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### Girl or Game

By R. RAY BAKER

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It had got to the point where Steve Mason had to know where he stood—on the deck of a sinking submarine ship or on a flying field preparing to soar among the clouds in a winged machine.

If Hazel Norrin said "yes" then it would be aviation; if she replied negatively that meant the plunge. All this about soaring and plunging, you must understand, had to do with Steve's mental state. The war had not yet stretched its steel-scaled arm to America, and Steve was considering neither aero journeys nor ocean voyages, literally speaking. He was still in Clifton college, a senior, and his favorite form of combat was baseball.

After being with Hazel once on the occasion of a theater party early in his senior year his admiration for her increased to a friendship which became so warm as the time for graduation approached that it finally ceased to be friendship, as far as his feelings were concerned.

Steve reached the "point" mentioned in the first paragraph at the same time his hand found the point of a picket in the fence enclosing the garden of her home. He had met Hazel late that afternoon by an accident, ostensibly. She was not supposed to know that he had lingered a full half-hour near the millinery store where she worked, waiting for her to appear so he could walk nonchalantly toward her and be surprised to meet her.

Steve had no real reason for believing that she cared for him. He was aware that some six or eight students were reported to have proposed to her and been rejected during the last three years, but he was willing to take a chance on being the seventh or the ninth, or even the thirteenth.

Steve knew that his red head and freckles didn't jibe with her creamy complexion and black hair, but he was not to blame for the contrast.

He picked a splinter from the fence, realized he was more nervous than he had been at any time since his initiation into Tau Beta Chi, floundered desperately for words, then got a grip on himself and let it out with:

"Hazel, I'm not going to beat about the bush. I'm not capable of pouring out sentimental gush and crawling on my knees, but I want to marry you, and I hope this is not 'so sudden' that you can't decide my fate here and now."

She laughed lightly and placed her hand over his as it rested on the fence and replied:

"I'm glad you're not capable of 'sentimental gush,' because I'm rather tired of it myself. I like the way you go about this, without moons or babbling brooks and I'll admit I care a lot for you, but I can't answer now. First I must have proof that you are the kind of fellow I would marry and that you really care as much as you say. But I am not saying 'no'—just remember that."

The next day he received a letter from her. It read:

"Dear Steve—Remembering what you told me yesterday I am giving you a chance to prove your affection. Tomorrow Clifton meets Alton for the state college baseball championship. My cousin, Will Forbes, will pitch for Alton, and in a letter I just received he told me that it means everything for him to win the game, as he expects to try for a professional league.

"Here's your chance to prove that you love me. If the opportunity offers to miss a ball or strike out at a critical point of the game and you can help Alton to win you surely can prove beyond doubt that you care as you say you do."

The letter stunned poor Steve, with his heart eating itself out for Hazel and the rest of him all wrapped up in the national game. Steve would rather play baseball than anything else in the world except have Hazel for a wife. Then, too, his love for his alma mater was strong, and his regard for honor and fair play was stronger.

"How can she ask such a thing?" he groaned aloud as he sank back in the only rocking chair his apartment of the rooming house afforded. He longed for his pipe, but he was in training.

"I can't do it," he repeated over and over. "It wouldn't be honorable or square; and I simply can't bring myself to do it. But Hazel—I can't give her up. She means too much to me even if she does ask impossible—almost impossible—things."

The day of the game turned out bright and clear in spite of Steve's wish that a deluge might visit the diamond. He saw her in the grand stand as he jogged out to center field for practice, and tipped his cap in answer to her jaunty wave of the hand.

The contest started with prospects of a close struggle. Each side scored a run in the second inning, and Alton pushed another across in the fourth. Clifton evening it up in the fifth. Thus the score stood a tie at the opening of the eighth.

The first Alton man to bat was retired on a pop fly to third.

But his successor hit a clean Texas Leaguer which landed him on second. He achieved third on a sacrifice grounder, knocked between second and first by the next man at the plate.

Two men were out and another on third. The Alton catcher advanced to the batter's box, and after two strikes and two balls hit one back of third which the Clifton left fielder came up on; but not fast enough to take it from the air. He picked it up on the bound and by a quick throw to the plate forced the Alton base runner to stay on third; but while this play was being enacted the Alton catcher reached second.

The Alton pitcher was next to bat. Here was a chance for him to win his own game, and the set of his jaw showed he was determined to do it. Steve, out in center, watched him anxiously as he swung and missed the first ball.

"Hope he doesn't send it out this way," Steve muttered, his mind still troubled by Hazel's request. His wish, however, bore no fruit, for the Alton pitcher knocked the ball high in the air toward center.

Steve, gauging correctly, saw that he would not have to move more than a few paces from his tracks to catch the ball. He braced himself and watched the sphere descend. It seemed as if it would never get to him. He held out his hands, cupped for the catch. Some of his teammates, displaying a supreme confidence in him, already had left their positions and were on the way to the bench.

"He's got it!" roared an enthusiast on the bleachers. "That boy never misses 'em!"

The ball struck Steve's glove, and at the same instant he seemed to see Hazel's face rise before him. The sphere bounded from his hands, and, while he chased it frantically, two Alton baserunners scored. Steve recovered the ball and threw it to second in time to stop the Alton pitcher, but the tie was broken, with the score 4 to 2 in favor of the enemy. The next batter struck out, and it was Clifton's turn at the bat.

The last half of the ninth opened with the tallies unchanged. The Clifton captain went among his players pleading with them to "do something for the old school." And they responded. The first man up knocked a sizzling grounder past second and got to the initial base. The one who followed duplicated the feat, back of first, and succeeded in acquiring possession of that sack, while his predecessor landed safely on second.

The next man hit one nearly to the left field fence, and the Alton man holding down that position scurried back and nalled it; but each of the base runners moved up a notch after the catch. Clifton's prospects were good, but her stock declined somewhat when the following batter fouled out.

Steve came to bat. With two men on bases, two out and two scores needed to tie, a more critical period of the game would have been imagined with difficulty. His face was pale, he clutched his bat nervously, his lips trembled. He did not even glance at the grandstand, but simply waited for the pitcher—Hazel's cousin and the man whose skyscraper he had missed—to throw the sphere.

As Steve was about to enter an automobile after the game he heard his name called and saw Hazel coming toward him. She drew him to one side and he motioned for the car to leave him.

She opened her mouth to speak, but he got ahead of her with:

"Miss Norrin, I wish you to understand that I got your letter all right, but I also want you to know that I didn't miss that ball on purpose in the eighth. I love you, just as I said, but I couldn't betray my teammates and my school in such a dishonorable manner."

Her eyes glistened unnaturally, and one big tear started down each cheek. There was a remarkable softness in her voice when she said:

"I knew you didn't try to throw the game, Steve. I wouldn't have had you do it for the world. I said you would have to prove that you were the kind of fellow I would marry, and I hope you didn't think I could have a traitor for a husband. If you had thrown the game I would never have spoken to you again. I was almost afraid, I must confess, that you had yielded when you missed that fly, but when you—you knocked that home run in the ninth and redeemed yourself and won the game for Clifton, I just cried—for joy—as I am crying now."

### Points in Cooking Cereals.

There are several practical points to remember in cooking cereals. One is that there is more danger of not cooking them enough than of cooking them too much. Uncooked cereal preparations, like cracked wheat and coarse samp, need several hours' cooking, and are often improved by being left on the back of the stove or in the fireless cooker overnight. Cereals partially cooked at the factory, such as the rolled or fine granular preparations, should be cooked fully as long as the directions on the package suggest.

Flavoring is also an important part of cooking cereals. The flavor most commonly added is salt. Such added flavor is perhaps less necessary in some of the ready-to-eat kinds which have been browned at the factory and have thus gained the pleasant flavor which also appears in the crust of bread and cake or in toast, but in the plain boiled cereals or mushes the careful use of salt in cooking them may make all the difference between an appetizing and an unpalatable dish. A good general rule is one level teaspoonful of salt to each quart of water used in cooking the cereal.

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