

Friendship

RUSSELL J. ZENTZ

(With apologies to Damon Runyan.)

I am standing in front of the Toddle House one evening when who should drive up in a bright yellow sedan but Georgie Roberts, with whom I am very chummy of late. Georgie is by no means an exemplary character, but it so happens that his old man in recent years develops to a new high the art of separating well-to-do citizens from their potatoes and as a result does not worry much these days concerning the necessities of life. Since Georgie is an only child, Roberts the elder is more than liberal with such material things as automobiles and potatoes, and I am broadminded enough to overlook certain minor defects in Georgie's character in order to assist him in distributing said potatoes in the most judicious manner possible.

I note that there are two dolls present in the sedan, as Georgie jumps from the front seat and comes over to give me the glad hello.

"Pal Joey," he says, "I am very happy to see you indeed. Have you by any chance an engagement for this evening?"

"Why, no, Georgie," I say, "as a matter of fact I am standing here considering how to pass the time when you drive up."

"This is a most fortunate coincidence," Georgie says, "for it so happens that I am in possession of four Annie Oakleys which will admit us to see the Butlers play the Purdues in a contest of basketball. As you see, there is an extra doll present and," he says, "although I tell her about you, in spite of this she is willing to have you accompany us. So let us be on our way, as we are already late for the contest," he says.

Now it is well known to one and all that I am by no means an admirer of physical exercise and I never attend a contest of basketball in my life, but I consider that only a small portion of the evening will be devoted to watching said contest, so I join the party. Georgie's doll is a small package who is named Jean and is such a dish as would cause even a monk to blink his eyes. In fact, I am forced to look twice to make sure she is real. My doll is a tall and willowy blonde who is not exactly a double for Betty Grable, but I am not dissatisfied as in my time I encounter many strange phenomena and by now am philosophical about such matters. I engage her in conversation and am pleased to learn that she is the type whose small talk is limited mostly to "yes" and "no" and "really?" because if there is one thing I hate more than another, it is a doll who is smarter than I am and shows it.

We soon arrive at the basketball hall and are assisted to a parking space by a John Law who waves a red flashlight at us, although I consider it an insult to the taxpayers to have a John Law engaged in such a pastime rather than pursuing criminals. We enter the hall and I see there are thousands of citizens present, and the contest must be under way already as all of them are screaming more than somewhat. I am glad our seats are high up, for I follow the blonde doll on the stairs and discover that she is assembled very expertly indeed, and I find myself wondering how she keeps her seams so straight.

Our seats are located about where the finish line is when the ponies are running, and I settle back to watch what is going on below. It seems that the five youths

frolicking in white underwear are the Butlers and the five in black underwear are the Purdues. Georgie informs me the object of the sport is to throw a large round ball through a ring from which a net hangs, though I fail to see why any normal person wishes to do such a thing. There are also two fat citizens in striped shirts who run up and down the hall behind the youths and every now and then blow a whistle, jump up and down, wave their arms, and make faces at the contestants, all of which causes a lull in the proceedings. I try to make sense of the confusion but a buzzer sounds and all participants walk away out of sight. I prepare to leave but am stopped by Georgie.

"Sit down, Joey," he says. "This is the half and there will be more later."

He says this as if it is something to be happy about. However, I remove my coat and re-occupy my seat. Presently a band begins to play and several dolls wearing shorts appear and begin to march to and fro and here and there, and while I can see no sense in this either, still it is a more interesting sight to behold.

Soon the band resumes its silence, the dolls go away, and the youths return and commence to run up and down the hall once more. As time goes by, the citizens around me become more and more agitated, and I am annoyed more than somewhat at several who are unable to restrain themselves to their allotted space. The noise becomes louder and louder until just as the buzzer sounds again, one of the Butlers throws the ball through the ring, and one and all jump up and down and scream at the top of their lungs. I prepare to leave, but once more Georgie stops me.

"Joey," he says, "the Butlers have just caught up with the Purdues. The contest is a tie, and it is necessary to play an overtime period."

I resume my seat. There is more running hither and thither and yon by the contestants while among the onlooking citizens, bedlam reigns. For the third time the buzzer sounds, and one and all give a final shout and begin to leave, appearing very happy about the whole thing. I share this feeling, since the contest is now apparently over, and personally I consider the public display of such unrestrained emotions very vulgar indeed and shameful evidence of a decaying society. The blonde doll tells me that the Butlers are the home team and that they are victorious, which accounts for the joyous scene. I regard it as a fine thing in any sport for the home team to win, but I fail to see why so many citizens shell out good potatoes to witness such an event.

We reach the car, and I suggest adjournment to a place where it is possible to spend the remainder of the evening in a more convivial manner, but the doll named Jean objects.

"I am very sorry, Georgie and Joey," she says, "but I am a working girl and I must go home. You see, I work in an office downtown and tomorrow morning I must get there early and type several reports before the boss shows up at eight. My boss," she says, "is a man who always shows up at eight and is very strict about such matters as reports. If they are not ready, I will be thrown out on my ear, and I do not wish to have this happen as it is very convenient to have one payday every week. And so," she says, "you see I have to get some sleep, although it is a shame to break up such a lovely time."

There is nothing for Georgie and me to do but agree, although I think at first that it is a very dirty trick indeed. But when I look at Jean I think that no one so pretty could give us the old heave-ho and still look as innocent as she does, and

I reflect that after all it is a fine and noble attitude to take and what this country needs is more dolls like Jean, though personally I do not wish to know too many.

Georgie has considerable trouble sneaking through the traffic, and in the meanwhile I discover that the blonde doll is a very friendly person and we quickly become better acquainted. In fact, I am sorry when we arrive at the house where the dolls are staying. Georgie and I bid them goodnight in the manner approved by social custom, to which I cannot see why anyone would make an objection, although it sometimes happens. Georgie and I then seek a spot in which to quench our thirst, and it is agreed that one and all have a most pleasant, if somewhat abbreviated, evening.

About a week later I am standing in front of the Toddle House when who should whiz by but Georgie, and on the seat beside him is the blonde doll, and beside her there is room for at least two more. Georgie goes root-a-toot-toot on the horn and gives me the cheery smile and the friendly wave, and even though a mutual acquaintance tells me the day before that the blonde doll's seams are painted, still I feel very hurt when I think of what my best friend does to me. In fact, I seriously consider severing all relations with Georgie, but on second thought decide to overlook the offense when I remember that I plan to borrow two fins from him to finance my date the next evening with the doll named Jean.

PURPLE PATCH

One day someone pulled a string and the peg-bottom nestled lovingly around the ankle. This bold gesture is an indication that sex had reared its ugly but familiar head. Grandma's ankle was showing! However, with her boyish bob and mannish clothes, she had no cause to worry. Woman's suffrage and other misguided concepts were largely responsible for this mode of dress. Man's best friend was no longer his dog but a woman. With clothes like these companionship was the only alternative. The primary hazard of this radical style was mistaking one's fiancee for her father in his nightshirt. But at least Grandma was no longer wearing what appeared to be a zoot-sooter's right pant leg.

Earl Otey in *On Through The Years*