

THE BULL BAITERS

A HARD BOILED "KING" OF UMPIRES

A GIRL IN BLUE

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Bull was the monarch of all he surveyed. Though he made 'em—Chief Umpire! King of the Umps, and crowned as such. Twice by the Irish and once by the Dutch. —Ballads of Brick McGovern.

"ONE false move!" implored Peewee. "One false move—that's all I ask! One false move and I crown you!"

Feet kicking up the dust, fists closed, and jaws working overtime, Umpire Bull Feeney and Third Baseman Peewee Patterson were breathing each other pigeon-fashion, and backing around in a wary circle.

They each let go a right at the same moment, and Peewee, who had once seen service in the ring, beat his opponent to the punch, following it up with a left that reached the same target.

Bull staggered back, recovered himself and returned to the attack, head down. In the interests of peace and dignity, Manager Brick McGovern and some of the more responsible players interfered.

Usually pugilistic encounters on the ball field have little significance and are forgotten in a day or two. But this fracas was different.

From the viewpoint of the ball player there is no such thing as a good umpire. They are all bad, and some are a little worse than others. Clubhouse opinion was unanimous in asserting that Bull Feeney was the most terrible crime ever perpetrated in organized baseball. Not that Bull didn't know his business; that was the awful part of it! Bull had been in the majors, and had even worked three times in a world's series. He was game, cool-headed, quick on his feet, and he had a voice like a fog horn.

But, of all the self-satisfied, truculent, sarcastic, limelight-loving and murder-inspiring umpires that ever bellowed through a moustache, Bull Feeney was the thrice-crowned king! Proudly he admitted the charge, and dared the world to make him otherwise. Therein lay the perpetual casus belli.

The crowd rode him, of course, but this was a mistake; it only encouraged the man. Bull got as much joy out of irritating the audience behind the wire netting as a small boy does in poking sticks through the bars of the circus cages.

Oh, Bull was really an awful thing, and he pursued the even tenor of his way, until Peewee Patterson, in sheer defense, cocked a board of strategy in the clubhouse one afternoon.

"Now, get me right," said Patterson. "I'm naturally peaceful. I ain't lookin' for trouble, but when any big bimbo sticks his nose between my teeth, he's going to lose it; that's all!"

This declaration of principles was approved by the strategists.

"But we got to use the old head on this guy," warned Rube Ferguson, outfielder. "We got to work on him. Fifty dollars a punch is too much dough. My idea is to get something on him."

"Ye-ah, I'll get my spikes on him some day," promised Lefty Carroll; "that what I'll get on him."

Peewee protested. "Let's get down to business. Now, here's something they tried on a guy down south once, and I'll tell the world it was rich."

Patterson's voice trailed off into the dramatic tenseness of a born conspirator. The others listened eagerly. The plot unfolded, and presently all could appreciate that the midge third-sacker had indeed unearthed a slender sword calculated to penetrate even the thick hide of Bull Feeney, and leave him writhing miserably at their feet.

A WEEK later the king of umps seated himself one evening in the lobby of his hotel to indite two letters. The first was in the nature of a report to the president of the league, and presented no difficulty. It read:

"Dear Mr. Powell: "I put Manager McGovern out of the game yesterday for abusive language. He is a dog. Yours truly,

JAMES P. FEENEY."

The second letter represented the first step into an unfamiliar world. He frowned thoughtfully at the hotel letter-heads, chewed the tip of the penholder, laid it down, looked about him, and surreptitiously produced from an inside pocket a small pink envelope that had come in the morning mail. For the twentieth time he read the contents, and for the twentieth time a wave of turkey red began at his gills and spread to the back of his neck. His heavy features struggled unsuccessfully against a sheepish grin. And small wonder! The age of miracles was here again! Bull Feeney had received a mash note! Cupid was burning incense at the shrine of an ump! Let unbelievers read:

"Dear Mr. Feeney: "I have often wanted to write to you, but this is the first time I have been able to get up the courage, and I hope you will not take offense, or think I am too bold.

"I go to all the games, and I think you are the very best umpire in the league. It must be wonderful to be so big and strong and fearless, and I would just love to know you, but I suppose you would not pay any attention to a mere girl—though my friends say I am not bad looking.

"Anyway, I can't resist confessing my admiration for a man who can face the crowd like you can, and I just hope you are not married!

"There, now, I've said it, and I do hope you won't be angry, but will instead find time perhaps to write to P. O. Box 341 and make me wildly happy.

"Your true admirer,

"JUST A GIRL."

The only woman Bull Feeney had ever loved was a little old lady back in St. Louis, and Bull wrote to his mother regularly every month. But recently he had been vaguely conscious of a growing interest in a face that looked at him from the sea of spectators in the St. Clair stands.

The face was that of a frail girl who always occupied the same seat. She was usually dressed in blue with a sort of hal-lujah bonnet with pink roses. The hat



"ONE FALSE MOVE," IMPLORED PEWEE. "ONE FALSE MOVE AND I CROWN YOU!"

framed brown hair and accentuated both the delicacy of her features and the palor of her skin. More and more he had come to look for her, drawn by a haunting memory of having seen her elsewhere.

One or twice he had wondered whether it would be safe to wait outside the gate, and kind of tip his hat a little as she passed out. But umpires find it a bit risky to encounter the crowd after a ball game—at least umpires like Bull Feeney. He was perplexed until—in and behold, here had come the letter! Oh, wonder of wonders!

He dipped his pen in ink and undertook to reply with painful earnestness.

"My dear young Lady: "Your valued letter received and contents noted."

He studied over that for a moment, tore it up, and tried again.

"Dear Sweetie: "That was awful. He scratched it out hurriedly, his face the color of a beet.

Someone sat down at the desk opposite him. He frowned, gathered up paper, pen and ink and retired to the seclusion of his room. By midnight the floor was littered with crumpled paper, but he had managed to break through the formidable barrier of an opening paragraph. Once started, he wrote at length, telling her all about his mother in St. Louis, and the timber claim in the California Sierras, where the railroad would one day build a branch line, and where the stars were the swiftest you ever saw. There was a trick squirrel that lived in a big pine right at the door of the cabin he was building—funny little cuss—which would get awful mad if you didn't notice it.

Of course an umpire wasn't no saint, or nothing like that, but he didn't go in for booze, and he knew how to be a square shooter with a nice girl, as she would find out, and would she please tell him.

Bull paused and wiped his ink-stained fingers on his trousers. His face took on a blank expression. Maybe the girl he was thinking about and the one who had written the letter were not the same person. He considered this possibility with dismay, laid aside everything he had penned and wrote this:

"Dear Miss Admirer: "Your letter is O. K. with me. Whereabouts do you sit?"

"Yours truly,

"JAMES P. (BULL) FEENEY."

Then he went to bed.

Two days later, Peewee Patterson, wild with joy, showed up at morning practice and waved a letter in the faces of the board of strategy.

"Hooked him!" he crowed. "The big fish fell for it! 'Dear Miss Admirer—where do you sit?' Oh, ho!"

They snatched at the letter, feasted their eyes on it, passed it around, and banged each other on the back, whooping triumphantly.

"Ain't that a pip!" "Well, the big bull's head." "What d'ye know?" "I guess that ain't speakin' him, huh?"

Rube Ferguson, first to calm down, looked up from the letter, a little puzzled.

"Well," he demanded, "where does she sit?"

The others looked at Peewee. Patterson met the question promptly:

"She sits anywhere we want her to; I got it all doped out. First we dope up another letter; make it strong this time, see? Then we dress Lefty up as a Jane, and plant him—"

Lefty interrupted hastily: "Say, how d'get that way?"

"Shut up," admonished Peewee. "Somebody's got to do it, and you're the best lookin'. If you work Saturday, you're off the next afternoon, ain't you? My sister's been on the stage, and she'll rig you up, and go with you."

"If I get pinched," warned Lefty, "I'll knock you for a mile of tombstones! I'll bust you all right on the jaw! I'll—"

He was howled down.

"We do this thing right," continued Peewee, complacently. "Lefty is going to be Miss Admirer, and from a distance she will be a pip. She tells him in the next letter where to look, and Sunday afternoon she keeps waving a handkerchief at him. Then she tells him to call on her."

"We hit the road Sunday night," objected Ferguson. "Bull goes north, top. No tellin' where he'll be working when we come back."

"That's all the better," Peewee pointed out. "It gives us time to smoke up a lot of letters. Bull will write his fool head off as soon as he gets a look at this Jane. When we're all together again, we slip him an address, and when he calls, we'll have the whole gang planted in the house, and at the right moment we come out and give him the grand razz. Will that baby quit riding us? I ask you a simple question."

The eyes had it without a dissenting voice.

"The reporters will eat them letters up," mused Ferguson. "The yarn will go all over the country. Can you imagine what the bleachers will do with that 'Miss Admirer' stuff? Peewee, I got to hand it out; you're there, kid; you're there!"

SO IT came to pass that Bull Feeney received a second letter, intended to fasten securely in his crimson gills a poisoned barb from Cupid's quiver. It ran:

"Dearie: "I was just tickled to death to get your letter, and to know that you are not offended."

"I shall be sitting in the grandstand next Sunday afternoon, just to the right of the plate, where I can see you best, and I will have on a blue dress."

"I do hope that you will like me, and will write and tell me so, because I am just crazy about you. I suppose you'll think I'm awful bold to say that, but it's the truth, and I don't care who knows it."

"If you will just tip your cap when you see me, I will know that everything is all right. I will be the proudest and happiest girl in the world, and when you come back, I will ask you to call."

"Good-bye, dearie, until I hear from you again."

"YOUR DEVOTED ADMIRER."

Alas, poor Bull! That letter saved off all four legs of the royal throne and brought him down, overnight, to the level of mere mortals. In the grandstand, just to the right of the home plate, she had said, and that was where she always sat—the pale, wistful girl with the pink roses on the hal-lujah bonnet. Who was she? Where had he seen her before?

No matter! The miracle was that she loved him, and she was young and beautiful and unbelievably frail.

It was a humanized Bull Feeney who brushed off the plate and called for the batting order the following Sunday afternoon. The board of strategy could hardly contain itself for joy.

The king of the umps faced the grandstand. For the first time in the memory of those who watched him eagerly, there was nothing belligerent in his manner.

His voice was as gentle as he could make it, his demeanor respectful, his broad shoulders drawn back heroically, and his face directed at someone in the audience sitting to the right of the home plate.

"Lefty's handkerchief must be going," warbled Peewee. "Bull's tipping his cap! I ask you a simple question: Ain't this the richest you ever seen?"

How were they to know that Bull Feeney had eyes for only one person in the whole audience, and that she was at least 50 feet from where the gorgeously arrayed Lefty Carroll was waving one of Miss Dorothy Patterson's very best handkerchiefs? How were they to know that the king of the umps had bribed a bet boy to trail a certain young lady to her home and report back that evening?

Leave the bull baiters to their abysmal ignorance, and consider only Bull Feeney, one hour before train time, chatting in the hotel lobby with bright-eyed little Toole-woolie Kerrigan.

"So you trailed her all right, did you lad? You're a grand boy! And where does she live?"

"Boarding house on Sixty-fourth street," said Toole-woolie. "I got her name from the grocer on the corner. I asked him who the girl was in crutches."

"Crutches?"

"Sure. She's a cripple—didn't you know that? She can't walk no better than I could before I went to the hospital. I guess that's why she comes early, and waits till the crowd is out of the park before she gets up. Her name is O'Donnell; didn't get the first name—say, what's the matter?"

Bull Feeney's jaws were opening and closing spasmodically. His mind was trying to adjust itself to the flood-waters of memory. He sank into a chair.

"If that wouldn't knock you kickin'!" he breathed. "It's Jim's daughter, sure enough—the little Doris grown up. That explains everything. I remember now; she was hurt in the same train wreck that killed him; and now here she is on crutches and confessin' herself to be me own sweetie. Come here, Toole."

The king of the umps fished in his pocket and produced a \$5 bill.

"I've got to be headin' for the train," he explained, "but there's a flower shop on the corner. Get something swell in the line of roses—pink ones—and take 'em out to her."

"What'll I say?"

Feeney look at his watch. "Just tell her that Bull says he's wise," he instructed, "and that he'll write from Portland; she'll get the rest."

"Fair enough," said Toole-woolie. "Half a dollar plus car fare."

AH, if Bull only had sense enough to ask Toole-woolie for the exact address! Instead his next letter went to Box 341, where it was extracted by Miss Dorothy Patterson and forwarded to Brother Peewee Patterson, according to instructions. Patterson summoned the board of strategy, and its members went into session in his hotel room. Peewee read the missive aloud:

"Dear Doris: "I was an awful boob, all right, not to have recognized you before this, but everything is O. K. now. As soon as you told me where you sit, I knew it was the same little sweetie that I had been laming all along, only I couldn't remember just then where I had seen you before. I got a kid to trail you home, and he got your name off the corner gro-

cer, so I sent some flowers, and I will sure call when I get back.

"The last time I met you, me and your father was working in the world's series at Chicago. Jim was one swell umpire and it sure busted me all up when I heard about him getting killed. He was always talkin' about you, and showing me your letters. You look a lot like him, only of course a lot prettier. I mean it; I ain't never seen anyone who could come up to you for class. The boys all have noticed you and they will be wild to think that I have copped you off, though of course, like me, they didn't know about the crutches, or about you being so bad hurt.

"Now, sweetie, I want you to know that them crutches don't mean nothing to me at all, only I hate to see you looking so pale and weak. You leave it to old Bull to fix things all jake, honey. I got one of the grandest mothers in the world, and I'll send for her right away. Then I got a cabin up in the mountains on a timber claim, and it's the prettiest and healthiest spot in the world. Me and mother will take care of you, sweetie, and we'll make your cheeks just like them pink roses on your hat.

"Babe, your letter sure has made the world look a lot different. I don't get no more fun out of riding the players or the crowd, or handing out the fines, because I realize now that most all the boys are married and have wives and kids, or else they got some little sweetie, only they'll never have none as nice as the one that I got.

"So, honey, just you take good care of yourself—and wait for old Bull to make things come out all right. You ain't no more crazy about me than I am about you.

"I guess I will close now. Sweetie, you won't have to use them crutches much when I'm around, because I'll carry you. That's the kind of a guy I am.

"Yours truly,

"BULL FEENEY."

PEEWEE PATTERSON slowly folded up the letter. For a full minute the silence was golden. Finally, Rube Ferguson tilted back in his chair and sighed profoundly.

"There it goes!" he commented. "There goes your old ball game! I'll tell the world that's gumming it up the prettiest I ever seen. Say, who started this thing?"

"Don't look at me," protested Peewee. "We was all in on it. What I want to know is: how come Bull to get switched off on to little Sweetie? You fellows know who he's talking about. It's that little Jane that sits over by first base. The one we call Sweetie."

"She ain't on crutches!" protested Rube.

"Yes, she is; I seen her on the street the other day, and she's a mighty nice little girl. Lefty, where did you sit that day?"

"Don't try to start nothin' with me," growled Lefty. "I sat just where you nuts told me—to the right of the plate. I come down the aisle and swung over toward third base—"

"First base!" shrieked Peewee. "That's the right-hand side."

"No, it ain't," snarled Lefty. "Not the way pitchers look at it, it ain't! And don't an umpire face the stands the same way? I doped it out, and I'll bust you one right eye the same way."

"Oh, no!" said Patterson. "That letter was supposed to be from a girl, not an umpire or a pitcher! I ask you a simple question: did you ever see a left-hander that wasn't cuckoo? I'm offa you for life—I'm through!"

Truck Darrow banged a heavy flat on the table. "Oh, no, you ain't! You ain't through by a long ways. You go to Bull Feeney—"

"Me!"

"Yeah, you! Wasn't it your bright idea to sink the hooks into him?"

Rube broke in:

"I'll tell the world I'm for that guy! Looks like we done him a lot of dirt. Umpirin' is a tough job."

Truck Darrow nodded emphatically. "I'll say it is. I was an umpire once in the Texas league. Bull's got my sympathy. Peewee, you gotta tell the old boy that we crossed him. He won't feel no worse than I do."

Peewee Patterson's face paled under the tan. "Looks like I'm stuck for it," he admitted, "but I'd rather be shot; honest, I would! Let's make it a committee. I'll do the talkin', but some of you fellows oughta come along, or he won't believe me."

Rube Ferguson grunted dimly: "I'll see you through."

"Well, I'll be the other goat," said Lefty. "He's stopping down at the St. Regis. Let's get it over with."

After that interview between the king of the umps and three representatives of the board of strategy the three ball players sat down to think it over.

"If he'd only opened up on us," Peewee groaned, "instead of just sittin' there lookin', I'm going to drop a line to my sister, and tell her to get acquainted with this Jane, and sound her out. Dolly's a good scout. Maybe Sweetie can be induced to fall for this guy and then everything's jake."

"Now you're talkin'!" said Lefty. "Your sister can introduce the whole gang and then we can all smoke it up about what a grand fellow Bull is. Now you're getting the old eye on the ball! This game ain't lost yet!"

"No," Rube admitted, "it ain't lost, but there's two out in the ninth, and I'll tell the world it's going to take a swell little battin' raly to save the beans!"

"I'll lead off, then," said Peewee. "And he did—wrote home that night and implored his sister to come to their rescue. In Miss Patterson's behalf, it should be stated that she did her very best. Nothing could please a young girl more than a romantic commission like that. A week passed, and then another. Peewee and his teammates were in Salt

Lake; Bull Feeney was still in Portland. The following letter came from Miss Patterson:

"Dearest Bud: "I can't find any trace of her. No one seems to know her address. The ushers say they haven't seen her since the Sunday afternoon when we did that foolish thing. Did you know she was the daughter of a very famous umpire? No wonder she took so much interest in the game. It seems perfectly dreadful to think of a girl on crutches sitting there day after day watching you boys so full of life and health!"

"You don't suppose anything could have happened to her? Someone told me she looked terribly frail. If there's anything further I can do, telegraph at once.

"DOLLY."

That letter left its recipients panic-stricken.

The days passed uneventfully. The teams returned to the St. Clair grounds. Bull Feeney's assignment sent him to the same place. They were very much shocked when they beheld him.

"He ought to lay off," opined Ferguson. "The old boy ain't there—no life, no pep. Seems like he was ten years older. I seen him lookin' up at the stands a little while ago. He sees she ain't in the old seat."

"Maybe she's sittin' somewhere else," Peewee suggested. "All of us oughta give the crowd the once-over."

They tried to follow out this idea, but all they succeeded in doing was to lose the game, and Brick McGovern was driven to vigorous protests. Their efforts at alighting were just as unproductive. Then one Sunday afternoon, in the last game of the series, the drama climaxed swiftly.

Bull Feeney was umpiring on the bases and all through the game certain players were aware that his condition was very bad.

"What do you figure that guy is doing?" asked Ferguson. "Wednesday he was lookin' pretty good. I thought everything was jake again. He was kiddin' with me, and seemed to have all his pep back. Yesterday he looked bad, but this afternoon he's white as a ghost. Brick was tellin' me that Bull tried to beg off workin', but on account of his partner being new, they wouldn't stand for it. I tell you, he's weak as a cat."

"It's the heat," said Peewee. "All them fleshy guys suffer in the heat."

"Ye-ah, but this one ain't even sweatin'. You watch Bull tryin' to cut across the diamond on a play at third. He runs like he was drunk. I wonder if he's hittin' the old bottle?"

"He's calling the plays too good for that," Lefty remonstrated. "No, that bird is just in; that's all. I don't think he's going to last the game."

Lefty came very near calling the turn. Bull Feeney just managed to finish on his feet—and that was all.

Then, the game over, the king of the umps took a few uncertain steps toward his dressing room, swayed a moment and pitched forward on the grass. When they got to his side he was in a cold faint.

Ferguson, Peewee, Lefty and Brick McGovern helped to carry him into the seclusion of the little room under the stands. They shoed the other players away.

"We know what's wrong," mumbled Peewee. "We'll take care of him. Get away!"

By dint of vigorous massage, and liberal application of cold water, they restored Bull to consciousness.

"Bull," besought Peewee, kneeling by his side, "you got me scared cuckoo. Don't take it so hard, man! We been lookin' for her to try and fix things all jake. Just you tell us where she lives, and we'll square it all up—you won't have to do nothin'."

Bull Feeney's lips curved in an odd smile. "She's in the hospital," he whispered. "That's the trouble; that's how I come to blow out like that."

"In the hospital?" cried Lefty. "Gee, what's the trouble, Bull? She ain't bad off, is she?"

Feeney propped himself up into a sitting posture with their help. He spoke slowly:

"No, she ain't bad off now. She's going to come out all right, and she's going to get married—to a big bum."

"Gee!" said Peewee. "Ain't that always the way? I ask you a simple question: Did you ever see a girl yet that didn't fall for a feather?"

"Tis a queer story," Feeney explained. "This little girl, you mind, was a cripple. Same trouble as Bill Kerrigan's kid. She was interested in the big bum, but not a bit would she encourage him, till she finds out whether an operation will help her to walk. So she goes to the hospital and falls for one of them bone-grafts. Operation is successful, but when she is comin' out from under the chloroform she calls for this big bum by name until Doc decides to send for him, and ask him what's the big idea. The fellow's explanation makes everything O. K., but the little girl is so weak that they see she ain't going to pull through—"

"I thought you said she was going to be married?" Peewee protested.

The king of the umps grinned up at them. The color was coming back to his gills.

"So I did," he assented. "I was but callin' the play the way it looked to me. She ain't going to die. Better still, she's going to walk—that is, she'll be able to walk with the aid of the fathead. You see, he didn't have much to offer her, but he had always lived clean, and he was built husky. There was one thing he could give her, and the doctor said 'twould save her—"

"What was that?" they demanded.

"Blood," he answered, "a quart of it, and every drop of it straight from the heart. Lift me up, you birds, and mind the bandages on me left arm; I promised her I'd be back right after the game!"

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