

MY HERO

GLENN H. FISHER

I wouldn't read this if I were you. Before you get any farther than this you should know that although I started to write a short story I never got it finished. I almost did though. It would have been a poor story any way — it's just the idea that I didn't finish what I started that irks me.

You see, it's like this. I'm a night clerk in a hospital. I work from five till twelve each evening — according — and since it is easy work I have time to study while on duty. I take some courses in a college nearby and one class is one in which we study writing, plots, and the like. I was writing my story for that class — that was last night in my office. It's a good place to study — at least from the standpoint of quietness — no one in the halls of the Administration Building after nine o'clock — no lights except for my desk lamp now that the war is on. The silence hurts sometimes but not often — only on nights like last night when the rain kept pecking on the window and the wind played hide-and-go-seek among the pillars out front. Last night was one of those nights when I like to go to bed because I sleep so well — the wind and rain, you know. Anyway, I was studying. I was walking around and around the room thinking about a plot and all of a sudden I had it. Without hesitation I sat down at my desk and began to write. Maybe I wrote ten or fifteen minutes before I paused for ink. My pen had gone dry. Someway I read back over what I'd written. It startled me — even me. I read again. It sounded much like a three part hybrid composed of True Story, imitation Shakespeare, and some of Gertrude Stein's better work. This started me thinking about the plot. I got up and started walking again because it was almost as impossible

as the dialogue. How I get such plots I couldn't say — inverted genius I suppose. I pondered. It wouldn't be so bad if only I could get the hero's dialogue to sound like a college professor — which he was — rather than something akin to a combination of a Brooklyn fan and Romeo in the Balcony scene. I paced the floor again as far as the water cooler.

"Having trouble?" asked a voice.

"Yes," I said flatly — truthfully. Then, thinking, I whirled — startled — and faced the intruder. I hadn't heard the front door open so naturally I was surprised. Instantly I was all business and at my desk.

"May I help you?" I asked as always to strangers — businesslike.

"Maybe." He leaned against the door-jam.

"Name, please?" I asked politely. There was a pause.

"John," he said firmly, "Professor John Barton."

I wrote the name down on the blank before it registered. Then I looked at him but before I could speak he spoke.

"Yes, I know — you think coincidence. But it's not really. I'm here to protest about my part in the story you are trying to write — my dialogue especially. You don't need to stare, I'm as harmless as I am truthful." I stared.

I had to admit that he was a dead ringer for my Professor Barton who was giving me so much trouble. I watched him in silent awe as he sat himself down on the edge of my desk. I handed him what I had written involuntarily. He handed it back without even a glance at its contents.

"Now," he started vigorously, "here I am in love with Mary Jane — a very nice girl by the way — and I'm supposed to find

out where she goes every Thursday at four and stay till five-thirty. It seems that I'm the jealous type. Is this right so far?"

I nodded affirmative and remained silent.

"Here is where you stopped. Mary and I have been eating dinner and we are still at the table. Now to go on. I'd say, 'Mary, you and I are happy, huh?'"

I was on the alert. "How about that 'huh'?" I asked instantly — always prompt with constructive criticism.

"I say it often," he answered calmly.

"But should a college professor use such language?"

His gaze was withering. "I am the hero of the story, ain't I?"

"Ain't!" I gasped, astounded.

"So what?"

"But a college ----"

"I know. A college professor doesn't usually say things like that. But I'm different."

"But I still think ----"

"I don't give a damn what you think," he snapped.

That was the last straw. A college professor swearing! I couldn't imagine it. It left me a little weak. Then anger possessed me and I put bite and sarcasm into my words.

"John Barton," I said, "I will have no more of this atrocious speaking. Either speak correctly or leave."

He was thoroughly angry by that time. "I am the hero of this story," he roared. "Either I say what I want to say or I refuse to bear the hero's burdens."

I too, was belligerent. "You speak correctly or not at all," I demanded.

His face was crimson. "Then not at all!" he shouted, and went out, slamming the door behind him.

"Well, I'll be damned," I said to myself. No hero, no story. I went home to bed and let the wind and rain lull me to sleep.

SPIKEY EVANS

MYRON SCARBROUGH

In the afternoons, before most of The Sun's staff had come to work, the windows of the sports room were tightly shut and the radiator sizzled merrily. The room was hot to a point well beyond mere discomfort, and the copy boy with the two o'clock mail or the occasional match-maker with his notice of a boxing tournament never tarried long in its unwholesome atmosphere.

While the torrid room and its stagnant air drove copy boy and match-maker from its tropic-like confines in short order, it never got the best of Spikekey Evans. Spikekey

was human, and he knew when he was hot and when he was cold, when he had air and when he didn't. He could open a window when he thought one should be opened, and he could turn a radiator's valve when he thought the valve ought to be turned. But when he was in this particular room, miserable though it was, he was oblivious of the stagnant air and the sizzling radiator. He was in a world apart from the world of the copy boy or the match-maker or the radiator.

Spikekey's world was the world of sports — sports of the past and of the present and