

He turned in the saddle to acknowledge the cheers of the people who were watching. He did not notice the low branch of the tree. He felt the sharp, violent blow and then fell limply from the saddle.

The big bay was free now and headed for wild country with his head high and his tail flowing like a victorious banner behind him.



The Bull

There is nothing I like better than a good hot bowl of bean soup on a cold day, especially if the soup has cooked for two or three days, and if it has plenty of onions and hot pepper seeds in it. It was just such a day a few weeks ago when I was having just such a bowl of soup down at the Foreign Legion, a restaurant I so named because of the hodgepodge of humanity that frequents the place.

On this day I was seated at the counter when a big fellow, who must have weighed three hundred pounds and who must have been at least seventy years old, came in and sat beside me. I could tell that something was bothering the fellow when he first sat down, by the way he hunched over and began to fidget with the napkin holder. Pretty soon he coughed and big tears began to roll down his massive cheeks and into a cup of coffee he was drinking.

There is nothing more pitiful than a man distressed enough to cry, especially the way this old guy was crying. His sobs shook the whole counter, and when he coughed it seemed his head or throat must burst. Thinking that I might console and quiet him, I asked if there was anything I could do. The old man took a drink of water and became collected enough to say that he and George had been teammates on the University of Chicago football team of 1887. The rest of the players on the team had all died before the old man and George. Now that George was dead, the big fellow was the only survivor. Then he began his story:

"It was a day like this when the incident happened that made George and me something special to each other. I am certain that no one before or since has ever seen what we saw that day.

"I don't suppose you know how the game of football was played back then. Well, the ball was shaped a lot different,

and we got only five points for a touchdown. There were other differences, like not having to wear a helmet or pads, and eleven men usually played the whole game. We carried fifteen players until one of the substitutes — I forget his name — got killed playing against Stanford.

"We had a good team that year. We averaged about two-sixty in the line and didn't have a back under two-fifteen. All bone and muscle, I weighed two-eighty-three stripped. We won twenty-seven games that year and scored four hundred and thirty-seven points to our opponents' three. California scored against us with a field goal, but we caught the fellow who kicked it on the next play and broke his leg.

"Well, we had taken a junket through the East and had beaten the best out there by scores like sixty-eight to nothing and fifty-seven to nothing and ninety-six to nothing, when our coach heard that Iowa wanted to play us. In those days, we didn't have to go to school very much to play football, so we decided that three or four more days off on the way back to Chicago wouldn't hurt. The coach wrote Iowa that we would play. Like I said, we were working on a twenty-seven-game winning streak and, as far as we knew, Iowa didn't have anything. We were sure in for a surprise.

"The day of the game we went out to the Iowa field, which was a clover patch with a high board fence around it and no seats for spectators. We wondered why there were no bleachers, but we decided that maybe the Iowans were just learning the game and that it hadn't caught on yet. When we went out on the field to warm up, standing in the middle of the field was a big black and white bull with the meanest pair of horns imaginable.

"The minute he saw us, he began to prance up and down the field, snorting and puffing like a . . . well, like a bull. We all laughed because we thought he was some kind of a pet or mascot or something. When I went out for the toss to see who kicked off, the bull pawed the ground and looked real mean. I thought the Iowans were trying to get us rattled, so I pawed right back and bellowed as near as I could like a bull.

"We won the toss and elected to receive. We lined up our eleven men, and they lined up ten men and a bull. Before we could get over our amazement, the ball went sailing over our heads and into the end zone where they jumped on it for a touchdown. The referee signaled that Iowa had scored. This made our coach finally decide to quit laughing and find out what was going on. He came out on the field and asked what the idea was of letting the game start with the mascot on the

field. The referee asked if he meant the bull. Our coach said, 'Of course, I mean the bull.' The referee said that the bull happened to be listed in the line-up as right tackle.

"Then our coach tore across the field screaming like a wounded panther and, among other things, asked their coach what he meant by ridiculing a fine game like football with that male heifer, and, if Iowa didn't want to play, why did they send the challenge. The Iowa coach said, 'We intend to play. Are you going to forfeit?'

"'Hell no, we're not going to forfeit,' our coach screamed, 'and you are going to get that animal off the field.'

"The Iowa coach answered, 'That animal, as you so rudely call him, happens to be my regular right tackle, and if you are going to play, you had better get started because you are behind five to nothing and the game is only about seven seconds old.'

"We finally sent for a rule book. Article 32, Section 7, stated that there had to be eleven 'players' on the field to start the game. It did not say whether the players had to be men, bulls, or tomcats.

"There's not much to the story after that. Coach got us all together and said, 'Men, I guess they have us. Well, we'll get in there and play them if they use a hundred bulls. You guys are on your own now. I've taught you everything I know about the game. If you let one skinny little bull whip you, well, you're not worthy to call yourselves University of Chicago football players. Now get out there and show them what you're made of.'

"That 'skinny bull' happened to weigh two thousand pounds. I know because I played across from him all afternoon. I will give the referee credit for one thing. He did make the bull wear a helmet so that he couldn't gore any of us to death. That darn bull did everything else though. He knocked us down when we had the ball and knocked us down when we didn't have the ball. The Iowa backs would hang on to his tail until he pulled them to the goal line; then they would let go and step across for another five points. Once, one of our backs—I forget his name—got as far as their twenty-yard line before the bull got to him. Then the bull knocked him down and rolled on him three times before the referee could blow his whistle. After that we had to kick every time we got the ball because none of our backs would carry it.

"At the end of the third quarter, the score was ninety to nothing in favor of Iowa, and we had only five men able to

stand on the field. We called the game and caught a train to Chicago.

"When we got to the University, the coach was fired for losing the game, and we were all kicked out of school for telling about the bull. We tried, through all the Iowa papers, to get proof of the tale we carried back, but it seemed that none of them considered football important enough to send a reporter to the game. The Iowa coach naturally denied the whole business and hinted that we probably drank too much to be proper University of Chicago representatives.

"After I left school I tried to forget the incident because I learned that when I began the story, people either laughed or edged away from me. For a while I did pretty well selling insurance; then I began to see the bull in my dreams.

"Once my insurance company was having a dinner, and the speaker was the president of the company. The longer he spoke the more he began to look like the bull. Finally I could stand it no longer and got up and ran out of the room. When I tried to explain my actions, they fired me. I found that when things became too bad, if I could find one of the old football players, we would talk over the game and things would be all right for a while.

"Once when I was visiting with one of the ends on the team in Philadelphia, I met a girl and we were married. It was ideal because when I began to see the bull, this end and I would talk the game over and things would be all right for a while. Then the end died, and more and more people began to look like the bull. One night I distinctly saw a pair of horns growing out of my wife's head. I left Philadelphia.

"After that I kept moving around, going from one town to another where my old teammates lived. They died one by one until George and I were left. Now even George is dead."

The old fellow began to sob again, so I paid for the soup and his coffee and left.