Box Car Crash

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I ALWAYS said, "It's marvelous the way George can pull through anything." And I used to be his roommate, so I got to know him pretty well.

The first time I remember that George showed he was made of brick clear through was the evening after his first football triumph. That was the day they coined for him the nickname, "Box Car O'Neil." Though a mere sophomore, he was a regular grizzly in size, and the Teachers' line just oozed out of his way. They weren't small change, either, but George went right in and took the punishment and made the two touchdowns almost single-handed. We won, 12-6.

After the game I fooled around with the boys at the Campus Grill for awhile, and then I went up to the room. George had got back from the stadium, and he was sitting on his bed. He was such a great big guy that his shadow almost filled the square of light from the huge window opposite. He was scraping with his foot on the rug and sort of staring at it. In his left hand he held a sheet of paper.

I was all excited to tell him what a swell game it had been and how glad we all were, but something in George's attitude cooled me.

"Are you injured, George?" I asked.

"No," he replied, shrugging, like a kid. "It's bad news."
"Oh," I said.
"The store at home has folded. It's been coming for years, of course. Dad's right back at scratch." Pausing, he frowned at his shoe. "Dad is going to manage a little oil station now. He suggests maybe I'd like to go home and help part time."
I nodded.
Well, you know, George took all that without a quiver of his lips. By morning he had decided to stay at school—regardless of how he had to cut the corners. He'd be entirely on his own.

Monday he started to scour the town, looking for a job. He came back that night, a bit more sober but not soured; October is no month to hunt for jobs in a college town. Tuesday it was the same story. And Wednesday.
"George," I said that night, "quit this running around. The athletic department will give you a job just to keep you in school."
I had hinted at that before, but George wouldn't hear it. His pride, I guess. He mumbled something about "no tramp athlete" and changed the subject.
His lack of funds was particularly unfortunate just then, because our room rent was about due. Of course, I'd have been glad to carry it for a few weeks, but I knew that couldn't go on forever. Anyway, George wouldn't have had it.
But no matter. Thursday he got a job—slinging hash. It was in a little east-side hamburger joint that I didn't know existed. George told me that the business was rotten but that he could earn his board there and enough money for the room, with a little left over each week to tuck away for winter quarter registration.
And all that time none of those sports writers—and not even the coach—knew what George was pulling against.

He was the same way when it came to love. It was just about the time he got this job that he met Alice. She was a plenty cute little number—brunette and black eyes, you know, and out for being collegiate; she cared little whether the being collegiate was with a sofa sheik or a football hero. She liked George because he was the latter.
George was just a big, innocent kid, and he didn't understand her. Though he tried to show her a good time, he wasn't flush with the means. After a few weeks she began to be irked at going to movies. She wanted to be able to show George off, and for that movies weren't near as good as the big dances.

George just grinned at her spunk, though, and kept right on going for more. He got so that he met her at English Hall after her 2 o'clock and would walk as far as the gym with her on his way to workouts. She reveled in that, I know. Those times he was her hero for the whole campus to see. People knew George, you see, what with his pictures in the papers every day and "Box Car" splashed all over the sports pages. The writers predicted that he'd pulverize the State forward wall in the big final game of the season. And people who are human just don't mind being seen with that kind of a fellow.

That is why I was so surprised to see George ambling along towards the gym all by himself the night before the fray with State.

"Is she sick?" I sidled up.

"Sick for Sammy Walters," he grinned.

He didn't have to go into details. Sammy was smooth, sleek, her type of "collegiate." Rumor said he was going to be a flash basketball center.

"The basketball season is coming on," I purred. I was surprised, though, she didn't wait till after the big game to air George.

But, you know, that didn't phase his playing. At first I'd felt all weak inside, because that does get some fellows. But no need. Against State the next day he was tremendous. I knew inwardly that he was just a broken-hearted kid—crushed, see? But to those howling fans and newspapermen he was their "Box Car O'Neil.' And to State he was a jinx.

He drove and crashed through State for first-and-ten after first-and-ten. 12-0 our favor. The shadows were lengthening. 25-0. He was unconquerable. It was a beautiful climax of the season.
AFTERWARDS I had a bite of lunch with the boys down at the Grill, and they marvelled, too, about George after I'd told them about Alice. Then I went up to the room to dress for a date. It was getting pretty dark. I wasn't surprised to see our room dark, though, since George didn't ordinarily get back from work till pretty late.

I snapped on the light, and there was George sitting on the bed, almost exactly like that other time I'd seen him. "More bad news from home?" I queried.

"Nope." He grinned, just like a great big overgrown kid. "My job's folded. The boss says the business is getting worse as the winter comes on." He walked over to the closet and got a suitcase and put it on the bed.

"What the hell are you going to do?" I asked.

"Go home and try out the oil station business." He was trying to grin. "I guess I'm just not big enough to take it."

I sure was surprised.

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THE LADY AUTUMN DOES NOT WEEP—

By Dorothy Turpen

A LADY may be sad of heart,
But to the world her smile is gay.
Thus Autumn waits for Winter's reign,
Yet dons a brighter scarf today.