

THE DOG WHO KNEW BASEBALL

By LEWIS S. SALSBURG

ILLUSTRATED BY THORNTON UTZ

Talking or eating, Skid Kelly never gave his mouth much rest.

"Stella," he said, as his fork speared another lunch lamb chop, "today I will prove for all time that I'm the best semipro pitcher and the best hitter ever seen in these parts."

Stella, who at 28 had consistently failed to prod her beau into a formal commitment to matrimony, was more given to tart comment than soothing pronouncements. "Ty Cobb must be out of his mind with jealousy."

Skid — a nickname derived from a nose shaped like a playground slide — responded only to what suited his hearing. "I should never have given up professional baseball."

"Wasn't it the other way around?"

Skid kept to his one-track mind while continuing to feed his slight physique. "Today, starting at three o'clock, I am going to win the Championship of the State for the old home town. Pass the ketchup."

"There will be eight other players on the field, modest one."

"Me and Pepper could do it alone."

"My dear Kelly. Your Pepper is still a dog, a nice dog I admit — even if right now out there on the back porch he's eating the meat I was saving for my brother Ed."

On the back porch, Pepper's ears were up with the sound of his name, and reluctantly he withdrew from the dish to stick his snout against the screen door and inquire with bright eyes, questioning countenance, and wagging tail if his presence was necessary for the conversation.

"Go back to your meal, ol' boy," Skid told him. "I'm just giving this doubting dame the facts of life."

It appeared that Pepper, with the wisdom of Shetland sheep dogs, understood. He gave Stella an amiable glance, which seemed to include forgiveness of a woman who would question his master's omniscience, and returned to his illicit feast.

"Let me tell you once and for all," continued Skid, "— that dog is the smartest ball-playing dog in the world."

Stella shook her head as if, sometimes, patience was more than she could afford.

"Why are you shaking your head?"

"I'm shaking my head about Pepper. That's what I'm shaking my head about. He stands behind you in the batter's box," she reviewed wearily, "and he runs down the base line when you



"By the time he gets the ball in his mouth and runs to first, the batter is home on a single and having a beer."

connect for a base hit —"

"Which is plenty."

"Don't interrupt me. In the warm-up, you march him around with the little toy bat in his mouth. Then you stand him at the plate. You pitch a rubber ball to him. Then, if he gets a foul tip he runs the bases for a home run. You call that baseball?"

Skid was indignant. "He hits fair lots of times! He can play right field!"

"Right field my eye! By the time he chases the ball, picks it up, and runs to first, the batter is home on a single and having a beer."

"What have you got against Pepper?"

"Not much. Except people keep asking whether Skid Kelly is more interested in giving me a ring or Pepper a collar."

A scrapper on the ball field, Skid was a coward within talking distance of matrimony. "I do more than other guys. That buggy ride we took last week cost me five dollars."

"Don't forget — you've been eating in this

kitchen ever since. Horse and buggy, h'mph! I know a fellow who has an automobile."

"Duke Gary. That four-flusher! He'd better keep away from you."

"He's bigger than you are."

"He'll fall harder when I hit him."

"My brother Ed says Duke's automobile can go thirty miles an hour."

"He'll run that fast when I chase him."

"Don't fight over me. I'll be in the old maid's home soon anyway."

"We've only been going steady a few years. What's your hurry?"

"You! If I'm your girl I want a ring that says so."

"One of these days, Stella, I'll get one for you — one of these days."

"Which day, may I ask?"

"The day I set or" — and Skid grinned at the insurmountable odds — "the day we lose a game to the Sluggers with me pitching."

"Like today?"

"Like today."

Stella leaned forward. "Your word of honor?"

"My word of honor."

"Raise your right hand and solemnly swear — if we" (he laughed at the absurdity of it) "lose to the Sluggers, I shall on that day place a ring upon your finger and plight my troth."

"I hear," said Stella with a sly smile, "the umpire for the game will be Tim McNamarra."

Skid gagged on a mouthful. "That thief!"

"Maybe Reverend Rutherford and his Sluggers will beat you after all."

"Fat chance!"

It was a gala afternoon. The flags were out, the stores were closed and the Lieutenant Governor himself led the parade through town to the ball park where a record crowd of five thousand from near and far converged by foot, streetcar, wagon, and jitney. Ropes along the sidelines kept the overflow off the field.

Before the start of the game, Skid and a happy, prancing Pepper escorted Stella to a pair of first-row grandstand seats behind third base. Skid was in a generous mood. "You look pretty in that new shirtwaist and hat."

"Other fellows think so, too."

"Don't let me catch you flirting. You're my girl."

Stella held out the significant finger on her left hand. "It's still bare."

"We made a bargain," he reminded her and promptly changed the subject. "Where's your

brother Ed?"

"Behind first base. He won't sit with me."

"What's eating him?"

"Your dog ate his meal."

"If your loony brother is hungry, I'll buy him a frankfurter and bun."

"You can get one for me."

"I don't want to be seen waiting on a girl. I'm the star of the team."

"I'll ask Duke Gary to get it." She swiveled her head and focused on a strapping, craggy-faced young man, several seats down in the same row. "Hi, Duke!"

Duke, sartorially dazzling in his stiff white collar and a red, yellow and green striped silk shirt, stood up — two hundred and ten pounds in a six-foot, three frame. "Hello, beautiful," he greeted with a wink and a tongue clicking sound of admiration. "Who's the woodenhead with you?"

"I'll show you!" Skid exploded. But Stella grabbed him and held on tenaciously.

"He'll pulverize you," she warned.

"Says who?"

"Hey, Skid," Duke taunted, "I hear you're a good pitcher with tiddly-winks."

Skid gave him a withering glare. "Where'd you get the shirt — from an awning?"

"What's the matter — too classy for you?"

"I'd buy one — if I had a baboon to wear it."

Duke started to move. "Behind the grandstand, Buster."

"Duke Gary!" Stella ordered. "You let Skid alone."

"Yes, ma'am." Duke bowed respectfully.

"Yes, ma'am. I won't hurt the little boy."

Skid was not backing down — entirely. "I'll get you one of these days, you big lug."

"Skid," Stella urged, "give Pepper his warm-up. The crowd is waiting."

The crowd, as usual, relished the warm-up. Pepper sat on his haunches at the plate, tail wagging, with a toy bat in his mouth. He faced Skid, who stood in front of the pitcher's box — about twelve feet from the plate — with a large rubber ball painted white and with inked stitches to simulate a baseball. Skid lobbed the ball in and, more often than not, hit the bat, which Pepper dropped and scampered to first base as the fans cheered and applauded. On the second hit, he circled the bases joyously for a home run — unmindful of the fact that the ball had rolled only a few feet. Pepper, as always, was delighted with his performance.

As he strode onto the diamond, waving his umpire's mask, the first words big Tim McNamarra bellowed were earthshaking: "Get that dog off this field!"

Skid, still smarting from his brush with Duke

Gary, screamed his rebuttal. "Over my dead body!"

"If that's the way you want it, I'll accommodate you!"

The feud between Skid Kelly and McNamarra was an old one. In younger days, both had played Class C pro ball on rival teams and to each the sight of the other produced a shoulder chip the size of a railroad tie.

The nose-to-nose confrontation was quickly interrupted by the field umpire, who pulled McNamarra aside and gently explained that the dog was a big attraction and opposing teams always agreed to his presence to swell the gate receipts.

"What," demanded McNamarra, "is the game coming to?" And without waiting for an answer, he turned to Reverend Rutherford, the manager of the Sluggers. "Good day, Reverend," he greet-

"You say I can't chase him?"

"That's exactly what I say."

"In that case, Mr. Kelly, would you be so kind as to add his name to your list."

"Add whose name?"

"The dog's."

"Are you crazy?"

McNamarra's face flushed ominously. "If he bats," he roared, "— and batting he was — he's on your team and either you put his name down and do it right now or that dog doesn't show any of his four legs on this ball field!"

Skid swallowed a vitriolic retort. There was something about McNamarra's expression and stance that left no doubt that, on this point, he would be resolutely irreversible. Reluctantly, Skid produced a pencil and scrawled the name, Pepper. "Satisfied?" he snarled.

McNamarra disdained to answer. He raised his

arms, his stentorian voice boomed, "Play ball!" and five thousand voices echoed the exhortation.

And Stella Kinsella looked again at her bare engagement finger. Would it or would it not be soon adorned?

As the game progressed from inning to inning, the heroic deeds of Skid Kelly were the stuff that makes legend. In eight innings he had allowed only one hit. At bat, he had four for four, one a home run with Pepper yelping happily as his master circled the bases. The score was 7 to 0.

With the home team at bat in the bottom half of the eighth, Skid paid a visit to Stella.

The more modest he tried to look as the fans cheered him, the more he exposed his self-esteem. "That boob was lucky to get a scratch hit off me," he grumbled. "I'd have

had a no-hitter going by now with my perfect day at the plate. Am I good?"

A gloomy Stella glanced toward Duke Gary. "I've been good, too. A lot you care! Duke's been trying —"

"I've been watching," Skid conceded. "You've been behaving."

"What do I get — a gold star for my report card?"

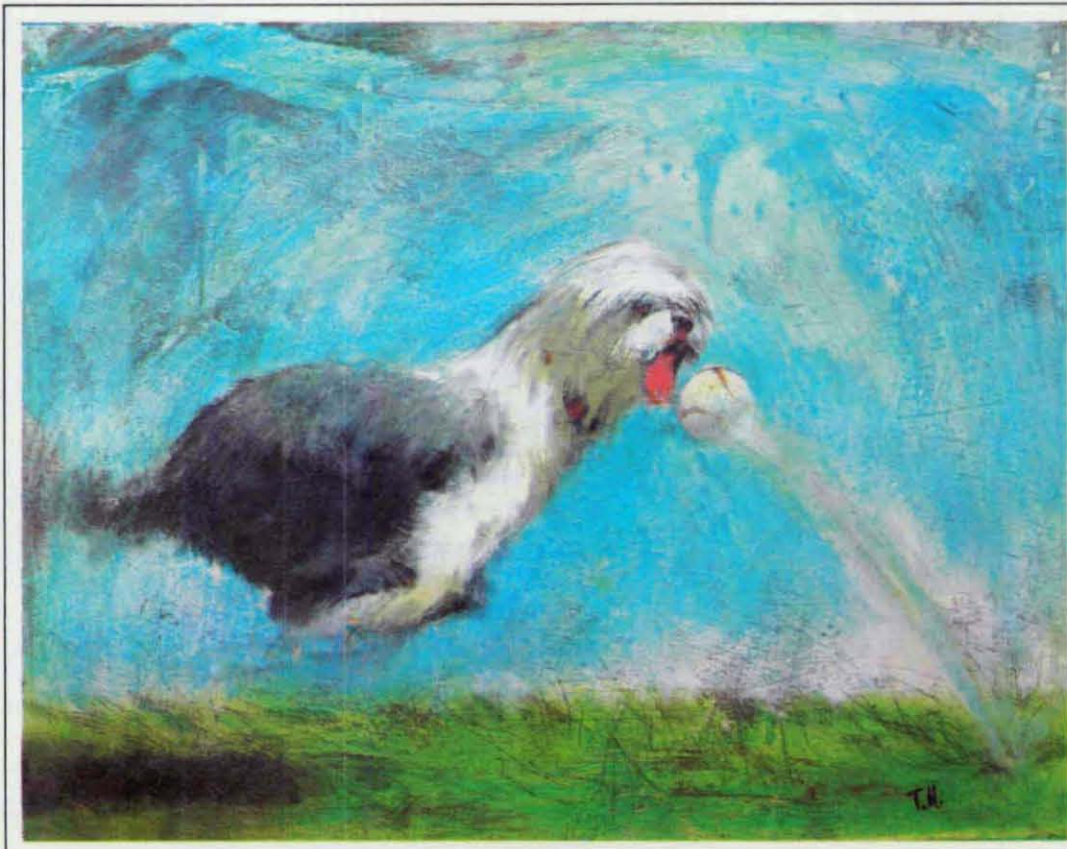
"I told you — if we lose I'll get you the ring." He grinned smugly. "In fact, I'll get it tomorrow morning."

"When you toss a coin you call heads, tails, and standing up. If the coin flies away, you lose."

He patted Stella's shoulder with feigned sympathy and returned to the bench with the renewed cheers of the home fans tingling in his ears.

It was then that an idea sparkled in the desperate mind of Stella Kinsella. Hers but to do or die — a spinster.

The home team went down in order. They



This is Pepper, the best right fielder around.

ed courteously. "What about the dog?"

The Reverend was a mild man, a baseball enthusiast who had once played two seasons with Buffalo before giving up the game to study for the ministry. "I have no objection."

He handed his list of players to McNamarra, who pretended to scrutinize it carefully to keep Skid waiting.

"Thank you," McNamarra said finally, pocketing the lineup. "Now" — and his austere glance swept the field — "who's the manager of the home team?"

Skid jabbed his list at him.

McNamarra pretended surprise, then accepted and perused the paper. "Kelly," he inquired with puzzled mien, "are you the manager *and* the pitcher?"

"That's who I am! Also the best hitter. I can do anything but umpire. I leave that to the has-beens and those who never were."

"Tell me, wizard — what is the name of the dog?"

"Pepper."

didn't care. The game was already won.

As if to compound Stella's brainstorm, Skid Kelly committed himself to a quixotic maneuver. He waved in the right fielder and marched up to his enemy.

"McNamarra," he announced, "I'm making a substitution."

McNamarra took out his list and waited imperiously.

"The right fielder, Sutherland, comes out."

McNamarra checked off the name. "Sutherland out."

"Pepper goes in."

McNamarra blinked once. "What'd you say?" He blinked twice.

Skid repeated himself.

The red was flushing McNamarra's face again. "You're going to play a dog on the field!"

"He's on the list of players," Skid reminded him. "You made me put him there. Remember?"

"Leading seven to nothing, top of the ninth — you think you're going to have a picnic, eh? What d'you think we're playing — vaudeville?"

"He's a smart dog. He's got to break in some time."

Reverend Rutherford, sensing a squabble, approached the plate to calm the belligerents. Skid explained the situation.

"I want you to understand, Reverend, I'm not trying to belittle your team. It's just that this big ox made me put Pepper on the player list and now, so help me, I'm going to work him or I'll make this oaf disqualify himself."

"You!" thundered McNamarra. "Are you trying to intimidate me?"

"Intimidate!" Skid raised his hands imploringly to the heavens as if beseeching the angels to enlighten him. "Where did he get a word like that? He can't spell cat."

Reverend Rutherford stepped between them. "Kelly," he said, for the sake of peace, "if you

want the dog in the outfield, go ahead. But you had better be sure his throwing leg is good."

While the crowd divided itself into roars of approval and disapproval, Skid escorted Pepper to right field, set him in a proper spot with encouraging words of instruction, and beaming as might a proud parent, returned to the pitcher's mound.

The first baseman played deep and the center fielder moved over toward the right. Skid planned to pitch so that the batters — if they connected — would hit to the left. He was cocky enough to believe that he could retire the side without any outfielders. But, just as he turned to face the first batter, he glanced toward the stands

for his routine check. He saw Stella, laughing uproariously, on the lap of Duke Gary. For a moment, he stared dumbfounded. Then he uttered a savage sound, threw down his glove, and made a beeline to the scene of the outrage.

Things happened fast. Skid leaped over the railing, yanked Stella off the lap, and swung at Duke. Duke ducked, and returned the blow with a vengeance.

Before players and fans and Stella could stop the melee, Duke Gary had done a swift, complete job; he had scored on both eyes and bloodied Skid's nose and lips with accompanying lacerations of the adjoining flesh.

The game was halted while cold compresses

were applied to Skid's swollen physiognomy.

But nothing helped.

Trembling with

rage and frustration, Skid

stubbornly went back to pitch.

He walked four men in a row without

putting over one strike. His players gathered

around and heatedly persuaded him to quit. The left

fielder was a fledgling pitcher. Skid reported to McNamarra that

the left fielder would pitch and he, Kelly, would play left field.

The battered countenance and discolored eyes were a tonic to

Tim McNamarra. "Kelly," he grinned, "you ought to let your

dog lead you out there." Skid drummed a forefinger on

McNamarra's chest. "I can see left field from here, but you

can't see the plate right under your own nose and when I

get to bat I'll knock that ball so far you'll need Indian

scouts to find it!" He would have continued the diatribe, but his

players were interrupting again to remind him pleadingly that he should replace Pepper

in right field. But Skid was too proud to overflow

McNamarra's cup of satisfaction. "Pepper stays!"

Result: disaster in the top of the ninth. As

tumult and madness raged through the

frenzied throng, Reverend Rutherford's

Sluggers were not retired until they had

collected eight runs. Eight! With a weak

pitcher and only two human outfielders,

there were wide holes for balls hit be-

yond the infield and easy outs became

easy hits. Only one hit found its

way toward Pepper, a line single

just inside the foul line. He ran

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"From the dog's leg elbow to the bottom of his collar is the strike zone."

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dutifully after it and, finally snatching it in his mouth, raced toward first. But by the time he reached the first baseman who had rushed out to meet him, the batter was safe at third, and the crowd was out of its collective mind.

"I think," said Stella Kinsella to herself, "I'm as good as married."

When the home team came to bat, last half of the ninth, trailing 8 to 7, the boos directed at Skid Kelly reached a crescendo heard a mile away.

But Skid was made of stern stuff. He paced the third-base coaching box and rallied and cajoled the men waiting to bat. In his fierce concentration and determination, he felt his own muscles relaxing once more into their operational groove.

The first two men singled. Things were looking up! But the third batter went down on strikes and the next man flied out. Two men on base with two gone, one run behind. Another out would end

the game. The semipro Championship of the State!

The batter's box was empty.

"Sutherland!" Skid screamed. "You're up. Sutherland!" Then he saw the angelic look on McNamarra's face. He heard a hush in the crowd. He saw the contemplative countenance of Reverend Rutherford. Every one of the five thousand fevered men, women, and children knew that it was Pepper's turn to bat. Everybody but Skid Kelly. It just hadn't occurred to him.

He stood like a stone, absorbing the shock. Then he rushed to McNamarra, gathering delirium en route.

"What's bothering you now, m'lud?" McNamarra inquired airily.

"The dog —" Skid gasped. "I have a pinch hitter for him."

"You have now, have ye? Well, save yourself the trouble."

"I'm the manager!" shrieked Skid. "I have the right to put one man in for another man!"

McNamarra's expression was beatific. "I do agree with you," he declared. "A man for a man, yes. But in this case it's a dog for a dog. I'm fair and I'm reasonable, I am. If you think the mutt can't hit, Kelly, all you got to do is find yourself another dog."

Skid's lips flipped impotently. Finally the words came out. "He can field but he can't hit!"

"I saw him batting in the warm-up before the game." McNamarra was having difficulty controlling his rapture. "I thought he was good, I did."

"That was a toy bat! The ball was a rubber ball! It was pitched to him from only a few feet away!"

"Tell me now, wasn't it you, yourself, who was saying to me — he's got to break in some time? He's on the list of players, he is. He just played right field. You insisted on it. Now, he takes his turn at bat. Right is right," he pronounced, and King Solomon could not have been more august. "As the manager of

your team, Mr. Kelly, will you kindly inform your animal he's up?"

Skid's battered vision riveted venomously on his nemesis. "Even a clock that's stopped," he howled, "is right twice a day. You ain't even that good!"

McNamarra feigned astonishment. "*Ain't*? That's bad grammar. Shame on you."

Skid, arms flailing, was doing a ballet of frustration when his eye caught the solemn look of Reverend Rutherford. Why? Then Skid understood. Pepper was small and a pitcher would have fits pitching to him. If Pepper walked, the bases would be loaded and he, Kelly, four for four, would be the next batter.

"Pepper," he shouted, suddenly exultant. "Come on, boy. You're at bat."

As Skid arranged Pepper at the plate and set the toy bat in his mouth, the opposing pitcher's jaw sagged.

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Reverend Rutherford went to the mound, had a few words with his pitcher, then both approached McNamarra who now perceived soberly that the tables had turned and Skid Kelly might conquer after all.

"Tim," said the Reverend, who could not conceal his amusement, "will you designate the strike zone for my pitcher?"

Skid joined the group while McNamarra rendered his decision. "From the dog's leg elbow to the bottom of his collar," he announced with grave dignity and, ever diligent in his profession, bent over and indicated the strike levels with a flat hand. Pepper sat proudly, tail swishing, eyes bright with excitement.

The pitcher shook his head sorrowfully. His name was Freddy, a morose young man whose chronically dim view of things in general was acutely aggravated by his present predicament. "Reverend," he said respectfully, "I need a rifle with a good sight to get that ball over."

"You can do it, Freddy," encouraged the Reverend with more assurance in his voice than prevailed in his mind.

"You think so?" Freddy wasn't convinced.

"Throw underhand. Put the ball in there for three called strikes."

"I might just as well toss to a keyhole."

"I have confidence in you, Freddy."

"I wish I did."

The Reverend patted him reassuringly. "Throw it easy and carefully. We can't afford a walk. Kelly is up next and he's feeling his oats again."

The crowd raised a nerve-shattering cry and clamor.

Stella sat tense and unbelieving.

McNamarra, maintaining his stately manner, dusted the plate and, at the same time, ignored the diminutive, hairy batter poised for the first pitch.

Skid, waiting his turn to bat next, squatted close to the plate and kept up a steady patter of encouragement to Pepper. "Just sit, Pepper, just sit, ol' boy. Good Pepper. Just sit tight. Steady, Pepper, steady boy."

The pitcher eyed the batter, and still didn't like what he saw. The catcher was down on both knees and bent forward. McNamarra, without loss of aplomb, crouched on one knee.

The first pitch, a high lob, hit the dirt four feet in front of the plate.

"Ball one!" bellowed McNamarra.

"That's the old eye, Pepper!" cheered Skid. "That's the old eye!"

The second pitch was two feet over Pepper's head.

"Ball two!"

"He's scared of you, Pepper boy! Wait him out, wait him out!"

Freddy mopped his brow, shook his head woefully, and went for the resin bag. The catcher came out to the mound to console him.

The third pitch did it! It was low and wide on the inside and dropped on Pepper's tail. Pepper gave a little yelp but he wasn't hurt much. McNamarra, in the classic pose, pointed unflinchingly to first base, directing the batter to take it.

A bounding, jubilant Skid Kelly escorted Pepper to first, planted him firmly on the bag and instructed him not to move until he gave the signal.

of baseball. A young man in the crowd standing along the foul line unobtrusively stepped up to the first baseman, whispered a few words, and quickly disappeared back into the crowd. The first baseman seemed puzzled for a moment, then approached the mound and consulted with Freddy, the pitcher. Freddy appeared surprised, but soon nodded agreement, whereupon he, in turn, motioned to the catcher to come forward and obviously imparted the information delivered by the first baseman. The catcher nodded ready compliance.

The bawling mob vibrated with

to him and who, now, had returned. The young man also knelt, apparently to watch him remove a shoe and go through the motions of dislodging a pebble — or so it seemed — but actually the young man slipped a frankfurter into the player's glove.

The first baseman, with the bait concealed in the folds of his mitt, returned to his position while Freddy the pitcher stalled.

"C'mon, doggie," coaxed the first baseman. "Nice juicy meat. Smell it. Yum, yum."

The home-team coach along the initial sack saw nothing and heard nothing. He was screaming delirious encouragement to Skid Kelly to whack that ball to kingdom come.

Enticing, decoying, tantalizing in the friendliest of whispering voices, the first baseman was urging Pepper to partake of the appetizing frankfurter tightly clutched in the glove at his knee, smack against Pepper's snout.

"Yum, yum, smell that meat. All for you, Pepper. You're a good doggie, Pepper. Take a bite."

It wasn't that Pepper succumbed to temptation. He knew nought of scoundrels in the infield. He thought merely that the man was being hospitable — so why not? He moved his head for a taste. The frankfurter was surreptitiously withdrawn a little, a little more and, when Pepper got it in his mouth, he was off the bag.

Skid's warning cry rent the air too late. The pitcher had fired the ball to first. Pepper was tagged out. The game was over.

Skid Kelly stood rigid in the batter's box as if he never again could move a muscle — nor would care to.

The Reverend Rutherford, to his credit, offered to forfeit the win when he heard what had happened, but McNamarra would have none of it.

"It serves them right," McNamarra stated in his best pontifical manner. "From now on, you can be sure, there'll be no more dogs playing baseball."

Skid kept his word to Stella Kinsella. He gave her an engagement ring the very next morning, and they were married — three years later.

Happily they lived forever after — except for dark moments when Stella worried that one awful day Skid would find out where the frankfurter had really come from. It was, of course, her idea, and her brother Ed had concealed his identity well in delivering the hot dog to the first baseman.

She never knew for sure whether Skid had found out the truth, or whether he merely suspected it. But what she did notice was that as he grew older — but as batty as ever about baseball — Skid Kelly had a habit of stopping everything once in a while, and muttering a single word to himself: "Women!"



"It sort of self-destructed as I passed by."

As dogs, to this day, have never been articulate in the human tongues, there remains some doubt as to how much Pepper actually understood, but his master appeared to have complete confidence in him. When Skid gathered his bat and moved jauntily to the plate he was grinning from ear to ear. Though both of his eyes were black and blue, the home-town fans observing his swaggering manner never doubted that his eyesight was good enough to clobber the ball a country mile.

Then there occurred one of the most dastardly deeds in the annals

the electrifying drama of the scene. The home team trailed 7 to 8, two men out, last half of the ninth. Skid Kelly, the sensational hitter at bat, the bases loaded with a man on third, a man on second, and a dog on first.

The first pitch was a deliberate ball. The pitcher, watching the first baseman, worked slowly, very slowly. The second pitch was a deliberate ball. Then the first baseman shouted for time out, pointed to his foot and limped over the foul line into the crowd, removed his glove and knelt in front of the young man who had previously whispered