

The MOON of the ARFY DARFY

When a man gets down beyond a certain point, there's only one way for

By NELSON ALGREN



The ninth-race prices flash once and out: first SHOW; then PLACE; then WIN. The red OFFICIAL blinks once and goes dark. Winners and losers alike have left. Tip-sheet sellers and shoe-board watchers, clerks and touts, railbirds and the clubhouse cocktail set, all will be back at window and shoe board, paddock and rail, when odds for the first race light up tomorrow.

Only the sweepers high in the seats remain in the vaulted, echoing stands.

Then along the rail, one eye cocked for the race-track cop, Floweree moves alone through the windy glooms.

Floweree, half an inch over five feet high, moves in a curious shuffle-and-pause through a litter of crushed Lily cups. Comes kicking dead tickets, bad guesses and such, through the ruin of the day's million-dollar defeat: seeking a five-dollar victory to last him through the night.

"Hey you!" Floweree doesn't turn to see who's summoning him. Instead he picks up one last abandoned ticket and hurries through the gate.

Where he leans one moment against the iron: to take a toothpick out of his shoe. Then moves on, without shuffle or kick, to wherever toothpick-shod men go. The day's last stooper has finished his day. Whether he's made it or whether he hasn't, they'll run again tomorrow.

And a moon of the backstretch, still and white, looks about with a ruled-off jockey's eyes.

A moon on the arfy-darfy.

That never will return.

I slipped the quarter into the box before the conductor could say, "Hey! You!" How was it that, the time I beat Shoemaker, nobody said, "Hey! You!"?

It wasn't "Hey-You" when I brought in Greek Diabie at 44-1. It was roses for Diabie and roses

for me too. It was "The party's for you tonight, Mister Floweree." It was "Meet Mr. Cannon, he wants to interview you." It was "Why couldn't you win on Diabie at Cahokia but you bring him in at The Big A?"

"Because of the long straightaway, Sir," I answered Mr. Cannon.

I sat in the back of the bus running through the old tickets. Bettors misoverlook winners sometimes. Nobody had missed in the handful I held. But I didn't throw them away.

I didn't really care. In the middle of a win streak a jock puts two grand on another dog in the same race. So he's ruled off. When you come to the end it's the end that's all. I went up the aisle dropping the tickets one by one on the empty seats. I got off where Ogden crosses Fifth Avenue.

Streets go six different ways at that intersection, with a bar every other door. One route, it looked like, had nothing but bar doors. That was the route I was looking for.

I saw the bums and I saw the nabs. I saw hustlers and old-time scuffs. I saw the people light as feathers. I saw the people heavy as lead. There were some made of water and some held by wires. One walked with a pocket full of fish-hooks. Another had never had pockets at all. I saw up-and-comers and over-the-hillers. Fireships, finks and coneroos; and an old-time hooker with her own ghost beside her. I saw round-the-block cruisers and fly-by-nighties. It must be a full moon tonight, I thought, all the bings are out.

Two blind cane bummies were taking up the middle of the sidewalk in an argument. One jerked off his black glasses so he could see who he was arguing with. "You've led five runs runnin'," he accused the other bummy. "Yes—and I'll lead the next five too!" The other told him who was boss in the outfit—and the other

one went for him with his cane. The boss bummy knocked the assistant bum's cane flying. It looked like a Japanese movie.

"You working for me or am I working for you?" he wanted to know when the other went to pick up his cane.

"Oh, hell," the assistant cane bum purely whined, "you lead all the time."

Who got to lead the next five runs I didn't tarry to learn. Everyone in Chicago wants to be top man. I walked on.

An oversized party in a turtleneck sweater and his cap pulled over his eyes rattled a red collection box at me—"Have a heart for little kiddies, Buddy," he told me. What little kiddy did you slug to get that box, I wondered.

"The price of one beer may save a life," he blocked my way to let me know, in a voice like a rowboat being dragged across pebbles. Nothing short of whiskey could save his own.

"I'm on the stem myself," I told him. He looked me over and saw: My condition was worse than his own.

When I looked back he was looking after me. All I had to do was turn around and he would have put a dime on me. So long as he wasn't following I'd quit while I was even. I walked on.

A broad in a doorway hollered, "Hey, soldier!" Well, that was an improvement over "Hey you." I threw my shoulders back, stuck out my chest and went over to her.

"Drag my old man out of this joint," she gave me orders of the day.

"Why don't you do it yourself?"

"Ram declared me out of bounds."

"Who's Ram?"

She pointed one finger upward to a sign. It was a hand-lettered job swung between a couple of big cracked flowerpots. Something that looked

*Nelson Algren first attracted national attention in 1942, with the publication of *Never Come Morning*, a powerful novel of poverty and crime. His best-known work is the 1949 National Book Award winner, *The Man With the Golden Arm*, a fascinating study of Frankie Machine, dealer in a gambling club, and the sordid world in which he operates. In 1956, *A Walk on the Wild Side* appeared to great critical and popular acclaim, reaffirming Algren's place as one of America's leading contemporary writers.*

as if it had once been a palm frond was still stuck in one pot. The sign said:

SOUTHSEA ISLE

R. ENRIGHT, PROP.

"I'll do what I can, Sis," I told her as an excuse to go inside.

Inside I saw Sis had been wrong—*she* wasn't out of bounds. It was the people inside who were out. I never saw a cave like this before. It felt like a place a lot of people come to but nobody ever leaves. Nobody was guarding the door. It wasn't too late to turn, yet I kept moving in as if I'd been sent for.

The front bar was just one long narrow aisle that could pass for the side entrance to Hell if somebody swept it out. Someone began playing a piano far in the rear. I felt my way, taking care not to brush against anyone on the stools—one brush and any one of them would fall on his head and just lay there. I made it all the way to the two rubber plants on either side of a bead-string portiere, and stepped through the beads. Everyone in that room had been waiting for me. They were looking at me but I couldn't see *them*. I stood against the wall to catch the piano.

All the good times are past and gone

the piano man was singing—

All the good times are o'er.

I looked down to see if I was standing on somebody dying.

Outside of the circle of blue-green light was nothing but a sinking gloom. Where little white faces rose real slow; then sank back into the gloom.

All I could smell was a pit where tigers lived without room to pace. All I could hear was breathing, breathing.

Like every breath was the last.

I began to make out figures. Cats who couldn't stay on the frontbar stools any longer had been assigned to lean on walls back here—

The longest train I ever did see

Was on the Georgia Line

The engineer came by at six o'clock

The cab came by at nine. . . .

The piano man stopped on an upbeat. He crooked a finger at me.

All the good times were gone for him too. I read it in his face as he had read it in mine. We'd never seen each other before yet we'd known each other all our days.

"It's all too easy now," he told me, skipping "my name is so-and-so" and shaking hands and all of that.

I knew the feeling he had in mind. Know how it feels when things have been so hard for you, to have them come so easy for others. We mucked out the stalls, hauled water, walked hots and cooled horses and calmed horses until we smelled horse. It was three years before I got to gallop one. I knew how *that* felt, that first gallop. I'd earned it. Now it's a couple months and they give a kid a contract. He sits on top and thinks he's race-riding. And don't even rate the horse. Rides him like his contract is for one race. Thinks his job is just to make the horse run faster than the others and then they'll put a wreath around *him* too. It is all too easy now.

Then, dark as that cave was, he took out a pair of glasses yet darker, threw his cap on the piano, and began to play again. Mary Mother, how his playing picked up! I went cold when he

him to go—no, not up, but farther down to absolute bottom, where he can find something low enough to start him back up.



Moon of the Arly-Darly

began to sing—and the words went through me warm—

*Let me tell you people
About this blackjack game
It's caused me nothing but trouble
I have only myself to blame
How unlucky can one man be?*

*Every quarter I get, Lord
Blackjack takes it away
My friends don't come around me
Because I been so blind
I can't even borrow a nickel
How unlucky can one man be?*

*The dealer hit sixteen with a five
Just enough to make twenty-one
How unlucky—how unlucky—how
unlucky—*

the needle had hit a crack yet he kept grimacing with the crack till I caught on. Then he took the glasses off, bent down and switched the record off, and came up wearing the G.I. cap. He looked up at me. A record mimic no less.

"That's my trade, friend. What's yours?"

"I see what you mean," I told him, not knowing what I meant myself.

Suddenly squatting, eyes closed fast, he began a rocking on his toes in that misty greenish light, with his hands clasped below his knees, making some sort of old-time singsong deep in his throat in time with his rocking—

*All the good times are past and gone
All the good times are o'er. . .*

he leaped up—"Now I got to go to work."

Just like that. Crooks a finger at me, tells me what it used to be like, makes like Ray Charles, gives an impersonation of a Chinaman kicking cold turkey, then blows me off. I stood around to see what he meant by going to work. But he didn't do the record-mimic routine again.

He had a tambourine on that box and just pounded away on things like *Blue Moon* and *Cocktails for Two* until a woman came walking like she was held together by Band-Aids, dropped a dime in the box and went back to where she'd been lying before the Band-Aids came loose.

"If I put down a dime for that kind of banging," I told him, "I'd never be able to face my friends."

Then I walked away.

He called after me but he didn't say "Hey you!" I turned around.

"How are they?" he called to me.

"How are who?"

"Your friends."

And went back to his bangbang banging.

I went up to the front near the door. There was an empty stool somebody just had fallen off. He was lying on the floor. I stepped over him and sat down.

Two bartenders' aprons were dirty. Neither stopped rushing beer and booze. They looked like they hadn't stopped rushing since yesterday midnight. But the third fellow's apron had just been put on. He was the one who said "Out you go" or "Have one on the house." There was no trouble spotting R. Enright, Proprietor.

I didn't bang on the bar for service. I just sat and waited. He strolled over. He wasn't anxious for my trade.

"I've seen you before."

He didn't ask. He told me.

"I've seen you too," I told him. "You used to be Postmaster General till you broke with Roosevelt."

He liked that. The barflies he was serving hadn't heard of Roosevelt. But a lot of people in his day must have told Enright with his stiff white collar, gray hair combed back and the look of an Irish eagle, who he looked most like.

He looked like Jim Farley.

I put down two bits for a shot of bar whiskey and lay two bits beside it. He didn't look at the two bits. He just looked at me.

"I'll make you later," he told me. Then picked up the two bits.

Way in the back the old mimic was carrying on for nickels and dimes. I figured Enright had him chained. Only one thing you can do for a junkie: chain him. If you keep him from getting sick he can't mind a chain. When Enright came my way again he came with a bottle. He set it beside my glass and walked away. He couldn't chain me.

But isn't that as nice a way as any of letting somebody let you know he's got you made? Either he saw me ride or my picture. I only took one shot and pushed the bottle back.

A girl two barflies away saw the move; a dark-haired country type wearing a green babushka.

"These Chicago girls. . . ." She began some kind of beef just to pass the time. "You know what one of them *Fireball* fools told me?—I started the babushka fad around here."

Enright leaned back against the damper: He'd heard all this before.

"The very nerve! I was wearing a babushka two years in L.A.! I was the one brought it around here and they think wearin' a babushka gives them class. Honest to God, broads like that must drink out of their old man's shaving mug."

Enright, looking like he was being asphyxiated by boredom, came back. He pushed the bottle toward me. That was the tipoff that he had something in mind.

More reason not to hit it. It would look like I was hard up. So I didn't push it back, I just let it stand. I could have tilted that bottle and not put it down till it was empty but—control. I learned it from controlling two-year-olds and I've kept it, it's all I've kept.

The originator of the babushka was

wearing a Longines. I walked back to the piano to see whether he was still wearing one. He wasn't. But he was still carrying on—

*And as we light a cigarette
To some exquisite chanssonette*

I stood it as long as I could. Then I went back and sat beside the country type.

"Can I offer you a drink?" I asked her.

She didn't look me over so much as she appraised me.

"I buy my own drinks," she decided.

"Do you want to say hello?"

I went back to my own stool. I couldn't remember ever being brushed off faster.

"That finky cop," she told Enright. It looked like she told Enright all her troubles—"You know that jojoba directs traffic Saturday mornings on Warren and California? I was carryin' my man's pants to the cleaners 'n you know what he asked me?"

"No," Enright acknowledged.

"He asked me, 'Baby, is them my size?' Just like that."

"What'd you tell him?"

"They're too small for you" was all I could think to say. It was just the way he said it—like he knew me that burned me."

"He does know you," I filled in, "he was giving you a pass."

"Go ride your horse," she told me.

I'd had enough of the Southsea Isle. I got up and started for the door. Enright called me.

"Drop back tomorrow, Floweree," he told me. "I got something for you."

I just looked at him. Like he was out of his mind.

"For just you," he added.

I liked Enright's habit of waiting for people to come to him. Next day I'm supposed to remind him—"You said you might have something for me, Mister."

I didn't say it. I ordered a shot like the night before and he put the big bottle down. When he took his own goodtime walk there was nothing there waiting but an empty shot glass beside a full bottle. The set-down jock had gone south.

I stayed out of Enright's and had my best week since leaving Cahokia.

A cat in front of me told the seller, "Two dollars on number eight three times," and the seller punched him a

combination and the beef began. He didn't want win or place, he just wanted show. The seller pointed to the sign on the window—COMBINATION. The cat finally took the tickets and went away mad. He didn't know what he'd bought, I knew he didn't know. I followed him.

Number eight ran second. The clown howled with disappointment, threw his tickets down and went to complain to the bartender. I could have run after him and told him the seller had done him a good turn: that he had place money as well as show. But by the time I picked up the tickets he'd gone.

I picked up twenty-one bucks and sat down next to a big old darky gal and asked her how she was doing.

"I dreamed Number Five last night," she told me, "today I bet four races 'n no number five win yet. Now I know, fifth race, number five got to win."

I took her program out of her hand. "That's the very reason number five can't win," I told her, like I knew something for sure she could never know. "There's your winner—I got to do it with your pencil" and circled number nine: Mom's Request.

What did I have to lose?

Mom's Request broke in front, drew away and was home free: eighteen dollars straight.

I didn't ask the old gal for anything. For a minute I didn't think she was going to come up. Then she said, "Mind my seat," like she was sure I would.

When she came back she handed me a fiver and her program. I understood by that that if the next one didn't make it, she'd expect change.

"Now is the time for the five," I took another shot at her program. Number five was Ilo-Ilo. I took one look at them out of the gate and began backing away. It was time to get lost. Ilo-Ilo ran dead last. I went down to the other end of the stands.

I'd had a good day.

I got a shave and haircut, paid my room rent, had my first real meal in a month, bought a zippy little sports jacket for three dollars in a secondhand joint and I was ready for Enright.

"You're looking sharp," Ram told me.

"I had a winner," I told him.

"You want another?"

"I'll listen," I let him know. He motioned me over to a corner of the bar and talked with his head turned to the barflies.

"You know that thing Hartack been riding?"

I knew the horse he meant but I wasn't suppose to know.

"He's been riding lots of horses."

"Flamisan."

Flamisan is made more for flying than running.

"I got a guy will put up five bills to have Flamisan run no worse than second."

"Second to what?"

"That's his business. I'm serious," Enright scolded me. "He's been in here every night for a week. I been holding him for you."

"Does he know me?" I asked.

"He don't know you from Ezra Taft Benson."

"Who's Ezra Taft Benson?" It was my turn to learn something.

"No matter."

"I don't get your drift," I told Enright. "Do they know you around the pad-docks?"

"I rode ten years with those people."

"Then they won't bother you."

Enright stood up to look at me from a



"It looked thirsty."

better distance. Then told me as cool as you'd care for:

"You're Hartack."

I didn't say anything.

He looked me right in the eye.

"Bill Hartack."

"I understood you the first time you said it," I told him. "I'm Bill Hartack. And you're Ezra Taft Benson."

Not that I didn't get the drift. I just wanted to be sure that the drift I was getting was the drift Enright was putting out. I knew it had been worked around every stable in the country.

The stables was where I met Enright two hours before post time.

As soon as I saw him coming I realized something:

I wasn't going to ride anymore.

I put on boots, but my pants legs covered them to the ankles. I hid behind a pair of sunglasses. Then I put on a helmet. I know too many riders around there to put on silks. Then I tied a whip onto my hand.

The mark was a big-hand, big-belly, big-laugh, old jolly-boy wearing a shirt covered with rose petals and a ten-gallon hat. I'M FROM OMAHA, a badge he wore on his breast pocket said. He was from Omaha all right. He was *all* Omaha.

He was so hungry to make that five G's that I *had* to be Willie Hartack. I gave him the Hartack shake—as cold a piece of skin as he'd ever felt. He drew back.

"You know what kin run faster'n a horse?" was his idea of opening a discussion about fixing a horse race.

"What runs faster than a horse, Amos?" Enright humored him.

"A pig!" Amos let us know.

Well, Enright had gone along this far. Let Enright finish it.

"A pig?" Enright asked.

"Shor! For the first thirty feet!"

Nobody laughed. Not even Enright. I tipped the wink for Enright to back off. I could handle Amos.

"Was there something you wanted to see me about?" I asked him.

Amos stopped flushing, coughed once, and got into it. "I think something is going to outrun that thing you're riding," he told me.

"Then you better bet on it," I suggested.

"I'm a man likes to be *shor*."

"Nothin's sure in a horse race, Mister."

"Step over here, son," he asked me.

We went over to a shadow of the stable. "I can't hang around here long, Mister," I told him. "I'm supposed to be in the jocks' room now. What do you think can beat *Flamisan*?" He was even money and the odds were going to drop lower by post time.

"If Flamisan loses stride," he falters there—"Well, you're on his back, son."

"What's it worth to you, Mister?"

He had it ready. I counted five C's. Then I handed it back.

"It's worth eight," I told him.

"What it's worth and what I got are two different things," he told me. "Six is high as I'll go."

"Six fifty."

When he handed it back there were six C's and a twenty. I didn't want to lose him. I flicked my little whip against my boots and left him standing.

I handed Enright the glasses, the whip and the riding boots in a barbershop down the street from the gate. I showed him the C-plus-twenty I'd worked the mark for.

"You were great in there," Enright told me. Then we cut it down the middle.

"You think the guy will lay for Hartack?" I wondered, not really caring.

"He won't lay for Hartack. He'll lay for me," Enright told me. "Give him a couple days to get back to Omaha before you come into the joint."

Enright liked the idea of the mark making a beef in his joint. That I could tell.

I moved out of that flop that night. I found a place called the Avenue Arms. It wasn't the Hilton or anything like it. But the room didn't have an iron Valet Service Door. That was all I wanted: a room without an iron door.

I picked up the *Form* the next morning and looked at the charts:

Flamisan, in hand while placed on the inside, was forced to come out and circle his field on completing the first mile, continuing gamely to take a commanding lead through the upper stretch. Won driving.

It looked like a rainy day in Omaha.

THE END

ANOTHER NICE THING ABOUT IT IS THAT YOU CAN TAKE IT ALONG CAMPING, fishing, hunting, hiking, picnicking or almost any place. Because canned Florida orange juice (O.J. for short) comes in its own handy "jug" so to speak. It's delicious for breakfast or any time, full of natural vitamin C, and wholesome as all outdoors. So drink up!



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LAKELAND, FLORIDA



THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

"On the other hand, it would be quite a feather in our cap if they made it to the moon."