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Gordon gave him one look. "I came the gate," he said.

"Hope you won't feel bad about not being," said the man with an easy grin.

"I bought this puppy from a breeder of champion stuff. Firelight Melody's. My two handlers have the next best in the ring. Can't be beat."

Gordon bent over and lifted Top Hat's front and set his legs firm and straight. He put his hand under the puppy and pushed his hind legs out a trifle.

The judge came down the line. He spoke to the man, and they laughed. He went over the man's puppy carefully. Gordon looked away. Somebody spoke outside the rope. He looked up. There was his mother in a pale yellow dress. She was much thinner and kind of pale under the brim of her soft hat.

"Gordon," she said.

His world rocked. She must have come with the man. She came to see him pull down the blue ribbons and purple rosettes and silver platters.

"Gordon," she said again.

"Hello," he said.

"Keep a stiff upper lip," she said.

The world whirled back again. That was what she always said: when he broke his arm, when he had to have tonsils out, when he went in in the big basketball game. It was kind of password meaning she wanted to win!

"O.K.," said Gordon.

He could see everywhere now, as distinct as a life blade. Evening. His eyes left the circle outside. Women marking dog legs. The girl in the dungarees, out-golden dog in her hat. And Elaine in a picture hat and a red print with white pants. They were eating ham-burgers.

He was kind of pac-ific and around, looking at him. As the judge finished go-over the dog that next to Top Hat, mother suddenly away and caught dad's arm and him over.

They were standing together, just in the rope, when the judge ran a hand down Top Hat's firm barrel, out by all those days and days of careful feeding. Down his front legs. He looked at his mother. Gordon had brushed them with paste. They were white and even. Top Hat's tongue lolloped out and the judge's hand and everybody's.

The judge waved him up to run the rest of the ring. Gordon trotted, and he remembered what the girl said. Top Hat floating gait, easy and strong. He looked with a proud eye at Gordon.

They went on. Dogs lined up again. The man moved up to the two other dogs were placed next. The judge passed Gordon, came back, him up to fourth place. Then they all walked again. Gordon was up above two dogs.

Top Hat stood steady while the judge pushed his legs again. Looked at his mother from the back. Then

the judge walked to the table and took the ribbons. It was all over.

Gordon looked at the man and the dog who was Top Hat's brother. The other dog was lighter in bone, he knew it. That dog hadn't been worked with like Top Hat, it wasn't so well filled in the barrel. Then his hand went to Top Hat's muzzle. He didn't care. He cared fiercely. But anyhow, Top Hat had done him proud. Prize or no prize, he had done his best.

Gordon was still looking down at Top Hat when the judge nudged his shoulder. He jerked up, and there was a blue ribbon in the judge's hand and he held it out to Gordon. Gordon got to his feet and mumbled, "Thank you." The crowd clapped wildly. The judge gave the red ribbon to the man who was mother's friend. The man was very red and angry. He jerked his dog out of the ring.

And the judge said to Gordon, "Come in the last class with your puppy."

Gordon didn't know what that meant. The steward told him the winner of every class went in for a class for best. A puppy couldn't be best but he could be reserve winner, second best, if he was good enough.

Top Hat pranced happily across the grass. Mother and dad were there, arm in arm.

"I'm so happy you won," said mother. She meant it too.

Dad was grinning all over his face. He said, "Your mother and I are going to get some food. Want to come?"

"No."

"How long you been in the Army?"

"About thirty years."

"Noncommissioned officer?"

"No."

"H'm-m-m! You must be pretty dumb."

And the second soldier walked away before the first—Maj. Gen. William H. Wilson, the Old Man himself—could scramble out from beneath the machine.

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THEN Elaine came floating up and she was just as beautiful as a girl could ever be. "Oh, Gordon, I'm excited to death," she said.

"Think of you being a winner! Why you—you're important! You're wonderful."

"I got a good dog," said Gordon.

Elaine hung on his arm. "Look, how about coming over tonight and telling me all about dogs? Maybe I could take a dog in the ring sometime. It's terribly exciting."

Gordon looked down at Top Hat. "Thank you," he said coldly, "I'm too busy. I got to train my dog for the obedience trials. I'm busy all the time." He walked deliberately away and found the girl in dirty dungarees and said, "You helped a lot. How's for a hot dog before your class comes up?"

"Swell," said the girl. "There's five more classes before they'll get to the solid color other than black, bitches."

They walked off together and the two dogs trailed pleasantly along, Top Hat bouncing and making playful nips at the golden girl. When he swung on her ear she put him in his place.

"You going to get to the Blueridge show next month?" asked the girl. "Or is it too far?"

"I guess maybe no place is so far," said Gordon, "that Top Hat and me can't get there."

Horrors of War

Camp Stewart, Georgia.

Only the dungaree-clad legs of a soldier protruded from beneath the auto he was repairing when another soldier came up.

"Working on the Old Man's car, eh?" the second soldier asked.

"Yes," the first replied.

"Gettin' paid extra?"

"No."

"How long you been in the Army?"

"About thirty years."

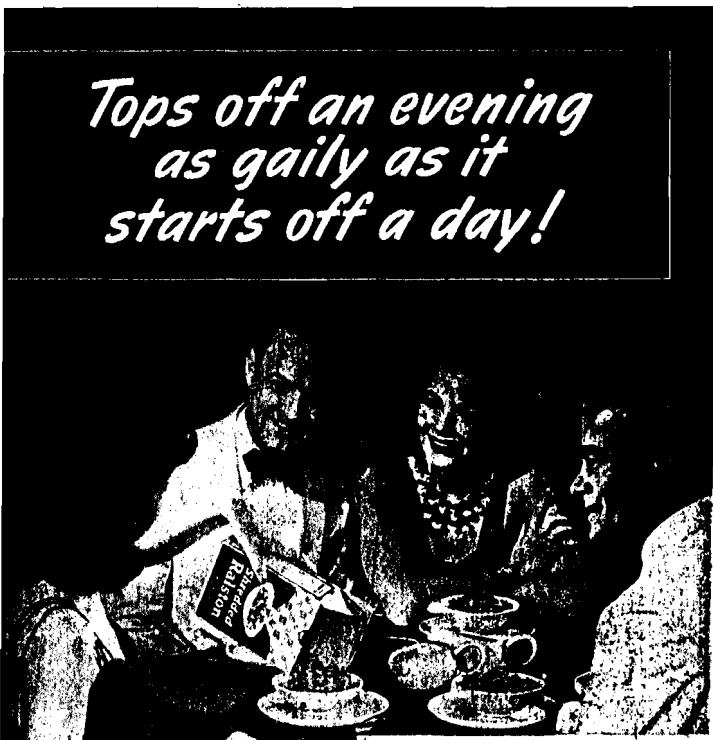
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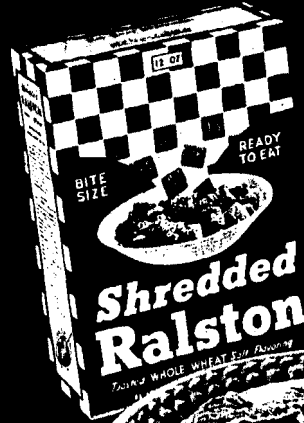


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