

THE big man walked from the door of the office building and paused on the sidewalk to fill his lungs. The crisp October air went into him and seemed in a measure to cleanse him of the filth that clogged his soul. He moved to the gutter and spat. Then with a loathing glance at the office building he walked hurriedly on.

About this office building there was nothing to give the impression that it might dirty a man's soul. It was facaded of chaste marble on the outside. Up on the twentieth story was a suite of rooms filled with handsome stenographers and fine maple-wood furnishings. This big man, named Buford, had been sitting in the largest and fanciest of the rooms. Across the desk from him reposed Mr. Martin Flack, a portly and well-jowled financier. It is necessary to insist that Mr. Flack was a "financier." He was president, it is true, of the Eagles Baseball and Exhibition Company, Inc., but this was owing to a business merger lately consummated. In no sense was Martin Flack a baseball man, else he would not have brought about the conversation of which Dipsey Buford was party of the second part, and which ran as follows:

"I'm told," said Mr. Flack in his friendly way, "that Manager Burnham intends starting you in the first game tomorrow and back again in the fourth."

"Yep," said Buford.

"And there is more than a chance," said Mr. Flack, "that there will be only four games to this world series. From the players' point of view that's all very well. You men only get your split on the first four games."

"So what?" asked Buford.

"Look at it from my angle," Mr. Flack continued. "The first two games are played in our stadium which seats upward of eighty thousand. The series then moves west to Panther Park—a mere hatbox with a capacity of thirty."

"It'll make tough pitchin' that fourth game," Buford observed. "It'll be Sunday with ground rules, and all."

Then Martin Flack had said, "A pitcher could lose that game and not be sorry, Buford. It'll be a tightwad series for us all unless we get another chance to fill the stadium."

SHORTLY afterward Buford issued into the street feeling about as unclean as a man could who'd had a bath and shave not two hours before. He walked rapidly to his hotel where he undressed to the skin and bathed again.

"I should've let him have one," Buford was thinking while he soaped and sponged.

He hadn't, though, and this sin of omission still irked him next afternoon when he put his right foot in the pitching stirrup and upped his left foot nearly to the level of his eyebrows and roared one through there like the fast express. It made strike one on the Panther, and the big show was on.

"At's makin' 'em like it, Dipsey . . . Hey, Dipsey, this is where we came in."

The last remark, which emanated from Montague Bates at shortstop, had to do with the big show of the year before. The Eagles had won that series in four straight with Buford taking the first and final contest. The papers, in fact, were making considerable play of the Buford string. He had never lost a world-series game and he had won seven during his twelve-year stretch with the Eagles.

"John (Dipsey) Buford," one sports columnist wrote, "is half of the greatest battery in operation today. One may as well mention Lee without Jackson or Ike without Mike as to divide the name and fame of these super-inseparables—Dipsey Buford and Beany Magee."

Buford caught the hard-flung ball from the man behind the plate. The

# Say It Isn't So

By Holmes Alexander

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN FLOHERTY, JR.

**It took a lot of strenuous pitching for Dipsey Buford to learn that he wasn't any better than the man who was catching him**

force of the throw stung his gloved palm. Magee always pegged the returns as if he meant to knock the pitcher down. This annoyed Buford, but not as much as remembering that squib in the sports column. Buford snorted as he set himself to pitch.

"Hokum," he muttered. "Where do they get that inseparables stuff? Like I couldn't get along without Magee. If I never saw him again, I'd miss him like the measles."

HE WENT into his windup and took the signal. Somewhere between the time his hands came up and his arm went down, Buford adjusted his fingers on the stitches. A batter had no chance to see this done. There was a sharp, downward arc as the ball flicked in and the batter lashed at it. The curve had fooled him. Magee smothered the easy pop-up.

"One away, Dipsey . . . Round the horn."

While the infielders crisscrossed the diamond with their throws, Magee walked out to the pitching box. He was a small man as catchers go. He had quick brown hands and sharp eyes in a high-cheeked, leathery face. He was known as a man of brains—hence his nickname. All but one of his teammates affectionately called him Beany.

"Well, Magee," said Buford. "What'd you want now?"

"This next guy," said Magee. "Don't feed him nuthin' high. Curve him low."

Buford curved the fellow low and struck him out . . .

It was not until late in the game, and coasting to a 3 to 0 shutout, that Buford got around to thinking about Mr. Flack. It did seem when you stopped to add it up that the club owners had a raw deal in the world series. With half the games played at Panther Park there wouldn't be much of a melon to slice anyhow, and Flack had the stockholders to think about. "A pitcher could lose that fourth game and not be sorry." What did that mean if not what it seemed?

"He'd have to gimme what I asked for," thought Buford. "I could get doubles on my winner's share. Maybe five, six grand—the heel!"

He tried to forget all this while he worked. Sweat oiled the big, flat-lying muscles through his shoulders and back. His fast one skipped and his curve ball was like coming round the mountain. He worked methodically, pacing himself, following Magee's signals, keeping ahead of the batters and sometimes sloughing off a third strike with his change of pace. But in the ninth inning he thought again of Martin Flack: "Five, six grand. Who's it goin' to hurt? The fans see more baseball. We still win the championship and—"

His thoughts went skyward with a batted ball, and suddenly he was running to back up the outfield relay into

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"Beany," said Dipsey Buford. He knelt, supporting the fellow's head. "It's nothin'—just an ankle. You'll be back"





ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN HOLMGREN

## Knit One, Pull Two

By Pat Frank

**W**HAT makes it so good," said Bitsy Biggers, "is it's simple, see. My best flashes are always simple. Like calling you 'America's Midnight Date.' Where'd you be without that?"

"I don't know," said Karen March, examining a runner in the eighty-nine-cent stockings that sheathed one of her hundred-thousand-dollar legs, "where would I be?"

Bitsy Biggers tossed his tiny, elegant hands at where the ceiling would have been, if the set had had a ceiling. "You'd be in the B's, that's where you'd be! Now this is the way it goes—a sort of slow build-up keyed on National Defense and Aid to England. All you've got to do—"

"Bitsy," said Karen, "I was tied up with National Defense last week. Remember—Karen March buys bonds." This was as much as she dared protest, because Bitsy was chief of public relations, and a power on the lot.

The Blimp, who shot the studio stills, began to unlimber his tripod. The Blimp was her shadow. Wherever she was—at the Troc or in her own kitchen, in a box at Santa Anita, or riding a circus carrousel—the Blimp trailed in her wake like a loaded barge behind a trim yacht. She said, "All right, what is it?"

It was like arguing with a freight train going downgrade.

"All you've got to do," said Bitsy, "is knit a sweater and send it to an R.A.F. pilot through the British War Relief. You do it anonymously, sort of. You don't use your screen name. If you used your screen name the British might catch wise that it was a gag, and not go for it. The British have got no sense of publicity."

"What name do I use?"

"What was that name you had when you came here?"

"Mertz—Katherine Mertz."

"Use that one. Well, you put a note in the sweater and, of course, the flier writes to you, and you write back, and a romance springs up."

"I knit?" asked Karen.

"Yeah, you knit. A romance springs up, and he asks you to send your picture. So you send one of your pictures—and, of course, he recognizes you. The story will break out of England."

"What story?"

"Oh!" Bitsy groaned, and put his face into his hands. "Don't you get it? Screen star, British ace knit together by sweater romance! It'll be Page One everywhere!"

"I'm all set up," said the Blimp. "Just take this chair over here, will you, Miss

March? It looks kind of homey. And cross your legs so that runner won't show."

"Got the props?" Bitsy asked. The Blimp found a ball of yarn and two knitting needles in his camera bag and put them on Karen's lap. "All right, Miss March," said the Blimp. "Knit."

Karen took the needles in her hands. She tried to remember how her mother had held them, back in Oakwood, Iowa.

"You're not eating with them," Bitsy said. "They ain't chopsticks."

**T**HE wardrobe mistress came, finally, and showed Karen how to hold the wool, and the needles, and she even showed her how to knit a few needle lengths. The Blimp made his pictures, and Karen asked, "Well, what do I do now?"

"You quit knitting," said Bitsy. He turned to the Blimp and said, "You run up to town and buy a pull-over sweater. Better get a pretty big one. I guess these pilots are pretty big, like Cooper or Gable. Better get a Gable size."

Karen didn't feel very good about the letter. She was only twenty-one, but she had been in Hollywood three years and she felt much older than that. "They're just kids," she told herself. "They're just kids, and maybe he'll only

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be twenty or so and I'll be darned if I'm going to hurt him."

The reply came more quickly than she had expected, because it came by air, via Lisbon. He was very grateful for the sweater. It was by far the finest sweater that had come to his squadron from America. It was, however, a bit large, but that was really his fault. "I'm only five-eight," he explained. She must have a fascinating time, living in Hollywood with all the cinema stars. He hoped their correspondence could continue. His name was Pilot Officer Jeffrey Glendenning.

So she wrote, and he wrote, and she came to know a good deal more of him. He was twenty-four, and a Cambridge man, and he might have been a barrister had not the war come along, and he flew a Spitfire.

In the third letter he mentioned, casually, that he had been credited with his fifth Jerry. Then for a long time no letter came, and Bitsy Biggers was worried, and Karen found herself crying in her dressing room.

**T**HE fourth letter came from a hospital. A Messerschmitt's shell had exploded against his back armor, and he had splinters in both arms. "They got all the stuff out of me," he said, "and I'll be back with the squadron in a week." As a postscript he said the only thing which had really been ruined was her sweater. Would it be too much trouble for her to knit another? There was a second postscript. He'd been thinking of Katherine Mertz a good deal in the hospital. He didn't have any other girls. Would she send her picture?

"We've got him!" said Bitsy Biggers, as if he'd hooked a tuna off Catalina. "You, Blimp, go buy him another sweater."

"No," said Karen. "I'll knit this one myself."

Bitsy took a look at the funny shade of green in her eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "All right with me, but hurry it up."

She bought the heaviest, softest wool, and each day held a conference with the wardrobe mistress, so there would be no uneven rows or dropped stitches, and when it was finished she found a prop boy who was five-eight, and made him stand in for her so she could see that it would surely fit. Then she took the picture, the one anyone would recognize as Karen March, "America's Midnight Date," and Bitsy mailed them off together. Then they waited.

"Dear Katherine," his letter began. "If you had to send me the photograph of an actress, why not Dietrich or Lamarr instead of that empty Karen March? You know we don't like her very much over here, and I'm the joke of the mess."

Bitsy began to swear. "If this ever gets out," he warned, "this'll ruin you. What're you laughing about?"

When he had gone she went to the Blimp's darkroom. "Blimp," she said, "do you remember what I looked like when I first came here?"

"Yes," he reflected. "You were pretty awful. Freckles—hair sort of half blond and done wrong—well, pretty awful, except sort of cute."

"Blimp, let me have one of the stills you made of me then."

"Nope. Studio has ordered they're never to go out."

"Please, Blimp, one."

"Who's it for?" he asked suspiciously.

"It's for myself," she said. "Blimp, how long's the war going to last?"