

stem blocking the ant's path. Other ants going and coming found it easy to pass under the stick's one-inch opening. Ants going to the bed were met by ants returning from the bed. And like I said none went around the stick, but under it. What I wondered was what was this ant, carrying the tall leaf, going to do? So I got left-fielder Walter Guerra involved.

"Hey," I yelled to Walter Guerra in left field. "Come here a minute."

"What're you doing," Walter complained. "Their game winner's on third base!"

"Forget that," I said.

"Why? What you looking at?" Walter asked.

"Ants."

"Ants? For what?" Walter asked: "There's a GAME going on."

"I know. But you got to see this ant. It's about to DO something."

"Do what?"

"Watch," I said.

Walter came closer.

"Now do you see?"

Walter stood on the opposite side of the ant line. He looked at the ant with the gigantic leaf, compared it to the others.

"Wow," Walter said. "How do you think something that small can carry something so big?" He picked up a rock and started to smash it.

"Stop! What're you doing?" I said.

"I just want to teach it a lesson."

"No. Wait. Observe."

Walter put the rock down. We both heard the crack of the bat.

"Get the BALL," someone shouted. "What in DAMNATION are you two doing out there!" The ball rolled up to Walter. He hurled it (with all his might) to home plate, but it only reached the pitcher's mound where it stuck in the sand.

"Lotta good that did," I said as the runner on third stepped on home plate and scored the game winner to the cheers of our heckling opponents (mostly parents).

"It didn't even roll," Walter said, deflated. He crouched back down. "Now, what were you saying?"

"Watch," I said. "All the other ants can go under this stick because their leaves are small. But what will the one with the tall leaf do, Walter?"

"How the heck do I know," Walter said. "He'll go around it, I guess. Because he's sure not going to turn around and go back. Look how far he came!"

As the tall-leaf ant approached the stick, we heard a loud screaming, which we took to be our coach having a heart attack. The ant reached the bridge-stick, and did a most amazing thing. Without missing a beat, the ant lowered the tall leaf sail behind him, took it by its stem, and, without it even touching the bridge or the ground, pulled it under the bridge! Then, once it cleared the bridge, it raised its tall sail leaf again and went on its way.

"Wow," I said. "Impressive."

"MIGHTY Impressive," Walter said. "Never seen nothing like it. NOW can I smash it?"

"Course not. Let's see where it goes." Walter looked up to see who was yelling. Coach's brains were about to pop out of his head. Coach was a chronic smoker and nearly swallowed an unfiltered Raleigh.

"Coach wants you," Walter said. "And he don't look too happy. Here comes my mom, too. I gotta go."

As we went in, Walter's mom met us at the pitcher's mound, saw the stuck ball Walter had thrown and consoled him for not saving the winning run:

"You could've done better," she said, "without Nature Boy here distracting you."

Oh well.

The grandstands were empty. I was the only one left.

Coach and me.

"Well if you can't pay attention to the game," Coach said, "maybe you can help me pick up the equipment. And by the way, where's your mom?"

Before I could answer, he complained, "Guess I'll have to run you home."

"What if she comes to get me," I asked.

"Tough titty ain't it?" he said, re-torching his cigarette.

In Coach's car driving down Babcock Road, it occurred to me why Mom was late. It was Friday, and Friday was her hair-n-nail appointment. I was about to tell Coach this, when he let out:

"Good God Almighty! Look at that lunatic with the dog on top of her car!" His jugular was about to pop. Sure enough, up ahead, coming in the opposite direction, was the shocking sight. There was Mom with her newly coiffed hairdo, crouched over her steering wheel, blowing her wet nail polish with Sam our mixed-breed beagle on top of Mom's car, ears flapping, mouth open, tongue hanging out, the pride of our family. Before she passed and caught a glimpse of me, I compressed my entire body into the space below the dash board.

"Never seen a sight like that," Coach said. "What kind of lunatic drives with a dog on top of her car?"

"Maybe it's a trend," I said looking up at coach from the floor-board.

Coach slapped the steering wheel of his 3-speed '61 Ford Falcon and laughed and coughed so hard, I thought he'd croak right there. Instead of dying, he adjusted the rearview mirror to watch Mom and Sam the brown mongrel beagle disappear around the bend on their way to not find me at the ballfield.

And that was enough baseball humiliation for a lifetime. I quit and never went back.

Millie

Dave Northrup

Millie Lipari woke to shadows. Slowly the grey rectangle of a curtained window appeared and when she turned her head she discerned the larger area of a door. Did it open on to the hotel corridor? Quickly she thrust an arm out from her side, and met cold, empty sheets. Then Millie remembered. It was Sunday morning. Mia and Mama Gia would be in their rooms down the hall until well after eight o'clock.

Millie drew a deep breath and placed her bare arms atop the bedspread. The rows of tufted material felt cool against her skin. Chenille, she remembered the name, and wondered what language it came from. It did not sound Italian. Anyway, Carlotta never would have permitted anything that even hinted of the old country in the bedroom shared with Barto. As the sunlight grew, the curtain glowed brightly, and the small round mirror atop her bureau became a gleaming silver disk. Fragments of a game she and her mother had played in this very room crept into Millie's memory. When she was little, before Mia had arrived, Millie