



JOE and I were standing near the tail assembly of the battered crate, watching Cy Edwards looping a Waco high in the sky, when we heard the laugh. It was a funny kind of laugh. Sort of low and husky. It came from up near the prop of the ship. We turned our heads, and Joe muttered something under his breath. A good-looking guy was standing near the prop; he had one hand on it. He was big—and he had shoulders something like the nacelle of a French bombing ship. Which means that they were wide.

He chuckled as Joe moved toward him, and I could see right away that the pilot wasn't going to like this bird. I was right.

"Take your paw off that prop, Willie"—Joe always tags any one he doesn't like that way—"and let us in on the joke."

The big gent looked at Joe. When it comes to size, Joe is about the huskiest pilot I ever watched squirm into a cockpit. This other guy was a couple of inches taller, and his shoulders were wider—but that was about the only edge he had on Joe. He grinned.

"Come over and make me take my paw off the prop, Archie!" he returned lazily. "An' about the joke—maybe you own her, eh?"

Joe stiffened. His head dropped a little forward, his hands clenched. He started to move in on this other bird. But that didn't seem to bother him any. He still leaned against the prop. Joe stopped about two feet away from him.

"Lay off that ship, you!" he snapped. "Or I'll knock you off her!"

The big guy kept right on grinning. He had a browned face, blue eyes, and white teeth. His features were nice and even.

"You—and how many other guys'll do what?" he came back. "An' just when'll all this—"

Joe took a step forward, and whipped out a straight right. It never landed. The big guy took his right hand off the prop, but it was his left that caught Joe just under the right ear. He grunted, slipped down to the soft earth. The big gent leaned against the prop again. Joe rolled over on his back, groaned. The other guy spoke.

"My name's 'Buck' Allen," he stated. "I'm fightin' 'Young Frisco' at the Stadium Friday night. Any trainin' I can get—helps. Lead with your left the next—"

Joe was up. He was shaky, and it was a cinch that he didn't know what this guy Allen had been talking about. He let loose a wild right. The big gent moved his head back a little and Joe almost fell into the engine of the ship.

"Easy!" Allen muttered. "Don't bump this wreck—she'll fall apart."

Joe let out a roar. I grabbed him by the arm.

"This guy's a fighter!" I yelled at him. "He's a professional—"

Joe shook me off. His head was clearing up. But he was awful sore. And the sight of Allen leaning against the crate's prop didn't make him feel any better.

"Take your hand off that—" He got that far, then he let go a wild right again. And this time the prop-leaner accommodated him. He took his right hand away from the prop—and struck it against Joe's jaw. The pilot was out before his knees started to crumple. I got scared.

"You big bum!" I yelled. "You may have killed him!"

He was staring down at Joe. "Get some water!" he snapped at me. "You can't kill 'em when they fly wrecks like this one. Get the wet stuff—I got to talk with him."

Joe groaned, and tried to get up. I went off toward the hangar, looking for some water. The big guy could sock. It took me a little while to find a pail that didn't leak. I wasn't much worried about Joe. He's been knocked cold before. When I got back with the liquid, Joe was propped up against a gas can, near the ship. Buck Allen was sitting down beside him. Joe was rubbing his jaw, which was pretty red.

"He's all right," Allen told me. "Just a tough guy gone wrong, that's all."

Joe slopped some water on his face. He looked at me, grinned. That's like Joe. Good-natured, when there isn't any other way to be. No use swinging rights on a guy you can't hit.

"As I was tellin' your pal," Allen stated cheerfully, "before you came at me the second time, I'm a fighter."

Joe nodded. "I guess it's the truth," he stated a little thickly.

The big guy grinned. "I'm on with Young Frisco at the Stadium, Friday night," he went on. "My manager's sick in bed with a punch on the jaw. I gave him the sock. He got nasty with the sport writers, and they ain't giving me any publicity. So I socks him on the chin—and figures out a way to get it, myself."

I grunted. "Knocking Joe out won't get you none," I stated. "That's old stuff."

Joe glared at me. The fighter chuckled. He looked up toward the air spot where Cy was stunting the Waco.

"That was just one of them things," he stated. "I want to make a 'chute drop."

I stared at him. Joe tried to get to his feet—and succeeded. He walked over toward the nearest wing tip and grabbed a strut for support.

"Come on!" he muttered thickly. "An' I hope it don't open!"

The big gent didn't seem to hear him. He walked toward Joe, and I followed.

"It's like this," Buck stated: "Ben Byers, Charley Lee and 'Ringside'—them guys are over at College Field watchin' the college boys do some parlor stuff in the outside ring. We go up—get over the field. I get out on a wing—an' go over the side. I drift down. Maybe I land right on top of 'em. A 'chute-hoppin' pug. That's publicity, ain't it? It'll be all over the papers tomorrow."

I blinked. Joe grunted. "An maybe you'll be all over ten feet of dirt!" he stated. "Ever ride in a ship before?"

I knew the answer to that one. This big bozo had ridden up before. He called a bus "she" instead of "it," and his air talk made sense all around.

"I was grease monkey for Sammy Fay, over at Phoenix," Allen said grimly. "But I ain't never been over the side before."

Joe nodded. "Listen, scrapper," he muttered, "you might come down on a rough spot, an' twist an ankle. A guy that can sock like you—he don't need publicity."

Allen grinned. "Me an' Young Frisco—we both need it!" he came back. "They ain't selling no pasteboards at the Stadium."

Joe grunted. The three of us stood in silence for a few seconds. Then Joe spoke.

"You sign a note saying you're making this hop-over in your right mind, are taking all the responsibility. Mac, you hook that Irving on him. It'll cost you fifty bucks to go over the side of this crate, Allen."

The big guy grinned. He fished into his hip pocket, produced the coin. While he was counting it, Joe grinned at me and winked. He took the bills, looked them over, and stuffed them into a pocket of his trousers.

"We fly over College Field at five thousand," he stated. "I'll figure wind drift. When I jerk my head and say the word—you get out on the wing. I'll drop her down in a slant, give you the get-clear yell. You shove off, count three, and jerk the rip cord. Pull your feet up a little, just before you hit the field. Got it straight?"

The big guy nodded. "Just like Tunney's right," he came back. "When sport boys crowd around me I've got an earful for 'em. I was just flying around, see—an' I spots some fights going on. Sure do eat up the leather-pushing stuff. So I just step over the side, an' come down. Say, that's a better gag than Ike could think up with six months off for the thinkin'. It's good for a column."

I went over and got the Irving seat-pack 'chute. We strapped it on over Buck Allen's coat. He fished in his pocket and handed me a couple of pasteboards.

"Ringsides," he stated. "After I make this hop-over they won't be so easy to get."

I stuck them in my pocket and showed the big scrapper the rip-cord release ring, over his left thigh. Joe had his helmet and goggles on—he handed Allen an extra pair of goggles. He was smiling, but it was a funny smile.

"After you K. O. this other pug, Friday night, you can give 'em back to me, Big Boy," he stated. "They'll be worth something then, as a souvenir."

I didn't like the way Joe pulled, it. There was something funny in his tone. But the big guy didn't seem to suspect anything. He climbed into the rear cockpit of the Jenny two-seater. I stared at Joe.

"What's up?" I asked.

Joe rubbed his jaw. "This guy's tough," he stated. "He wants trainin'—I'm going to give him some!"

Then he climbed into the front cockpit. I spun the prop for him and the engine roared. Joe speeded her up a little, signaled for me to pull the blocks from under the wheels. I did. He taxied out, and they both waved to me. Joe lifted the ship off the field, climbed her steadily toward the ground spot where the college boys were holding their four-round scraps, with the sport writers looking on.

I felt kind of funny about the thing. There was a haze off to the eastward, and College Field was about nine miles away. I lost the ship as she got altitude, and went over and sat down on a gas can. Twenty minutes passed, and I commenced to get worried. Then I heard a sky drome, picked up the crate coming in. Joe circled the field once, landed against the wind. He taxied in to the dead line, climbed down the front cockpit. He was grinning.

"Did he make it?" I asked.

Joe Lewis kept right on grinning. "Not bad," he stated. "He came within two miles of hitting the field!"

I stiffened, stared at Joe. So that was the game! The big bozo had come through with fifty bucks, and had risked his neck in a 'chute drop—just for the sake of landing two miles from the spot he'd figured on landing!

Joe chuckled. "Maybe it was my fault, Mac," he stated. "We were up pretty high and I kind of figured the wind drift wrong. Instead of drifting him toward the College Field, it pulled him away from it. He landed in a nice, cleared field, out near that new development. Ain't that tough?"

I kept right on staring at Joe. "It'll be tough," I stated, "when that bozo gets a flivver back to this point."

Joe shook his head. "Not at all," he contradicted. "There's a fair out back of Pasadena. We're going over right away. Chance to joy hop some passengers at three bucks a ride. Throw your junk into the rear cockpit—an' let's sky ride."

I grunted. Joe was grinning broadly. I thought of the 'chute pack. They didn't grow on trees.

"He's got the Irving," I stated slowly. "Maybe you didn't think of that."

"An' maybe I did," Joe came back. "I'll buy that back from the big ham, after he K. O.'s this Young Frisco."

I stared at Joe. "You're going to the fight—after what you just pulled?" I howled. "Say, these pasteboards I've got are ringside. When Allen spots us the fight'll go on *outside* the ropes!"

Joe chuckled. "I didn't guarantee where he'd land, Mac," he stated. "Throw that junk in the back—we're winging for that fair."

I groaned. It was a cinch that I should have guessed Joe wouldn't take two slams on the chin—without some sort of a comeback. I thought of the big bozo. Down two miles from field. No sport writers to see him flop and then strut his stuff. No publicity. Just fifty bucks handed out—for the privilege of risking his neck on a 'chute jump.

"Joe," I said slowly, "that was a kind of rough trick."

"Mac," he came back, "that wasn't half so rough as the wallops that big baby handed me."

There was something in that. I got the rear cockpit loaded with odds and ends. When I came back, from a last trip to the hangar we'd been renting for almost nothing from Cy Edwards, Joe was in the front cockpit. His eyes were on the road that ran past the field. I climbed up on a wing step, before swinging into the rear cockpit.

"Joe," I yelled at him, above the throttled-down beat of the Hall-Scott, "we'd better pass up that fight."

He grinned. "Mac," he howled back at me, "I wouldn't miss it to watch Lindy pull a landing on a dime! That guy Allen—he's got a wallop."

I nodded. "That's the point!" I yelled back grimly, and swung a leg into rear cockpit.

We didn't do so good at the fair. Three passengers the afternoon we flew over. I got the evening papers, and among the columns *not* present was the one about Buck Allen's 'chute drop. It was the same way the next morning. Joe read the sport pages and grinned. I felt sort of badly about the thing.

In the afternoon—the fight was to be held tomorrow night—we were out near the ship when a snappy-looking roadster pulled up. A girl got out of the car. She was a looker. She came toward us, and there was a sort of tight smile on her red lips.

"Which one of you gentlemen," she asked in a slightly sarcastic tone, "is Joe Lewis?"

Joe smiled. "I'm Lewis," he stated. "The ship's safe, and I'm a good pilot if I do say so. If you've never been up—"

The girl interrupted. Her eyes sort of flashed, and her tone reminded me of the bell at the Olympic Club, in San Francisco. Just that sharp.

"Good pilots don't tell hop-off men to jump from a wing so that they'll land two miles from the place they're supposed to land!" she snapped. "My name's Dolly White. I'm engaged to Buck Allen."

Joe stiffened. I groaned. Dolly White! A 'chute jumper, herself. Used to work with Paul Posen's Sky Circus.

"The 'chute silk's over in the roadster," she went on, as we both stared at her. "I've been looking for you since yesterday afternoon. I've got a message from Buck. He says you've got fifty dollars of his. He says you're to bet it on him—the odds are two to one—with Buck on the short end. After he wins the fight—you're to hand him the hundred. That's all. You can take the 'chute out of the car."

Joe looked at me. I didn't say a thing. Joe smiled grimly.

"Supposin'," he suggested, "I don't do the way your big boy friend thinks I should do?"

The girl's eyes held fine scorn. "Use your own imagination!" she snapped, and turned her back on us.

Joe didn't move. The girl climbed into the roadster, tossed out the 'chute pack, drove off. I smiled grimly.

"Do you bet the fifty on Buck, at two to one?" I asked. "Or do we fly to distant places?"

Joe shook his head. "I bet the fifty as I please!" he snapped. "That big bozo don't scare me! His wallops don't put me to bed! I've been knocked out by tougher guys! He came up and made dirty cracks about the Jenny. He put his paw all over the prop. I took him up and let him hop over the side. That lets me out."

I shrugged my shoulder. Joe stopped talking. Joe was right about one thing—Buck Allen wasn't scaring him any.

"The next time he sticks a fist in your face," I stated slowly, "he'll put something behind it. Better get the coin down on him, Joe!"

Joe got sore. "It's my funeral, ain't it?" he yelled at me. "What you beefin' about?"

I nodded. "Sure," I returned. "You called it that time. It's *your* funeral!"

Friday morning we flew back to Cy Edwards' field. We were working on the engine of the crate, when Cy came out with the morning paper. He had a broad grin on his face.

"This Dolly White is good!" he stated, and both Joe and I stopped what we were doing, and dropped down to the field. "Look at the publicity she gets for the leather-shover she's going to tie up with!"

We looked. Joe muttered under his breath. I wiped my eyes with the back of a grease-smeared hand, to make sure that I was seeing right. I was. It was all over the paper. The bozo who was fighting Young Frisco was a sky jumper. The girl had flown a two-seater from the Phelps' Airport field. Buck

Allen, who was slated to meet Young Frisco in the final, et cetera—that gent had gone over the side, before dusk. He'd drifted down into College Field, just as the final bout was on. The sport writers were still present. And Buck had told them that he was up flyin' with his girl friend, like he always did in calm weather—and he'd seen the fights on below.

I grinned. The sport writers hadn't fallen for that line, but they were playing it up for all it was worth. And it was worth plenty. Ringside had tagged Buck "'Chute Allen." He referred to him twice as the "Flying Fighter." And Buck had two columns.

Joe muttered to himself. He had a frown on his face.

"The girl did it!" he muttered. "But that don't make him no scrapper!"

I grunted. "It makes him a drawing card!" I came back. "Be a sport, Joe—lay the coin the way he told the girl he expects you to lay it. He's got a head on him—that gent!"

Joe kept right on frowning. I could see it would take him some time to forget those two wallops. And the fact that Buck Allen had gone out and got his publicity, even after Joe had let him off in the wrong corner of the sky—that didn't make Joe feel any better.

"A flying fighter, eh?" he muttered. "I'm betting that coin on Young Frisco, see?"

I groaned. But there was no use talking any more about it. When Joe made up his mind—it was made up. We worked on the engine all day, went in town and put on the feed bags, and then we headed for the Stadium. We were late getting there—the prelims were on—and there was a crowd fighting to get in. A special cop told us that it was a sell-out. We made the pass gate, and I pulled out the two pasteboards. A guy with a derby looked them over.

"Just a second!" he told us, and stuck out an arm.

Joe shoved me out of the way. His face was getting white.

"He's called in the passes!" I muttered. "Laugh this one off!"

The gent with the derby read something that was scrawled on a slip of paper. He looked at the passes again. Joe was getting all set for an argument. But the derby wearer just grinned.

"My mistake, boys!" he stated cheerfully, and handed me a couple of seat stubs. "Right down in a corner. Okay!"

We went through. I got Joe by the shoulder. There was something awfully funny.

"There wasn't any mistake there, Joe!" I muttered. "Buck Allen just wants to be sure we're inside."

Joe grinned. "Fine!" he came back. "When he comes into the ring—I'll make it surer!"

We went down an aisle. The seats were in the second row, right on the aisle. Joe shoved me in first.

"I got more room out here!" he stated grimly.

The third fight was on, but it stopped just as we squatted. A short guy forgot to move his chin out of the way, and he took a long count. The semifinal started slow—and kept going the same way. Both boys were clever, and they knew it. The referee called it a draw, and the packed house cheered. They wanted to see the final.

Young Frisco came in first. He was a husky Italian, with a lot of black hair on his chest. He had a scowl on his face, and he dug his big dogs into the resin box as though he was awful sore. Maybe he didn't like the publicity Buck Allen had gone out and grabbed off. Buck came in—and the crowd howled. He looked good; his skin was browned, and he wasn't fat. Some one tossed up a white-and-black-sided piece of cardboard. The announcer pointed toward our corner—and Buck came that way.

"Hello, 'Chute!" Joe bawled up at him. "Thanks for the fifty!"

I groaned. Buck Allen leaned over the ropes and started to say something. The announcer grabbed him by the arm and asked him his weight. Buck muttered the answer as his handlers pulled him down on the swinging stool and started to pull on the leather.

The crowd was yelling a lot, but Joe has a good pair of lungs. And we were right on top of the Flying Fighter.

"So long, 'Chute!" he bawled up at the ropes. "Kill this guy, Frisco!"

I could see the muscles of Buck's face twist, from where I sat. But he didn't turn his head. Joe got up.

"Back in a minute, Mac," he said to me, loudly. "I got to get fifty down on Young Frisco!"

I grabbed him by the arm. But he went up the aisle. Allen was half out of his stool—his handlers shoved him down again. The announcer was bawling out the weights. Young Frisco had three pounds on the Flying Fighter. They were two big boys.

The referee climbed into the ring, called both boys out to the center. While he was giving them the same old instructions they'd heard plenty of times before, Joe came back. He was grinning.

I frowned at him. There were times when he gave me a pain in the neck—this was a couple of them. The referee went to the ropes; the two fighters headed for their corners. Stools swung out; handlers

dropped out of the ring. The crowd quieted down. Joe lifted his head.

"Got the fifty on Young Frisco, 'Chute! Listen for the birdies—Big Boy! He's knocking you—for a loop!"

The bell clanged. For a split second I figured Buck Allen was coming through the ropes—to get Joe. But he didn't. He swung around. Frisco came out with a rush, and caught Buck in the corner. The hairy-chested bird was pushing in rights and lefts.

Buck slid along the ropes, and got away. But Young Frisco was on top of him again. A long left battered Buck back into the ropes. A hard right straightened up his body from the crouch. The crowd was on its feet—it commenced to look like an early finish. Buck tried to get into a clinch.

Young Frisco stepped back—and let him have a one-two. Buck went back into the ropes again, and the big Italian threw over a terrific right. It landed. Buck went down to his knees.

Buck Allen took eight—and staggered to his feet. The gent from San Francisco waded in again, swinging rights and lefts. Buck staggered, lowered his head, took a step out from the ropes and shot over a straight right. Young Frisco staggered back. There was a terrific yell from the crowd. But it died the next second. The scrapper side-stepped a left and shot over a swinging right. The blow caught Buck under the left ear. He went to his knees. He was up at the count of six, and as the Italian came in, the bell clanged.

I drew a deep breath. They were working hard over the Flying Fighter. But they were working over Young Frisco, too. I took a look at Joe. His eyes were wide; he was staring up at Buck's back. The crowd was yelling steadily.

"Last round!" I shouted in Joe's ear. "This won't go—more than two!"

The whistle blew—the seconds slid out of the ring. The hairy-chested scrapper was glaring across at Buck, waiting for the bell to sound. Buck was shaking his head from side to side.

The bell sounded. Both men went out fast. They met in the center of the ring. Frisco tried a swinging right. Buck blocked it. The 'chute jumper crashed in two to the body—and the hairy-chested fighter backed out. Buck followed him up, with the crowd yelling wildly.

Young Frisco side-stepped a left. He fell into a crouch, came in on Buck Allen. The Flying Fighter held his ground under a flurry of rights and lefts. Young Frisco was pretty well covered. A hard right to the face sent Buck into the ropes. He tried to get in a clinch, but the hairy-chested fighter shifted to the left, and crashed in two to the body. Buck looked wobbly in the knees.

There was no let-down on Young Frisco's part. He stayed on top of Buck—and he let his gloves fly. Again he battered Buck into the ropes. A left to the body lowered the Flying Fighter's guard. I yelled hoarsely as the Italian's right streaked out. There was a sharp crack.

The referee shoved Frisco across the ring toward a neutral corner as Buck slipped to the resin for the third time in a round and a half. The Flying Fighter was trying to draw his legs up under his body—he was trying desperately at the count of five. At nine he swayed to his feet. Young Frisco came out from the ropes slowly. He held his left out, and his right ready for the finishing blow.

Buck Allen was in a crouch. Red streaked down from his lips. Young Frisco jabbed a left at his body. Joe shouted hoarsely.

"Keep your guard up, Allen!"

I flashed a glance at Joe. Yelling for Buck Allen! Trying to tip the groggy fighter off—when he was betting on the other fighter!

My eyes went to the ring again. Buck was keeping his guard up. Young Frisco was in close. He jabbed another left across, trying to get the guard down. It didn't drop. He swung a sharp uppercut with his right. And then, suddenly, it happened.

Buck Allen jumped back from the uppercut. Young Frisco was off balance, momentarily. There was the flash of Buck's left arm. It battered down the high-held left of Young Frisco. And straight from the shoulder, with everything he had behind it, streaked the Flying Fighter's right!

It landed flush on the Italian's jaw. There was nothing to stop it. Young Frisco was toppling into it. That blow sounded something like a pistol shot. Young Frisco kept right on toppling. The ring shook as his body pitched to one side of Buck Allen.

Buck walked shakily toward a neutral corner. The crowd was shrieking wildly. The referee started to count. At six he stopped, walked over to Buck and raised his right hand. Young Frisco was out—and then some.

I looked at Buck Allen. He walked toward his corner. Handlers were reaching for him, trying to pat him on the back.

The big bird dropped out of the ring. He came up beside Joe. His face was cut, his lips puffed. He spoke thickly.

"You double-crossed me, pilot. How much did you—lose on the Italian?"

Joe kept on grinning. "I *won* fifty—on you, 'Chute!" he snapped back. "I'll split the win coin. You can scrap!"

I stared at Joe. Then my eyes went to those of Buck Allen. I got a glimpse of his girl, behind him, trying to reach his side. The Flying Fighter was grinning now. His eyes widened.

"We're square, pilot!" he muttered thickly. "I got you—up there. Kept my guard up, didn't I? We're square now!"

And then the crowd was swarming around him, and the girl was squealing excitedly. Joe and I headed for the nearest exit. When we got outside I grabbed him by the arm.

"How come you changed your mind and bet on 'Chute?" I asked him.

Joe grinned. He'd collected the bet on the way out.

"That's a new coat of dope for the Jenny, Mac," he told me. "How come I bet on him? Say, didn't he show me he had a head?"

I grinned back at him. "And didn't you know he could sock?" I came back grimly. "And the answer to that one is—you did!"