

## THE RUNNER UP

BY JOHN CAMPBELL HAYWOOD

*THERE is a method of story telling used more by French writers than those of our own country, which consists in beginning with the anti-climax or the climax and at the end explaining in narrative form the reason for the situation. This must not be confused with the murder or theft story in which the major part of the yarn leads to the finding of the doer of the crool deed.*

IT WAS WITH no blare of trumpet that Sam Stubbs was welcomed back into the fold of the Woodlands Golf Club after an absence of three years nor did Peter Dole, who brought him into the club-house, add to his good standing among the members for doing so. The fact is Sam was a black sheep. He left the club after being defeated in the final for the President's Cup by Peter and the reason for his defeat was the same as in all tournaments here and abroad in which he was runner-up. He couldn't stand prosperity. With each win as the tournament progressed he celebrated a little more so that when the final came, the nerve he should have saved for the great event had been thrown upon a lee shore drowned by the strong waters. To get where he often did in the game showed his strength and his weakness.

There was a foursome and me in the grill room when the two came up the drive in Peter's car. We could hardly believe our eyes. Sam's record as we had heard it during the three years was utterly bad. He had not gone to the war because the war wouldn't have him. Men brought talk of a debased and demoralized life, of meeting him panhandling and all that sort of thing. All bad, yet here he was and Peter—we all liked Peter—bringing him. What could be the reason?

They went into the locker room and presently Peter came out. He came to us. His face was set in hard lines.

There was none of the usual persiflage in his greeting. We all noticed that.

"I don't want any questions asked—now" he said, "But I'm going to play Stubbs a match this afternoon. It's for blood," he hesitated and flushed a little. "I think we ought to have a referee. How about you?" he turned to me.

I was the only one not dressed for golf, I had hurt my wrist a day or two before.

"What's it all about?" I began, when he cut in curtly.

"It's a match, and it's—it's important. Help me out will you?"

I hesitated, but my curiosity got the better of me. I had often played with Stubbs in the old days. I wanted to see if he could come back. I hoped so, but I knew perhaps better than the others that the drift away had been a long one.

"All right," I said, "I'll go you." Peter went to the locker room and the others with a few chaffing remarks to me went out to the links.

Presently I lit my pipe and went to the first tee. Peter and his partner soon joined me. I shook hands with Stubbs and looked into his eyes. What I saw startled me. It was not the Stubbs of old. The man had changed fearfully and horribly. Above the wasted flesh on his face, the eyes, out of deep sockets, glared at me fiercely, hungrily for an instant. Then he turned away. But in that instant I thought I saw the starvation of a soul. Deg-

gradation breeds a cold shiftiness or defiance in the eyes. Nothing of that was in his. It was more heartbreaking, more sad in its unutterable longing for something that had been denied. But it changed as he looked at Peter. It became hatred pure and unmasked. I was not sorry I had brought my heavy cane.

The game was a terrible one. Stubbs had not lost his grip. Without a word between them they halved the first two holes in par. Then Peter won the short third. After that it was not golf. Stubbs played as though in a frenzy and of course, played badly. He lost the fourth, and Peter, staunch and certain player, deliberately gave him the fifth. Perhaps Stubbs did not notice it but I who know his game so well saw him take the wrong club and top into the bunker.

And never a word between them—never a look that wasn't venom from Stubbs or kindly pity from the other. The caddies saw nothing unusual in the game. To them it was an ordinary match. Once they chattered a bit and I stopped them sharply. It was getting on my nerves—the queerness of it all and the dangerous nearness of an outbreak when I saw Stubbs cheat to win the ninth hole. Peter was three up and had driven into the rough. We were all looking for the ball. Peter and I were behind Stubbs when he found it and stepped on it. It was no accident. Peter looked at me but said nothing. I felt he wanted no interference, so kept quiet. Stubbs said, "Here it is," and for a moment looked at us, his hand in the pocket of his coat. It was not a pleasant look. He seemed to be inviting trouble. After that both men played rottenly. Stubbs won four of the holes to the sixteenth and was dormie. Then a most extra-

ordinary thing happened. I was sure Peter was letting him win. He overran his approach putts—a thing he rarely does, and took chances, a thing he scorns to do when he has a game well in hand. I knew in the mental shape Stubbs was in any duffer playing steadily would have been a match for him, yet here was Peter, old reliable, conscientious Peter deliberately throwing the game. They both were hole high on their shots to the green; Peter in the rough to the left—it looked as though he played there on purpose—and Stubbs on the green five feet from the pin. I happened to be walking up with Stubbs. I wanted Peter to at least halve the match and he had a chance, but not if Stubbs stepped on the ball—so I thought I'd head off any little play of that sort.

"You go to your ball," I said quietly, "we don't want any little tricks like you played on the ninth." It was almost the first word I had spoken to him. He spun toward me quickly.

"Damn you," he said, and I could almost have sworn there were tears in the sunken eyes. "I'm going to let him win the next two holes. If there's any interference from you, you get this—see?" He half drew his hand from his right side pocket and showed me the butt of a pistol. Then he turned and went towards his ball. Peter pitched out nicely but overran the hole two feet. Stubbs went by at least five feet on the down grade. His fourth putt rested about six inches from the hole. He picked up his ball. "I'll give you that" he said pointing to Peter's two-foot putt and walked off to the eighteenth tee. Peter began to protest.

"Your hole," I whispered quickly, "and win the next unless you want him to give it to you. I'll tell you why later." Peter followed the instructions

and the match was squared. Stubbs wouldn't play an extra hole. I don't know what the man said but with his left arm over Peter's shoulder and his right hand in his right side pocket, they went off to the locker room. I stopped at the 19th hole. Soon afterwards I saw them drive away in Peter's car. Late in the evening I called Peter up. He had left me to go with a potential murderer. I was anxious about him. He answered me cheerfully. Somehow I gathered from the restraint in his voice that Stubbs was with him.

## PART 2.

"I know you chaps were wondering why I brought Sam Stubbs to the club on Thursday," began Peter, when we lunched together a few days after the match, "and you in particular who bore part of my burden for me. It was an experiment—a risk of course with a chap in his mood and condition, but nevertheless an experiment, but it proved my contention."

"Where is the rotter now," I began when Peter interrupted.

"Hold your horses! My contention is that no one sinks so low but that a memory gathered from a touch of the hand, or a face at the window or perhaps a chance word, or even a half forgotten game, may incubate the withered seed of self respect and bring to life again the good that is in every man. I tried it on Stubbs. It worked."

"Where did you pick him up?"

"My place was burglarized last week."

"Burglarized?"

"Yes! You know I have taken Bentley's cottage furnished for the summer. I moved in on Monday and took over a few personal belongings, my silverware and cups and

that sort of thing and after I'd set 'em up round the place I went to bed. Bentley took his servants so I get my breakfast in town and dine mostly at the club. About two in the morning I was awakened suddenly. I sat up in bed and listened. It seemed a long time in the dark before I heard anything. Then I distinctly heard the rattle of my golf clubs. I had left them in the hall. The place has no gas or electricity but I had a flash light on the bureau. I reached for it and found my slippers and dressing gown. Opening the door I slipped out and closed it after me. From the top of the stairs I saw a light, a narrow blade of light, stream into the hall through the portiers that cut off the library. I was unarmed except for a policeman's billy I always have at my bedside. I have always hated to have revolvers round the place since—but that's another story. I crept down the back stairs and through the dining room and into the living room which is across the hall from the library. The portiers were parted about a foot. I saw an open suit case on the table. I saw my golf bag leaning against the table and I saw a man with the old President's cup I won three years ago in his hands. He was staring at the inscription, his mouth working. I could not see his eyes, the visor of his cap shaded them. I watched him put the cup gently into the suit case and take my driver from the bag. He fondled it as though he loved it. He took each club in turn and as he stooped over the carpet with my putter I saw his shoulders heave as though he were stifling and his hands, grimy hands they were, seemed to whiten at the knuckles as he gripped the shaft. Then he muttered. I cannot tell you what he said, but I read into

the words, longing, yes, and suffering such as you and I may never know. He threw his visor back to wipe the sweat that poured into his eyes and I saw his face. It was time for me to break in. I called his name. Quick as a flash a gun was pointed in the direction of my voice.

"Don't be an ass," I said, again using his name. Of course you have guessed it was Stubbs. "Don't be an ass, it's me, Peter Dole." The gun cracked and I heard the bullet strike the wall behind me. I dropped to the floor as though I had been shot. He put the gun in his pocket and covered his face with his hands. It was horrible to watch him. He seemed wanting to look into the dark of the room where I lay but afraid to. I saw his staring eyes through his fingers. Then he turned around and bent over the suitcase and fondled the cup. In an instant I was upon him and had borne him to the floor. He made no struggle. Indeed, when I had taken the gun and let him get on his feet he looked relieved. But if ever there was hate in a man's eyes it shone in his. Then he began to talk, hurriedly, in a voice brimming with passion. And what do you think the substance of it was? I'll leave out the part that isn't fit to print. But that I, Peter Dole had brought him to where he was. I sat opposite to him listening. I kept the gun in my hand. I want to tell you about it and forget it. I thought I was dealing with a mad man but I wasn't. He was a piece of driftwood nearer shore than he thought.

For some moments Peter drew on a somewhat recalcitrant cigar.

"It appears he didn't know Bentley's was occupied. Some chaps had told him it was vacant and there were easy pickings. It was the first time he'd

tried the game. He was nervous. When, among the silverware he saw the President's cup he lost count of everything else. He said no one knew how he loved golf, no one knew how he wanted to win a cup. Time after time he came within reach of it—was runner-up and was beaten. Then came the match with me. He was sure of that—but he lost it. It was the last straw. No! it wasn't altogether a weak nature but an unresisting one. He went from bad to worse.

Peter's eyes had rather a triumphant glow as he leaned over the table and looked at me.

"There's good in every man," he said. "The sight of the old cup stirred Stubbs, touched a chord or something. While he was cursing me he was challenging me to play him for it again. It seems he'd kept up his game on public links. At last I said I would play him but it must be on our grounds and I would stake the cup on the match. That was foxy on my part because if a man can't be built up in his home surroundings its a poor shot elsewhere. I gave him two days to get in shape and meet me at my place. Yes, I hardly expected him but he came, I think the chance of getting the cup drew him. And if his hatred of me, fostered in his foolish mind at the beginning of his downfall, could have killed I would have been dead now. But, my boy, the beauty of our splendid playground, the knowledge of lost touches upon a life he used to love, pricks of a conscience that had been drugged to sleep, did the work I hoped it would. Of course I know he cheated at the ninth, of course I know I could have beaten him at any stage of the game and tried to lose, of course I saw him hanging on the brink over which the wee small voice inside of a man's

body has gone to its eternal undoing, and I played him to the final putt. But he had awakened then. If there's a spark in you of decency yet alive you can't cheat at golf and win on it and live with yourself—you simply can't do it and I saw he couldn't. The spark was alive and I blew on it—That's all."

"But you didn't win," I said.

The old waiter who had heard the humming of one voice hovered near at the breaking of my own. I waived him away.

"But you didn't win," I repeated.

For a moment Peter watched a smoke ring break over the candelabra.

"If I had I should have killed the sprout that was coming to life. Do you know what he said to me as we left the last green? No! Well, he said, "Peter, God bless you, you have brought me back."

When Peter finished his yarn by telling me he had taken Stubbs into his office and he was making good, I was a little miffed.

"To make you a real hero, he ought at least to have shot you in the leg at the last hole and repented openly."

"Or you," said Peter, "in the kernel of your nut if he could find it."



SORROW