

# *Chapter 11*

## *Marathon Day*

Mom called Thursday Dad's marathon day, as in "don't bother your dad today, kids, it's his marathon day". Dad left for work before sunrise and our breakfast and came back home after sunset and our dinner on Thursdays. He would work his regular shift and then put in overtime, traffic duty. Dad didn't sing any Frank Sinatra songs on Thursdays.

I left my letter to Dad near his coffee mug before I went to bed Wednesday evening. Thursday at breakfast I asked Mom, "Was Dad reading anything this morning, Mom?"

"Just his newspaper, sweetie. Your father certainly loves his sports page."

"Did he say anything, anything at all?" I asked.

"Oh, your dad isn't very talkative at quarter past five on the morning of his marathon day. But wait, he did have a special message for you."

"Really! What was it?" I implored.

Pat dropped his spoon into his bowl of Cap'n Crunch cereal. "You don't have to scream, Eileen," he said. "Thanks for waking me up."

Mom continued after a sip of her coffee. She began, "He said....." but then she drank some more coffee.

"What did he say, Mom!" No one ever called me patient.

"He said to tell you to make sure you bring out the trash to the side of the road before school. The garbage men are coming today."

I couldn't concentrate on "new math" so Mr. Enright kept me in during recess. It was called new math because it replaced the old math that didn't prevent the Russians from being the first to launch a satellite in space. I was in space though, thinking about my letter and wondering if Dad read it. Wally "Speed" Miller was kept in, too. He had written a love note to Susan Gross. He signed it, "Forever yours, Tank Arbuster". Mr. Enright gave us work to do and headed to the faculty lounge to flirt with Miss Williams.

"I heard it through the grapevine that your dad won't let you try out for The Gas," Wally said from across the classroom. I tried ignoring Wally's words but they kept on coming. "I know you think I'm a jerk, Eileen, but I am actually doing you a favor. Most of the guys don't really want you on the team, anyways. At least I'm honest with you; I tell it to your face. The other guys say it behind your back. You should thank me."

"You want honesty, Wally. I don't think you're a jerk. I think you're a big jerk."

"Maybe so," Wally said. "But I'm the big jerk who's going to be the starting second baseman for Mitchell's Gas, and you're going to be in the stands watching me."

“Is it true that all the guys don’t want me to go out for The Gas?” I asked Joey Mitchell during physical education class. We were playing bombardment for the fifth week in a row. The students in Mr. Enright’s and Miss Williams’ classes would fire red, playground balls at each other while Mr. Doubleday, who we all called “Mr. Doublechin” because he weighed 300 lbs., would sit in his office, read the newspaper and eat potato chips. A ball buzzed by my head and knocked the glasses off of Dexter Peabody, the school spelling bee champion.

“Don’t let Speed get to you, Eileen,” Joey said.

“But is it true what he says? Do all you guys want me off the team?”

“No, it’s not true that all the guys want you off the team, okay? I want you on the team. Tank wants you on the team. Wally doesn’t know what he’s talking about,” Joey said.

“So, two guys want me to play but everyone else would rather that I just go jump rope or play with dolls.” Joey scooped up a bouncing ball and gunned it at the pack of girls from Miss Williams’ class. Most of the girls in both classes despised bombardment. The pack of girls screamed as the ball careened off of three or four of them.

“Look, Eileen,” Joey said, “when the rest of the team figures out what is pretty obvious, that you can play and you’d give us a better chance of beating the Donut Hole, they’ll come around.” I was now the only girl left in the game of bombardment, the only girl.

Dinner that night was daisy ham, green peas and mashed potatoes. Pat always mixed his ham and peas and potatoes together in a disgusting jumble. I couldn’t watch him eat it and I had no appetite of my own. Mom was on some diet that had her eating about seventeen grapefruit a day. She told a story about Mrs. Glassman and her arthritis. When she finished, about half an hour later, I asked her, “Mom, did Dad call home today about anything at all? I mean, other than the trash.”

“Well, yes, he did call me during his lunch,” Mom said. “He had himself the corned beef at the P.O. Spa. Cold slaw on the side with those crispy fries he loves so much.”

“What did he say, Mom? What did he say?”

“He said that after dinner tonight he wanted you and Pat to play some catch before it got dark. He said that a little practice would help the both of you so you could make that baseball team you so want to play for.”

“Wait. You’re sure he said me too?” I needed to be certain.

“Yes, Eileen. He means the both of you.”

Dessert was tapioca pudding, my favorite, but I didn’t have time for any that night. Pat and I played catch until the first stars made their appearance in an impossibly beautiful April sky.

