

The Runt of the Litter

by Con Chapman

There were four boys in that house: John, who went to West Point; Joe, who was Student Council President; Jim, who was the only halfback in many a year to gain over a hundred yards a game. And Dave, the runt of the litter.



All the others had come one right after another, except for Dave. He was an afterthought, an accident. He was five years younger than the one before, and shorter than the others. He seemed to resent it from the first day he understood that he didn't measure up.



Sophomore Kaylee Knabe scored for Loveland on this 56-yard run with 1:47 left in the game against Turpin on September 28.

I used to play with him, though he was younger than me. He'd made his way onto my baseball team, even though he was two grades behind me. He'd willed his way into starting at second base. He was The Kid—scrappy, making every play, punching out hits, fearless.



As we grew older, the differences between Dave and the other kids grew. They and I got taller, he did not. We got bigger, he did not. Where once he was everybody's favorite, the sparkplug, now

he was too small. You wouldn't put him on the football field—he'd get killed by kids twice his size.

He drifted off to the margins of our lives, and although you didn't notice it at first, he became bitter. Why—he must have been thinking—why am I the runt of the litter? Why are all my brothers well-formed, on the verge of manhood? What am I going to do to compare to them? Lead dogs.

I went away to school, and came back for the summer. I don't know why, but one day I walked into the hotel coffee shop, maybe for breakfast while I was goofing off, killing time with somebody big enough to haul three hundred pound blocks of ice. I saw Dave sitting at the counter, drinking coffee. Little Dave,

I thought. He was ten when I was twelve—what's he doin' drinking coffee? Then I figured out he must have been 18 if I was twenty. He could drink coffee if he wanted. He had a blue stocking cap on his head

in the middle of summer—self-absorbed, sullen. I said “Hey Dave,” and he just looked at me over his shoulder.

The guy I was with, who knew the town better than I by then, said “You don't want to talk to him” and kinda pushed me on to a booth. “What's up with him?” I asked, and the guy just shook his head. “Nobody knows,” he said. “Best not to bother tryin' to figure it out. He won't say.”

I left in the fall, and didn't think about it again until a few years later, when I read a squib in the local paper my mom sent me. “Local Man Killed in Bar Fight” said the headline. Dave had been stabbed and bled to death. He hadn't backed down from somebody bigger.

