

Jim

by William Trent Pancoast

Jim twisted the skinny trunk of his body in a fast, violent jerk just as the cop grabbed the buckle of his left Harley Davidson boot. When the boot flopped off, Jim found himself sitting upright, ready to jump up and run. But then he felt the baton lock down on his neck. He started to fight it off, but the other cop stomped on his bare ankle and the struggle was over.

He looked for his three grandkids through cold drizzle. It was November, the last game of the year for his eighth grader grandson, and he had volunteered to take the three younger grandkids to the game. No one had told him it would cost \$13 for the four of them to get in--\$3 each for the kids and \$4 for him. He didn't have \$13.

So he had told that to the young lady collecting the money. "I'm sorry. I don't have any money." The kids had already scampered ahead and there was nothing he thought he could do.

As he lay on the cinder track that circled the football field, he glimpsed Sissy playing alongside the wooden bleachers. That made him momentarily happy even with the heavy man standing on his ankle. "Come on, Jim. Put your other hand back here."

Jim pictured the puzzled look on the face of the money-taker at the gate. She never said a word, just flipped her right wrist up a couple of times while he shrugged and sidled after the kids. He never thought it would be a crime not to have any money for the after-school football game.

Jim had never changed his hair style since he had first slicked it into a ducktail in 1958, and now the hair held bits of cinders and leaves where he had fallen when taken down. He wanted to ask for sympathy, tell this son of the cop who had first busted him over 40 years ago that it would kill him to go back to prison for violating his probation, which is what he was doing the moment he refused to walk back to the gate with the cops.

"Damn, Jim," the cop said, and wrenched the plastic tie tighter. "You never learn."

Sitting up again, Jim watched the kids near him on the track. "Grandpa! Can I get hot chocolate?" called the boy. "And a hot dog," Sissy chimed in.

Jim looked around the stadium, not changed much from 1959, when he had scored eight touchdowns in his first three games as a ninth grader before being kicked off the team for smoking in the alley beside the teacher parking lot. Ah, shit. If he hadn't smoked, hadn't got drunk so many times, hadn't stole some chicken shit motorcycle parts and gotten caught up in the system.

Jim heard the cheering and turned to watch his lanky young grandson outrunning the entire field to score another touchdown, and a tear rolled down his fresh-shaven cheek. He could feel it moving slowly, like it might never get where it was going.

