

The Tortured Joy

The company had sent its pamphlets on ahead, so everyone in town knew of that spring's event. The drift in barber shops and telephones foretold a green success.

That night a grandstandful looked on as marching marchers marched in song onto the field. Speculators in the stands kept up a wide-eyed buzz, out-answering each other.

"My God, look what they're doing now, Ethel! They're going to raise the cross that man brought in. It must have been about like this last year-- I hope he has the same amount of luck."

They nailed him to the cross, each hammer-stroke inviting groans and shrieks from lookers-on. The band was playing the national anthem, keeping time with the pound--pound--pound.

At his last words (picked up by microphones) each person fell down on his knees and bowed his head--but most eyes peeked to see the rest. Crews dimmed, then doused the floodlights--all was still.

They let him down and locked him in a room behind the grandstand for a mournful hour. Then Jove (the stadium's janitor) unlocked the door to get a broom--and let him out.

Darkness enabled him to cross the field and shinny up the cross, but now, instead of hanging by his nails, he stood with one foot on each side of the crossbar, arms raised.

They switched the floodlights on and aimed some searchlights deep into the spangled sky; the band broke into stirring patriotic tunes, and the crowd let forth a cheer of tortured joy.

The marching marchers marched back whence they came and everyone filed out, remarking how it was the best they'd ever seen or how they thought it might have been a bit improved.