

THUNDER FROM THE STANDS

by Vincent Richards

CHAPTER V
Synopsis
Len Rollins, tennis ace, dreamed of fame and glory when, as a member of the Davis cup team he would play for America. But he falls in love with Grace Worthington, rich and socially prominent, who is willing to defy her family and marry him—if he gives up tennis. Fate intervenes. He injures his ankle and the doctors say he will never play again. He and Grace are married and live blissfully on the salary he earns as salesman in a sporting goods shop. As his ankle heals he is tempted to return to the courts. He has agreed to play in a tournament on the Sunday Grace's family invites them both to the country for a week-end. Grace goes alone.

ty? Good God, he was guilty! Guilty as hell!
It was an easy victory. So much easier, he reflected as he took his shower, than would be his conquest over Grace. With her, he wasn't even sure—
He stayed at home all of Sunday evening, but she did not return. Finally he went to bed and fell into a restless, troubled sleep.
When he arrived home from work the next day she was there. And Richard Whyte was with her.
"Hello." Her voice and the lips she raised to his were cool. "Dick drove me in from Easthampton. I made him stay to dinner."
Len shook hands with Whyte. "Of course. Glad to see you." Studying Richard Whyte seated in the big chair near the window, Len was more acutely aware than ever before of the other's good looks, his poise, his social grace.
"I hear you're doing awfully well," Whyte said. "Cracking the business world the way you used to crack a tennis ball."
Len could not explain to himself just why he resented Whyte. There was something in his tone, perhaps. "I've had one or two good breaks, I guess," he replied with a smile.
Grace said: "But he's still a tennis player at heart and not a business man, Dick. Aren't you, darling?"
Len bit his lip. What the hell was Grace doing—making sport of him before this other man. He was in the wrong; he knew that. But he'd been wrong before about things and she'd never acted this way. Was this her idea of punishing him?
Conversation during the simple dinner was for the most part friendly, but cool and restrained.

At last they had cigarettes and coffee in the living room. Then Whyte took his leave. He thanked them for their hospitality, complimented them on the charm of the apartment and hoped they'd be out at Easthampton very soon.
Grace walked from the foyer back into the living room and switched on the radio. She sat in the big chair which Whyte had recently vacated. For some reason this bothered Len. But he kept his voice level, unexcited, when he spoke.
"I want you to know," he said, "why I didn't tell you about my being scheduled to play yesterday afternoon. I meant to tell you that same evening you told me about the invitation to Easthampton. I let you know frankly and honestly how I felt about going out there. Then later I realized that if I mentioned anything about tennis it would appear—"
She nodded without interest, made no reply.
"All right," he went on, "all right. So you don't believe me?" She leaned forward in her chair. "No. Absolutely not."
He felt anger surging through him and groped for something to say that would hurt her. "You're leaning backward just because of your silly prejudice toward something I once loved as much as—"
He didn't finish the sentence, in his own surprise and discomfort at the words he had spoken.
Tears came into her eyes. He jumped up and switched off the radio. "Now we'll settle this thing once and for all," he shouted. But she rose and walked from the room. He followed her. She went into the bathroom, slammed and locked the door.
He went back into the living room. He couldn't remember

when he'd ever been so angry about anything. Darn women, anyway with their narrow single-track minds! Why he had ever married was more than he could understand. Throwing freedom away in exchange for—what? Why, for practically everything he wanted to do he had to question himself first: "Will it be all right with Grace?" or "Will Grace be willing?" or say, "I'd better make sure Grace hasn't made other plans." That's way it went constantly. Grace this, Grace that, Grace the other thing, Grace—
What the devil was she doing in there? She wouldn't be a little fool. Of course not. An argument—sure. But she wouldn't be. Bathroom. The word bothered him. He didn't like it. It made him think of razor blades and iodine. Only yesterday in the paper he had read—he was at the bathroom door knocking on it loudly.
"Are you all right?" He rattled the knob. "I'll smash the door down if you don't answer."
"I'm—all right," came in a small muffled voice.
"Then open the door or I'll—"
He threw himself against it.
The lock turned over. He twisted the knob. Opened the door.
A great and overwhelming relief flooded him. There was neither razor blade nor iodine bottle in sight. She was merely sitting on the black and white hamper, sobbing, quietly.

It was stock checking time at the shop and Len was counting and rearranging equipment.
Perched ten feet above the floor he took the boxes Weir handed up to him, stacking them on the stock room shelves. Another row and the ladder would have to be moved. He considered changing it over before starting the next shelf, but decided to reach the distance. By stretching, arm fully extended, he could manage. The first box was placed. The second one slid as he tried to put it on top of the first.
It happened even before he had time to prepare himself, to regain his equilibrium. The sharp intake of Weir's breath and his own short cry were simultaneous with the scraping of the ladder as it went out from under him. One thought flashed penetratingly clear in his mind as he felt himself whirling through space—the ankle! His hands flayed for something to hold to; his feet, legs and body prepared themselves for the shock they knew must come on collision with the hard cement of the stock room floor.
And then miraculously he was standing there, shaken, white-faced, breathlessly amazed that he was safe, and Weir was inquiring solicitously if he was hurt.
He shook his head, still puzzled at the marvel that he had managed to land upright. That he had landed, the full weight and force of his six feet and one hundred and eighty pounds, almost upon the weak left foot. And the ankle had not given way!
Unbelievably, his breathing not yet regular, he trotted around, experimenting. Why, the ankle felt fine! Showed not the least bit of strain under the terrific jolt it had just withstood.
"That the foot that was injured?" Weir queried, his voice a little strained, his face flushed from the fright of having seen young Rollins come hurtling through space.
Len nodded. "Yes. Funny, isn't it? They told me if anything like this ever happened it would—but it's funny. Very damn' funny! I wonder,"—he shrugged. "Shall—shall we finish up?"



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Dr. Leopold Weingrat was a short, totally bald man with large owl-like eyes. The specialist listened carefully while Len told him everything: about the accident, the removal of the bandages, what the hospital doctors had said about his never being able to play again, of his fall from the ladder. Not once did Dr. Weingrat interrupt, but when Len had finished speaking he nodded thoughtfully. "So—o-o," he said, then ordered Len to take off his shoe and sock.
The doctor placed the foot up on an ottoman under a dazzling white light. His fingers moved swiftly, surely, over the skin and flesh and bone. He slapped gently, twisted. "Hurt?" he grunted. Len shook his head. "That?" Another twist. "That?" Still another twist, the other way. Five minutes of this, then he growled. "Well X-ray it—that is best. So far—" he shrugged his heavy shoulders.
"So far—what, Doctor?"
"All right. Perfectly all right. But I can't be sure, young man—yet." He wagged a finger. "But I'm not often wrong, young man. No, not often." He crossed the room and wheeled the X-ray machine into position. Four pictures were taken—one from each side, one from the top and another from the bottom. "Come tomorrow at this time," Dr. Weingrat said unemotionally, "and I'll let you know."
"So," Dr. Weingrat greeted Len when he was ushered in next day, "on time, eh? Sit down." He came to Len with pieces of something that looked like photograph film in his hand. Then he punctuated his speech with flourishes of the hand that held the X-ray revelations.
"Young man, his voice was gruff, but kind. "Your case is a very strange one. There is a small bone in the ankle—" there followed a detailed scientific and technical explanation which Len somehow survived.
". . . and therefore," Dr. Weingrat concluded, while Len hung breathlessly on every terse word as it came from the specialist's thick lips, "there is no reason,

none at all, why you shouldn't play tennis if you want to. That ankle you need never worry about again. It is as strong as—well, strong as that of a young horse!"
The room was spinning. Len, trying to keep his voice from cracking, merely said, "I'll leave my name and address with the nurse so you'll know where to send the bill."
And then, in a daze he found his way out into the street. People were passing by and automobiles were humming along Park Avenue, losing themselves in the ramp that ran around the Grand Central Building. But Len was not entirely conscious of his surroundings. The people, the traffic, the sounds of the city, the heat of the day, his own moving body were vague. He was on court, wide with perfectly chalk-lines running parallel and others intersecting at given distances.
And over green grass gleaming white-clad figures were swinging racquets as a white ball flew over a correctly sloping net, and there was applause that sounded like rain beating heavily on a tin roof. And one of the players was himself.
During the next month Len played at different clubs against men who were ranked in the first ten. Topnotch competition quickly brought back his game. He was, in fact, better than he had ever been before. Since his enforced retirement his stroking and service seemed to have improved both in power and skill. The newspapers gave him columns of space and mentioned him frequently in connection with the Davis Cup team.
There was a change in his relationship to Grace—subtle, but definite. She dined alone now when he was late, instead of waiting for him and often was not home when he came in. No longer did she storm or plead with him about running off week-ends leaving her alone. It seemed, after that first stormy scene when he had told her about Dr. Weingrat's diagnosis, that she had resigned herself to the inevitable.
But it was Frank Wheatley first opened Len's eyes and then Len blamed Grace and not himself. He went directly home following a match to have it out with her, but she was not there. By the time she did arrive, he had exaggerated the truth a hundredfold.
(Continued Next Week)

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