

# THUNDER FROM THE STANDS

by Vincent Richards

**CHAPTER XI**

The ball streaked over the net. Lefevre returned it, not too hard. He knew, and he knew Len knew, that his only chance now was to outplay the American. But Len realized that given a sensible opportunity he could gamble—afford to be daring. But until that opportunity came—

Softly, too, he returned the ball. It was a case now which of the two would weaken first. And Lefevre was the greatest, the steady volleyer the game had ever known. Would he outplay the American? Those in the stands sat forward in breathless suspense watching this duel of duels.

The volleying continued steadily. Then Len saw a small opening. Swiftly he sent the ball flying to Lefevre's backhand, driving him out of position. The Frenchman returned the ball and quickly reversed to cover the open court. Coolly, deliberately, knowing the great Lefevre was doomed if his own aim was true, if his hand did not waver, Len Rollins' racket cut the air in a short, swift arc.

And even as the ball "pinged" from the taut gut he knew that his aim had been true and that his hand had not wavered. The ball sped to the corner from which had just come the great little Frenchman.

The packed stands sat for a split second in stunned silence while the ball bounded crazily away. Lefevre, a peculiar twisted smile upon his mouth, turned and watched it. Then he shrugged, wearily dropped his racket and strode quickly forward to the net, vanquished, hand outstretched in congratulation.

Then there was pandemonium. Swanstrom and Clark were beside Len, hugging him as he walked slowly off the court, and Charlie Hughes and Frank Wheatley were openly happily crying. And from all sides came applause. The roaring was like thunder.

And as Len walked from the court toward the ramp which led to the dressing rooms, hot, perspiring, smiling happily, suddenly very tired, the spectators rising in tumultuous acclaim only one thought came to him clearly—he must not forget to cable flowers to Grace.

Joseph Boncour's annual party in honor of the Davis Cup participants is the social event of every Parisian summer.

The guests are topnotchers in the worlds of sport, art and business. The members of the United States Davis Cup team, on the evening of Henri Lefevre's defeat were Joseph Boncour's guests of honor. And he whose praise was sung the loudest found it difficult to join in the carnival spirit.

Though he had attained that for which all his life he had been striving—to stand supreme in the world of tennis—Len lacked the feeling of elation he once thought this achievement would give.

Had he won—or had he lost? In gaining that which he most wanted he had lost the one person in the world he most needed.

He had a fifty thousand dollar check he could cash. But he wouldn't. He didn't want that sort of money. Purchase money. Payment for a life without Grace.

He shook his head to clear the mist from his eyes. Two men were standing before him and one was talking. He recognized Joseph Boncour; the other man he had seen before, but he could not recall where.

For the past hour Monsieur Boncour had been aware of the strange quiet aloofness of his most glittering guest. And Joseph Boncour knew that there is no better way for a man to recover his vitality than to take a few strong drinks.

He had taken upon himself to bring this about and was crossing the wide, ancient room when John Shay joined him. Now the two men stood before Len—the host and the man whose face Len vaguely remembered—and Boncour was asking in meticulous if accented English:

"You two men know each other, yes? Mr. Rollins—Mr. Shay."

"We're from the same country and practically in the same business," Shay laughed lightly. "Yet we've never been introduced. 'I'm the American promoter, you know, Rollins. Tennis. Professional tennis. I handle the Tilden group. But we'll talk more about that later. That was a honey of a match this afternoon. You were swell in those last three sets.'"

Boncour's gently persuasive voice asked: "You gentlemen perhaps would enjoy a short personally conducted tour of the Boncour wine cellar? It is known throughout the continent as one of the most ancient. Some of the brands, they are one and two hundred years of age."

Len touched the extended glasses of Boncour and Shay and then the wine was warm in his throat. It sent a glow throughout his body. Boncour looked at them inquiringly. "Splendid!" John Shay exclaimed.

"This is," Len said honestly, "the finest I've ever tasted in my life." The Frenchman beamed.

After a few more samples all around Shay said: "Rollins, you know why I am here. Not only in Europe, but—" he bowed slightly toward the Frenchman—"also at this charming party to which Monsieur Boncour was so good as to invite me."

Len made no reply and the tennis promoter hurried on. "I came to Europe to offer Henri Lefevre a contract of fifty thousand dollars and five per cent. of the gate receipts for a tour of the United States after winning the Davis Cup final. But he did not win. Len Rollins won. And it is no secret that Len Rollins will be the biggest drawing card on the courts."

He paused dramatically, took from his inside coat pocket a folded paper. "The contract is yours, Rollins, if you want it. What do you say?"

Len could not answer at first. Fifty thousand dollars! If he took this offer he could return the check to Grace and still be worth a small fortune. Still feel secure and never have to be afraid of the future. But what would his friends say, what would his country think, if he quit the amateur ranks suddenly like this? They were banking on him now to help keep possession of the cup his sensational victory had reclaimed.

Joseph Boncour's voice came to him as if from a great distance: "Of course my young friend is naturally a little stunned at the suddenness—"

And John Shay's laughter, also from a distance. "Naturally," the promoter said. "We'll let it rest then, Rollins, until—say tomorrow? Give you time to think things out."

Len nodded. "Yes, that'll be fine," he answered in a low voice. "Maybe I'll let you know even before that."

The novelist, Dupre, whose books sold by the thousands, addressed Len: "Monsieur Rollins, may I present you to a very charming young lady?" His tone

implied that he was merely repeating the young lady's request. Len winked at Swanstrom and Letenour standing together as he crossed the room at the novelist's side.

Dupree paused before a chair around which a number of young people were grouped. Len was introduced and there were congratulatory murmurs and ejaculations in both English and French.

"... and this," Dupree was saying as Len turned to acknowledge the introduction, "is a girl whose family I have known for many years."

The man's voice drifted away, ceased to exist. Before Len a girl was rising from the heavy oak chair, and he blamed Joseph Boncour's ancient wine for the terrifying close resemblance.

"Len," she said softly. She was here, here!—standing before him, eyes starry, calling him by name.

He stepped forward and grasped her outstretched hands. "Grace darling—" a lump rose in his throat and he could say no more.

Somehow they made their way out of the room to the garden where other couples sat at tiny tables sipping drinks. Like two lost children returning safely at last from out of frighteningly dense woods they found a table partly screened by a hedge. Len took Grace in his arms but did not kiss her. Tenderly, soothingly, he stroked her hair.

"I—I just couldn't do it, Len," she said. "I couldn't. He was good and kind; perfect. But he wasn't you. He understood. I caught the first boat I could; I wanted to intercept that letter. If you still love me, Len, I'll go wherever you say. To Boston, Forest Hills, Bermuda, The Riviera—all over the world. I don't care."

For a time he did not speak. He knew now that in time he could do without his game, but never without the dark-haired, starry-eyed girl beside him.

He kissed her. Her hand in his, they left the garden. Frank Wheatley was standing near the door of the big room as they returned to it.

"Frank," Len said with simple pride, "this is Mrs. Rollins. Grace, Mr. Wheatley."

There was a second's questioning flicker in Frank's eyes, then he murmured softly, "I'm glad. Very glad."

The wine merchant came forward with the Titian-haired girl on his arm but Len didn't see her. He said to the host: "May I use your telephone, Monsieur Boncour?"

"But of course." The wine merchant nodded toward a maid, spoke rapidly to her in French.

The maid curtsied and led Len, Grace's hand possessively tucked under his arm, toward a quiet part of the seventeenth-century house to where a telephone was enclosed within a small anteroom off the reception hall.

He took the receiver off the hook, handed it smilingly to Grace. "You jabber with the operator, darling—I don't speak her language."

"What shall I jabber?" "Tell her we want to put in a trans-Atlantic call."

"But Mother and Dad know I'm—"

"Tell her," he went on, "to get Mr. Henry Justin, Talbot's on Fifth Avenue, New York City. We're going to Indianapolis."

Quietly she stood, the receiver still in her hand, and her eyes rested on his face. He could hear the questioning, insistent voice of the telephone operator asking for the number. And then firmly she replaced the instrument.

"Len, darling," she said softly, "I can't let you do that. You would be unhappy, terribly unhappy. And if you were I would be too. You will always love tennis; I shall always be jealous of it. But we must both make concessions. Every couple must. I want you to take that professional offer. It's honest work—and you'll like it. I'll go along with you wherever you have to go. And we'll save our money—the money you earn, Len darling. Maybe you'll play for five or six years and then you will have had enough. Then we can settle down. And we'll both still be young and—"

"We'll go back to 4-B." She nodded, crept into arms he held toward her. "And it will be raining, maybe, just like—just like—oh, kiss me, Len darling; kiss me and tell me this is real, that we're not dreaming, that we've really found each other at last and for good."

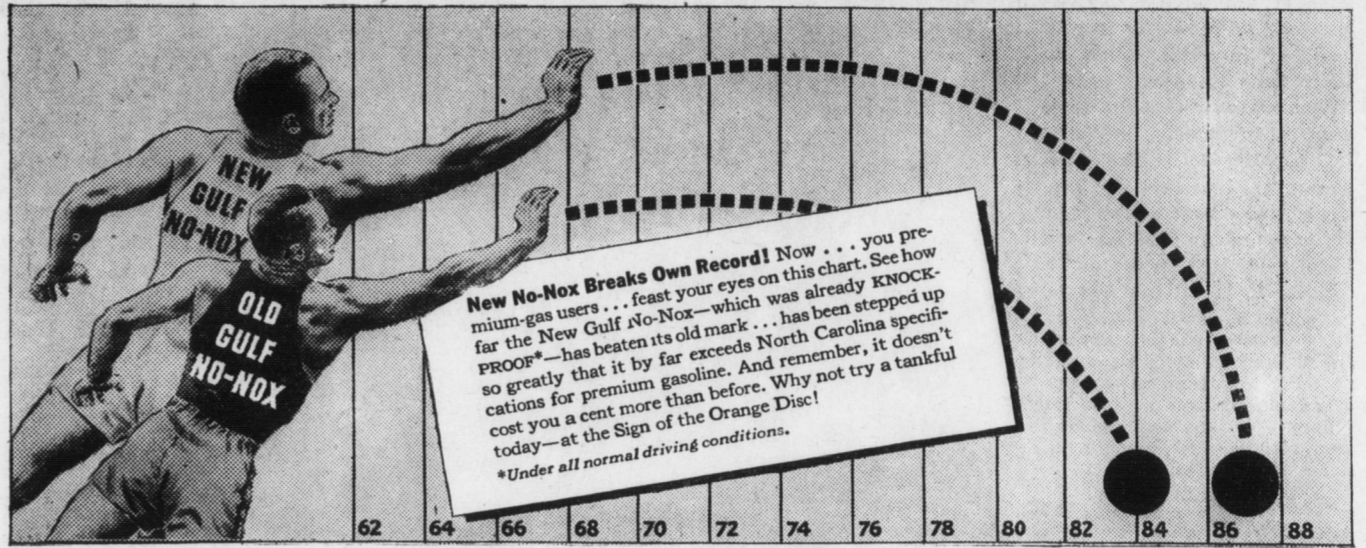
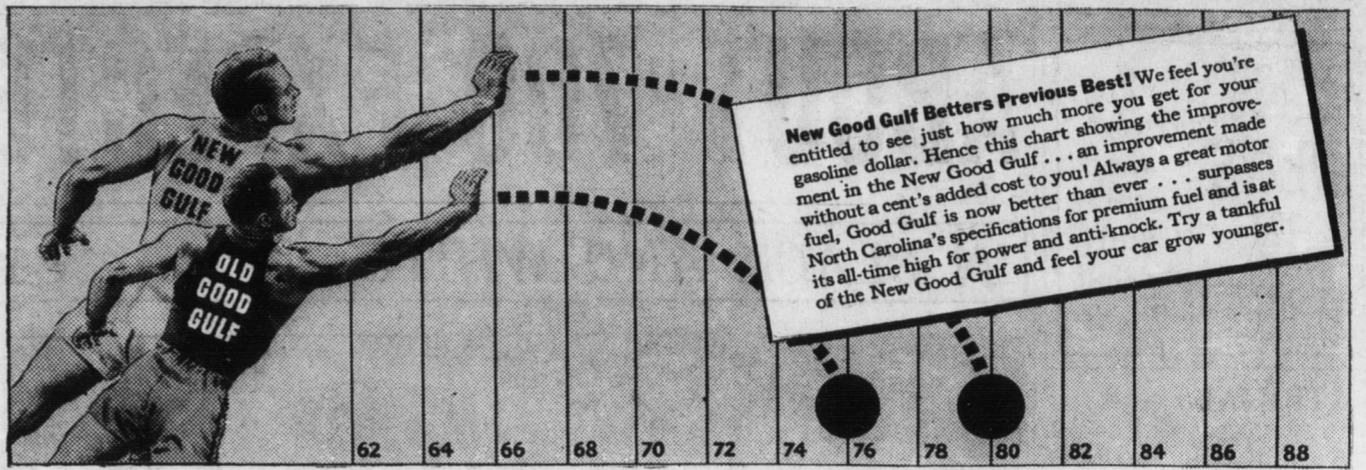
"It is real, Grace. It never will change. It will rain tonight, my only love, and many nights to come. And every morning the sun will be shining brightly because we'll be together."

She raised her lips. "Forever, Len." "Forever."

From somewhere deep in the shadows of Joseph Boncour's ancient, marble-halled castle the crystal chimes of a grandfather clock announced the ending of one day and the beginning of a new.

(THE END)

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Friday, October 25th	1st Sale
Monday, October 28th	1st Sale
Wednesday, October 30th	1st Sale
Thursday, October 31st	2nd Sale
Tuesday, November 5th	2nd Sale
Thursday, November 7th	1st Sale
Friday, November 8th	2nd Sale
Tuesday, November 12th	1st Sale
Wednesday, November 13th	2nd Sale
Friday, November 15th	1st Sale
Monday, November 18th	2nd Sale
Wednesday, November 20th	1st Sale
Thursday, November 21st	2nd Sale
Monday, November 25th	1st Sale
Tuesday, November 26th	2nd Sale
Thursday, November 28th	1st Sale
Friday, November 29th	2nd Sale
Tuesday, December 3rd	1st Sale
Wednesday, December 4th	2nd Sale
Friday, December 6th	1st Sale
Monday, December 9th	2nd Sale
Wednesday, December 11th	1st Sale
Thursday, December 12th	2nd Sale
Monday, December 16th	1st Sale
Tuesday, December 17th	2nd Sale
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