

A MATTER of PRECEDENT

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Johnny Missed a Golf Tournament,
but Saved a Life and Won a
Fair-Haired Daughter of
His Chief Opponent

JOHNNY BENEDICT was mad. He was so mad he was getting more logical, and when we tell you that, you must know that Johnny was a doctor. Not just a doctor, really, but a surgeon, and one of the two best surgeons in Linwood County. The only two. The other was Fairchild Laird. Fairchild had been centering the insides of the residents of Linwood for some thirty-five years and was still going strong. Thereby hung Johnny's ire.

Laird had an uncanny genius for landing in the thick of things both dramatic and glamorous, and somehow Johnny always found himself on the wrong end of the deal, swearing vengeance and vowing he'd never be the goat, no, never, until next time. There was the case of the Pulaski quadruplets—and who but "Fair" Laird could have guessed that the stout, aging mother of seven, living in the four-door shack out at the mica mines, could possibly produce four offspring? She'd looked just the same as ever and he'd acted just the same. But no, "Fair" turned young Mrs. Reggie Wallbrook over to Johnny, and for four months he leaped to answer phones and stood for minutes, groaning and inwardly cursing while the lovely spoiled young society bride detailed her strange and complex feelings. And at the end of the course, Mrs. Reggie produced a nine-pound, bouncing boy, abruptly went into violent hysterics and convulsions and, only by the grace of God and the skill of the hastily called Laird, was saved.

Then when the quadruplets were born, "Fair" cracked every big paper in the country with pictures of himself, the four babies and the complacent, stolid Mrs. Pulaski. Which charred a little more hide on young Dr. Benedict's nose and increased the fund of scores.

THERE were other issues. Dr. Fairchild Laird was house doctor at the Linwood City Hospital through the trying Winter months, always, but once the golfing weather arrived he became noble, persecuted and weary and Johnny was elected.

If there was a messy tonsillotomy one of the local physicians loyally turned to

stated bitterly. "We'd need only a blotter and a trowel to pick you up" then, in case!"

"A Laird," Susan reminded him sweetly, "can't make mistakes!"

"No?" Johnny growled, "well then, Dr. Laird, please remember this—I'll do two-thirds the duty on this tour, but I'm playing in that tournament, whether there's a surgeon on duty or not!"

"Why, Pop," Susan said reprovingly, "were you afraid you'd lose? When you know your game was never better?"

Johnny glared at her and tramped off to the office to check out. So that was it—old Laird thought he'd grab off the cup this year again! Well, he'd show him! He stormed into his locker room and yanked off the white tunic and linen trousers and flung them to the floor with fine disregard for rules. He grabbed his gray flannel slacks and gray sweater with savage haste and forgot to tie the gray inverted calf shoe. His clubs clanked cheerfully as he slammed out of the elevator and across the court to the battered old roadster parked among all the sleek town cars of the other doctors.

HE FINISHED eighteen holes and was satisfied that his game was shaping up. He was physically tired now and relaxed, and the shower room and cheerful gossip of the men lounging around in all stages of dress and undress completed his mental rejuvenation.

He finished dressing and went out to the veranda just as Susan came up the steps, followed eagerly by a rangy, thin young man with a shock of thick blond hair and contradictory dark brown eyes.

"On, Dr. Benedict," she said casually, "this is Captain Sellers—Lloyd Sellers, of the Nomad Tours. Dr. Johnny Benedict, one of our better surgeons, Lloyd," she added mischievously.

"There are two of us," Johnny told Lloyd Sellers coolly, "surgeons, you know—her dad and me!" He shook hands with the young man and disliked him cordially on principle. He didn't like blond men and he couldn't understand the mania that was motorcycle racing. Any more than he could comprehend the

of that old blighter, high-handedly assuming he'd be in there playing, after Semple! And even after him! He forgot his weariness; he shed his exhaustion like a cloak and felt new strength pouring over him.

Thunder heads marched up a sultry disc of breathless bronze sky and the leaves stood still in wilted, mute waiting. Dr. Fairchild Laird was playing Semple down and out of running, and the Nomad Tour wound to a mad, stupendous finish, unaware that in a small private room in Linwood Hospital drama moved sharply, swiftly toward an exit marked death.

"Get Dr. Laird," Johnny said sternly, and the nurse fled on winged feet.

"Dr. Laird is playing and cannot be disturbed," she reported.

"Get Dr. Laird and get him here in ten minutes or I'll haul you both before the State Board for criminal negligence," Johnny barked. She fled, white-faced. She had seven years of profitable nursing behind her and not all the golf nuts in Christendom could strip her of her prized R. N. and J. Benedict meant business—no fooling.

Dr. Laird raged in, hot, perspiring and furious. He had had to default to Semple within four holes of a rousing triumph. He knew Semple had been throwing his shots in every direction and the lid was off.

"I could have told you this was futile, young man," he began impotently, but Johnny cut him short.

"Get into your coat and gloves and be damned quick about it—we've seconds only. And it's one shot in 10,000."

JOHNNY'S hand did not falter as he worked swiftly, surely. Not until his shocked eyes saw and measured the dread gangrene infection. The one thing he had gambled against—the one thing that could turn his hopes to grief, defeat.

"Don't," Laird gasped sharply. Johnny's eyes measured his for a split second and moisture oozed along his forehead and streaked into his dark brows above the mask. "You haven't one chance in a million, Benedict! Only two men have done that—with success."

"Shut-up!" Johnny said succinctly and the head nurse dropped her hypo and it clattered along the floor. Johnny bent to his task. His forehead creased and nurses wiped perspiration from his eyes. He took instruments, used them swiftly, dropped them, took more. He sponged, cleaned, sutured and sterilized and a prayer lived on his lips and sealed his heart.

Finally he was done. Mechanically he stripped off the gloves and followed the stretcher up, his hand on the fluttering pulse of the boy. He drank black coffee, hot and clear, and several shots of stiff brandy. He stood by the bed or sat in

