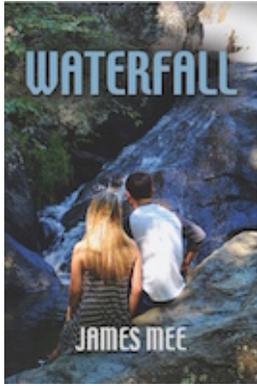
A photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a large, wet rock overlooking a waterfall. The woman is in the foreground, seen from behind, with long blonde hair and wearing a striped tank top. The man is sitting next to her, also seen from behind, wearing a white and blue baseball-style shirt. The waterfall flows over dark, wet rocks into a pool of water below. The scene is lush with green foliage on the left side. The overall lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

WATERFALL

JAMES MEE



Follow BB and Paige as they find love and adventure through the shenanigans of a colorful cast of New England characters. Uncle Lou, Arlene from The General Store, and a town full of unforgettable folk help BB and Paige discover the truth about life, love and friendship. Set in a “north-country” town, BB’s inquisitiveness leads him to a friendship with Paige, a world travelling girl from Washington DC. She’s from places “elsewhere and away” from the comfortable familiarity of Grandpa’s Knob, a town frozen in time that BB’s never left. BB learns there’s lots to know about things unfamiliar and unknown – with love at the top of the list! Enjoy the journey with BB and Paige as they embark on the biggest adventure Grandpa’s Knob has ever seen! The residents of Grandpa’s Knob, surly, silly and barely sane, provide the backdrop for BB to learn life’s lessons and realize the lessons were there in The Knob all along. Waterfall’s wit,

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Waterfall

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Waterfall

James Mee

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James Mee's personal, insightful comment on the preceding notice: "The characters and events in this story are fictitious. So, no, you're not in it. Any similarities to persons living or dead is merely the random collision of atoms and coincidence. So, no, you're still not in it."

Printed on acid-free paper.

First Edition

Contact the Author:

info@plcgent.com

Chapter 9

47-Pitch Out

Last year Uncle Lou said I had to play football in high school. I asked him why? He said, "BB, have you ever felt like God was dead, that love is a myth, that political agendas are bought and paid for?"

"No, sir," I answered.

"BB, you ever read Voltaire? Feel yourself wonderin', is it that God can prevent evil and won't . . . or that he wishes to prevent evil and can't?"

"No, sir."

"Do you ever sit around wondering if your existence is just the tragic blunder of blind fate?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, that's why you're playing football. You obviously aren't a thinking man. May as well start running around bumping into things now 'cause that's pretty much gonna be your life. So, are you going out for the team?"

I just glared at him and said, "Yes, I won't." But that answer didn't fool him like I was hoping it would. He could see that his current approach wasn't working on me. So, then he changed tactics and made it sound like it would be great to play because girls love football players. It's a primitive thing. It's built into them. They're wired that way. They can't help it.

So, as freshman I went out for the Junior Varsity football team.

This year I'm going to be sophomore and I am hanging out with Paige. I think I would rather just keep hanging out with Paige. But if girls love football players, and Paige is a girl, ergo, I should make sure I'm on the football team. [*"Ergo," what a weird word. I heard it on a TV show called McCloud.*]

I told Paige I was on the football team, but she didn't seem to know anything about football. About all she said was, "As long as it's good exercise, I guess, it will be good for you." I kind of thought she'd be a little more gaga over the fact I played football. If she didn't know

anything about football how can she be “liking” me for playin’? I told her I wore a uniform. She said, “That’s nice, BB.” I wasn’t generating the awesomeness I was hopin’ for.

Now I’m thinking Uncle Lou just made it up about girls liking football players. What a wily, old crab he is. And I can’t quit now. I’m the quarterback. I’m not any good, but I’m the only one they’ve got on the Junior Varsity. I played quarterback last year and I will this year. I know the plays. I know how they work. So I can’t quit on my team.

I really wanted to impress Paige but I doubt she’d even come to a game. So far, all I’d done to this point was tell her stories about The Knob and hung out with her. I sort of wanted to do something that would be better than that.

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We started practice in August. It took up a lot of my Paige time. We’d practice in the afternoons and it was hot out.

One of my teammates, Trout Perchon, hailed from a part of town where it was thought that if you couldn’t run fast you would be caught and get your ass kicked by guys who did that sort of thing just for the fun of it.

And it can raise the sorry in your heart when you come to see the limp and lame, ambling around with infirmities, laid upon them by those with cruel intentions.

The assumption on the football team was that Trout must be able to run really fast because by sophomore year he still looked able bodied, considering. All body parts seemed to be appropriately placed and working. He was intact; loved by family and liked by friends, as best I could tell.

Our Junior Varsity football team was, for reasons less than clear, facing a much bigger varsity team from the next town over.

We were just Junior Varsity players, freshmen and sophomores, mostly. Our good players were already on the Varsity team, so it was

with some trepidation that we benchwarmers waiting for growth spurts, we holders of the tackling-dummies, we dreamers of being heroes, we pimple faced, high-voiced, ne'er-do-wells took on the behemoths called *The Quarrymen* Varsity football team.

The Quarrymen needed a pre-season tune-up match before their upcoming season opener, and their coaches were friendly with ours. Our coaches said they'd be glad to help out, and booked us a scrimmage game with those knuckle-dragging goliaths.

Our coaches even had the Junior Varsity cheerleaders come out for the game to cheer us on. Like the game really mattered. [*That was kind of exciting, actually. If you ask me I'd say about the only reason for playing football was being near the cheerleaders, majorettes or, in my case, Paige.*]

Edward and Arlene came down to the game. My Dad was there with some guy he arrested. Uncle Lou was there with Old Spot, the dog — and he brought along Paige! How did that happen?

You know, there's something about people taking time out of their lives to see what you're up to that makes you want to do good things. It's a feeling whereby you want to do some of those cool things you do in your dreams but do 'em in reality. Score the winning touchdown, make a crucial tackle, do something that matters. And then they will be happy for you, and proud of you, and you'll be happy, too, for showing them that you're an "alright" kind of person.

I did wonder, for a moment, who was running the store. Hopefully, it wasn't my brother Clovis. But Clovis knows Arlene means business, ever since he met the wrong end of her size 10 all-season radial work-boots.

Some of my teammates were razzing me about Paige. It was embarrassing but I didn't mind it too much. Made it seem like I had somebody in this world named Paige on my side. How can you not like that feeling?

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I guess the first thing you notice when your football opponents are huge and mean looking, and seem to hate your guts for no reason at all, is that when your Mom suggested stamp collecting, well, now it didn't sound so stupid.

Facing up to a team that shaves like your Dad does is scary, especially when you're a kid who hasn't matured fully yet.

We took the field trying to look bigger than we were in our ill-fitting, hand-me-down uniforms. Uniforms left over from the turn of the century, I'm guessing. Our helmets, some of which didn't even have facemasks, left our noses sticking out as if begging our opponents to smash them. [*Which they would soon be doing, and with great gusto.*]

Our Varsity team had all the good equipment. Most of our Junior Varsity helmets spun around on our heads when we got tackled. Each tackle looked like some freaky carnival show where the kewpie doll's head spins around. For some reason our heads were too small for those coconut-shell looking helmets.

Despite our strutting and puffing, I think it was safe to say we probably didn't spook The Quarrymen. I don't think guns would have spooked those guys. Besides, most of them already carried rifles in the back of their trucks, anyway.

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It was as beautiful a day as God ever made. The sun dappling the playing field, lofty clouds slowing down to watch the game — and the cheerleaders, coaches giving us a pep talk to get our spirits soaring to new heights of courage and bravery.

Paraphrasing the locker room speech, it went something like this: "No one could beat us. Size isn't everything, speed isn't everything, and neither is talent, so as long as you've got heart you can't be beat. *Remember it's not the size-of-the-dog-in-the-fight, boys, it's the size-of-fight-in-the-dog!*"

We hit the field running, our little souls as high as kites on a windy day, no one could beat us! At least not until they kicked the football and then our asses for the better part of two-and-half hours.

Joey 'the Rabbit' Rabatano was the first to go down. He tried to tackle a guy named Tank. [*Tank's not a very original nickname, I know, but you tell Tank that.*]

Tank had broken to the outside and that only left Joey the Rabbit between Tank and the goal line. The Rabbit came up fast and slammed into the Tank, head on!

"Unmerciful demons of Satan," Arlene would tell me later, "it was a ghastly sight, BB. Full of sounds you don't ever want to hear."

I do suppose that courage, with an orchestral arrangement and a handsome movie star, is one thing. But courage set to the snapping bones of Joey the Rabbit is quite another.

The Tank didn't seem to notice the inconvenience of the Rabbit's roadblock. The Tank proceeded to trample the 117-pound Rabbit into the ground, leaving the Rabbit lying on the ground, semi-conscious and quivering. Sort of like a fleshy, Jell-o souffle on green grass.

Some wiseguy yelled, "Get the fork-lift. "I guess my brother Clovis wasn't running the store.

Later Joey the Rabbit would say, "Well, at least I bled on him and that's gotta count for something." And in this game it surely did.

Tucker "Boom Boom" Cannon was the next to go. He played center. He hiked the ball to me on command. The Quarrymen had this guy, who literally weighed hundreds of pounds, line up right over Boom Boom. Then the two inside linebackers would get behind the big guy's ass and push him with all their might into the line of scrimmage and Boom Boom's head.

Despite his heroic effort, Boom Boom had what they call a concussion, nowadays. He went to the sidelines but, since he kept wandering away chasing invisible butterflies, they had to send him home.

We tried everything in our playbook, to no avail. As quarterback, I couldn't help but notice that my linemen seemed to be made of talcum powder, poor bastards . . . poor me.

Time and again the Quarrymen proceeded to plant me in the ground like Grandma's tulip bulbs. I'm thinking that a flower reference ain't really giving you the gravity of my situation. I had more grass in my helmet, mouth and ears than there was grass left on the playing field. I looked like a potted-plant with legs.

I was realizing I wasn't going to be a hero today. I doubted the cheerleaders or Paige were even watching, after a while. And I knew Uncle Lou was going to chew me a new one. Jeez, he'll be yellin' at me loud as storm clouds later.

My fight-or-flight instinct, which *is* imperative to one's survival, was in the dirt somewhere on the field . . . along with a good portion of my memories. And for some reason I kept repeating the combination to my school locker, over and over.

I started thinking with the two or three brain cells I had remaining that we needed a surprise play, a trick play. We needed something to fool those lumbering giants.

Something quick, something away from our strong side and our tight end, Dogfish Furr, Jr. [*The coaches said Dogfish had soft-hands. Which was a compliment, believe it or not. It meant he could catch a football when thrown to him.*]

Dogfish had managed to catch two passes from me. I use the word "pass" loosely. Mostly, I just threw the ball in the air in hopes the defensive linemen would stop crushing the joy of life out of me and that, perhaps, the pass would divert their mauling talents and attention toward someone else, anyone else.

Survival? Cowardice? Don't judge me until you've been buried over and over again under a couple thousand pounds of brute force and ignorance. At that moment, in that game, sharing the pain seemed like a good choice for me.

Dogfish somehow ran under the ball and caught it a couple of times. It was a miracle, really. It's hard not admiring a guy who will

catch a football in a thundering herd of angry ogres wearing cleats on their shoes.

Anyway, the defense was keeping a close eye on our offensive threat, tight-end Dogfish Furr Jr., and their defensive adjustment just might've been their Achilles heel.

It seemed to me we needed a play that would, in effect, send a fleet footed scat-back off tackle but away from where the play was supposed to *seem* like it was going. Get me? A play that looks like it is going strong-side to the left, the side where Dogfish was lined up on, but, in fact, would be going right. Misdirection!

The coach sent in the scatback, 112-pound Trout Perchon, with a play, but I had another idea. I called *47-pitch out*. In the huddle I explained the changes to the play I'd made in my head and, going against the play the coaches called, determined we'd try my trick play.

A quick snap, a fake hand-off, a reverse-pivot pitch-out to Trout. He's running to the weak-side, off tackle, then around the outside corner, wide and gone . . . hopefully.

To be clear, in this case he'd be running to our weak-side. Away from our tight end and flanker. We'd been running that strong-side all afternoon.

The *47 pitch-out* play would have to happen bang-bang-quick because the scatback would be running solo out there. Alone, with no lead blocking, no nothing, just his speed and courage. The outwitted Quarryman defense, anticipating yet another strong-side running play, would be fooled into looking and running the wrong way, chasing the fake hand-off and following the general misdirection.

Now we'd run a version of the *47-pitch out* in practice, without my new changes, and it worked great. So we weren't completely unaware of how the play went. I just customized the execution in the huddle. And it was a good idea, too, because we'd done nothing like it all afternoon.

Of course, as it is in life, things always work great when there aren't beasts with gnashing teeth chasing you, calling your mother

awful names and stepping all over your dreams with their dirt-clotted cleats.

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It was the quick snap that took the Quarrymen off guard. Then, after a fake to a running back, I reversed pivot and pitched the football to that speed merchant, the tiny Trout Perchon. He was off-tackle and around the outside corner.

And as if the Good Lord himself had willed it, the play actually seemed to be working. The defense was fooled . . . momentarily. Trout made the outside corner free and alone. The whole empty right side of football field was open and in front of him.

I'm sure for one blessed second the sound of glory could be heard echoing through the ear holes of his football helmet. A windy sound, not unlike a huge roaring crowd cheering just for you.

There he was in his moment, with the goal line in sight. The Quarrymen had been fooled and were running the wrong way.

His day had come. All those boyhood dreams were there waiting for Trout Perchon to catch them. 5 yards, 10 yards, 15 yards, he was moving down that field toward where dreams become life.

It was then I noticed that Trout was a mouth-breathing heel-runner!

He was no scatback!

He was a mouth-breathin' heel-runner!

His running style looked every bit like a toddler late for the bathroom!

[I found out in later years that the reason Trout showed up as able bodied for football practice wasn't because he was a fast runner from the tough part of town. It was because he seldom went outside. He never left his house. He was always in his room, practicing guitar.]

God must've given Trout other talents but, apparently, running fast and being elusive *were not* part of the package. I quickly began to

realize I'd sent my friend to his demise and all I could do was watch it unfold in front of me in a kind of weird slow motion.

When the Quarrymen figured out our ruse they were all and every one of them mad as hornets on fire!

They were now chasing after the tiny, mouth-breathing, heeling-running amoeba, Trout Perchon. And while running across the field they were descending on him at a much higher rate of speed than in normal circumstances. They had thirty yards or more to build up a full head of pissed off steam and they were closing in on him, full blast!

Unfortunately, it became clear to me that my Nana with her cane, her knee-high support hose, wearing a house dress, her *good* hair, and carrying a handbag, could have caught Trout . . . even if he had a head start.

So I was forced to witness one of the most crushing events I have ever seen on a football field — the annihilation of a courageous kid and his dream as they intersected with reality.

Our opponents, whose *size-of-the-fight-in-the-dog* had turned out to be way more bite and fight than our coaches led us to believe, got me thinking: what if your opponent is huge *and* what if his *it's-size-of-the-fight-in-the-dog* is just as huge as he is big? Then what are you supposed to do? How come coaches never tell you that part of the equation?

I'll tell you something worth knowing. No matter what anyone says to you in this life, remember that the opposite of his or her opinion is, probably, just as true.

Trout used a stiff arm as his first offensive weapon of choice in the hope of keeping tacklers off him. But that was crushed into his chest like tin foil at a barbecue.

Then, God bless him, Trout tried a cross-leg juke that he was taught by the coaching staff. The juke was a running move they insisted would fake out any would-be tacklers. Sadly, that move only faked out Trout. His legs crisscrossed oddly and made him look like a really bad ballerina in a very dark comedy.

And that's when it became apparent that Trout eluding capture was going to be a futile effort. I was thirty yards away but I could see his dream abandoning ship, and the flash of his eyes that brought on that *knowing* you don't want to know, the *knowing* that tells you, "Son, your dream is over now. Just batten down the hatches and wait for the hearse."

[*Yeah, an ambulance would have been too optimistic.*]

Thanks to a maniacal defensive tackle nick-named Da-structor, Trout's arms and legs were soon bent all Gumby-like, and the Da-structor was only the second wave of the Quarrymen to arrive.

Like tidal waves falling hard on sand, the rest of the Quarryman jumped on and finished off what scraps were left of Trout's broken-down 112-pound body. Seemed any piece of his body was fair game and, so, his bruises and contusions, cracks, breaks and lumps were to be aplenty.

When the ref's whistles blew the play over there was an Everest-like pile-up to be sure, a God-awful heap of unnaturalness.

They planted that poor kid in that football field . . . way down deep. A grave of sorts, you might say. Because that was where his childhood dreams of being a football hero came to rest. They were left out on that football field. . . and they are still there, I imagine, all these many years later.

As we helped Trout up he had sod sticking out of places sod ain't supposed to be sticking out of. Looking through the ear hole of his helmet at me he asked, "Have you seen my airplane, Dad?" And something else that sounded like, "How comes my teefs hurt?"

I didn't have the heart to tell him that it may be because there were three or four of them stuck to his chin.

+++++++

Dreams may die hard, but when they get hit real hard by the blunt force trauma of reality, well, they'll find a way of dying on you.

Silently almost, and sometimes you hardly see them go, or barely remember you had them in the first place, but off they go. That's life.

For a while Trout felt a hole in his heart where his football hero dreams used to be . . . it was right next to his broken ribs, so it was pretty easy to find.

The sun kept shining that day like nothing happened. But I saw a dream slip away, never to return.

And that's the trouble with dreams in this life. Those dreams we're dreaming aren't always ours to keep. I think, in a strange way, that is what Trout learned that day. I know I did.

Takes a while to find your very own dream in this life. A dream that can't be taken away from you. Most don't find them.

And all Uncle Lou said after the game was, "Not bad kid, not bad." You could have knocked me over with a feather. He wasn't storming mad or thunderin' at all. "Maybe you got a little courage in you after all, Irene."

Paige came over and do you know what she did? She cleaned off my face with a tissue and spit. I guess I had a bloody nose. She wasn't even squeamish. She had me tilt my head back and she held onto the top area of my nose. When the bleeding stopped, Paige held my hand and we walked all the way back to school. She didn't care if anybody even saw us holding hands! Hmmm, maybe girls do like football players!?

+++++

I knew in my heart, that curious piece of ticking in my chest, that fate now *owed* Trout Perchon. Fate had to repay the courage Trout shared that day on the football field. Life is magical that way, that's what Arlene says, and she's right about a lot of stuff.

Arlene told me, "Fate had to give Trout something in return for the lambasting he took because he took the challenge and sacrificed himself with good heart and intention. And it is an ancient balance that must be maintained. It is the mythical truth. It's folklore, it's

religion, it's yin and yang, and it's a lot of quantum physics we haven't figured out yet. Fate owes Trout Perchon. The equation must be balanced, BB."

I got to thinking after that so-called game, if you put yourself out there, if you expend of yourself in a way that allows you to meet life head on, if you face those hard and mean charging atomic particles in this realm we live in, and you survive, you *will* get something in return for that action . . . besides being hurt, that is.

It's sort of like what Isaac Newton said in his "Laws-of-Motion" theory, "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." [*Sister Mary Agnes taught me that — she loved science.*]

I often wondered what fate would trade-in-kind to Trout Perchon. What accomplishment fate would usher in for Trout's sacrifice that day on the football field and how long it would be before that restitution would take place?

Arlene just said, "Be patient, BB. Time will tell. It has to."

I tried to explain these notions of mine to Uncle Lou. All he said was, "Jeez-us creepers, you're a pansy, Irene!"

It's curious. I kept playing football, for some reason, all through high school. Probably felt I'd show old Uncle Lou I was no Irene. Stupid reason.

But the only game I remember with any clarity from those long gone days was the one with Trout Perchon, the heel-running scatback.

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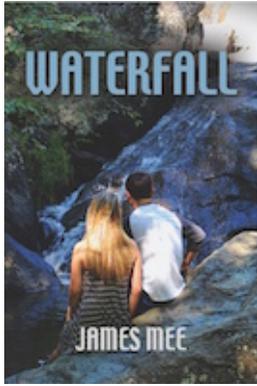
Some many, many, years later, while traveling in Europe I stopped by a café in Paris. Sipping dark coffee I could have cut with a scissor, I heard the most intriguing [*there's that word again*] music playing on the house system.

It was so interesting that I asked the bartender, "Who's this recording artist?" He looked at me in utter disbelief, and with what looked like an expression of utter disgust, then said, "Only zee

greatest guitarist in all of France monsieur ... Trout Perchon, zee Troutman.”

I raised my eyebrows back and forth a few times, then went directly to a music shop. I kid you not, beneath a huge poster proclaiming platinum sales and accolades of greatness was Trout in a beret, with his recording:

"47-PITCH-OUT, Featuring Trout Perchon And The Quarrymen."



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