

Creative Writers Section

A Ghost of a Chance

by: Dave Talbot

Pride coursed through his veins as he stepped onto the cinder track of the outdoor arena. The color and splendor danced before his eyes making him lightheaded. His gaze captured the bright banners while they furled and unfurled in the light, summer breeze. When he looked at his country's flag he became elated. Yet, at the same time, his gaze faltered and his proud shoulders slumped. He tried to remind himself that now was not the time to think of the limited sports training he had gone through.

The loudspeakers woke him out of his private revelry, bringing him back to reality:

"Welcome to the 1992 Summer Olympics."

The music blaring from the loudspeakers was the cue for the countries' representatives to march around the field.

Around the track he marched with the others, smiling and waving, and thinking how his lifelong dream had come true. Without the support of the schools he had attended and the willingness of others to help, he wouldn't be standing on this spot. Thankfulness flooded his heart as he fought to control the tears.

When his troop had reached the halfway mark around the track, he noticed a contestant marching beside him whom he didn't recognize. Curiosity about the stranger overcame his natural shyness and he began to speak.

"Excuse me. I don't seem to recognize you. Have you always been with the team?"

The stranger smiled. "Yes, in some ways I've always been with the team. I arrived last night as a late entrant."

"We can use all the help we can get. By the way, my friends call me Buck. I'm entered in the decathlon and pentathlon."

The stranger looked at the offered hand and smiled.

"I am entered in both events, too, and my name is Wa-Tho-Huck."

They marched thirty yards in silence before Buck spoke again.

"From what college did you get all your training?"

"Carlisle, and most of the training I did on my own."

"I never knew Carlisle had enough funds to support athletics," Buck said, looking at the stranger.

The stranger didn't have time to answer because, at that moment, they began filing through the exits to return to their respective rooms before the games started. Buck tried to keep an eye on the strange new friend, but it seemed as if he just disappeared.

Back in his room, Buck plopped himself in a comfortable chair to relax before the games. While he was rubbing the back of his neck, he thought of his chances of winning.

"Slim," he thought. "It'll be like walking in the middle of the night in the woods without a moon for a guide. I'll be stumbling most of the way without anything to guide me."

Someone knocked on his door, breaking into his thoughts.

"Hello," Buck said, standing in the doorway. "Come in. Have a seat."

The stranger stood momentarily on the threshold, as if fighting another person within himself, before stepping into the room.

"Uh, can I offer you anything?" Buck said.

"No thanks. I just came by to say good luck and may the best man win the gold."

"You're pretty sure that one of us will win the gold," Buck said with a chuckle. "Do you know something that I don't know?"

The stranger stood and offered his hand. When Buck shook the stranger's hand, a jolting spark of energy seemed to flow through his body.

"Just like the first time I shook his hand," Buck thought.

When the stranger stood in the archway of the open door, Buck couldn't be sure if he had walked or floated to the opening.

"Oh," Buck said, smiling. "Good luck to you, too, Wa-Tho-Huck," and, as an afterthought, "my friend."

Buck didn't have time to reflect on the visit. In fact, he didn't have time to reflect on much of anything. Once the games began, they were grueling contests of stamina. He pushed his lungs beyond endurance, and felt the searing of oxygen as he raced. Sweat didn't just run from his face, it cascaded. Through every turn, every jump, every throw, his muscles screamed in agonizing protest. Yet, he kept pushing himself, striving for the ultimate goal. The only thought he had were of others who might have done better if they were given the chance in school. He vowed to do his best for them, himself, and his country.

The days seemed to fuse together during the games. Even though Buck was doing his best, he always found himself a fraction of time or distance behind the stranger. Yet, in this aspect, he could be guaranteed a silver medal.

Finally, the games were over, and to Buck's surprise, he found himself standing on the highest platform to receive his gold medals. While the national anthems of the winner's countries were being played, Buck turned over his mind the incredibilities of his winning. He hadn't any right to be up here when it was the stranger who had won every contest.

People danced before Buck's eyes as they stepped forward to congratulate him. While he shook hands and smiled back at the smiling faces, the stranger appeared in his line of vision.

Buck stood mesmerized while the stranger spoke to him. He could not look away from the deep, penetrating brown eyes. He watched numbly as the stranger's hand moved in slow motion toward him. It seemed huge and inviting, and looked like a friendly span across the universe.

"Congratulations on the gold."

Buck grasped the hand. The jolt of electricity blinded his eyes with a bluish haze. When he could see again, the stranger was gone.

"Goodbye, friend Wa-Tho-Huck," Buck said to himself. "You are strange, but you will be known, if there are answers to my questions."

The ceremony over, and thinking of what he'd just said to himself, Buck jumped off the platform and began racing to his room. His heart thudded in his chest to match the slapping of his feet on the ground. Sweat broke out on his forehead and ran off the end of his nose while he turned the doorhandle of his room. An eerie silence prevailed like a shroud, sending chills up and down the length of his body, as he reached for the return cablegram message. He picked the cable up with his left hand and, when his right hand touched the envelope, it was as if he had completed an electrical circuit, power surged up both arms. At the same time, a voice spoke inside his head.

"For those who didn't get the chance."

Quickly he tore open the envelope and read the message:

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR GOLD STOP CARLISLE COLLEGE JAMES FRANCIS THORPE 1888-1935 "BRIGHTPATH" STOP WHY...

Just a Fable...

by: Sharyn Owens

Racing down the path, Danny looked nervously over his shoulder. His pursuer was still vigilantly trailing him, but Danny felt he was finally beginning to increase the distance between them. A few yards ahead was a shortcut Danny was familiar with. If luck was with him, he'd be able to duck in there and make his way safely home. Checking once again on the whereabouts of his would-be Nemesis, Danny swerved quickly into a small opening in the dense brush alongside the path. He continued to travel at top speed for another five minutes, then slowed to a more leisurely pace.

"Whew. That was close," he panted. "It sure is getting dangerous for an honest rabbit to try to earn a living. I really thought that dratted hound had me this time."

The remainder of his journey was uneventful. Due to the interference of that despicable hound, Horace, Danny had been unable to obtain the delightfully tantalizing romaine he had planned to procure for dinner. Now he'd have to scrounge something quickly or face disappointing Ethel and the little ones waiting at home.

Ethel was such a good wife, and so productive. Why, they'd been married only a year and had already had 26 babies. That was a respectable record for any rabbit. Those babies were, each and every one, absolutely adorable, too. Their little noses twitched curiously at every new adventure, and their tiny, furry ears flopped so comically. Danny awaited, with paternal pride and anxiety, the day when his babies would finally master the control of their ears.

Foraging as he daydreamed, Danny finally collected enough food for the evening meal. He arrived at home to find a bedlam of rejoicing. Susan and Oliver, Ethel's parents, were there, along with a multitude of Susan's other children. Danny was certain that today was not a holiday, yet the variety and quality of the food the ladies had prepared would be adequate for the Queen's banquet.

Danny scanned the crowd for Ethel. There she was, over by the playpen. Ethel was certainly a devoted mother, and so beautiful. She was still as fresh and lovely as the day they'd been married, with those shapely haunches, those delicate ears adorned with wildflowers, and those huge trusting, sensitive eyes. He threaded his way through the crowd toward his wife.

"Daniel," boomed Oliver from behind him. "It's about time you got home. Where on earth have you been? We've all been waiting for you. Sallie, Jeanne, and Earnestine all had their babies today. I have 45 new grandchildren."

"Congratulations, Dad," Danny exclaimed. "Wow, if this family keeps growing, we'll soon outnumber that Cottontail clan. I'm sorry I'm so late getting home, I had a slight disagreement with old Horace this afternoon."

"Son, I've told you countless times to stay away from that patch of romaine. There is no delicacy in existence that's worth battling old Horace to get. That romaine will be the death of you yet."