

# GOOD LUCK, JOEY

By James L. Clark

There it was in the morning paper, leaping off the page, as it were, in huge, black headlines – **JOEY SANCHEZ DIES**. He couldn't believe it and stared at the words, standing and shocked, by the front door for a full minute in the hallway. He stumbled into the living room, groped for a chair and collapsed into it. He felt dizzy. The room seemed to tilt and whirl. He dug his knuckles into his eyes.

*Oh God, it can't be true...it can't be...it can't.* The statement wouldn't go away...kept running through his mind. His chest started aching...throat tightened up...vision blurred. The realization swept over him...burrowed deep inside him...Joey Sanchez was dead. Almost never since that third-year philosophy class had he thought seriously about the...death question...and certainly not of himself as a player.

The racking sobs began to explode, tears running from under the open hands he held to his eyes...eyes he wanted to disbelieve...eyes he desperately hoped had deceived him. He threw back his head and screamed again, *no God, it can't be true...Joey Sanchez cannot be dead...it can't be true.*

The sobbing finally stopped, and, exhausted, he slumped in the chair, gazing at his hands, clenching and unclenching them into and out of fists. The phrase *with these hands I thee kill* started marching through his mind, sometimes softly, sometimes loudly...but always in perfect rhythm, just like that of the hands and arms flailing the small bag. He leaped from the chair, ran into the kitchen and plunged his hands under the hot water, scorching them into redness and pain. Still, the phrase persisted...*with these hands I thee kill.*

He felt like running from the house and shouting to the whole city that he didn't do it, that it was a one-chance-in-a-million accident...a fluke...something that almost never happened. Covered with perspiration, he returned, instead, to his chair, but was drawn to the headline as if by some magnetic force...and saw the picture of curly-headed Joey Sanchez. The lead paragraph of the account began, "After losing on Saturday night to former collegiate welterweight champ Jimmy O'Shea, boxer Joey Sanchez died this morning, shortly after midnight of..."

*Look over at Joey's corner, hey look... Oh God, the blood. Look, it's streaming from his mouth and nose...from somewhere over his left eye. Look at it...smeared on his chest, splattered all over those white trunks. Look down at my gloves, bright red and dark red from the fresh blood of the last round and the half-dry blood of the other rounds...Joey's blood. Look, my arms are covered with the sticky stuff. Do you smell it...I smell it on my face where it rubbed on in the clinches. Why don't they call it? Look, they're patchin' him up for another round.*

He dropped the paper to the floor and buried his head in his hands. He could smell the blood again...feel it. He felt sick and muttered, *Oh, dear God, why didn't they stop it then?*

*Hey, look in their faces...d'ya see 'em...the faces of the laughing, cheering crowd...the fat cats and their broads at ringside. Listen...listen to all those yells: "Kill him, Jimmy boy," "Put him away for good, Irishman," "Wipe him out this time." Listen! They love me. I'm pumped up to the limit. I'm way ahead. He's never touched*

*me yet, at least not hard. Hear the bell? Look...Joey is wobbling toward me. I can't believe it. He's here...looking at me...I think...but he's not here...he's not here...I don't know if he actually sees me.*

He looked down at the paper on the floor...looked again at Joey's picture...a laughing Joey when it was snapped at the weigh-in. He noticed the even, well-formed teeth and the wavy coal-black hair. He remembered the last time he saw Joey.

*I'm just doin' my job...jabbing his broken nose for what seems like the thousandth time, snapping his head back like the small bag. His left eye is completely closed, and he can hardly see me now. I'm taking care of business...making sure nobody – especially the sportswriters – ever accuses me again of not having the killer instinct. Watch. I step inside a weak, wide, desperate right hand that he would never have thrown if he'd been right, and pile my right into the side of his head so hard my whole arm goes numb for a second or two. I'm jabbing that left eye again and also give it a quick left hook. I see Joey sliding down now, but I catch him one more time with my right and he hits the mat hard. Except for a little twitching, he's lying still...on his back...blood trickling in his left ear...blood trickling out the right ear...weird.*

*No big deal. They're using the smelling salts...oughtta bring him right back...but he's not moving...not yet. Hell's bells, I've seen that lotsa times...no big deal. Maybe they'll have to take him to the emergency room...I've seen that lotsa times, too...been there myself once...no big deal.*

He remembered taking a long, hot shower, scrubbing away the blood and sweat, and then, having a great time with the reporters who had given their accounts of the fight in the Sunday morning papers, using terms like "Irresistible Irishman," "Jimmy the Juggernaut," "Collegiate Cannonball" and the one he liked best – "Champ." He remembered the thick, juicy steak with all the trimmings that more than compensated for the hours of drying-out before the weigh-in. He remembered being happily tipsy when he made it home at 3:30 yesterday morning.

The ringing of the phone snapped him back. It was John Flaherty, his manager. "I guess you've seen the paper, Jimmy."

"I've seen it."

"You all right?"

"I'm all right." It was hard to keep everything back.

"It's too bad, ain't it?"

"It's bad, Johnny."

"You ain't worryin', are ya?"

"No way." *Why the devil didn't he hang up?*

"Uh, Jimmy, the writers might be after ya right away. I don't believe I'd say nuthin'."

"Don't worry, John."

"Ya want I should come over?"

"Forget it. Goodbye, John."

He had awakened yesterday at about 2:00 p.m. and made a mental note that *Mom would have skinned me alive for missing Sunday Mass*. It was in the morning paper that Joey hadn't come around yet. That had worried him, but that had happened before, too. He hadn't noticed it until a friend had called and mentioned it...the poem – or whatever it was – on the editorial page. It had upset him. *Obviously by somebody who never laced on a glove, he had thought, and knows nothing about the game...probably some editorialist babe...some do-gooder tryin' to make it upstairs on somebody else's back...and Joey just out, not dead...everyday stuff.*

## PUNK

A red-deep pool slowly  
Engulfing the dingy tile; the  
Nearly lifeless form bestirring  
Itself...but barely; Father  
Arriving...the beginning  
Of the unintelligible chant.

The crowd streaming from  
The smoke-stenched arena,  
Heading for the bars and  
Flesh markets of both  
High and low esteem...the  
Kid had fought gamely.

In the adjacent stall  
A victor gazing at his  
Red-smeared gloves; for  
An instant, the trace of a  
Tear?...Nah!...then a shrug...  
Finally, the swishing shower.

Chant now done, the  
Glassy, pleading eyes looking  
For something more; a  
Red-drenched hand feebly  
Reaching out for...for...  
Something; a siren-sound  
Growing louder.

The small knot of cigarred,  
Sweaty, flabby, Flesh  
Merchants holding a Board  
Meeting, pronouncing the  
Managerial consensus...a great kid,  
But why that punky right lead?

Arena now deserted...save for  
The usual popcorn-and-peanut-eating  
Rats, the other rats having gone to  
Form Sheet and Odds-Maker.

Only thing left...  
A grave to be dug.

Those words had haunted him off and on all yesterday afternoon. He had skipped dinner out...had stayed to himself...none of the usual day-after celebrating. He had tried to watch television, but couldn't concentrate. He had gone for a walk after dark, but had the feeling that people were staring at him...even in the dark...people he'd never seen before.

As he finally drifted toward sleep around midnight, the words of that silly poem – or whatever it was – vaguely echoed off the walls of a long, nearly dark, bat-infested corridor through which he saw Joey walking...with no light at the end, the prelude to a string of nightmares put together like horror-movie trailers in movie-house advertisements of coming attractions, from which he woke periodically, drenched in perspiration. All through the scenes, he seemed to be scrubbing his gloves with a yellowish, foul-smelling detergent, the red-spotted gloves continually laughing at him. Throughout the ordeal, he was wearing the Father's collar and begging the gloves to come to confession, no matter if Jewish, Protestant or Catholic.

At dawn, he started the coffee, looked for some doughnuts, stared out the back window, but his mind started rolling again...bloody faces...one huge circle of them as they floated round and round in his consciousness – Tony Benotti, Jerry Craydon, Johnny Stater, Monk Ganus and all the others he had faced in a three-year career. It seemed like a million of them...beaten with his hands, some of them into bloody pulps...like Joey Sanchez. Weaving in and out of the bloody circle, now turned into the ropes of a ring, was a procession of fat cats and their ladies, waving their C-notes and ringside tickets, laughing at the bloody faces and pointing at them, but having no blood on their fine clothes. In the middle of the ring lay Joey Sanchez, blood trickling in one ear...out the other...deathly still.

He looked down again at his hands, still a little swollen from Saturday night. He reached for the coffee and spilled its boiling contents on one hand, recoiling in pain and muttering something he'd heard in Catechism about *sins of scarlet becoming white as snow*. Things began to run together. The phone started ringing...rang and rang...the writers, he guessed. He covered his ears but finally snatched it off the table, wires and all, and threw it through the window, glass flying everywhere. The clock in the hall started chiming, sounding like the bell for another round. He picked up a chair – like it was a feather – and threw it at the clock, crashing everything to the floor – clock, pictures, a lamp, his university diploma.

Though the phone and clock were broken and silent, nothing stopped the noises in his head or the sight of bloody faces and red-blotched gloves. He threw open the front door and went running into the street, grabbing everybody he could and screaming, *he's not dead, he is arisen*. Back in the house, he plunged his hands under the hot water again until he could no longer stand the pain, muttering *the spots...the spots...they won't go away. Dear God, the spots won't go away...they won't...*

The doorbell began ringing...rang and rang. He threw a small crucifix at the door, shattering the tiny cross and its figure into smithereens. As he pushed a chair in front of the locked door, someone kicked it in and it came crashing down on him and the chair. He looked up and screamed, *Oh, God, it's Joey Sanchez...his head is gone...but I recognize the blood. There's only the blood, but why's he wearin' a policeman's uniform?*

He began laughing hysterically...laughed and laughed until his sides ached, backing into a corner as other headless policemen seemed to come toward him, blood running down their uniforms. "But I got big bucks for that, Joey," he screamed, "I got big bucks and a title shot, Joey...you woulda done the same, Joey...big bucks..."

*I don't know where they came from, or why they stuck me with a needle. They just seemed to be there... dressed all in pure white. He lashed out at the policemen but felt himself going down. I'm floating now...just going home I guess...but I wish I could get my arms loose. Good luck, Joey.*