

Touchdown!

Written by Charlemae Rollins



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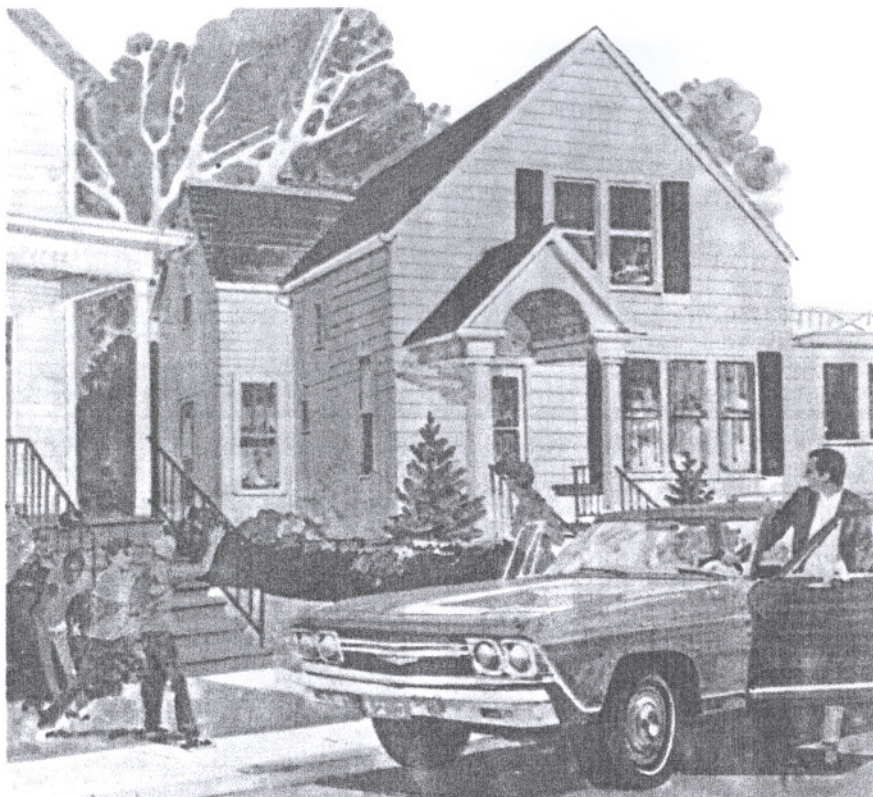
Alan lived next door to an old, empty house. The house had been empty so long that all the windows were boarded up, and the paint was peeling. On dark nights Alan and his friend liked to pretend that the house was haunted. On Halloween everyone thought that the boy who knocked on the door of the old house was the bravest of all.

Alan and his friends liked having the old house in the neighborhood. They especially liked the big empty yard. They could play football in the yard because there weren't any grown-ups to tell them to stop. Since the windows were all boarded up, they wouldn't break them, and there weren't any flowers to worry about stepping on.

One day Alan noticed some changes next door. It looked like somebody had cut the grass. He looked closer and saw ladders and paint cans beside the house. "I wonder what's going on," he thought.



When his mother came home from work, Alan asked her what was happening to the empty house.



"I think somebody finally bought it," she said. "It'll take them a while to fix it up, since it's been empty for so long, but I think it'll be nice to have some new neighbors."

Alan didn't know if he thought it was all that nice. The boys might not be able to play football in the yard any more.

Each day Alan saw changes in the house. First some men put in new windows. Then other men worked on the roof. Finally a painter came and painted the house bright yellow.

Sometimes Alan's friends came over to his house, and they watched the workmen next door.

"What'll we do without our haunted house for Halloween?" asked Russell.

"It was such a great place to play football," said Greg. He looked very unhappy.

One day the boys were tossing a football back and forth in Alan's yard when they saw a car pull up and stop. A man and a woman got out of the car.

"They must be the new people who are going to live in the house," said Russell.

"They look OK," said Greg. "Maybe they'd let us play football in the yard sometimes."

Suddenly the boys stopped talking as someone else got out of the car. It was a girl with long red braids.

"It's a girl," said Alan. He hadn't really thought about who would be moving into the house, but he never thought it would be a girl.

"There go our football games," said Russell.

"That'll mean there'll be girls all over the place," said Greg.

Alan just sat down on the steps and looked glum.

The next day the boys came over again to toss the football around. They couldn't really play a game in Alan's yard. It was too small. But tossing the ball was better than nothing.

The boys hadn't been playing long when the girl came out of the house and walked over to the boys.

The boys pretended they didn't see her.

She watched the boys toss the ball. Nobody said anything to her. Finally she said, "Hi. My name's Lisa. You boys don't have much room to play football over there, do you?"



"Nope," said Alan. But he still didn't look at her.

"We have a nice big yard," she said. "Why don't you come over here and play football?"

Alan looked at Lisa. "Won't your parents mind?" he asked.

"No," she said. "They won't mind you playing touch football if you let me play too."



"Oh, no," thought Alan. The last thing he wanted to do was play football with a girl. He looked at Russell and Greg, but they didn't say anything. Alan didn't know what to do. He really wanted to play football. Alan thought for a minute, and then he said, "OK. We'll all play." He didn't think it would be much of a game. He'd have to throw short passes and everything, but at least they'd get to play football.

They chose sides, and Alan and Lisa were on the same team. In the first play Alan got the ball. He saw Greg running toward him. Alan looked for Lisa. Nobody was around her at all.

"Here," she called. "Throw it to me!"

So Alan threw the ball. It wasn't a good pass. In fact it was terrible. It was going to go way over Lisa's head. But Lisa didn't look worried. Just as the ball got close, she jumped up in the air and grabbed the ball. It seemed to Alan like her feet must have had springs on them.

Then Alan saw Russell about to touch Lisa. But Lisa saw Russell too. Just as he was about to touch her, Lisa jumped out of his way, and Russell fell flat on the ground.

Then Lisa started to run, and there was nobody to stop her. She ran faster than any girl Alan had ever seen. She ran faster than any boy he had ever seen. She ran faster than anybody. Even Greg couldn't catch her, and he was a fast runner.

Lisa ran all the way to the edge of the yard. "Touchdown!" she cried.

The boys ran up to Lisa. "Boy, you can really run," said Greg.

"I never saw anybody catch such a terrible pass," said Russell.

Alan gave Russell a dirty look. Then Alan looked at Lisa. "Boy," he thought, "if she's that good a football player, I can hardly wait until baseball season." Alan liked baseball even better than football.

Lisa said, "Let's play some more."

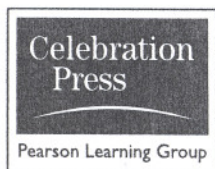


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