

A NOTE ON "THE COLLISION,"
NORMAN MAILER'S
FIRST SHORT STORY

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In the fall of 1932, the Mailer family—Barney and Fanny, and their children, Norman (who turned ten the following January), and Barbara (six in April)—moved from Flatbush, to another section of Brooklyn, Crown Heights, a middle-class Jewish neighborhood about a mile from Ebbets Field and Prospect Park. The Mailers remained there until the summer of 1943, when they moved to Pierrepont Street in Brooklyn Heights. Working in his second-floor bedroom at 555 Crown Street during the winter of 1933–34, Mailer wrote his most important juvenile work, "The Martian Invasion," a 35,000-word science fiction novel which had one root in the Buck Rogers radio show, and a second in the Princess of Mars books by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Barbara remembers her brother encouraging her to read this series, which she also gulped down.

But before composing the Martian novel, Mailer wrote his first real short story, "The Collison," about a hockey game between two undefeated high school teams. According to the date on a typescript of the story provided by Stephen Chipkin, Barbara and Norman's cousin, the story was written in January 1933. Mailer's parents mailed this copy to Barney's family in South Africa in that year, and it remained with them until a few months ago when Mr. Chipkin brought it to a family gathering at Barbara's home in New York.

During his Crown Heights years, Mailer went to some New York Rangers hockey games, (probably with Barney, who also took him to see the Dodgers), and it seems likely that he saw some high school games as well. Drawing on these ice-rink memories, he wrote this thousand-word story

about the comeback win of Sedley High over rival Bartel (both fictitious names) in breathless prose, and an over-reliance on the adverb “desperately.” If the depiction of the collision trick of the Bartel team during face-offs is a touch inchoate, the story rides on the juice of pre-adolescent energy, and a slam-bang conclusion as Sedley’s star, Bob Murray, crashes through the Bartel line to make the final goal in overtime, and in consequence, is asked by the coach to captain next year’s team.

Are there premonitory glimpses of Mailer’s future prose in the cumbersome, tense-confused rhythms of his first major fictional outing? Perhaps. As Mark Edmundson writes in his fine essay, “Mailer’s Greatness: A Note,” in this issue of the *Review*, the immediate jewel of his writing is his ability “to grasp the present in its full complexity, glory and grief,” as he does so memorably in *The Presidential Papers*, *The Armies of the Night*, and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, among others. It may be that Mailer’s life-long effort to create “writing . . . steeped in a sense of the uniqueness of his present,” the time of his time, began with “The Collision.”

" THE COLLISION "

by

NORMAN K. MAILER

(Written in January 1933, at the age of ten)

"Well, I guess we are going to have a pretty easy season of it", said Bob Murray, left wing and Captain of the Sedley High School Six. He had just been talking after they had beaten another high school, which was supposed to give them trouble in their victorious season so far.

They still had several more games on their season. The Saturday following this occurrence they beat another High School 7 - 0. However, there was one very important game at the end of the season and that was the game between Sedley and Bartel. Both teams had winning sixes so far this year. Both teams went through the season undefeated until this final game of the season, where both were to meet.

The Sedley coach had warned them that Bartel had a new trick called "collision".

On the afternoon of the game five thousand people turned out to see the big game. There was a chill wind blowing but otherwise the weather was clear. In the dressing room the players were talking excitedly. Both teams skated out to the rink amid the cheering of the crowd.

The teams lined up for play. The referee tossed in the "puck" on the end of his stick, and the center crashed headlong into the other center. The impact of the collision sent the puck skimming over the ice to Bartel's right wing. Immediately he dodged the defense man and taking a deep breath he aimed the puck at the cage. The goalie sent it back but the left wing again caught it on his stick and amid the cheering of the crowd sent the puck past the goalie's knee. It was a score of 1-0. The game continued. It was a furious battle of wits and might.

After a while the left wing again succeeded in getting the puck in from the collision trick. Desperately Sedley tried to get a goal, but to no avail. Instead Bartel got another goal, making the score 3-0. At the end of the first period Bartel was leading 3-0.

A sad group of players made their way to the Sedley dressing room and for ten minutes listened to the scolding of the coach.

At the start of the second period Bartel tried the Collision trick but when the left wing went after the puck, Bob came up to meet him. Instead of the Bartel left wing getting another goal Bob collided with him. The two hit each other very hard. Both were thrown off balance but Bob managed to send the puck against the side boards. Picking himself up he and eleven other men chased the free puck, but Bartel reached it first. The defense man who caught the puck first, sent it skidding up to where Bob was skating toward the melee. Wheeling quickly he caught the puck in the crotch of his stick and dodging the players who tried to stop him, he sent a black piece of rubber like lightning to the cage. The score board read 3-1 in favor of Bartel. Later in the period each team scored once, making it 4-2.

The beginning of the third period came. In the first five minutes both teams scored once more, making it 5 - 3. With ten minutes left to play, the regulation time, both teams tried desperately to score. The minutes passed. Hardly four minutes left to play; Bob whirled around the ends to receive a pass from the left defense. He sent the puck to the goalie but it was sent back to him by the goalie who had blocked it. Once more he sent it in the direction of the cage. The goalie half fell on it. With the puck right in front of the cage it was an easy matter for Bob to send it in.

Sedley tried desperately to make a tying goal as the score board read two minutes to play.

The referee tossed in the puck. The two centers collided once more with the same result. The left wing sent it in the direction of Sedley's goal. The goalie stopped it and sent the puck back into play. Bob saw the puck in front of him. Taking it in the crotch of his stick, he crashed through the line. Getting through, a Bartel man blocked him. In trying to dodge, he slipped, and the puck banged against the side boards. The defense man tried to get it but just as he was about to hit it, Bob crashed into him and the two were thrown with a crash on the side boards. Before other players could reach these two, Bob sent the puck skimming towards the goal. The goalie, however, stopped it and sent it back to where a wing smacked it against the side-boards. All players were like a flash at the place. They bumped each other and collided with each other. Finally, Bob caught the puck and sent it forward past the goalie to make the score 5-5 just as the red light flashed on the field.

The "overtime" began. Both teams hit each other just as Bartel's center hit the puck out of reach of the players. Before they could reach it, a Bartel wing caught the ~~king~~ puck and instead of hitting it, swept up to the goalie with Bob following him. The goalie helplessly trying to stop him as the player swept up. The player finally released the puck from his stick. The goalie by a miracle half stopped the puck with his knee. Just then, Bob swept up and took the puck right under the player's nose. Sweeping up across the ice, he flicked a shot at the goal. The goalie easily stopped it however. Once more Bob returned the puck. The goalie tried to stop it but could not, and Sedley won 6-5.

As joyous players slapped him on the back, the coach came up and said with a smile, "Well, Captain Murray, do you think you can come for next year?"

"I'll say I can", replied Bob.

T H E E N D .