

LARGELY on the strength of the argument that Enni had gone to Hawaii, Gay won the privilege of experiencing the American institution of Monday Night Football with Jonathan. By the time she made her way through the foyer and into the standing-room-only crowd at John Q's Restaurant on Public Square very near Old Stone Church, she wished she had lost.

John McCall sat on a barstool drinking a Red Dog and debating last-year's decision by Browns owner, Art Modell, to release long-time Browns quarterback, Bernie Kosar, in favor of the mechanically sound Vinnie Testeverde.

"All right," the other fan conceded. "I'll give you that. I didn't like the way it was handled either. But Uncle Art's going to do what's best for Uncle Art. He's got no sense of loyalty to his players or the fans. So what? He still wants to field a winning team."

"Kosar can win. He's proved it. Testeverde can't. And he's proved that. I don't care how good he looks throwing the ball if it ends up in the hands of the defense." McCall paused at hearing the unmistakable English accent. "That's my date," he said, stretching his neck and looking into the crowd.

"Step clear of my path, you drunken bounder, less I be forced to introduce you to me knee."

"You better move," teased one of his companions. "Sounds like she means it."

Not threatened in the least by the five-foot-six-inch, hundred-and-ten-pound strawberry blonde, the six-foot-three-inch, two-hundred-and-twenty-pound former college defensive end bent forward and barked three times in her face. The fourth bark turned high pitched when Beatrice's knee connected. The man doubled over in pain to an accompanying howl of laughter from his friends.

By then, McCall had reached the scene. "Beatrice, Beatrice," he called.

"Jonathan, this uncouth bounder just accosted me. I think you should take him outside for a lesson in manners."

"Sorry, man," said McCall, taking hold of the guy's arm. "She's English. She's never seen a football game. She didn't understand. Are you all right?"

"He'll make it," said one of the laughing friends.

"You guys get yourselves a round of drinks on me," said McCall. "Tell the waitress I'm over there almost at the end of the bar. No hard feelings. All right?"

"Yeah, sure. Get this bitch away from me."

McCall put his arm around Beatrice and pulled her away toward the end of the bar. "But Jonathan, he stuck his ugly mug right in my face and barked at me like a common mongrel."

"I know, Beatrice. It's what we do at football games."

"You can't be serious."

"Look around."

She climbed onto his barstool and surveyed the crowd with growing disbelief. She had never experienced the displeasure of being in the midst of a more raucous looking group. The entire bar was absolutely packed with men dressed in the same shades of brown and orange. Some had painted their faces. Every one had a drink in his hand, and some waved large dog bones in the air. All around, there were seemingly unprovoked breakouts of the same kind of barking the man had done to her. Many were eating chicken wings with their bare hands. Even women were barking and drinking. She watched two men chugging beers, encouraged by barks from the nearby crowd. "Will there be a riot?" she asked with a superior but anticipatory air.

"No lady," said the man who had been talking to McCall earlier. "This is football, not soccer. We don't have riots and trample each other to death like they do in your country."

"I suppose he has me there, hasn't he?"

"I suppose he does. Drink a couple Red Dogs and get in the mood. You have to get involved to enjoy the experience. Don't be an outsider, okay?"

A waitress leaned toward them from inside the bar. "You the one buying a round for those guys over there?"

"Yes. And give us another three Red Dogs, please." As she did, he went back to convincing Beatrice. "I promise I'll go to Severance Hall with you. I'll wear a tux and won't bark."

She scanned the crowd again. "For you, Jonathan," she surrendered.

The beers arrived and the other man handed one to Beatrice. "Go for it," he said.

"I haven't eaten. You'll have me pissed."

A questioning expression came over him, and he looked to McCall for a translation.

"In England, pissed means drunk."

"No kidding? Well, that's the general idea, sweetie." He and McCall started barking in unison and Beatrice started drinking. Their barks grew louder and louder as she chugged. She finished to the cheers of most of the people around them.

"Now you," she dared the stranger. She started barking. Rather than join in, McCall could not help laughing.

"What do you call that?" asked the stranger. Her English accent did not lend itself well to dawg barking. "Like this." He barked. She watched his mouth closely.

"Okay. Let's go, everyone." She started a much-improved dawg bark and the surrounding crowd joined in while the stranger and McCall chugged, the stranger easily winning.

"Where's the little girls room, Jonathan?"

"Walk around that wall. You'll see stairs leading down to it."

The stranger was curious about Beatrice. After she'd gone, he asked, "So, how are they in bed? British women, I mean."

"I've only been with one. I wouldn't generalize."

"Okay. The one then," insisted the stranger as if chugging beers together gave him the right. "Do you fit well together?"

"Not really," answered McCall, setting him up.

"Why not?"

"She's metric." They laughed until she returned.

When it became time to leave, McCall and Beatrice joined the mass of Browns Fans walking down West Sixth to the old stadium. Once inside, he handed her a ticket. "If we get separated, this'll get you back to our seats."

While McCall towed her along and she looked down at the field, Beatrice became aware of the strangely foreign feeling surrounding her. It was the football crowd, an intolerant anticipation about them, uncivilized, hostile, daring. "If I fall down," she thought, "these people will walk on me."

Once in their seats, they caught each other up on the week-long separation. "Something's different between us," she thought. She leaned over and kissed him. She came away worried. Could he be seeing someone else? "Have you missed me, Jonathan?"

Her tone alerted him that she had sensed his guilt feelings. She was dangerously close to her manic peak and easily able to outsmart him. "Of course, I have." He cheered with the crowd to buy time and find an explanation. "I'm thinking of leaving Moon Oil," he answered tentatively, trying to throw her off track. At her expression of relief, he asked, "You agree I should leave?"

"Certainly not. You could be President one day. Why ever would you want to leave? Not over the downsizing?"

"I can't support it."

"You can't change things by leaving."

"True, but unfortunately, I can't change things by staying either."

"Perhaps you're right, then. Perhaps it's time we both left."

He laughed. "You're amazing."

"I'm an actress, Jonathan."

"A very good one."

"How long can I continue to trace around the world at the Moon's whim reporting on this and that? You're right. I've built a good portfolio. It's time I got on with it. I'll stay as long as you're there. It should stay fun while you're there. Yes. We must think about leaving."

Crowd noise drew their attention to the game. Vinnie had completed a short pass in the flat. Unfortunately, it was to a defensive back who ran, untouched, across the goal line. In the end zone, he went down on one knee and made the sign of the cross.

"What's he doing?"

McCall was personally embarrassed to admit the football player was actually thanking God for allowing him to score a touchdown.

"Surely he doesn't think God would trouble himself to get involved in a football game?"

"Fraid so, Beatrice. Personally, I'm for the separation of church and football."

"I should say," she agreed with a tone of disgust. They watched the rest of the first half, and McCall tried to explain rules that made less sense to her than baseball. The half ended, and she noticed people walking up the aisles. "Is it over?"

"Half time," he answered. "Intermission."

"Can we go?" she asked with a let's-go-to-bed expression. "I've been ordered back to London by Thursday. That only gives us a couple nights."

"There's fireworks at half-time. Remember the first time we saw fireworks?" he asked, with double meaning. It was a special memory.

"Was that me or Enni?" she thought. When one sister had an experience and came home and shared, it often became as strong a memory for the other. "How can we ever see them?" she asked. Their seats were in the lower level, and the upper level would surely hide the fireworks. "When they kick the ball up high, we can't see it."

"Good point," he admitted, disappointed in her reaction and reminded she was a psychotic who could never love him. "We'll move down to where we can see. When they're over, we'll be half way to the door."

She shook a fist in the air and barked her approval of the plan. When they had walked clear of the upper deck she looked up at the night sky. "A dirigible," she pointed.

"The Goodyear Blimp. There's cameras on it."

"Really?" She waved up at the blimp.

Looking sadly at her smiling natural beauty, he pulled her to him and kissed her. "I miss you," he said.

Though he did not realize it, himself, she knew exactly what he meant. "You don't get the soft, cuddly Beatrice tonight," she thought. She gave him a wicked smile. "I'm going to boff your brains out tonight, Yankee."

Two men turned and looked at her. She licked her lips. McCall laughed.

The seats they found, in the mini dawg pound, were bad football seats but good fireworks seats. The stadium went dark, and the fireworks began. Absent any wind, the air filled quickly with smoke. A double-engine prop plane taking off from Burke Lakefront Airport appeared, from their viewpoint, as if it were flying through the fireworks. An amazing sight, it evoked images of past wars and the Enola Gay. Beatrice closed her eyes to see Daddy go past.

