

# SLUGGER SAL'S SLUMP

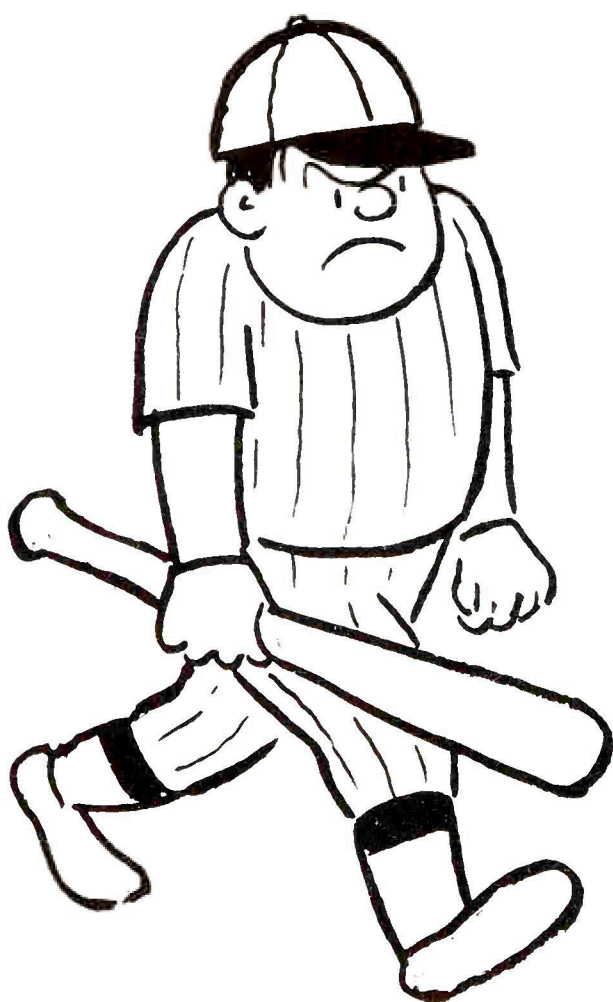
*Story and pictures by*

**SYD HOFF**



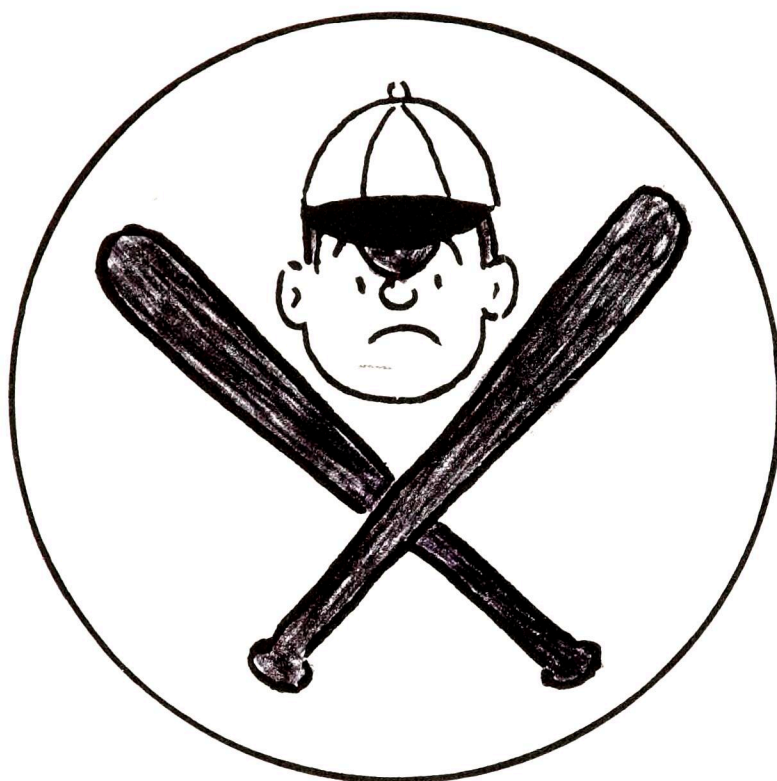
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Windmill Books and E. P. Dutton  
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Lately, there was something  
wrong with Slugger Sal.  
Every time he swung at a ball,  
he missed.





KER-PLUNK! went the ball as it  
landed in the catcher's mitt.



“Strike three, you’re out!” he heard an umpire say, for the twenty-ninth time in a row.

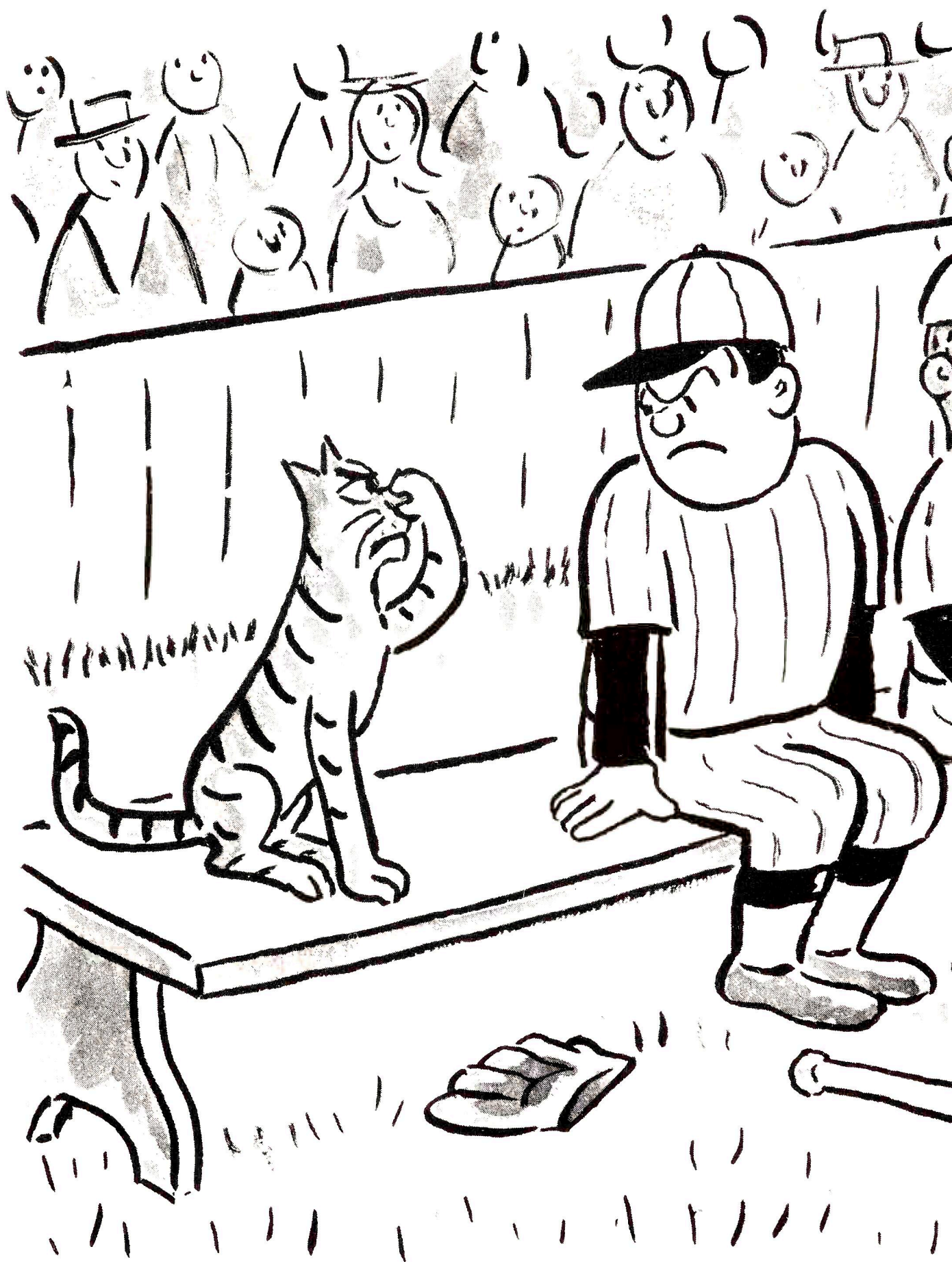


For the twenty-ninth time in a row,  
Slugger Sal walked back to the  
bench with a heavy heart.





“Am I all washed up as a baseball player?” he wondered.



A cat, the team's mascot, seemed to be wondering the same thing.





“You’re in a slump, but don’t let it worry you,” said Mr. Sugarman, the coach. “You’re sure to connect with the ball next time.”





But the next time and the next that  
Slugger Sal got up at bat, he only  
connected with *air*.



Instead of walking back to the bench, he wished he could go walking off a cliff.





“Come on, show some winning spirit,” said Margaret Ann, the third baseman, as the team ran out on the field to take their positions.



Slugger Sal stayed behind to talk to Mr. Sugarman. “Sir, shouldn’t you keep me on the bench?” he asked.



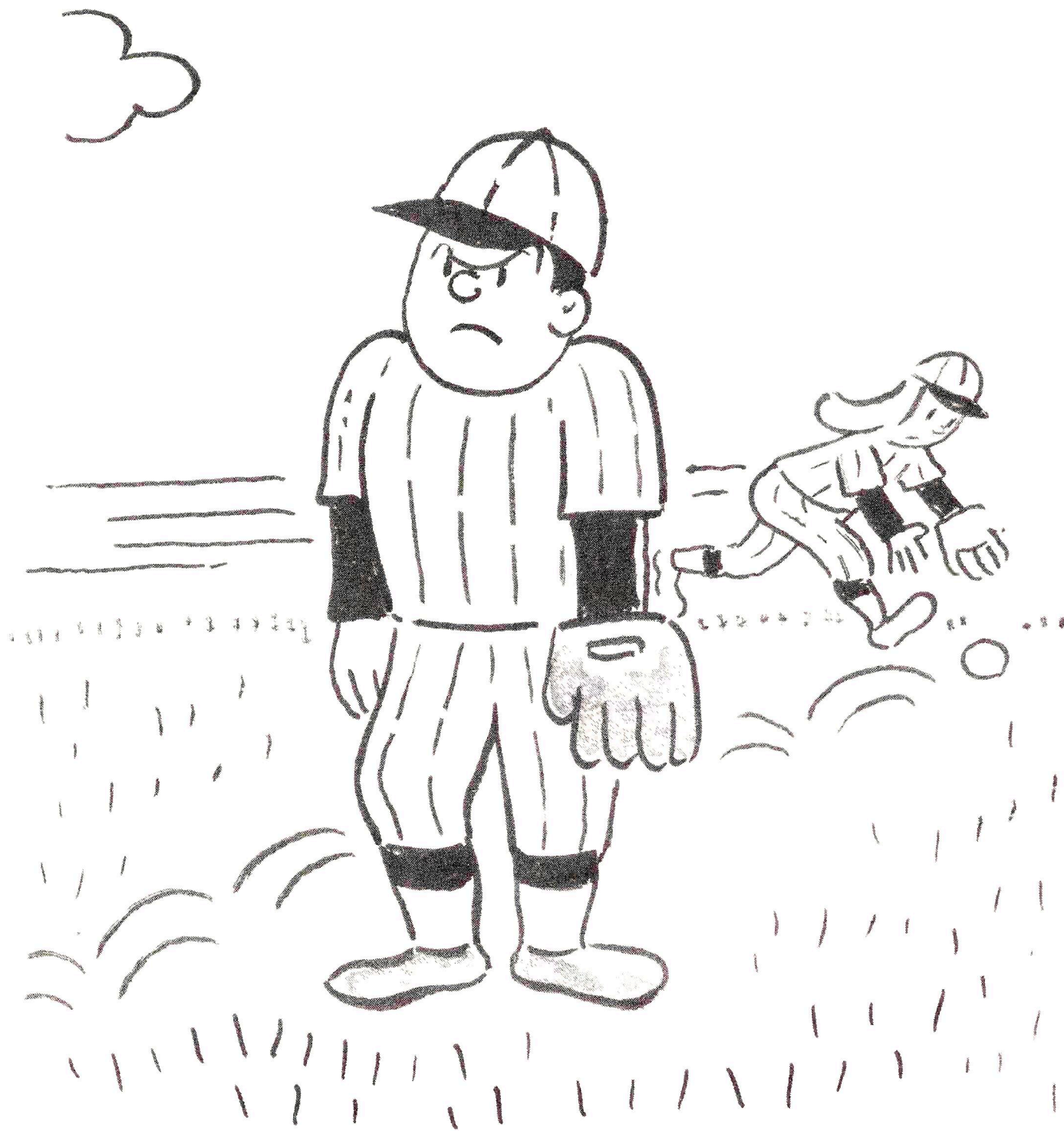


“No, we need you in the field.  
You’re the best shortstop we  
have,” said the coach.





So, Slugger Sal went out on the field to take his position, too.

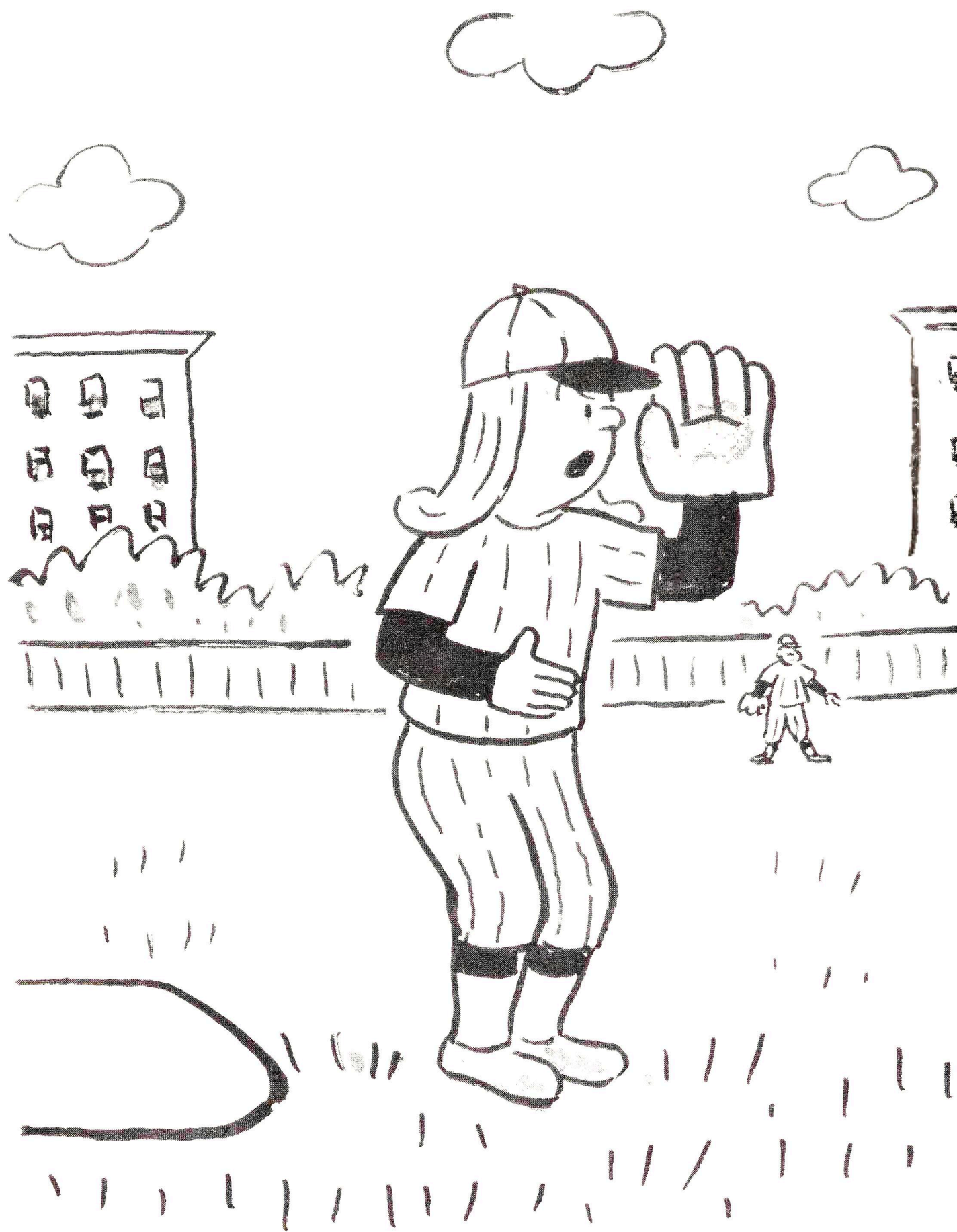


But he was so busy thinking about his slump, he didn't see a ground ball go past him on his right.





He didn't see another grounder go past him on his left, either.



“Hey, don’t you care if we win or lose?” Margaret Ann hollered over to him.





A pop fly was hit straight up in the air. It drifted over toward Slugger Sal.



He just stood there, without  
looking up.



“Catch the ball!” shouted the fans.



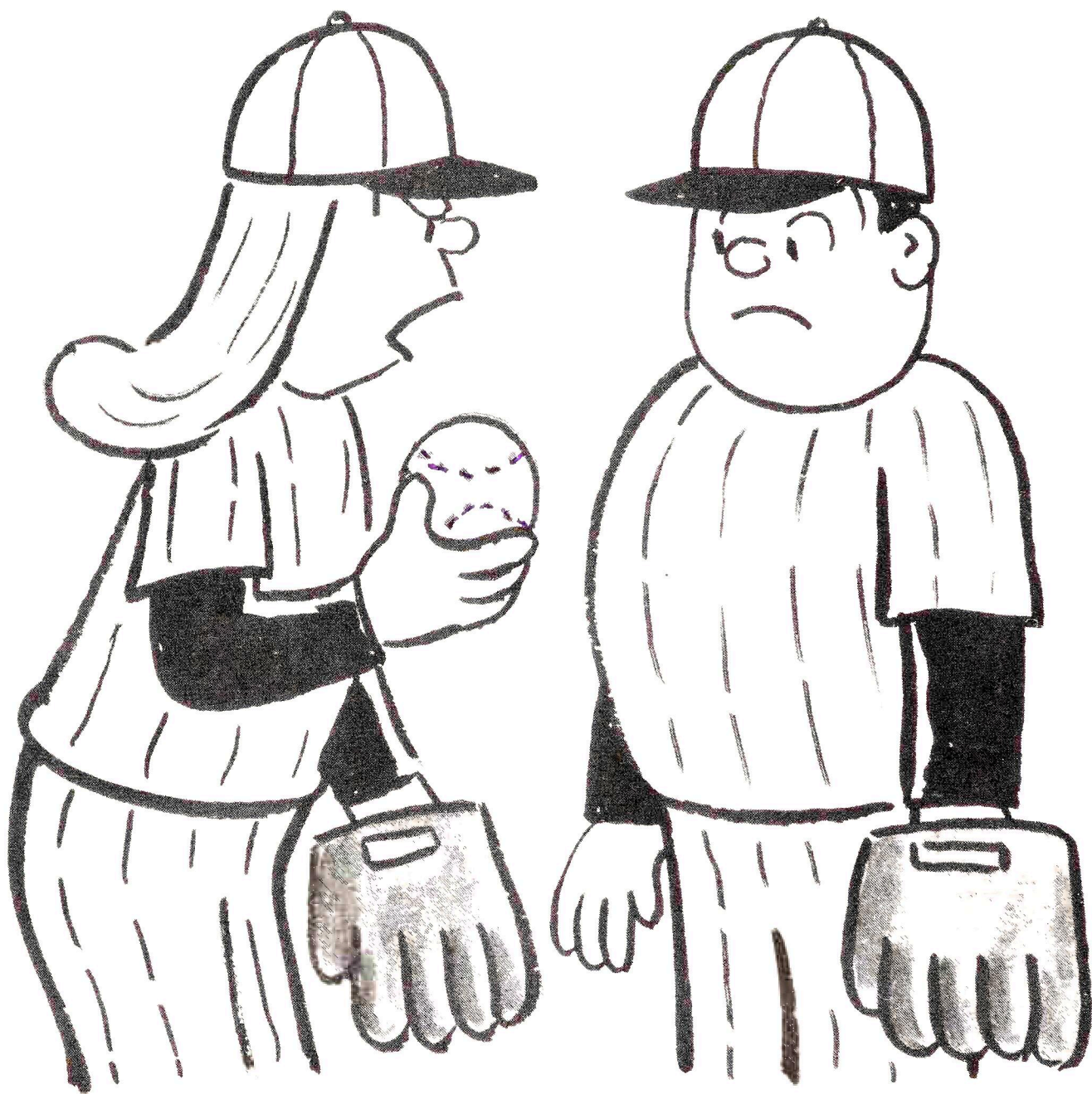


“Catch the ball!” shouted Mr. Sugarman, and even the cat seemed to be shouting.



Margaret Ann had to run over and catch the ball before it landed on Slugger Sal's head.





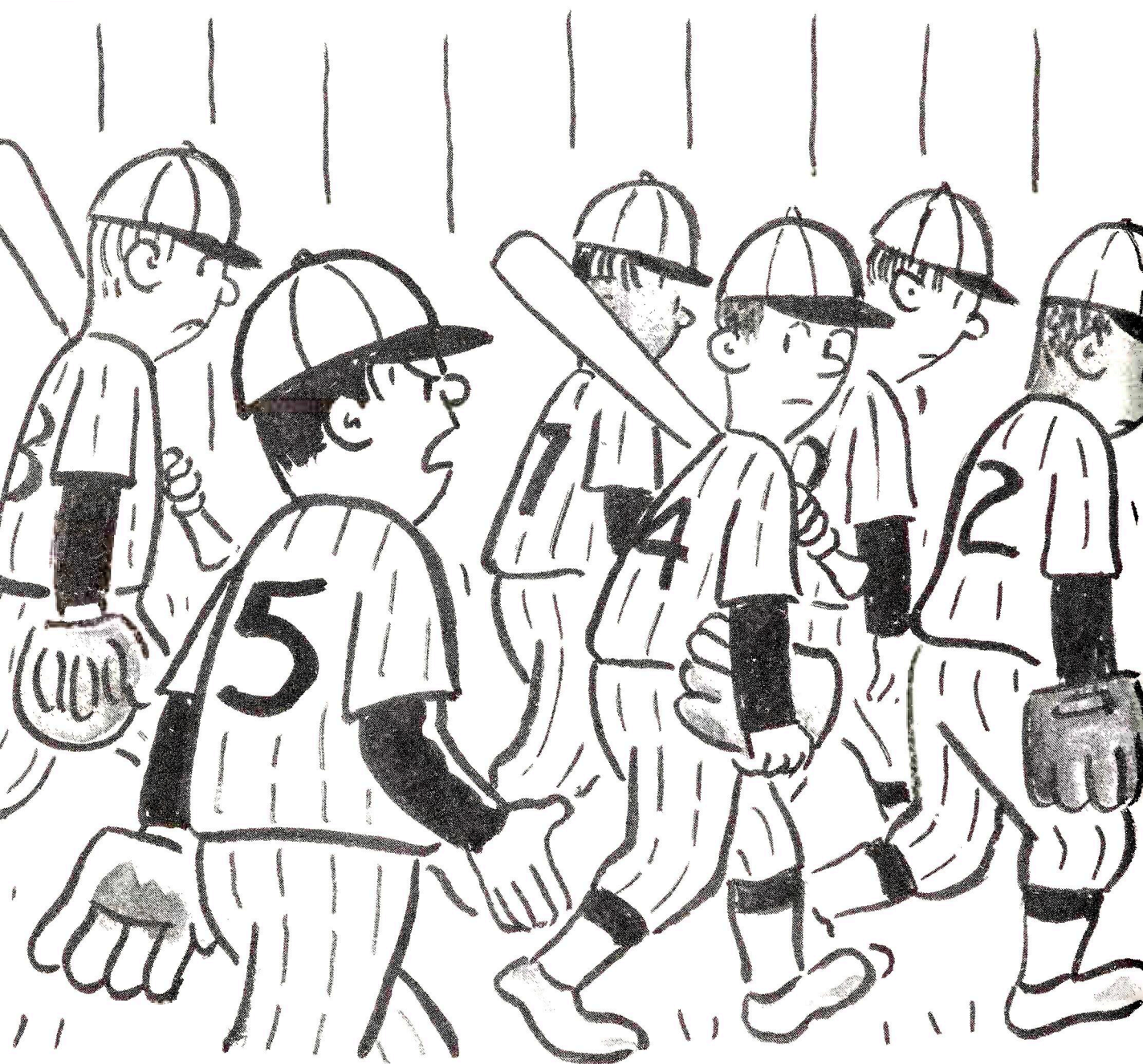
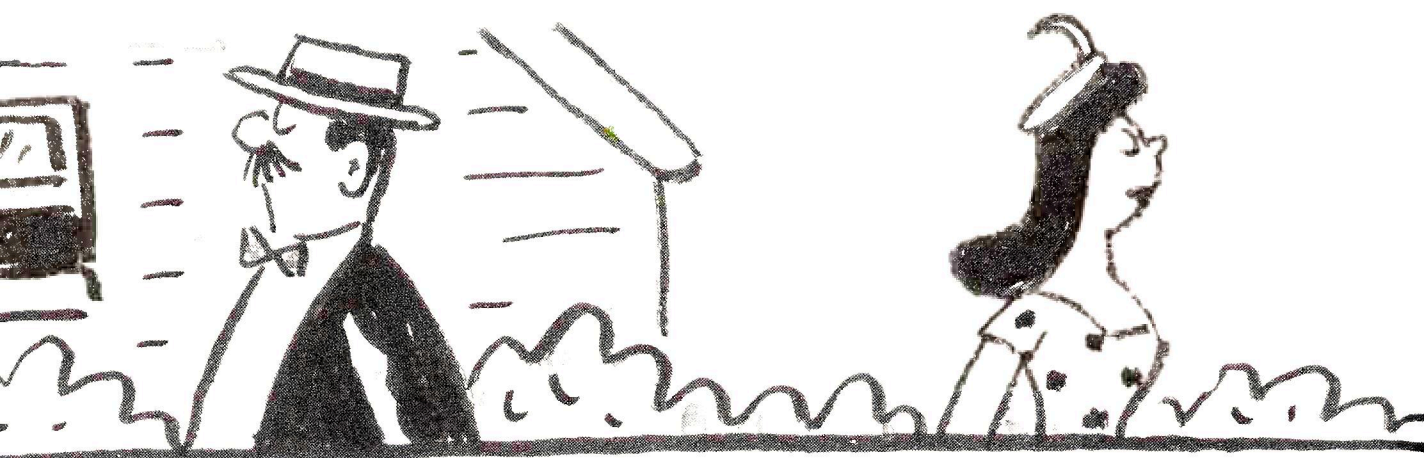
“Maybe I should have let it knock some sense into you,” she said.





The game ended and Slugger Sal's team walked off the field as if they were going to a funeral. "Cheer up, we'll do better tomorrow," said Mr. Sugarman.





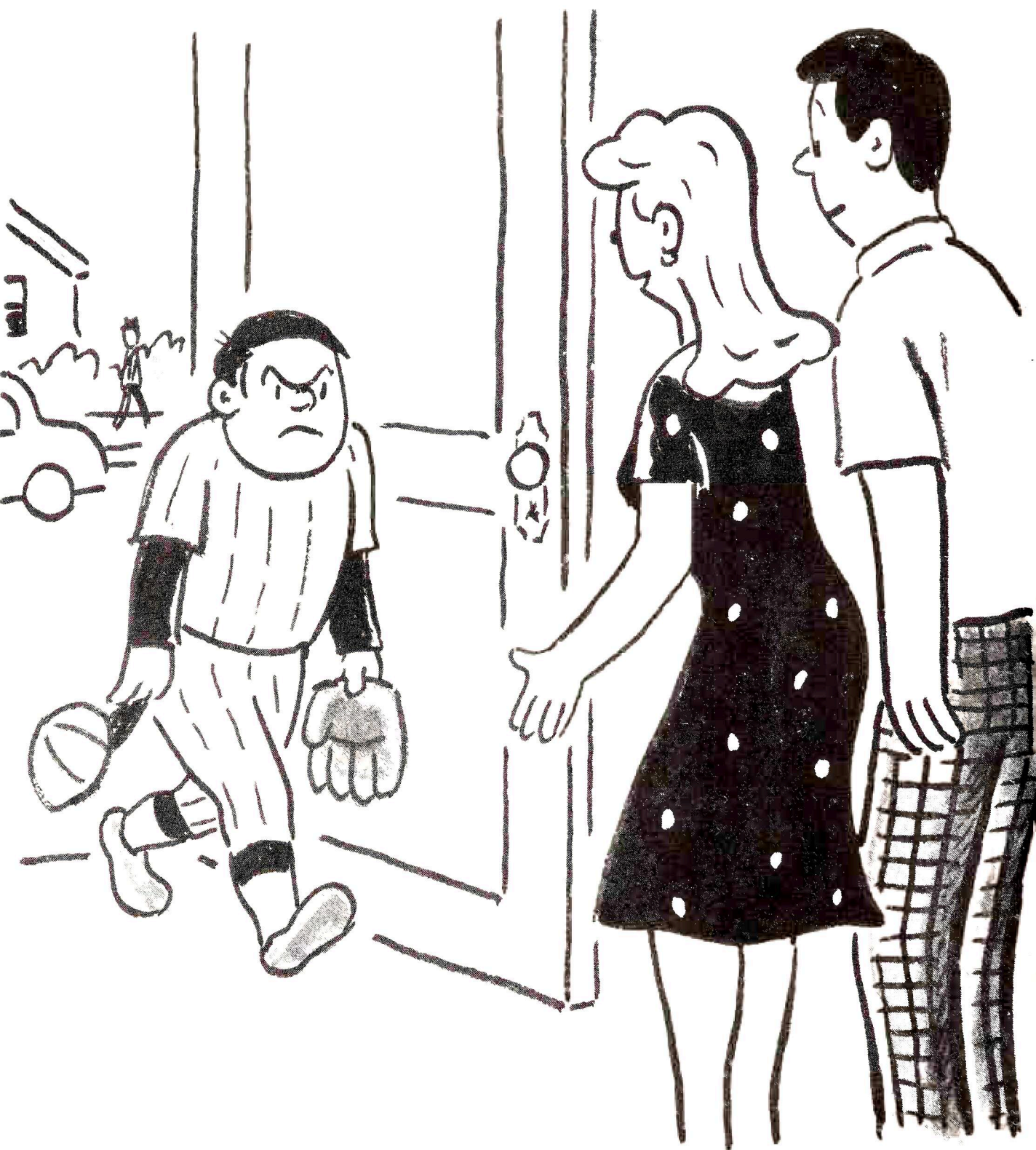
“Oh, what a slump I’m in. Oh, what a slump I’m in,” said Slugger Sal.



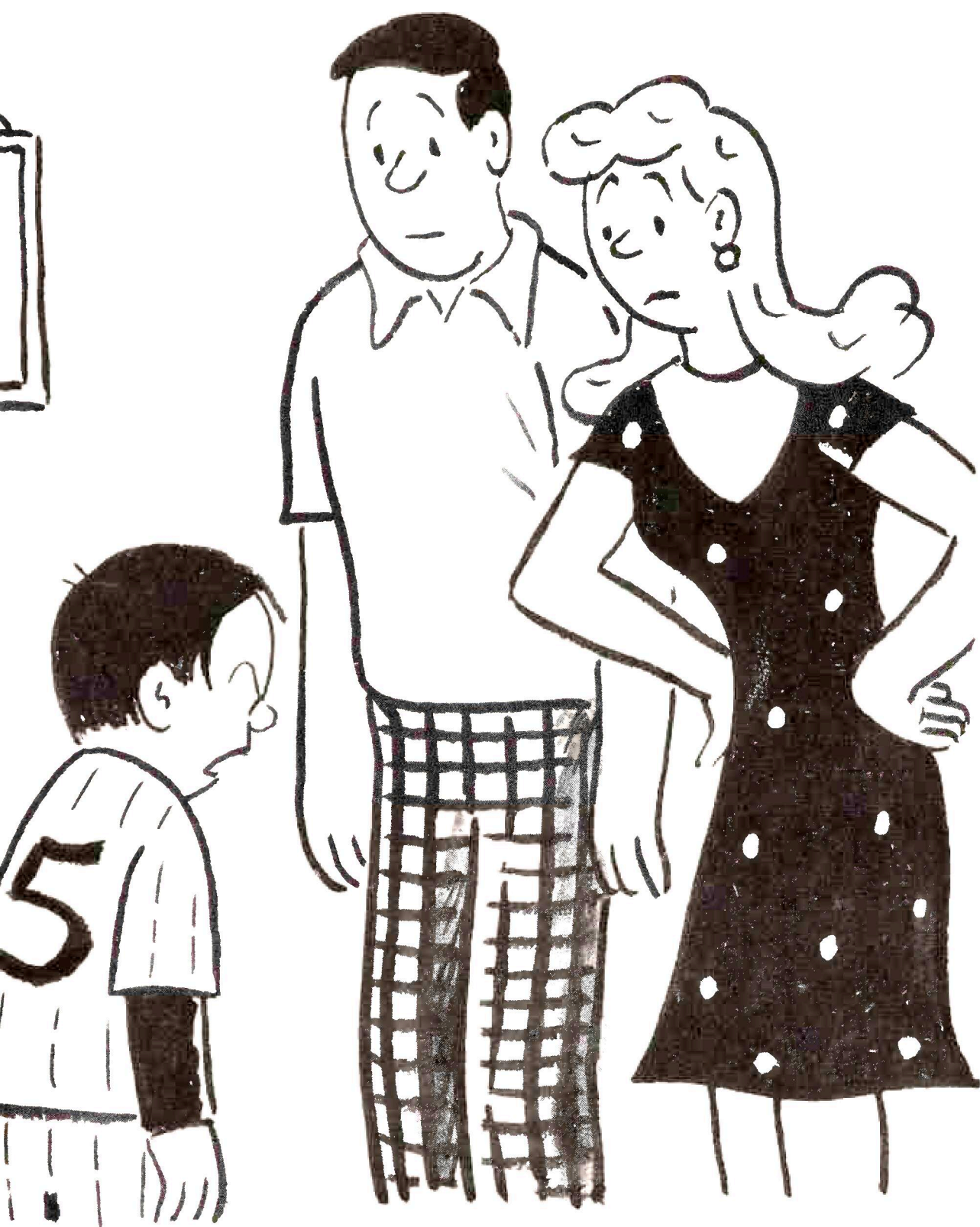


Now Mr. Sugarman didn't look so  
cheery, himself.



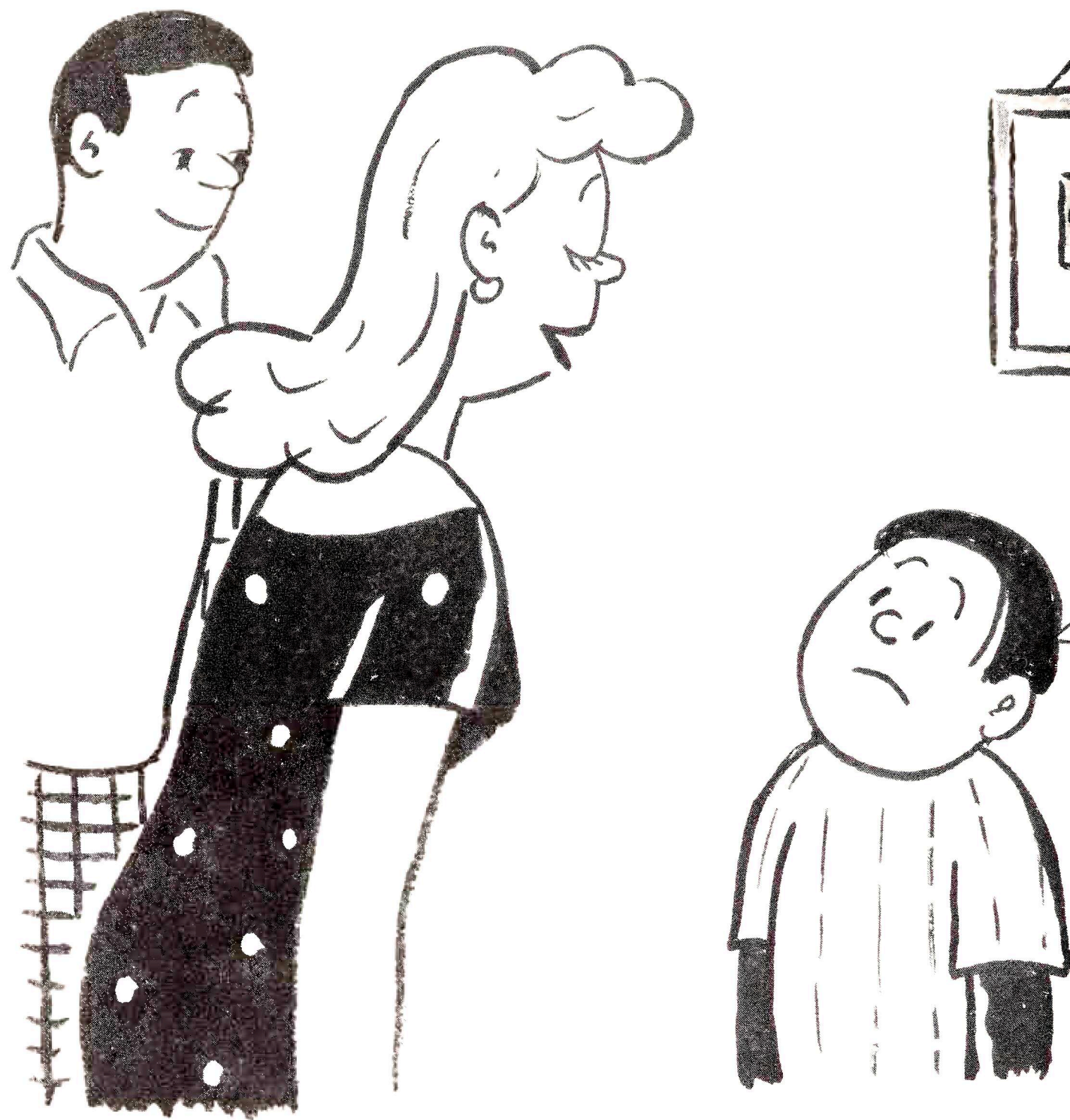


Slugger Sal walked into his house.  
“Well, how did your team do today?” asked his mother and father.



“All I know is I struck out six more times,” he said. “I’m in a slump. I’ll never be able to hit a ball again.”



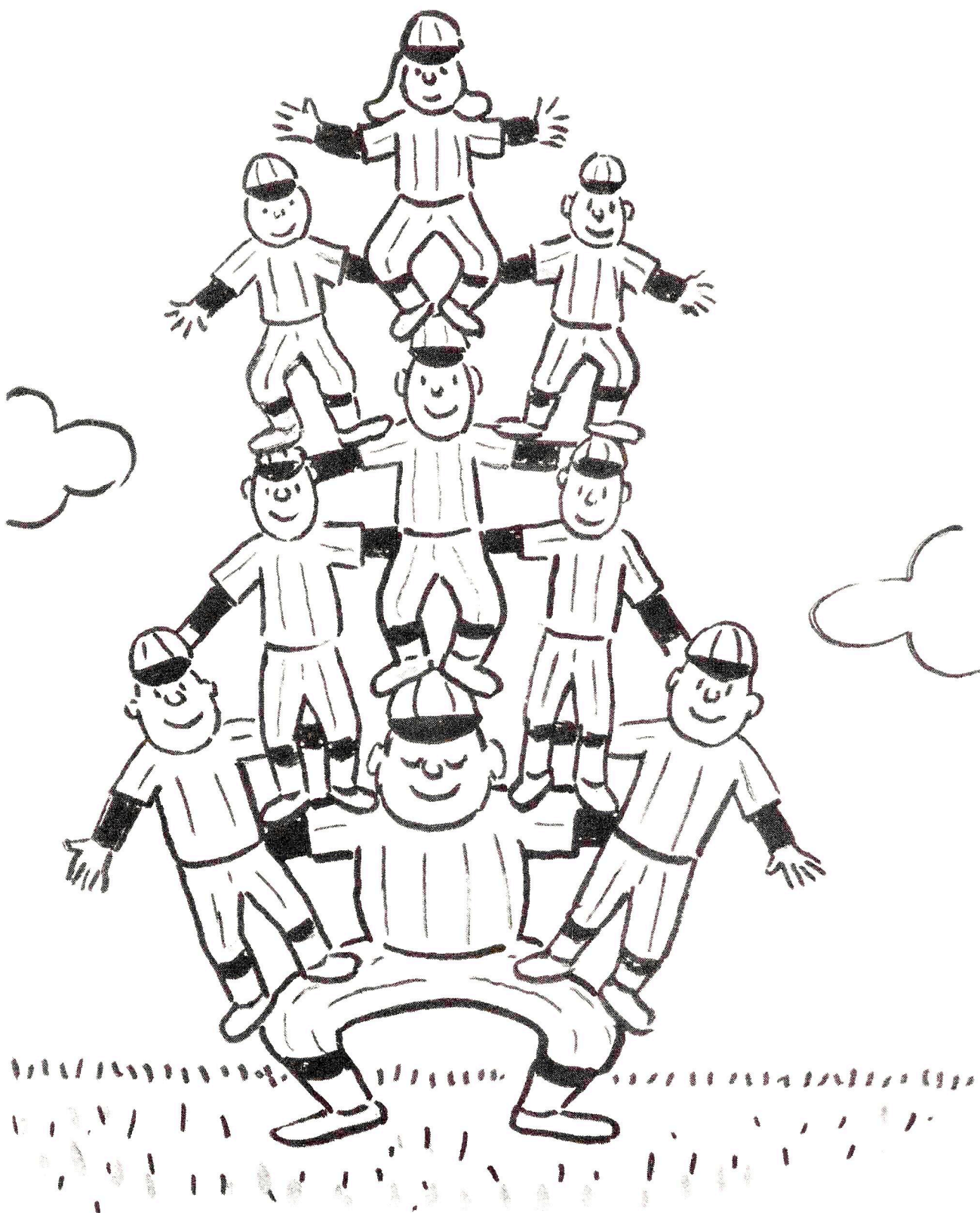


“Nonsense, your slump will end sooner or later. No slump lasts forever,” said his mother.



“That’s right. The trick is to keep on trying your best,” said his father, “and never do anything to hurt your team.”



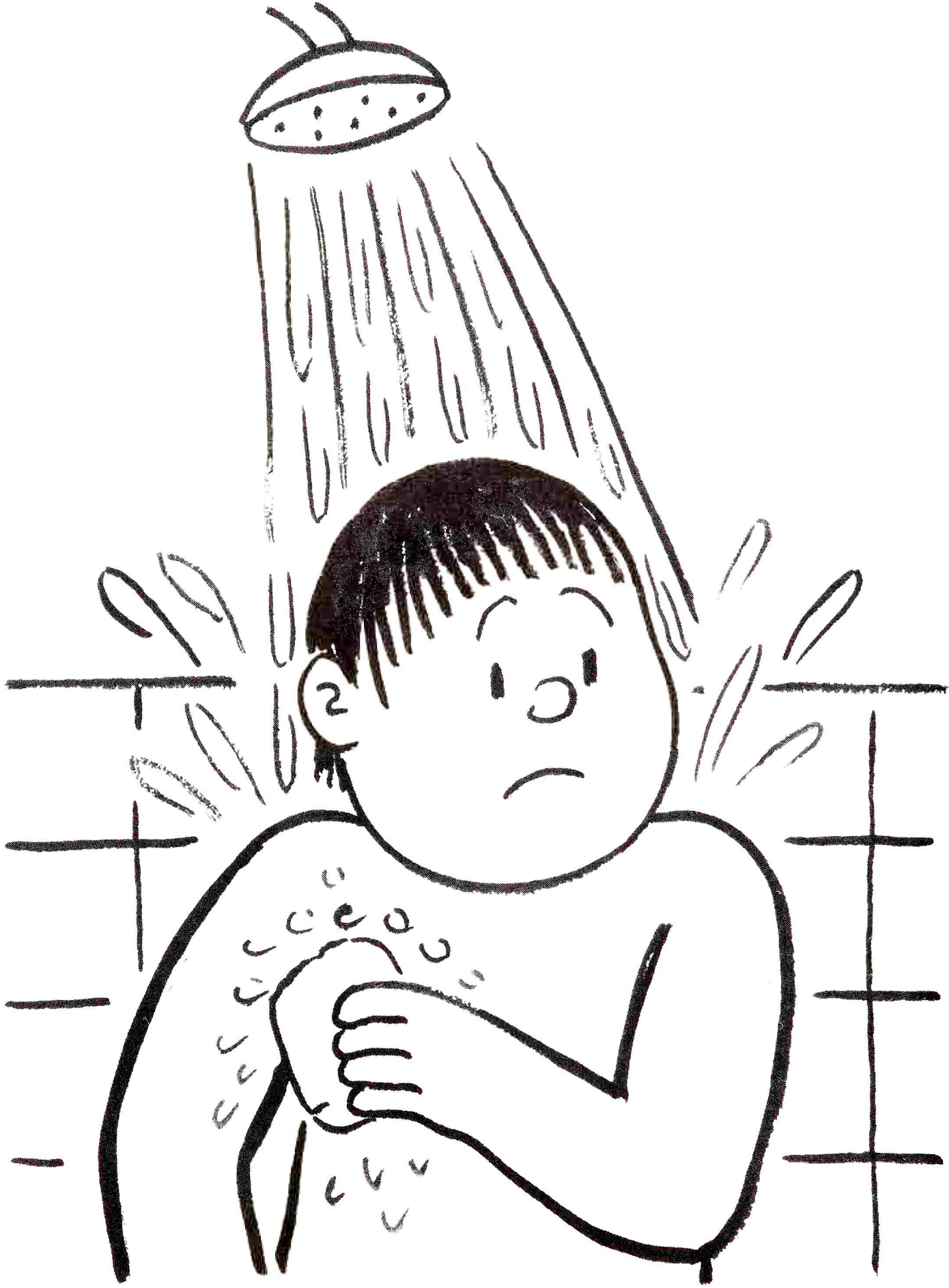


Slugger Sal thought of how he had  
been the strong man of his team.

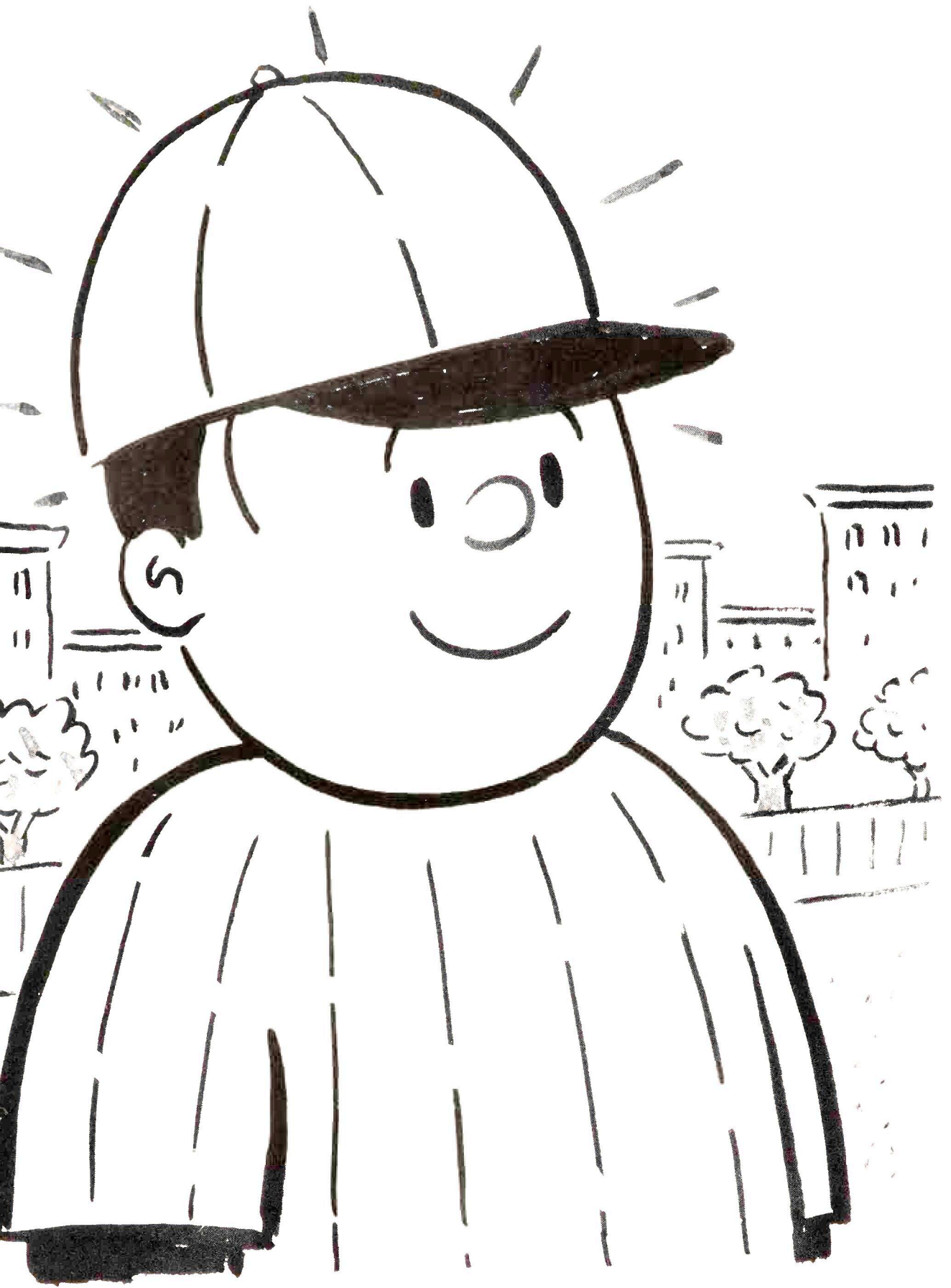


Then he thought of how he had let them down.





He kept thinking of it while he took his shower and for hours afterward.



The next day, the smile on  
Slugger Sal's face showed he had  
been thinking.





“Come on, team, let’s win today,”  
he said, before Mr. Sugarman  
could say it.



There was no change. Slugger Sal still struck out a few more times at bat.





But that didn't stop him from making some great plays in the field, and keeping on saying, "Come on, team, let's win today!"

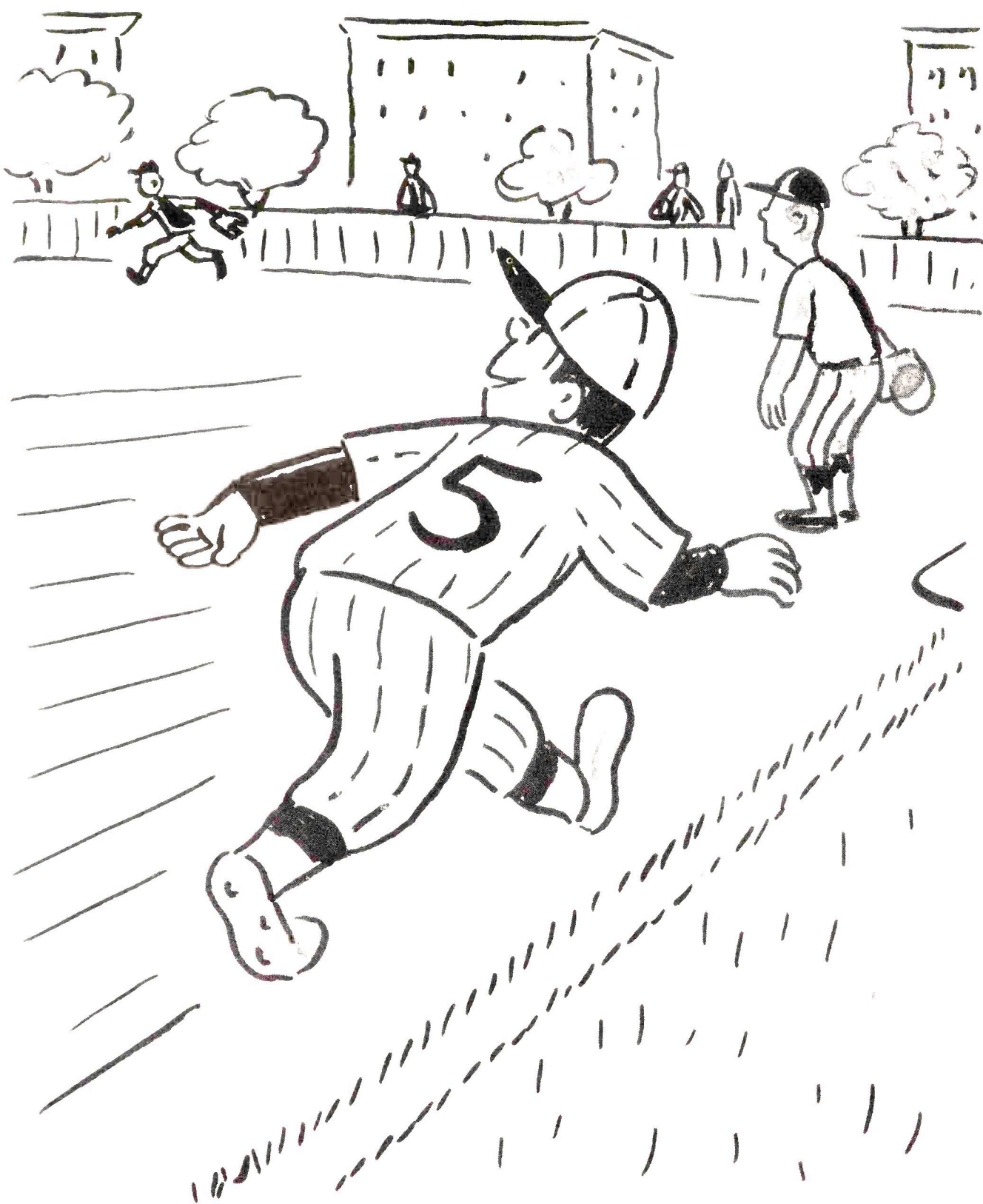


Then Slugger Sal stepped up to the plate in the bottom half of the ninth inning, with the score tied.





CRACK! He connected with the  
ball at last!



Slugger Sal ran to first base, then  
to second...





The ball was rolling to the fence.  
Outfielders were chasing it.



Slugger Sal rounded third. The ball was on its way to the plate. "Slide!" cried Mr. Sugarman.





He slid in before the catcher could tag him. “Safe!” shouted the umpire.



“I hope you’ll always play like that,  
even when you’re in a slump,”  
said Margaret Ann.





“I will,” said Slugger Sal, while  
the cat licked his face.