

IT WAS A HAMMER-AND-TONGS CONFLICT FROM
START TO FINISH.

Baseball Joe Around the World

Page 221

Baseball Joe Around the World

OR

Pitching on a Grand Tour

By LESTER CHADWICK

AUTHOR OF

“BASEBALL JOE OF THE SILVER STARS,” “BASEBALL
JOE IN THE BIG LEAGUE,” “THE RIVAL PITCHERS,”
“THE RIGHT-OARED VICTORS,” ETC.

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BOOKS BY LESTER CHADWICK

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Baseball Joe Around the World

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BASEBALL JOE AROUND THE WORLD

CHAPTER I

IN DEADLY PERIL

“Great Scott! Look at this!”

Joe Matson, or “Baseball Joe,” as he was better known throughout the country, sprang to his feet and held out a New York paper with headlines which took up a third of the page.

There were three other occupants of the room in the cozy home at Riverside, where Joe had come to rest up after his glorious victory in the last game of the World’s Series, and they looked up in surprise and some alarm.

“Land’s sakes!” exclaimed his mother, pausing just as she was about to bite off a thread. “You gave me such a start, Joe! What on earth has happened?”

“What’s got my little brother so excited?” mocked his pretty sister, Clara.

“Has an earthquake destroyed the Polo Grounds?” drawled Jim Barclay, Joe’s special chum and fellow pitcher on the Giant team. 2

“Not so bad as that,” replied Joe, cooling down a bit; “but it’s something that will make McRae and the whole Polo Grounds outfit throw a fit if it’s true.”

Jim snatched the paper from Joe’s hands, with the familiarity born of long acquaintance, and as his eyes fell on the headlines he gave a whistle of surprise.

“Third Major League a Certainty,” he read. “Gee whiz, Joe! I don’t wonder it upset you. That’s news for fair.”

“Is that all?” pouted Clara, who had been having a very interesting conversation with handsome Jim Barclay, and did not relish being interrupted.

Mrs. Matson also looked relieved and resumed her sewing.

“Is that all?” cried Joe, as he began to pace the floor excitedly. “I tell you, Sis, it’s plenty. If it’s true, it means the old Brotherhood days all over again. It means a fight to disrupt the National and the American Leagues. It means all sorts of trickery and breaking of contracts. It means distrust and suspicion between the members of the different teams. It means—oh, well, what doesn’t it mean? I’d rather lose a thousand dollars than know that the news is true.”

“But perhaps it isn’t true,” suggested Clara, sobered a little by her brother’s earnestness. “You can’t believe half the things you see in the papers.” 3

“Will it hurt your position with the Giants, Joe?” asked Mrs. Matson, her motherly instincts taking alarm at anything that threatened her idolized son.

Joe stopped beside his mother’s chair and patted her head affectionately.

“Not for a long time if at all, Momsey,” he replied reassuringly. “My contract with the Giants has two years to run, and it’s as good as gold, even if I didn’t throw a ball in all that time. It wasn’t the money I was thinking about. As a matter of fact, I could squeeze double the money out of McRae, if I were mean enough to take advantage of him. It’s the damage that will be done to the game that’s bothering me.”

“Perhaps it won’t be as bad as you think,” ventured his mother. “You know the old saying that ‘the worst things that befall us are the things that never happen.’”

“That’s the way to look at it,” broke in Jim heartily. “Let’s take a squint at the whole article and see how much fire there is in all this smoke.”

“And read it out loud,” said Clara. “I’m just as much of a baseball fan as either of you two. And Momsey is, too, after all the World’s Series games she’s seen played.” 4

It is to be feared that Mrs. Matson’s eyes had been so riveted on Joe alone, in that memorable Series when he had pitched his team to victory, that she had not picked up many points about the game in general. But anything that concerned her darling boy concerned her as well, and she let her sewing lie unheeded in her lap as Joe read the story from beginning to end.

“Seems to be straight goods,” remarked Jim, as Joe threw the paper aside.

“They’ve got the money all right,” rejoined Joe. “They’ve got two or three millionaires who are willing to take a chance and put up the coin.”

“One of the names seems to be rather familiar,” remarked Jim, with a sidewise look at Joe. “Do you remember him?”

“I remember him,” replied Joe grimly, “but I’d bet a dollar against a plugged nickel that he remembers me better yet.”

“Who is it?” asked Clara with quickened interest.

“Beckworth Fleming,” replied Joe.

“Rather a pretty name,” remarked Mrs. Matson absently.

“Prettier than he was when Joe got through with him,” interposed Jim with a grin.

Mrs. Matson looked up, shocked.

“Oh, I hope Joe didn’t hurt him!” she exclaimed.

“Whatever Joe did was for the good of his soul,” laughed Jim. “I can’t say as much for his body.”

“It’s all right, Momsey,” smiled Joe. “He was insolent to Mabel, and I had to give him a thrashing. But that’s neither here nor there. He’s the spoiled son of a very rich man, and he’s one of the men behind this new league. ‘A fool and his money are soon parted,’ and he’ll probably be wiser when he gets through with this than he is now.”

“But why shouldn’t they start a new league if they want to?” asked Mrs. Matson. “I should think they had a right to, if they wanted to do it.”

“Of course they have a right to,” agreed Joe. “This is a free country, and any man has a right to go into any legitimate business if he thinks there’s money in it. Neither the National League nor the American League have a mortgage on the game. But the trouble is that there aren’t enough good players to go round. All the really good ones have been already gobbled up by the present leagues. If the new league started in with unknown players, it wouldn’t take in enough money to pay the batboys. The consequence is that it tries to get the players who are already under contract by making them big offers, and that leads to all sorts of dishonesty. You take a man who is making three thousand a year and offer him six if he’ll break his contract, and it’s a big temptation.”

“They’ll be after you, Joe, sure as shooting,” remarked Jim. “It would be a big feather in their cap to start off with copping the greatest pitcher in the game. They’d be willing to offer you a fortune to get you. They figure that after that start the other fellows they want will be tumbling over themselves to get aboard.”

“Let them come,” declared Joe. “I’ll send them off with a flea in their ear. They’ll find that I’m no contract jumper.”

“I’m sure that you’d never do anything mean,” said his mother, looking at him fondly.

“There isn’t a crooked bone in his head,” laughed Clara, making a face at him as he threatened her with his fist.

“The contract is enough,” said Joe; “but even if I were a free agent, I wouldn’t go with the new league and leave McRae in the hole. I feel that I owe him a lot for the way he has treated me. He took me from a second-string team and gave me a chance to make good on the Giants. He took a chance in offering me a three-year contract in place of one. I’m getting four thousand, five hundred a year, which is a good big sum whatever way you look at it. And you remember how promptly he came across with that thousand dollars for winning twenty games last season.”

“We remember that, don’t we, Momsey?” said Clara, patting her mother’s hand.

“I should say we did,” replied Mrs. Matson, while a suspicious moisture came into her eyes. “Will we ever forget the day when we opened that letter from the dear boy, and the thousand-dollar bill fell out on the table? It gave us all the happiest time we have had in all our lives.”

Jim, too, mentally blessed that big bill which had brought the Matson family to witness the World’s Series games and so had enabled him to meet Joe’s charming sister. Perhaps that vivacious young lady read what was passing in his mind, for her eyes suddenly dropped as they met Jim’s eloquent ones.

Joe flushed at this reference to his generosity, and Clara was quick to cover her own slight confusion by rallying her brother.

“He’s blushing!” she declared.

“I’m not,” denied Joe stoutly, getting still redder.

“You are so,” averred his sister in mock alarm. “Stop it, Joe, before it gets to your hair. I don’t want a red-headed brother.”

Joe made a dash at his tormentor, but she eluded him and got into another room.

“Come along, Jim,” said Joe, picking up his cap. “Let’s warm up a little. We want to keep our salary wings in good condition, and maybe the open air will help to get the bad taste of the new league out of our mouths.”

They went into an open lot near by and had a half-hour’s practice, pitching to each other at a moderate pace, only now and then unlimbering some of the fast balls that had been wont to stand opposing batters “on their heads” in the exciting games of the season just ended.

“How does the old soup bone feel?” inquired Jim.

“Fine as silk,” replied Joe; “I was afraid I might have strained it in that last game. But it feels as strong now as it did at the beginning of the season.”

They had supper a little earlier than usual that night, for with the exception of Joe’s father, who was busy on a new invention, they were all going to a show that evening at the Riverside Opera House. It promised to be an interesting entertainment, for the names of several popular actors appeared on the program. But what made it especially attractive to Joe and his party was the fact that Nick Altman, the famous pitcher of the “White Sox” of Chicago, was on the bill for a monologue. Although, being in the American League, Joe and Jim had never played against him, they knew him well by reputation and respected him for his ability in their chosen profession.

“As a pitcher he sure is classy,” remarked Joe. “They say that fast inshoot of his is a lulu. But that doesn’t say that he’s any good on the stage.”

“He’s pulling in the coin all right,” replied Jim. “They say that his contract calls for two hundred dollars a week. He won’t have to eat snowballs this winter.”

“Jim tells me that a vaudeville manager offered you five hundred dollars a week the day after you won the championship for the Giants,” said Clara.

“So he did,” replied Joe, “but it would have been a shame to take the money.”

“Such a shrinking violet,” teased his sister.

“I’m sure he would make a very good actor,” said his mother, who would have been equally sure that he would make a good president of the United States.

The night was fine, and the town Opera House was crowded to its capacity. There was a buzz and whispering as Joe and his party entered and made their way to their reserved seats near the center of the house, for Riverside regarded the famous pitcher as one of its greatest assets. He

had given the quiet little village a fame that it would never have had otherwise. In the words of Sol Cramer, the hotel keeper and village oracle, Joe had “put Riverside on the map.”

There were three or four sketches and vaudeville turns before Altman, who, of course, was the chief attraction as far as Joe and his folks were concerned, came on the stage. He had a clever skit in which baseball “gags” and “patter” were the chief ingredients, and as he was a natural humorist his act went “big” in the phrase of the profession. Knowing that Joe lived in Riverside and would probably be in the audience, Altman adroitly introduced his name in one of his anecdotes, and was rewarded by a storm of applause which clearly showed how Joe stood in his home town.

“You own this town, Joe,” laughed Jim, who was seated between him and Clara—Jim could be depended on these days never to be farther away from Clara than he could help.

“Yes,” mocked Clara. “Any time he runs for poundkeeper he’s sure to be elected.”

Joe was about to make some laughing retort, when his quick eye caught sight of something that made the flush fade from his face and his heart lose a beat.

From the wing at the left of the stage *a tiny wisp of smoke was stealing.*

Like lightning, his quick brain sensed the situation. The house was old and would burn like tinder. There were only the two exits—one on each side of the hall. And the place was crowded—and his mother was there—and Clara!

His plan was formed in an instant. He must reach a narrow corridor, by which, out of sight of the audience, he could gain the back of the stage and stamp out whatever it was that was making that smoke.

He rose to slip out, but at that moment a big bulk of a man sitting two seats ahead of him jumped to his feet with a yell.

“Fire! Fire!” he shouted wildly. “The house is on fire!”

CHAPTER II

QUICK AS LIGHTNING

For one awful instant the crowd sat as though paralyzed.

But in that instant Joe acted.

With one powerful leap he reached the frenzied shouter, his fist shot out, and the man went down as though hit with an axe.

Up the aisle Joe went like a flash, cleared the orchestra rail at a bound, and with one more jump was on the stage.

The audience had risen now and was crowding toward the aisles. Women screamed, some fainted, and all the conditions were ripe for a panic.

Above the hubbub, Joe’s voice rang out like a trumpet.

“Keep your seats!” he shouted. “There’s no danger. I tell you to keep your seats.”

The crowd halted uncertainly, fearfully, and Joe took instant advantage of the hesitation.

“You know me,” he cried. “I tell you there’s no danger. Haven’t you ever smelled cigar smoke before?”

The suggestion was a happy one, and the crowd began to quiet down, regaining their courage at the sight of that indomitable figure on the stage.

Jim had been only two jumps behind Joe in his rush to the front, and while Joe was calming the crowd Jim had rushed into the wing and dragged down some draperies that had caught fire from a gas jet. In a moment he had trampled them underfoot and the danger was over.

The orchestra had seemed to keep its wits better than the rest of the throng, and Joe signaled to the leader to strike up a tune. The next instant the musicians swung into a popular air, and completely reassured, the people settled down into their seats.

And while Joe stands there, exulting in his triumph over the panic, it may be well for the sake of those who have not read the preceding books of this series to sketch something of his life and adventures up to this time.

Joe’s first experience in the great game in which he was to become so famous was gained on the diamond of his own home town. He did so well there that he soon became known in the towns around as one of the best players in the county. He had many mishaps and difficulties, and how he overcame them is told in the first volume of the series, entitled, “Baseball Joe of the Silver Stars; Or The Rivals of Riverside.”

A little later on, when playing on his school nine, he had obstacles of a different character to surmount. The bully of the school sought to down him, but found that he had made a mistake in picking out his victim. Joe’s natural skill and constant practice enabled him to win laurels for himself and his school on the diamond, and prepared him for the larger field that awaited him when later on he went to Yale.

As may be easily understood, with all the competition he had to meet at the great University his chance was long in coming to prove his class in the pitching box. But the homely old saying that “it is hard to keep a squirrel on the ground” was never better exemplified than in his case. There came a time when the Yale “Bulldog” was hard beset by the Princeton “Tiger,” and Joe was called on to twist the Tiger’s tail. How well he did it and what glory he won for his Alma Mater can be read in the third volume of the series, entitled: “Baseball Joe at Yale; Or, Pitching for the College Championship.”

But even at the top notch of his popularity, Joe was restless at college. He was bright and keen in his studies and had no difficulty in standing up well in his classes. But all his instincts told him that he was made for the out-of-door life.

His mother had hoped that Joe would enter the ministry, but Joe, although he had the greatest respect for that profession, did not feel that his life work lay in that direction. He had been so successful in athletic sports and took such pleasure in them that he yielded to his natural bent and decided to adopt professional baseball as his vocation.

His mother was sorely grieved at first, and the more so as she felt that Joe was “stepping down” in entering the professional ranks. But Joe was able to show her that scores of college men were doing the same thing that he planned to do, and she had too good sense to press her opposition too far.

The opening that Joe was looking for came when he was offered a chance to play in the Pittston team of the Central League. It was only a minor league, but all the great players have been developed in that way, and Joe determined to make it a stepping stone to something higher. How he speedily rose to leadership among the twirlers of his league is told in the fourth volume of the series, entitled: “Baseball Joe in the Central League; Or, Making Good as a Professional Pitcher.”

While Joe had been winning his spurs, the keen-eyed scouts of the big leagues had not been idle. The St. Louis team of the National League drafted him into their ranks and took him away from the “bushes.” Now he felt that he was really on the highway to success. Almost from the start he created a sensation, and it was his pitching that brought his team into the first division.

A still wider field opened up before him when after one year with St. Louis he was bought by the New York Giants. This had been his ambition from the start, but he had scarcely dared to hope that his dream would come true. He promised himself that he would “pitch his head off” to justify the confidence that McRae, the Giants’ manager, had put in him. How he came through an exciting season and in the final game won the championship for his team can be seen in the sixth volume of the series, entitled: “Baseball Joe on the Giants; Or, Making Good as a Ball Twirler in the Metropolis.”

Of course this brought him into the World’s Series, in which that year the Boston Red Sox were the Giants’ opponents. It proved to be a whirlwind series, whose result remained in doubt until the last inning of the last game. Joe had fearful odds to contend against since an accident to Hughson, the Giants’ standby, put the bulk of the pitching burden on our hero’s shoulders. Unscrupulous enemies also sought by foul means to keep him out of the Series, but Joe’s indomitable will and magnificent pitching won out against all odds, as told in the volume preceding this, entitled: “Baseball Joe in the World Series; Or, Pitching for the Championship.”

If ever a man had earned a rest it was Joe, and, as we have seen, he was taking it now in his home town. Jim Barclay, a fine young Princeton man and second-string pitcher on the Giants, had come with him, not so much, it is to be suspected, because of his fondness for Joe, though that was great, as to be near Clara, Joe’s charming sister, who had been working all sorts of havoc with poor Jim’s heart.

By the time the orchestra had finished the tune, the panic had about subsided. But Joe was taking no chances and he motioned for a repetition. The leader obeyed, and at the end of this second playing the danger was entirely over. The audience was seated, with the exception of the man whom Joe had knocked down, who slunk shame-facedly out of the hall holding his hand on the place where the blow had landed.

And now that the peril had passed, it was Joe who was panic-stricken. Though brave as a lion and quick as a panther in an emergency, he was the most modest of men and hated to pose as a hero. He was wondering what he should say or do, when Altman solved the problem by coming up to him with both hands extended. That gave the audience its cue, and in a moment a tempest of cheers swept the hall.

“What’s the matter with Matson?” someone shouted in a stentorian voice.

“He’s all right!” came back in a roar.

“Who’s all right?”

“Matson! Joe Matson! Baseball Joe!”

Men crowded forward, and in a moment Joe was surrounded by his friends and fellow townsmen, most of whom had known him when he was in knickerbockers and now were more proud of him than they had ever been, even when he returned to Riverside crowned with the laurels of his last great season. Joe was mauled and pounded until he was almost out of breath, and it was a relief when at last he had made his way back to his mother and sister.

They were both crying openly with joy and pride, and the looks they turned on Joe were a greater reward than all the plaudits of his friends.

There was no going on with the performance after that. The nerves of the audience were too highly keyed by the great peril that had been escaped. And they had a more dramatic scene to remember and talk about than anything that could be given them from the stage.

In the excitement, a great many of those present had lost track of the friends or relatives that

had been with them, and from all sides came various calls.

“Where is Frank?”

“Did you see what became of my sister Bessie?”

“Oh, Bill! I say, Bill! Where are you?”

Many of the scenes were most affecting. Women would rush into each other’s arms, crying with joy to find that the lost ones were safe.

“I can tell you it’s a grand good thing that panic was stopped so quickly,” remarked one man to another, as he gazed admiringly at the hero of the occasion.

As Joe and his folks were leaving, a tall, well-dressed man stepped up to Joe and extended his hand.

“Let me congratulate you, Mr. Matson,” he said effusively. “That was a splendid thing you did to-night. I never saw anything finer.”

“I’m afraid you exaggerate it,” deprecated Joe.

“Not at all,” said the stranger. “By the way, Mr. Matson, it’s a coincidence that I came to town with the express purpose of seeing you on a business matter. But I didn’t expect that my first meeting with you would be under such exciting circumstances.”

He took a card from his pocket and handed it to Joe.

“My name, as you see, is Westland,” he continued. “I’m stopping at the hotel, and I would be glad to see you there or at any place that may be convenient to you some time to-morrow.”

“Suppose you call at my home to-morrow morning,” said Joe. “It’s only about five minutes’ walk from the hotel.”

“You needn’t bother about giving me the directions,” said Westland, with an ingratiating smile. “Everybody in Riverside knows where Baseball Joe lives. I’ll be around at eleven o’clock.”

He lifted his hat and departed, while Joe and the others walked toward home.

“What do you suppose he wants of you, Joe?” asked Clara, with lively curiosity.

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered her brother carelessly. “Some reporter probably who wants to get the sad story of my life.”

“If it is, he’ll have something to write about after to-night,” put in Jim. “Great Scott! Joe, if that had happened in New York it would be spread all over the front page of to-morrow’s papers.”

“Oh, Joe, I’m so proud of you,” sighed his mother happily.

“You’re a brother worth having!” exclaimed Clara warmly.

Jim was on the point of saying that Joe was a brother-in-law worth having, but checked himself in time.

They had almost reached the house when Clara began to laugh.

“What’s the joke?” inquired Jim.

But Clara only laughed the harder until they became a little alarmed.

“No, I’m not hysterical,” she said, when she could speak. “I only happened to remember what tune it was the orchestra played. I suppose it was the first thing the leader thought of, and he didn’t have time to pick out another. Do you remember what it was?”

They cudged their brains, but could not recall it.

“What was it?” asked Jim.

“‘There’ll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night!’”

CHAPTER III

THE STRANGER'S VISIT

Promptly the next morning at eleven, Westland put in an appearance at the Matson home. He was carefully groomed and everything about him indicated money. He fairly exuded prosperity.

He greeted Joe with a cordiality that seemed a trifle overdone, considering their brief acquaintance.

"By George, Mr. Matson," he said, "this town has fallen for you all right. The whole place is buzzing with that affair of last night, and I don't wonder. If it hadn't been for you, the coroner and undertaker would be busy this morning."

"Oh, I don't know," responded Joe. "If I hadn't got to it someone else would. It wasn't much of a blaze anyway, and ten to one it would have gone out of itself."

"Modest I see," laughed Westland. "They say that all great men are. But you can't get anyone in this town to take such a slighting view of it as you do yourself."

"You said last night that you had a business matter you wanted to see me about," suggested Joe, in order to change the subject.

"So I have," replied Westland, "and I've traveled over a thousand miles to talk to you personally about it."

He lighted a fresh cigar while Joe waited indifferently. He had been interviewed so much in the last year or two on all conceivable subjects that his curiosity was scarcely awakened.

"Of course, Mr. Matson," began Westland, "you've heard of the new major league that has just been organized and——"

Joe's bored feeling vanished and he was wide-awake in an instant. So this was what the visit meant! Jim's prediction was coming true sooner than he had expected.

"Pardon me, Mr. Westland," he interrupted, "but if this is about baseball, I have a friend visiting me who is as much interested in the game as I am. In fact, he's a player himself. It's Jim Barclay of the Giants. You've heard of him, of course. Hello there, Jim!" he called, as he threw open the door into the adjoining room, where Jim was watching a distracting dimple come and go in Clara's cheek as they chatted together.

"Really, Mr. Matson," said Westland, visibly flustered, "much as I would like to meet Mr. Barclay, I would rather——"

But just then Jim came strolling in, and Joe hastened to introduce him. He had used the stratagem in order to have a witness at hand. He was determined that no false or twisted version of the interview should be given out broadcast in the interest of the new league.

Despite his annoyance, Westland was diplomat enough to make the best of the situation, and he acknowledged the introduction graciously.

"Mr. Westland called in connection with the new league we were reading about yesterday, Jim," explained Joe, "and I knew that you would be interested and so I called you in."

Jim's jaw set a trifle, but he only nodded and Westland went on:

"I'm a business man, Mr. Matson, and so are you. So I won't beat around the bush, but come straight to the point. You're the greatest pitcher in the country, and we want to secure your services for the new league. We've got oceans of money behind us, and we're prepared to let you name your own terms. We'll give you anything in reason—or out of reason for that matter—if you'll sign up with us."

He delivered himself of this with the air of a man sure of having his offer accepted. But if he had expected Joe to gasp with astonishment and delight, he was disappointed. 25

"Well," said Joe quietly, after a moment's pause, "that's certainly a very liberal proposition _____"

"Oh, we're no pikers," put in Westland complacently.

"But there's one little thing in the way," Joe went on; "and that is that I'm already signed up with the Giants for the next two years."

Westland saw that he was in for a tussle and braced himself.

"Of course, of course," he said, with the tolerant smile of a man of the world. "I didn't think for a minute that McRae would let his kingpin run around loose without being signed up. But you know what baseball contracts are. They're so jug handled that no court would uphold them for a minute. In fact, McRae wouldn't dare to bring it into court. He may threaten and bluster, but that will be the end of it. That ten-day clause alone would kill it with any judge."

"Even admitting that I could break my contract with the Giants and get away with it," said Joe, leading him on, "what guarantee would you have that I wouldn't do the same thing with you if I should want to?"

"The guarantee of your own self-interest," replied Westland, flicking the ash from his cigar. "We'd make it so much worth your while to stay with us that there wouldn't be any inducement to go anywhere else." 26

"In other words," said Joe, with a touch of sarcasm, "if you once bought me you'd rely on your money to see that I'd stay bought."

"Now, now, Mr. Matson," put in Westland deprecatingly, "there's no use putting it in so harsh a way as that. This is simply business I'm talking to you, and in this world every man has got to look out for Number One. Now I don't know how much money McRae pays you, but I make a guess that it's about five thousand a year, a little more or a little less. Now I'll tell you what we're prepared to do. We'll hand you twenty thousand dollars the day you put your signature to a contract with us. Then we'll agree to pay you fifteen thousand dollars a year for a three-years' term. And to make the whole thing copper riveted, we'll put the whole amount in the bank now, subject to your order as you go along. So that even if the new league should break up, you could loaf for three years and be sixty-five thousand dollars to the good."

With the air of one who had played his trump card and felt sure of taking the trick, Westland from out his pocket drew a fountain pen.

"Put up your pen, Mr. Westland," said Joe calmly, "unless you want to write to those who sent you here that there's nothing doing." 27

Jim brought his fist down on the arm of his chair with a bang.

"That's the stuff, Joe!" he cried jubilantly. "You knocked a home run that time."

A look of blended astonishment and vexation came into Westland's eyes. He seemed to doubt the evidence of his ears.

"Surely you're joking, Mr. Matson," he said. "No man in his senses would turn down such an offer as that."

“I must be out of my senses then,” replied Joe, “for that’s exactly what I’m doing.”

“Perhaps you think we’re bluffing,” said Westland, “but money talks, and here is where it fairly shouts.”

He drew from his pocket a roll of bills of large denominations and laid it on the table.

“There’s the signing-up money,” he explained. “They wanted me to bring a certified check, but I insisted on the actual cash. Count it if you like and take it to the bank if you doubt that it’s good. There’s twenty thousand dollars in that roll, and every cent of it’s yours if you put your name at the bottom of this contract.”

He laid an official-looking document on the table beside the bills, and leaned back in his chair, ostensibly intent on the end of his cigar, but watching Joe keenly from the corner of his eyes.

That pile of crisp yellowbacks was more money than Joe had ever seen at one time in his life, except through the bars of a cashier’s cage. And all he had to do was to reach out, sign his name, and the next minute thrust the bills into his pocket. They meant independence. They meant security. They meant the power and comfort and luxury that money can give.

But they also meant treachery and dishonor, and Joe never wavered for an instant.

“It’s a lot of money, Mr. Westland,” he agreed, “but it isn’t enough.”

A look of relief came into Westland’s eyes. Perhaps his task wasn’t hopeless after all.

“If that’s the case, perhaps we can raise the figures a little,” he said eagerly, “although we thought we were making a very liberal offer. But as I said before, we’re no pikers, and we wouldn’t let a few thousands stand between us. State your terms.”

“You don’t understand,” replied Joe. “What I meant was that there isn’t money enough in your whole crowd to make me go back on my word and jump my contract.”

“Hot off the bat!” exclaimed Jim. “Gee, I wish McRae and Robbie and the rest of the Giant bunch could have heard this pow-wow.”

Westland evidently had all he could do to contain himself. He had felt so serenely confident in the power of his money that he had scarcely allowed himself to think of failure. Yet here was his money flouted as though it were counterfeit, and he himself, instead of being greeted with open arms, was being treated with scorn and contempt.

“Upon my word, Mr. Matson,” he said, with an evident effort to keep cool, “you have a queer way of meeting a legitimate business proposition.”

“That’s just the trouble,” retorted Joe. “It isn’t legitimate and you know it. In the first place you’re offering me a good deal more than I’m worth.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” expostulated Jim loyally. “There’s at least one man in the league getting that much, and he never saw the day when he was a better man than you are.”

“More than I’m worth,” repeated Joe. “Still, if that were all, and you were simply trying to buy my baseball ability, it would be your own affair if you were bidding too high. But you don’t want to give me all this money because I’m a good pitcher. It’s because you want to make me a good liar. You think that every man has his price and it’s only a matter of bidding to find out mine.”

“Now, now!” said Westland, spots of color coming into his cheeks.

“And more than that,” went on Joe, not heeding the interruption, “you want to make me a tool to lead others to break their contracts, too. I’m to be the bellwether of the flock. You figure that if it’s once spread abroad that Matson has jumped into the new league, it will start a stampede of contract breakers. I tell you straight, Westland, it’s dirty business. If you want to start a new league, go ahead and do it in a decent way. Get new players and develop them, or get star players whose contracts have expired. Play the game, but do it without marked cards or loaded

dice.”

Westland saw that he had lost, and he threw diplomacy to the winds.

“Keep your advice till it’s asked for!” he snarled, snatching up the money and jamming it viciously into his pocket. “I didn’t come to this jay town to be lectured by a hick——”

“What’s that?” cried Joe, springing to his feet.

Westland was so startled by the sudden motion that he almost swallowed his cigar. Before Joe’s sinewy figure he stepped back and mumbled an apology. Then he reached for his hat, and without another word stalked out of the house, his features convulsed with anger and chagrin.

As he flung himself out of the gate, he almost collided with a messenger boy bringing a telegram to Joe.

The latter signed for it and tore it open hastily. It was from the Giants’ manager and read:

“I hear the new league is coming after you hotfoot. But I’m betting on you, Joe.

“MCRÆE.”

He handed it over to Jim who read it with a smile.

“Betting on me, is he?” said Joe. “Well, Mac, you win!”

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CHAPTER IV

THE TOP OF THE WAVE

While they were still discussing the telegram, Joe’s father came home to lunch from the harvester works where he was employed. He seemed ten years younger than he had before the trip to the World’s Series, which he in his quiet way had enjoyed quite as much as the rest of the family.

He greeted the young men cordially.

“I met a man a little way down the street who seemed to have come from here,” he said, as he hung up his hat. “He had his hat jammed down on his head, and was muttering to himself as though he were sore about something.”

“He was,” replied Jim with a grin. “He laid twenty-five thousand dollars on the table, and he was sore because Joe wouldn’t take it up.”

Mr. Matson looked bewildered, but his astonishment was not as great as that of Clara, who at that moment put her head in the door to announce that lunch was ready.

“What are you millionaires talking about?” she asked.

“What do millionaires usually talk about?” answered Jim loftily. “Money—the long green—iron men—filthy lucre—yellowbacks——”

“If you don’t stop your nonsense you sha’n’t have any lunch,” threatened Clara, “and that means something, too, for mother has spread herself in getting it up.”

“Take it all back,” said Jim promptly. “I’m as sober as a judge. Lead me to this lunch, fair

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maiden, and I'll tell you nothing but the plain, unvarnished truth. But even at that, I'm afraid you'll think I'm romancing."

The merry group seated themselves at the table, and Clara, all alive with curiosity, demanded the fulfilment of Jim's promise.

"Well," said Jim, "the simple truth is that that fellow who was here this morning offered Joe sixty-five thousand dollars for three years' work."

Mrs. Matson almost dropped her knife and fork in her amazement. Mr. Matson sat up with a jerk, and Clara's eyes opened to their widest extent.

"Sixty-five thousand dollars!" gasped Joe's father.

"For three years' work!" exclaimed Mrs. Matson.

"Why," stammered Clara, "that's—that's—let me see—why, that's more than twenty-one thousand dollars a year."

"That's what," replied Jim, keenly relishing the sensation he was causing. "And it wasn't stage money either. He had brought twenty thousand dollars with him in bills, and he laid it down on the table as carelessly as though it was twenty cents. And all that this modest youth, who sits beside me and isn't saying a word, had to do to get that money was to put his name on a piece of paper."

"Joe," exclaimed Clara, "do tell us what all this means! Jim is just trying to tantalize us."

"Stung!" grinned Jim. "That's what comes from mixing in family matters."

"Why, it's this way, Sis," laughed Joe. "That fellow traveled a thousand miles to call me a hick. I wouldn't stand for it and made him take it back and then he got mad and skipped."

"Momsey," begged Clara in desperation, "can't you make these idiots tell us just what happened?"

"Them cruel woids!" ejaculated Jim mournfully.

"Do tell us, Joe!" entreated his mother. "I'm just dying to know all about it."

Teasing his mother was a very different thing from teasing Clara, who was an adept at that art herself, and Joe surrendered immediately.

They forgot to eat—all except Jim, who seldom carried forgetfulness so far—while he told them about Westland's call and his proposition to Joe to break his contract and jump to the new league.

Sixty-five thousand dollars was a staggering amount of money, a fortune, in fact, in that quiet town, and yet there was not one of that little family who didn't rejoice that Joe had turned the offer down.

"You did the right thing, Joe," said his father heartily; "and the fact that lots of people would call you foolish doesn't change things in the least. A man who sells himself for a hundred thousand dollars is just as contemptible as one who sells himself for a dollar. I'm proud of you, my boy."

"I could have told beforehand just what Joe would do," said Mrs. Matson, wiping her eyes.

"You're the darlinest brother ever!" exclaimed Clara, coming round the table and giving him a hug and a kiss.

The thought of Clara being a sister to him had never appealed to Jim before, but just at that moment it would have had its advantages.

For the rest of the meal all were engrossed in talking of the great event of the morning—that is, all but Joe, who kept casting surreptitious glances at the clock.

“Don’t get worried, Joe,” said his sister mischievously, as she intercepted one of his glances. “Mabel’s train doesn’t get in until half-past two, and it isn’t one o’clock yet.”

Joe flushed a little and Jim laughed.

“Can you blame him?” he asked.

“Not a bit,” answered Clara. “Mabel’s a darling and I’m crazy to get hold of her. After Joe, though, of course,” she added.

Joe threw his napkin at her but missed.

“Sixty-five thousand dollars for a baseball player who can’t throw any straighter than that,” she mocked. “It’s a lucky thing for the new league that you didn’t take their money.”

“Maybe I had better take their money after all!” cried Joe tantalizingly.

At these words Clara threw up her hands in mock horror.

“You just dare, Joe Matson, and I’ll disown you!”

“Ah-ha! And now I’m disowned and cast out of my home!” exclaimed the young baseball player tragically. “Woe is me!”

“I don’t believe any decent player would ever have anything to say to you, Joe, if you did such a mean thing as that,” went on Clara seriously. And at this Joe nodded affirmatively.

An hour later, all three, chatting merrily, were on their way to the train. But their progress was slow, for at almost every turn they were stopped by friends who wanted to shake hands with Joe and congratulate him on his presence of mind the night before.

“One of the penalties of having a famous brother,” sighed Clara, when this had happened for the twentieth time.

“You little hypocrite,” laughed Jim. “You know that you’re just bursting with pride. You’re tickled to death to be walking alongside of him. Stop your sighing. Follow my example. I’m tickled to death to be walking alongside of you and you don’t hear *me* sighing. I feel more like singing.”

“For goodness’ sake, don’t,” retorted Clara in mock alarm. “Oh, dear, here’s another one!”

“Were you addressing me when you said ‘dear’?” asked Jim politely.

Clara flashed him an indignant glance, just as Professor Enoch Crabbe, of the Riverside Academy, stepped up and greeted Joe. He was earnest in his congratulations, but his manner was so stilted that they looked at each other with an amused smile, as he stalked pompously away.

“I wonder if he believes now that I can throw a curve,” laughed Joe.

“He ought to ask some of the Red Sox who whiffed away at them in the World Series,” said Jim with a grin. “They didn’t have any doubt about it.”

“Professor Crabbe had very serious doubts,” explained Joe. “In fact, he said it was impossible. Against all the laws of motion and all that sort of thing. I had to rig up a couple of bamboo rods in a line, and get Dick Talbot, a friend of mine in the moving-picture business, to take a picture of the ball as it curved around the rods, before I could prove my point.”

“Did it convince him?” queried Jim.

“It stumped him, anyway,” replied Joe. “But sometimes I have a sneaking notion that he thinks yet that Dick and I played some kind of a bunco game on him by doctoring the film.”

“Well, I hope that nobody else stops us,” remarked Clara. “It seems to me that almost everybody in Riverside is on the street this afternoon.”

“It wouldn’t be such an awful mob at that,” replied Jim. “But it’s a safe bet that one man at least won’t stop Joe to shake hands with him.”

“Who is that?” asked Clara.

“The fellow who yelled ‘Fire’ in the hall last night,” answered Jim with a grin.

“I hope I didn’t hurt him,” observed Joe, thoughtfully.

“Perish the thought,” replied Jim. “You just caressed him. He was a big fellow, and he probably sat down just to take a load off his feet.”

“I’m glad he wasn’t a Riverside man, anyway,” remarked Joe, loyal to his home town. “I never saw him before. Probably he came from some place near by.”

“Oh, then, of course he won’t mind it,” chaffed Jim.

“Of all the nonsense——” Clara was beginning, when her eye caught sight of a figure she recognized on the station platform which they had nearly reached.

She nudged her brother’s elbow.

“There’s the man you were talking to this morning,” she said in a low voice.

“By George, so it is!” replied Joe, as he followed her glance. “And he’s talking to Altman. Trying to make him a convert.”

“A renegade, you mean,” growled Jim.

CHAPTER V

LUCKY JOE

Westland saw the party coming, and with a scowl turned his back upon them.

Altman, however, greeted Joe with a smile and, excusing himself to Westland, went over to meet him with extended hand.

“How are you, old scout?” he exclaimed. “You sure batted .300 last night.”

Joe greeted him cordially, while Jim and Clara strolled on toward the end of the platform. It was astonishing what good company those two were to each other, and how well they bore the absence of anybody else from their conversation.

“I’m feeling fine as silk,” was Joe’s response to Altman’s question.

“Didn’t sprain your salary wing, or anything like that?” grinned Altman. “You fetched that fellow an awful hit in the jaw.”

“I hated to do it, but it was coming to him,” laughed Joe.

“Well, if there are any doctors’ bills, I guess the Riverside people will be willing to take up a collection to pay them,” replied Altman. “It’s mighty lucky for the town that you happened to be in the crowd last night.”

“I suppose you’re off to keep your next engagement,” said Joe, to change the subject. “By the way, Nick, that was a mighty nifty skit of yours at the hall last night. It brought down the house.”

It ought to pull big everywhere.”

“I’m glad you liked it,” replied Altman. “I’m booked for twenty weeks and I’m drawing down good money.”

“I suppose you’ll be with the White Sox next year, as usual,” said Joe.

Altman hesitated.

“W-why, I suppose so,” he said slowly. “My contract with them has another year to run. To tell the truth, though, Joe, I’m somewhat unsettled.”

“Why,” said Joe, “you’re not going to give up the game for the stage, are you?”

“Oh, nothing like that,” replied Altman. “I’d rather play ball than eat, and I’ll stick to the game as long as this old wing of mine can put them over the plate. But whether I’ll be with the White Sox or not is another question.”

“Some other team in the American league trying to make a dicker for you?” asked Joe. 42

“Not that I’ve heard anything about,” responded Altman. “But the American League isn’t the whole cheese in baseball—nor the National League, either, for that matter.”

“I see Westland has been talking to you,” said Joe. “I don’t want to butt in, Nick, but don’t let him put one over on you.”

“The new league seems to have barrels of money,” replied Altman, evading a direct answer. “This fellow Westland seems aching to throw it to the birds—he’s got a wad in his pocket that would choke a horse.”

“Yes,” said Joe dryly, “I’ve seen that wad before. But take a fool’s advice, Nick, and stick to the old ship.”

“That’s all very well,” said Altman. “But a man’s worth all that he will bring in any other line of work—and why shouldn’t it be so in baseball? Who is it that brings the money in at the gate, anyway? We’re the ones that the public come to see, but it’s the bosses that get all the money.”

“Lay off on that ‘poor, down-trodden slave’ talk, Nick,” said Joe earnestly. “You know as well as I do that there are mighty few fellows who get as well paid for six months’ work as we ball players do. But, leave that out of the question for a minute—don’t you suppose the backers of this new league are just as eager to make money out of us as anybody else? Do you think they’re in the game for the sport of it? And don’t you know that the coming of a new league just now is likely to wreck the game? You know how it was in the old Brotherhood days—they did the same crooked work then that they’re trying to do now—bribing men to jump their contracts by offers of big money. The game got a blow then that it took years to recover from, and there wasn’t a single major league player that in the long run, didn’t suffer from it. Play the game, Nick—and let’s show these fellows that they can’t buy us as they would so many cattle.” 43

Altman was visibly impressed, and Westland, who had been watching proceedings out of the corner of his eye, thought it time to intervene. He strolled down toward them and without looking at Joe, spoke directly to Altman.

“Train’s coming, Nick,” he said. “I just heard the whistle. I’ll stay with you so that we can get seats together in the smoker.”

“Well, good-bye, Joe!” said Altman. “I’m glad to have seen you again, anyway, and I’ll promise not to do anything hastily.”

And as Jim and Clara came hurrying up at that moment, Joe had to be content with the hope that, at least, he had put a spoke in Westland’s wheel.

The train was in sight now, and all thoughts of baseball were banished for the moment at the thought of what that train was bringing to him. 44

With a rush and a roar the train drew up at the station. The colored porter jumped down the steps of the parlor car to assist the descending passengers.

Joe uttered an exclamation, and Clara gave a little squeal of delight as two young people, whom a family resemblance proclaimed to be brother and sister, came hurriedly down the steps.

In a moment they were the center of an eager and tumultuous group.

“Mabel!” exclaimed Joe,—at least that was all that they heard him say just then. What he said to her later on is none of our business.

The girls hugged and kissed each other, much to the aggravation of the masculine contingent, while Reggie Varley extended his two hands, which were grasped cordially by Joe and Jim.

The romance which had culminated in the engagement of Mabel Varley and Joe dated back two years earlier. Joe had been in a southern training camp, in spring practice with his team, when one day he had been lucky enough to stop a runaway horse which Mabel had been driving, and thus saved her from imminent danger and possible death. The acquaintance, so established, rapidly deepened into friendship and then into something stronger.

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Mabel was a charming girl with lustrous brown eyes, wonderful complexion and dimples that came and went in a distracting fashion, and it was no wonder that Joe before long was a helpless but willing captive. She, on her part, developed a sudden fondness for the great national game to which she had hitherto been indifferent.

They had met many times during the season, and with every meeting her witchery over Joe had become more potent. He had stolen a glove from her during one of his visits to Goldsboro, her home town in the South, and during the exciting games of the last World’s Series he had worn it close to his heart when he had pitched his team to victory.

And when he told her this on the night following the famous game that had set the whole country wild with excitement, and told her too, that victory meant nothing, unless she shared it with him, she had capitulated and promised to become his wife.

Reggie, her brother, had formed Joe’s acquaintance earlier than Mabel and in a less pleasant way. He was a rather foppish young man who cultivated a mustache that the girls called “darling,” and affected what he fondly believed to be an English accent.

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In a railway station he had left his valise near where Joe was sitting, and, on his return, found that the valise had been opened and some valuable jewelry stolen from it. He had rashly accused Joe of the theft, and had narrowly escaped a thrashing from that indignant young man, in consequence.

The matter had been patched up at the time, and afterward, when Joe learned that he was Mabel’s brother, had been forgiven entirely. The men were now on the most cordial of terms, for Reggie, despite his peculiarities and though he would never “set the river on fire” with his intellectual ability, was by no means a bad fellow.

There was a merry hubbub of greetings and exclamations while the men arranged for the baggage and the girls asked each other twenty questions at once and then the party paired off for the walk to the Matson home—that is, Joe and Mabel and Jim and Clara, formed the pairs, while Reggie was, so to speak, a fifth wheel to the coach!

Not that this bothered Reggie in the least. He ambled along amiably, dividing his talk and attentions impartially, serenely unconscious that each pair was willing to bestow him upon the other.

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“We ought to have a band playing ‘See, the Conquering Hero Comes,’” remarked Jim to Mabel, who was walking in front with Joe.

“I know he’s a hero,” said Mabel, her eyes eloquent as she looked at Joe. “I can hardly pick up the paper but what it calls him the hero of the World’s Series.”

“I don’t mean a baseball hero,” said Jim, “but a real, honest-to-goodness hero—the life-saver and all that kind of stuff, you know.”

“Yes,” joined in Clara, “you came a day too late, Mabel. You ought to have seen Joe at the Opera House last night. He was simply great.”

“At the Opera House?” Mabel repeated, in some bewilderment.

“Sure,” chaffed Jim. “Didn’t you know Joe’d gone on the stage?”

“Yes,” said Clara, carrying out the mystification. “He made a hit, too.”

“There was at least one man in the audience he made a hit with,” chuckled Jim.

“Don’t let them fool you, Mabel,” said Joe, tenderly. “There was just a little excitement at the Opera House last night and Jim and I took a hand in stopping it. They’re making an awful lot of a very simple matter.”

“You’ve no idea what a voice Joe has for public speaking,” persisted the irrepressible Jim. “Last night he was a howling success.”

“Clara, dear, tell me all about it,” entreated Mabel. “We girls are the only ones who can talk sense.”

Thus appealed to, Clara told about the circumstances of the night before, and, as may be imagined, Joe did not suffer in the telling. If the latter had needed any other reward for his exploit he found it in Mabel’s eyes as she looked at him.

“I thought I knew all about you before,” she said, in a half whisper, “but I’m learning all the time!”

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CHAPTER VI

CIRCLING THE GLOBE

When the party reached the Matson home, motherly Mrs. Matson took Mabel into her arms as she had long since taken her into her heart. Then Clara took her up to her room to refresh herself after the journey, while Jim and Joe took care of Reggie and his belongings.

“Oh, I’m so glad that you’ve got here at last!” exclaimed Clara, as she placed an affectionate hand on Mabel’s shoulder.

“And you may be sure that I’m glad that I am here,” was the happy response. “I declare, this place almost feels like home to me.”

“Well, you know, we want it to feel like home to you, Mabel,” answered Joe’s sister, and looked so knowingly at the visitor that Mabel suddenly began to blush.

In the meantime, Joe had taken Reggie to the room which the young man was to occupy during his stay. Joe carried both of the bags, which were rather heavy, for the fashionable young man was in the habit of taking a good share of his wardrobe along whenever he left home.

“Some weight to one of these bags, Reggie,” remarked Joe good-naturedly, as he deposited the big Gladstone on the floor with a thud. “You must have about three hundred and fifteen new

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neckties in there.”

“Bah Jove, that’s a good joke, Joe, don’t you know!” drawled Reggie. “But you’re wrong, my boy; I haven’t more than ten neckties with me on this trip.”

“Say, I’m glad to know you’ve got so many. Maybe I’ll want to borrow one,” went on Joe, continuing his joke.

“Of course you can have one of my neckties if you want it, Joe,” returned the fashionable young man quickly. “I’ve got a beautiful lavender one that ought to just suit you. And then there is a fancy striped one, red and green and gold, which is the most stunning thing, don’t you know, you ever saw. I purchased it at a fashionable shop on Fifth Avenue the last time I was in New York. If you wore that tie, Joe, you would certainly make a hit.”

“Well, you see, I’m not so much of a hitter as I am of a pitcher,” returned Joe; “so I guess I’d better not rob you of that tie. Come to think of it, I got several new ties myself last Christmas and on my birthday. I think they’ll see me through very nicely. But I’m much obliged just the same. And now, Reggie, make yourself thoroughly at home.”

“Oh, I’ll be sure to do that,” returned Mabel’s brother. “You’re a fine fellow, Joe; and I often wonder how it was I quarreled with you the first time we met.”

“We’ll forget about that,” answered Joe shortly.

Naturally the men returned to the living room first, and while they were waiting impatiently for the girls to rejoin them, Joe caught sight of a letter resting against the clock on the mantelpiece.

He took it up and saw that it was addressed to himself, and that it bore the postmark of New York. He recognized the handwriting at once.

“It’s from McRae,” he said. “The second message I’ve received from the old boy today, counting the telegram this morning. Excuse me, fellows, while I look it over.”

He tore it open hastily and read with glowing interest and excitement.

“The World Tour’s a go!” he cried, handing the letter over to Jim. “Mac’s got it all settled at last. When we said good-bye to him in New York it was all up in the air. But trust Mac to hustle—he’s got enough promises to make up the two teams and now he’s calling on us, Jim, to keep our word and go with the party. We’re all to meet in Chicago for the start on the nineteenth of the month.”

“Gee!” exclaimed Jim. “That doesn’t give us very much time. Let’s see,” as he snatched up a newspaper and scanned the top line. “To-day’s the sixteenth. We’ll have to get a wiggle on.”

“Bah Jove,” lisped Reggie. “It’s bally short notice, don’t you know? How long will you fellows be gone?”

“Just about six months,” said Joe, his face lengthening as he reflected on what it meant to be all that time away from Mabel.

“What’s all this pow-wow about?” came a merry voice from the door, as the girls tripped in, their arms about each other’s waist.

“I’m glad we girls aren’t as talkative as you men,” said Clara, mischievously.

“When we do talk we at least say something,” added Mabel. “What is it, Joe?”

“I’m afraid it’s rather bad news in a way,” said Joe. “I’ve just got a letter from McRae in which he tells me that he’s completed all arrangements for a baseball tour around the world. You know, Mabel, that I spoke to you about it just before we left New York. But it was only a vague idea then and something of the kind is talked about at the end of every baseball season. Usually though, it only ends in talk, and the teams make a barnstorming trip to San Francisco or to Cuba. But this time it seems to have gone through all right. And now Mac is calling upon Jim and me to go along.”

“My word!” broke in Reggie, “anyone would think it was a bally funeral to hear you talk and see your face. I should think you’d be no-end pleased to have a chance to go.”

To tell the truth, neither Joe nor Jim seemed elated at the prospect. Joe’s eyes sought Mabel, while Jim’s rested on Clara, and neither one of those young ladies was so obtuse as not to know what the young men were thinking.

“When do you have to go?” asked Clara, soberly.

“We have to be in Chicago by the nineteenth,” answered Joe, “and we’ll have to leave here the day before. To-day’s the sixteenth and you can see for yourself how much time that gives us to stay in Riverside.”

“No rest for the wicked,” said Reggie, jocularly. “Pon honor, you boys have earned a rest after the work you did against the Red Sox.”

Clara was very far from her vivacious self as she thought of the coming separation, but Joe was surprised and the least bit hurt to see how lightly Mabel seemed to regard it.

“It’s too bad, of course,” she said, cheerfully, “but we’ll have to make the best of these two days at least. It’s a pity, though, that it wasn’t November nineteenth instead of October.”

“We could have started a bit later if it were only for the foreign trip,” explained Jim, “but we’re going to play a series of exhibition games between here and the Coast, and we’ve got to take advantage of what good weather there is left. If we can only get to the Rockies before it’s too cold to play, we’ll be all right, because in California they’re able to play all the year round.”

“My word!” exclaimed Reggie, “I don’t see why they don’t cut out the exhibition games altogether. I should think this country had had baseball enough for one season.”

“Not when the Giants and an All-American team are the players,” replied Joe. “The people will come out in crowds—they’ll fairly beg us to take their money.”

“And it will be worth taking,” chimed in Jim. “Do you know how much money the teams took in before they reached the coast on their last World’s Trip? Ninety-seven thousand dollars. Count them, ladies and gentlemen—ninety-seven thousand dollars in good American dollars!” he added grandly.

“That sounds like a lot of money,” said Reggie, thoughtfully.

“And they’ll need every cent of it too,” said Joe. “It’s the only way a trip of that kind can be carried on. The teams travel in first-class style, have the finest quarters on the ship, and stay at the best hotels. In the games abroad there won’t be money enough taken in, probably, to cover expenses. Then the money we’ve taken in from the exhibition games will come in handy.”

“How many men are going in the two teams?” inquired Clara.

“I imagine each team will carry about fourteen men,” replied Joe. “That will give them three pitchers, two catchers, an extra infielder and outfielder, beside the other members of the team. That ought to be enough to allow for sickness or accident.”

“How much do you fellows expect to get out of it for yourselves?” asked Reggie.

“That’s just a matter of guess work,” Joe replied. “I understand that what is left after all expenses are paid will be divided equally among the players. On the last World’s Trip I think it amounted to about a thousand dollars apiece. But then again, it may not be a thousand cents. All we really know is that we’ll have a chance to see the world in first-class style without its actually costing us a dollar.”

“Oh, you lucky men!” said Clara, with a sigh. “You can go trotting all over the world, while we poor girls have to stay at home and look for an occasional letter from your highnesses—that is, if you deign to write to us at all.”

"I'll guarantee to keep the postman busy," said Jim, fervently.

"Same here," said Joe, emphatically, as his eyes met Mabel's.

"Do you know just what route you'll follow?" Reggie asked.

"Our first stop will be at Hawaii," replied Joe, consulting his letter. "So that the first game we play outside of the States will still be under the American flag. We'll see Old Glory again, too, when we strike the Philippines. But that will come a little later. After we leave Hawaii, we won't see dry land again until we get to Japan."

"I fancy we'll get some good games there, too," broke in Jim. "Those little Japs have gone in for the game with a vengeance. Do you remember the time when their Waseda and Keio University teams came over to this country? They gave our Princeton and Yale fellows all they could do to beat them."

"Yes," said Joe, "they're nifty players when it comes to fielding and they're fleet as jack rabbits on the bases—but they're a little light at the bat. When it comes to playing before their home crowds they'll be a pretty stiff proposition."

"Do you take in China at all?" asked Reggie.

"We'll probably stop at Shanghai and Hongkong," replied Joe. "I don't imagine the Chinks can scrape up any kind of a baseball team, but there are big foreign colonies at both of those places and they'll turn out in force to see players from the States. Then after touching at Manila, we'll go to Australia, taking in all the big towns like Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. While of course the Australians are crazy about cricket, like all Englishmen, they're keen for every kind of athletic sport, and we're sure of big crowds there. After that we sail for Ceylon and from there to Egypt."

"I'd like to see Egypt better than any other place," broke in Clara. "I've always been crazy to go there."

"It's full of curiosities," remarked Jim. "There's the Sphinx, for instance—a woman who hasn't said a word for five thousand years."

Clara flashed a withering glance at him, under which he wilted.

"Don't mix your Greek fable and your Egyptian facts, Jim," chuckled Joe.

"Huh?"

"Fact. Since this trip's been in the wind, I've been reading up. Those Egyptian sphinxes—those that haven't a ram's or a hawk's head—have a man's, not a woman's, head."

"That's why they've been able to keep still so long, then!" exclaimed Jim.

"You mean thing!" cried Mabel.

"Don't lay that up against me," he begged, penitently, "and I'll send you back a little crocodile from the Nile."

"Oh, the horrid thing!" cried Clara with a shudder.

"I'm doing the best I can," said Jim, plaintively. "I can't send you one of the pyramids."

"That's the last we'll see of Africa," went on Joe. "After that, we set sail for Italy and land at Naples. Then we work our way up through Rome, Florence, Milan, Monte Carlo, Marseilles, Paris and London. We'll stay about a month in Great Britain, visiting Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dublin. Then we'll make tracks for home, and maybe we won't be glad to get here!"

The vision conjured up by this array of famous cities offered such scope for endless surmise and speculation that they were surprised at the flight of time when Mrs. Matson smilingly summoned them to supper.

Of course, Joe sat beside Mabel and Jim beside Clara. If, in the course of the evening meal, Joe's hand and Mabel's met beneath the table, it was purely by accident. Jim, on his side would cheerfully have risked such an accident, but had no such luck.

Joe was happy, supremely happy in the presence by his side of the dearest girl in all the world. Yet there was a queer little ache at his heart because of the apparent indifference with which Mabel had viewed their coming separation.

"You haven't said once," he said to her in a low tone, with a touch of tender reproach, "that you were sorry I was going."

"Why should I," answered Mabel, demurely, "since I am going with you?"

CHAPTER VII

THE GATHERING OF THE CLANS

If Mabel had counted on creating a sensation, she succeeded beyond her wildest hopes.

For a moment, Joe thought that he must have taken leave of his senses.

"What!" he cried, incredulously, half rising to his feet.

This sudden ejaculation drew the attention of all the others seated at the table.

"Land sakes, Joe!" expostulated his mother, "you almost made me upset my tea cup. What's the matter?"

"Enough's the matter," responded Joe, jubilantly. "That is, if Mabel really means what she said just now."

"What was it you said, Mabel dear?" asked Clara.

"Come, 'fess up," invited Jim.

"I guess I'll let Reggie tell the rest of it," said Mabel, blushing under the battery of eyes turned upon her.

"All right, Sis," said Reggie, affably. "Bah Jove, I give you credit for holding in as long as you have. The fact is," he continued, beaming amiably upon all the party, "the governor asked me to take a trip to Japan and China, and Mabel put in to come along. I didn't twig what the little minx was up to, until she said we could go on the same steamer that took the baseball party. Lots of other women—wives of the managers and players and so on—will go along, I understand. So there's the whole bally story in a nutshell. Rippin' good idea I call it—what?"

"Glory hallelujah!" cried Joe, grasping Mabel's hand, openly this time.

"It's simply great!" cried Jim, enthusiastically.

"You darling, lucky girl!" exclaimed Clara, while Mr. and Mrs. Matson smiled their pleasure.

"Had you up in the air for a minute, didn't it, old top?" grinned Reggie.

"I should say it did," Joe admitted. "I thought for a minute I was going crazy. Somebody pinch me."

Jim reached over and accommodated him.

“Ouch!” cried Joe, rubbing his arm. “You needn’t be so literal.”

“There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for my friends,” said Jim, piously.

Questions poured in thick and fast.

“How can you possibly get ready in time?” asked Clara. “It’s the sixteenth now, and the teams leave Chicago on the nineteenth.”

62

“Oh, we’re not going to make the trip across the country,” explained Mabel, flushed with happiness. “Reggie and I will join the party in San Francisco or Seattle, or wherever they start from. So that will give us nearly a month, and I’m going to spend most of that right here—if you can stand me that long.”

Clara came round the table and gave her an impulsive hug.

“I’d be glad to have you stay here forever,” said Mrs. Matson fervently.

Just here a thought struck Joe.

“It’s the greatest thing ever that you’re going as far as Japan,” he said. “But why can’t you keep on with us and swing right around the circle?”

“You greedy boy!” murmured Mabel.

“We’ve thought of that too,” explained Reggie. “The governor promised Mabel a trip round the world as soon as she got through with the finishing school. She could have gone last year if she had chosen, but she got so interested in baseball——”

“Reggie!” murmured Mabel, warningly.

“Well, anyway,” said Reggie a little lamely, “she didn’t go, and so I put it up to the governor that there was no reason she couldn’t go now. He saw it the same way—he’s a rippin’ good sort, the governor is—and he’s left it to us to make the trip all the way round—that is, if I can get through my business in Japan in time.”

63

“If you don’t get through in time, there’ll be murder done,” threatened Joe.

In the animated talk that ensued all took a part. But toward the end of the meal, Joe noticed that Jim was a little more subdued than was usual with him, and that some of the sparkle and vivacity had vanished from Clara’s eyes and voice.

He glanced from one to the other and knew the reason. He knew how deep the feeling was growing between the two and realized what the coming six-months’ separation would mean to them. A generous impulse came to him like a flash.

“Listen folks,” he said. “Surprises seem to be in fashion, so here’s another one. Clara’s going along with us.”

Astonishment and delight held Clara speechless—then she rose and flung her arms impulsively about her brother’s neck, and for the second time that day Jim would have been willing to let her be a sister to him also.

Jim reached his brawny hand across the table.

“Put her there, Joe, old boy!” he said. “You’re the finest fellow that ever wore shoe leather.”

64

“Won’t it be just glorious!” exulted Mabel.

“There never was such a boy in all the world,” murmured Joe’s mother.

“But, Joe dear, won’t it be too great an expense?” suggested Clara. “You know it’s less than a month since you sent us that thousand-dollar bill that took us to the World’s Series.”

“That’s all right, Sis,” reassured Joe, patting her hand. “Remember I cleared nearly four

thousand dollars extra in the World's Series, and this won't put much of a dent in that. You just go ahead and doll yourself up—and hang the expense.”

And so it was settled, and it is safe to say that a group of happier young people could not be found anywhere than those who discussed excitedly, until late into the night, the coming trip with all its marvelous possibilities.

The next two days flew by all too rapidly. The girls, of course, had plenty of time, but Joe and Jim had a host of things to attend to and a very limited time to do them in. But somehow, Joe made time enough to say a lot of things to Mabel that, to lovers at least, seem important, and Jim, though not daring to go quite so far, looked and said quite enough to deepen the roses in Clara's cheeks and the loveliness in her eyes.

It was hard to part when the time for parting came, but this time there was no long six-months' separation to be dreaded—that is, as far as the young folks were concerned.

Mr. and Mrs. Matson had counted on having their son with them throughout the fall and winter, but they had been accustomed for so long to merge their own happiness in that of their children that they kept up bright faces while they said good-bye, although Mrs. Matson's smile was tremulous.

A day and night of traveling and the ball players reached Chicago, where, at the Blackstone, they found McRae awaiting them—the same old McRae, aggressive, pugnacious, masterful, and yet with a glint of worry in his eyes that had not been there at the close of the World's Series.

Robbie was there too, rotund and rubicund, but not just the Robbie who had danced the tango with McRae before the clubhouse on the occasion of the great victory.

But if worry and anxiety had set their mark upon the manager and trainer of the Giants, it had not affected the players, who were lounging about the corridor of the hotel.

A bunch of them, including Burkett and Denton and good old Larry, gave the newcomers a tumultuous welcome.

“Cheer, cheer, the gang's all here!” cried Larry.

McRae clasped Joe's hand in a grip that almost made him wince.

“So the new league hasn't got you yet, Joe?” he cried.

“No,” laughed Joe, returning his clasp; “and it never will!”

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIVAL TEAMS

Robbie, who had come up just in time to hear Joe's last words, gave him a resounding thump on the back.

“That's the way to talk, Joe, old boy!” he cried. “I've been telling Mac all along that no matter who else weakens he could bet his last dollar on you.”

“Not that I needed any bracing up,” declared McRae. “I know a man when I see one, and I count on you to the limit. I didn't send that telegram because I had any doubt, but I knew that

they'd make a break for you first of all and I didn't want you to be taken by surprise. By the way, have any of them turned up yet?"

"A chap named Westland came to see me the very day I got your telegram," replied Joe.

"And he came well heeled, too," put in Jim. "Money was fairly dripping from him. He just ached to give it away. It was only up to Joe to become a bloated plutocrat on the spot."

68

"Offered good money, did he?" asked McRae, with quickened interest.

"Twenty thousand dollars right off the bat," replied Jim. "Fifteen thousand dollars a year for a three-year contract. And as if that weren't enough, he offered to put the money in the bank in advance and let Joe draw against it as he went along."

McRae and Robbie exchanged glances. Here was proof that the new league meant business right from the start. It was a competitor to be dreaded and it was up to them to get their fighting clothes on at once.

"That's a whale of an offer," ejaculated Robbie.

"They've thrown their hat into the ring," remarked McRae. "From now on it's a fight for blood."

"There's no need of asking what Joe said to that," said Robbie.

"I wish you'd been behind the door to hear it," grinned Jim. "The way Joe lighted into him was a sin and a shame. He fairly skinned him alive. It looked at one time as if there would be a scrap sure."

"It would have been a tremendous card for them to get the star pitcher of the World's Series," said McRae with a sigh of relief. "And in these days, when so many rumors are flying round it's a comfort to know there's one man, at least, that money can't buy. There isn't a bit of shoddy in you, Joe. You're all wool and a yard wide."

69

At this moment, Hughson, the famous pitcher who had been a tower of strength to the Giants for ten years past, came strolling up, and Joe and Jim fell upon him with a shout.

"How are you, Hughson, old man?" cried Joe. "How's that wing of yours getting along?"

"All to the good," replied Hughson. "I stopped off for a day or two at Youngstown and had it treated by Bonesetter Reese. I tell you, that old chap's a wonder. He tells me it will be as good as ever when the season opens."

"I'm mighty glad you're going along with us on this trip," said Jim, heartily. "It wouldn't seem like the Giant team with you out of it."

"I'm going through as far as the coast anyway," answered Hughson. "More for the fun of being with the boys than anything else. But I don't think I'll make the trip around the world. I made a half promise some time ago to coach the Yale team this coming spring, and they don't seem inclined to let me out of it. And I don't know if after all it may not be best to rest up this winter and get in shape for next year."

The three strolled on down the corridor, leaving McRae and Robbie in earnest conversation.

70

"How many of the boys is Mac taking along?" asked Joe.

"I think he figures on about fourteen men," replied Hughson. "That will give him three pitchers, two catchers, an extra infielder and outfielder, besides the seven other men in their regular positions. That'll allow for accident or sickness and ought to be enough."

"Just as I doped it out," remarked Joe.

"On a pinch, McRae could play himself," laughed Jim. "No better player ever held down the third bag than Mac when he was on the old Orioles. The old boy could give the youngsters points even now on winging them down to first."

“For that matter, Robbie himself might go in behind the bat,” grinned Joe. “No ball could get by him without hitting him somewhere.”

“It would be worth the price of admission to see Robbie running down to first,” admitted Hughson, with a smile.

“What kind of a team has Brennan got together for the All-American?” asked Joe.

“Believe me; it’s a good one,” replied Hughson. “He’s got a bunch of the sweetest hitters that he could get from either league. They’re a bunch of fence breakers, all right. When those birds once get going, they’re apt to send any pitcher to the shower. You’ll have all you want to do, Joe, to keep them from straightening out your curves.”

71

“I don’t ask anything better,” replied Joe, with a laugh. “I’d get soft if they were too easy. But who are these ball killers? Let me know the worst.”

“Well,” said Hughson, “there’s Wallie Schalk behind the bat—you know how he can line them out. Then there’s Miller at first, Ebers at second, McBride at short and Chapman at third. The outfielders will probably be Cooper and Murray and Lange. For pitchers Brennan will have Hamilton, Fraser and Ellis,—although Ellis was troubled with the charley-horse toward the end of the season, and Banks may take his place.”

“It’s a strong team,” commented Jim, “and they can certainly make the ball scream when they hit it. They’re a nifty lot of fielders, too. I guess we’ll have our work cut out for us, all right.”

“Both Mac and Brennan have got the right idea,” said Hughson. “Too many of these barnstorming trips have been made up of second string men, and when people came to see the teams play and didn’t find the real stars in the line-up they naturally felt sore. But they’re going to get the simon-pure article this time and the games are to be for blood. Anyone that lays down on his job is going to get fired. It’ll be easy enough to pick up a good man to take his place.”

72

“What’s the scheme?” asked Joe. “Are we two teams to play against each other all the time, or are we to take on some of the local nines?”

“I don’t think that’s been fully worked out yet,” replied Hughson. “I know we’re going to play the Denver nine and some of the crack California teams.”

“Easy meat,” commented Jim with a grin.

“Don’t you believe it,” rejoined Hughson. “Don’t you remember how the Waco team trimmed us last spring? Those fellows will play their heads off to beat us—and they’ll own the town if they succeed. They figure that they’ll catch us off our guard and get the Indian sign on us before we wake up.”

“Yes. But do you think they can get the Indian sign so easily?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Of course, those minor teams will play their very best, because it would be a feather in their cap if they could take a game away from us. They’ll probably look around and pick up the very best players they can, even if they have to put up some money for the purpose. Just the same, we ought to be able to polish them off with these.”

73

“Well, of course, we’ve got to expect to lose some games. It would be a remarkable thing to go around the world and win every game.”

“Yet it might be done,” broke in Jim.

“I suppose there’ll be quite a party going along with the teams, just for the sake of the trip,” observed Joe.

“You’ve said it,” replied Hughson. “At least half of the men will have their wives along, and then there’s a whole bunch of fans who have been meaning to go round the world anyway who

will think this a good chance to mix baseball and globe trotting. Altogether I shouldn't wonder if there would be about a hundred in the party. Some of the fellows will have their sisters with them, and you boys had better look out or you'll lose your hearts to them. But perhaps," he added, as he saw a look of quick intelligence pass between the chums, "you're already past praying for."

Neither one of them denied the soft impeachment.

"By the way," said Hughson, changing the subject, "while I think of it, Joe, I want to give you a tip to be on your guard against 'Bugs' Hartley."

"Why, what's he up to, now?" inquired Joe.

"I don't know," Hughson replied. "But I do know that he's sore at you through and through. He's got the idea in that twisted brain of his that you got him off the Giant team. I met him in the street the other day——"

"Half drunk, I suppose," interjected Jim.

"More than half," replied Hughson. "He's got to be a regular panhandler—struck me for a loan, and while I was getting it for him, he talked in a rambling way of how he was going to get even with you. Of course I shut him up, but I couldn't talk him out of his fixed idea. He'll do you a mischief if he ever gets the chance."

"He's tried it before," said Joe. "He nearly knocked me out when he doped my coffee. Poor old 'Bugs'—he's his own worst enemy."

"But he's your enemy too," persisted Hughson. "And don't forget that a crazy man is a dangerous man."

"Thanks for the tip," replied Joe. "But 'threatened men live long' and I guess I'm no exception to the rule!"

CHAPTER IX

THE UNDER DOG

"Talking of angels!" exclaimed Jim, giving Joe a sharp nudge in the ribs.

Joe looked up quickly and saw Hartley coming down the corridor.

"It's 'Bugs,' sure enough," he said. "And, for a wonder, he's walking straight."

"Guess he's on his good behavior," remarked Hughson. "There's a big meeting of the American League here just now, winding up the affairs of the league, now that the playing season is over. Maybe Hartley thinks he has a chance to catch on somewhere. Like everybody else that's played in the big leagues, he hates to go back to the bushes. He'd be a find, too, if he'd only cut out the booze—there's lots of good baseball in him yet."

"He's a natural player," said Joe, generously. "And one of the best pitchers I ever saw. You know how Mac tried to hold on to him."

"I don't think he has a Chinaman's chance, though, of staying in big league company," observed Jim. "After the way he tried to give away our signals in that game at Boston, the

Nationals wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole, and I don't think the American has any use for him either. You might forgive him for being a drunkard, but not for being a traitor."

Hartley had caught sight of the group, and at first seemed rather undecided whether to go on or stop. The bitter feeling he had for Joe, however, was too strong to resist, and he came over to where they were. He paid no attention to Jim, and gave a curt nod to Hughson and fixed a malignant stare on Joe.

"All dolled up," he said, with a sneer, as he noted the quiet but handsome suit that Joe was wearing. "I could have glad rags, too, if you hadn't bilked me out of four thousand dollars."

"Cut out that talk, Bugs," said Joe, though not unkindly. "I never did you out of anything and you know it."

"Yes, you did," snarled Hartley. "You got me fired from the Giants and did me out of my share of the World's Series money."

"You did yourself out of it, Bugs," said Joe, patiently. "I did my best to have Mac hold on to you. I never was anything but your friend. Do you remember how Jim and I put you to bed that night in St. Louis when you were drunk? We took you up the back way so Mac wouldn't get next. Take a fool's advice, Bugs—cut out the liquor and play the game."

"I don't want any advice from you!" sneered Hartley. "And take it from me, I'll get you yet."

"Beat it, Bugs!" Jim broke in sternly, "while the going's good. Roll your hoop now, or I'll help you."

Hartley hesitated a moment, but took Jim's advice and with a muttered threat went on his way.

"Mad as a March hare," murmured Jim, as they watched the retreating figure.

"Do a man a favor and he'll never forgive you," quoted Joe.

"Where did he get his grouch against you?" asked Hughson, curiously.

"Search me," replied Joe. "I think it dates from the time when he was batted out of the box and Mac sent me in to take his place. I won the game and Bugs has been sore at me ever since. He figured that I tried to show him up."

"I wonder how he got here?" mused Hughson. "The last time I saw him was in New York, and the money I lent him wasn't enough to bring him on."

"Perhaps Mac gave him transportation," suggested Jim.

"Not on your life," rejoined Hughson. "Mac's got a heart as big as a house, but he hates a traitor. You see, though, Joe, I was right in giving you the tip. Keep your eyes open, old man."

Joe was about to make a laughing reply, but just at that moment Larry and Denton came along with broad smiles of welcome on their faces, and the unpleasant episode was forgotten.

It was a jolly party that left Chicago the next morning for the trip around the world. The managers had chartered a special train which was made up wholly of Pullman sleepers, a dining car and a smoker.

It was travel *de luxe*, and the sumptuous train was to be their home for the full month that would elapse before they reached the coast.

"Rather soft, eh, for the poor baseball slaves," grinned Jim, as he stretched out his long legs luxuriously and gazed out of the window at the flying telegraph poles.

"This is the life," chanted Larry Barrett.

"Nothing to do till to-morrow," chimed in Denton. "And not much even then."

"Don't you boys go patting yourselves on the back," smiled Robbie, looking more like a cherub than ever, as he stopped beside their seats on his way along the aisle. "These games, remember,

are to be the real thing—there's going to be no sloppy or careless work just because you're not playing for the championship. They're going to be fights from the time the gong rings till the last man is out in the ninth inning."

If Robbie wanted action, he got it, and the first games had a snap and vim about them that augured well for the success of the trip. It is true that the players had not the stimulus that comes from a fight for the pennant, but other motives were not lacking.

There was one game which was a nip-and-tuck affair from start to finish. At the end of the fourth inning the score stood 1 to 1, and at the end of the sixth inning the score had advanced so that it stood 2 to 2.

"Say, we don't seem to be getting anywhere in this game," remarked Jim to Joe.

"Oh, well, we've got three more innings to play," was the answer.

In the seventh inning a most remarkable happening occurred. The All-Americans had three men on bases with nobody out. It looked as if they might score, but Joe took a sudden brace and pitched the next man at the bat out in one-two-three order.

The next man up knocked a pop fly, which Joe gathered in with ease.

"That's the way to do it, Joe!" sang out one of his companions. "Now go for the third man!"

The third fellow to the bat was a notable hitter, and nearly every one thought he would lace out at least a two-bagger, bringing in probably three runs. Instead, however, he knocked two fouls, and then sent a liner down to first base, which the baseman caught with ease; and that ended the chance for scoring.

"That's pulling it out of the fire!" cried McRae. The showing had been a good one, but what made the inning so remarkable was the fact that in one-two-three order the Giants got the bases filled exactly as they had been filled before. Then, more amazing still, the next man was pitched out, the second man knocked a pop fly to the pitcher, and it was Joe himself, coming to the bat, hit out a liner to third base, which was gathered in by the baseman, thus ending the Giants hope of scoring.

"Well, what do you know about that!" cried Brennan. "The inning on each side was exactly alike, with the exception that our third man out flied to first base, while your man flied to third."

But that ended the similarity both in batting and in scoring, for in the eighth inning the Giants added another run to their score, and held this lead to the end, even though the All-Americans fought desperately in the effort to tie the score.

"Oh, we had to win," said one of the Giants. "Too many of our folks looking at us to lose."

Many members of the teams had their wives or sisters with them, and defeat would have been galling under the eyes of the fair spectators.

Then, too, the Giants had their reputation to sustain as the Champions of the World. On the other hand, the All-Americans were anxious to show that even though they had not been in the World's Series, they ought to have been—and it was a keen delight to them to make their adversaries bite the dust.

Add to this the fact that there was a strong spirit of rivalry, good-natured but intense, between the scrappy McRae and the equally pugnacious Brennan, whose team had been nosed out by the Giants in that last desperate race down the stretch for the pennant, and it is no wonder that the crowds kept getting larger in every city they played, that the gate receipts made the managers chuckle, that the great city papers gave extended reports of the games and that the baseball trip around the world began to engross the attention of every lover of sports in the country.

Joe had never been in finer fettle. His fast balls went over the plate like bullets from a gatling gun. His fadeaway was working to a charm. He wound the ball near the batters' necks and

curved it out of reach of their bats with an ease and precision that explained to the applauding crowds why he was rated as the foremost pitcher of the day.

Jim, too, showed the effect of his season's work and Joe's helpful coaching, and between the two they accounted for three of the games won by the Giants before they reached Colorado. Two other games had gone to the All-Americans in slap-dash, ding-dong finishes, and it was an even thing as to which team would have the most games to its credit by the time they had reached the Pacific coast.

The tension was relaxed somewhat when they reached Denver, where, for the first time, instead of fighting it out between themselves a team picked from both nines was to play the local club.

"Here's where we get a rest," sighed Mylert, the burly catcher of the Giant team.

"It will be no trick at all to wipe up the earth with these bushers," laughed Larry Barrett.

"What we'll do to them will be a sin and a shame," agreed "Red" Curry, he of the flaming mop, who was accustomed to play the "sun field" at the Polo Grounds.

"It's almost a crime to show them up before their home crowd," chimed in Iredell, the Giant shortstop.

But if the local club was in for a beating, they showed no special trepidation as they came out on the field for practice. If the haughty major leaguers had expected their humble adversaries to roll over and play dead in advance of the game itself, they were certainly doomed to disappointment.

The home team went through its preliminary work in a snappy, finished way that brought frequent applause from the crowds that thronged the stand.

Before the game, Brennan, of the Chicagos, sauntered over to Thorpe, the local manager, who chanced to be an old acquaintance.

"Got a dandy crowd here to-day, Bill," he said. "We ought to give them a run for their money. Suppose I lend you one of our star pitchers, just to make things more interesting."

"Thank you, Roger," Thorpe replied, with a slow smile, "but I think we're going to make it interesting for you fellows, anyway."

"Quit your kidding," grinned Brennan, with a facetious poke in the ribs, and strolled back to the bench.

The gong rang, the field cleared, and the visiting team came to the bat. Larry, who had finished the season in a blaze of glory as the leading batsman of the National League came up to the plate, swinging three bats. He threw away two of them, tapped his heels for luck and grinned complacently at the Denver pitcher.

"Trot out the best you've got, kid," he called, "and if you can put it over the plate I'll murder it."

CHAPTER X

BY A HAIR

The pitcher, a dark-skinned, rangy fellow, wound up deliberately and shot the ball over. It split the plate clean. Larry swung at it—and missed it by two inches.

He looked mildly surprised, but set it down to the luck of the game and squared himself for a second attempt. This time he figured on a curve, but the boxman out-guessed him with a slow one that floated up to the plate as big as a balloon.

Larry almost broke his back in reaching for it, but again fanned the air. The visiting players, who had looked on rather languidly, straightened up on the bench.

“Some class to that pitcher,” ejaculated Willis.

“It isn’t often that a bush leaguer makes a monkey out of Larry,” replied Burkett.

“I’ve seen these minor league pitchers before,” grinned “Red” Curry. “They start off like a house afire, but about the fifth inning they begin to crumple up.”

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The third ball pitched was a wide outcurve at which Larry refused to bite. He fouled off the next two and then swung savagely at a wicked drop that got away from him.

“You’re out,” called the umpire as the ball thudded into the catcher’s mitt, and Larry came back a little sheepishly to his grinning comrades on the bench.

“What’s the matter, Larry?” queried Iredell, as he moved up to make room for him. “Off your feed to-day?”

“You’ll find out what the matter is when you face that bird,” snorted Larry. “He’s the real goods, and don’t you forget it.”

Denton, the second man in the batting order, took a ball and a strike, and then dribbled an easy roller to the box, which the swarthy pitcher had no trouble in getting to first on time.

Burkett, who followed, had better luck and sent a clean single between first and second. A shout went up from the Giant bench, which became a groan a moment later, when a snap throw by the pitcher nailed Burkett three feet off the bag.

The half inning had been smartly played and the Giants took the field with a slightly greater respect for their opponents.

Joe had pitched the day before, and it was up to Fraser to take his turn in the box. He walked out to his position with easy confidence. He was one of the best pitchers in either league, and it was he who had faced Joe in that last battle royal of the World’s Series and had gone down defeated, but not disgraced.

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But to-day from the start, it was evident that he was not himself. His speed was there and the curves, but control was lacking.

“Wild as a hawk,” muttered McRae, as the first Denver man trotted down to base on balls.

“Can’t seem to locate the plate at all,” grunted Robbie.

“He’ll pull himself together all right,” remarked Brennan, hopefully.

But the prophecy proved false, and the next two men up waited him out and were also rewarded with passes. The bases were full without a hit having been made, and the crowds in the stand were roaring like mad.

Brennan from the coaching lines at first waved to Fraser and the latter, drawing off his glove, walked disgustedly to the bench.

“What’s the matter with you to-day?” queried McRae. “You seemed to think the plate was up in the grandstand.”

“Couldn’t get the hang of it, somehow,” Fraser excused himself. “Just my off day, I guess.”

Hamilton succeeded him in the box, and from the way he started out it seemed as though he

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were going to redeem the poor work of his predecessor. He struck out the first man on three pitched balls, made the second send up a towering foul that Mylert caught after a long run, and the major leaguers began to breathe more freely.

“Guess he’ll pull out of the hole all right,” remarked Robbie.

But for the next batter, Hamilton, grown perhaps a trifle too confident, put one over in the groove, and the batter banged out a tremendous three-bagger to right field. Curry made a gallant try for it but could not quite reach.

Three runs came over the plate, while the panting batsman slid to third. The crowd in the stands went wild then, and Thorpe, the manager of the local team, grinned in a mocking way at Brennan.

“Is this interesting enough?” he drawled, referring to Brennan’s patronizing offer to lend him a player.

“Just a bit of luck,” growled Brennan. “A few inches more and Curry would have got his hooks on the ball. Beside, the game’s young yet. We’ve got the class and that’s bound to tell.”

Hamilton, whose blood was up, put on more steam, and the third player went out on an infield fly. But the damage had been done, and those three runs at the very start loomed up as a serious handicap.

“Three big juicy ones,” mourned McRae.

“And all of them on passes,” groaned Robbie. “Too bad we didn’t put Hamilton in right at the start.”

Neither team scored in the second inning, and the third also passed without result.

Hamilton was mowing down the opposing batters with ease and grace. But the swarthy flinger for the local club was not a bit behind him. The heavy sluggers of the visiting teams seemed as helpless before him as so many school-boys.

“That fellow won’t be in the minors long,” commented Brennan. “I wonder some of my scouts haven’t gone after him before this. Who is he, anyway?”

“I’ll tell you who he is,” broke in Robbie, suddenly. “I knew I’d seen him before somewhere, and I’ve been puzzling all this time to place him. Now I’ve tumbled. It’s Alvarez, the crack pitcher of Cuba.”

“Do you mean the fellow that stood the Athletics on their heads when they made that winter trip to Cuba a couple of years ago?” asked McRae.

“The same one,” affirmed Robbie. “I happened to be there at one of the games, and he showed them up—hundred thousand dollar infield and all. Connie was fairly dancing as he saw his pets slaughtered. I tell you, that fellow’s a wonder—he’d have been in a major league long ago if it hadn’t been for his color. He may be only a Cuban, and he says he is, but he’s so dark-skinned that there’d be some prejudice against him and that’s barred him out.”

“That’s what made Thorpe so confident,” growled Brennan. “He’s worked in a ‘ringer’ on us. We ought to make a kick.”

“That would put us in a nice light, wouldn’t it?” replied McRae, stormily. “We’d like to see it in the papers, that the major leagues played the baby act because they couldn’t bat a bush pitcher. Not on your life! Thorpe would be tickled to death to have us make a squeal. We’ll simply have to lick him.”

But if the promised licking was yet to come, it was not in evidence in the next two innings. Alvarez seemed as fresh as at the beginning, and his arm worked with the force and precision of a piston rod.

“What’s the matter with you fellows, anyway?” raged McRae, when the end of the fifth inning

saw the score remain unchanged. "You ought to be in the old ladies' home. It's a joke to call you ball players."

"It must be this Denver air," ventured Willis. "It's so high up here that a fellow finds it hard to breathe. These Denver boobs are used to it and we're not."

"Air! air!" snapped McRae. "I notice you've got plenty of hot air. Go in and play the game, you bunch of false alarms."

Whether it was owing to his rasping tongue or their own growing resentment at the impudence of the minor leaguers, the All-Americans broke the ice in the sixth.

Burkett lined out a beauty between left and center that was good for two bases. Willis followed with a towering sky scraper to right, which, although it was caught after a long run, enabled Burkett to get to third before the ball was returned. Then Becker who had perished twice before on feeble taps to the infield, whaled out a home run to the intense jubilation of his mates.

"We've got his number!" yelled Larry, doing a jig on the coaching lines.

"He's going up," sang out "Red" Curry.

"I knew he couldn't last," taunted Iredell, as he threw his cap in the air.

But Alvarez was not through, by any means. Undaunted by that tremendous home run which might have taken the heart out of any pitcher, he braced himself, and the next two men went out on fouls.

"I thought we had them on the run that time," observed McRae, "but he's got the old comeback right with him."

"Never mind," exulted Robbie. "We're beginning to find him now, and we've cut down that big lead of theirs to one run. The boys will get after him the next inning."

But even the lucky seventh passed without bringing any luck to the visitors, and although the major leaguers got two men on bases in the eighth, the inning ended with the score still three to two in favor of the local club.

"Looks as though we were up against it," said Jim, anxiously, as the Giants went to bat for the last time.

"It sure does," responded Joe. "I'll hate to look at the papers to-morrow morning. The whole country will have the laugh on us."

"The boys will want to keep away from McRae if they lose," said Jim. "He'll be as peeved as a bear with a sore head for the next three days or so."

"Now, Larry, show them where you live," sang out Curry, as the head of the Giant batting order strode to the plate.

"Kill it," entreated Willis. "Hit it on the seam."

"Send it a mile," exhorted Becker.

It was not a mile that Larry sent it, but it looked so to the left and center fielders who chased it as it went on a line between the two. A cleaner home run had probably never been knocked out on the Denver grounds.

Larry came galloping in to be mauled and pounded by his exulting mates, while McRae brought down his hand on Robbie's knee with a force that made that worthy wince.

"That ties it up," he cried. "Now, boys, for a whirlwind finish!"

CHAPTER XI

A CLOSE CALL

The crowds in the stand, which had been uproarious a few moments before, were quiet now. The lead which the local club had held throughout the game had vanished; the visitors had played an uphill game worthy of their reputation, and now they had at least an even chance.

Denton came to the bat, eager to emulate Larry's feat, but Alvarez was unsteady now—that last home run had taken something out of him. He found it hard to locate the plate, and Denton trotted down to first on balls.

As no man was out and only one run was needed to gain the lead, a sacrifice was the proper play, and Burkett laid down a neat bunt in front of the plate that carried Denton to second, although the batter died at first.

Alvarez purposely passed Willis on the chance of the next batter hitting into a double play, which would have retired the side. Becker made a mighty effort to bring his comrades in, but hit under the ball, and it went high in the air and was caught by Alvarez as it came down, without the pitcher moving from his tracks.

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With two out, there was no need of a double play and the infielders, who had been playing close in, resumed their usual positions. Iredell, the next man up caught the ball square on the end of his bat and sent it whistling between center and third. The shortstop leaped up and knocked the ball down, but it was going too fast for him to hold.

Denton had left second at the crack of the bat, and by the time the infielder regained the ball had rounded third and was tearing like a racehorse toward the plate. There was little time to get set and the hurried throw home went over the catcher's head. Denton slid feet first over the plate, scoring the run that put his team in the lead.

Willis tried to make it good measure by coming close behind him, but by this time the catcher had recovered the ball and shot it back to Alvarez who was guarding the plate. He nipped Willis by three feet and the side was out.

But that one run in the lead looked as big as a house at that stage in the game.

"All you've got to do now, Hamilton, old man, is to hold them down in their half," said Brennan.

"Cinch," grinned Hamilton. "I'll have them eating out of my hand."

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But the uncertainty that makes the national game the most fascinating one in the world was demonstrated when the Denver team came in to do-or-die in their half of the ninth.

Hamilton fed the first batter a snaky curve, which he lashed at savagely but vainly. The next was a slow one and resulted in a chop to the infield which Larry would have ordinarily gobbled up without trouble. But the ball took an ugly bound just as he was all set for it and went over his head toward right. Before Curry could get the ball the batter had reached second and the stands were once more in an uproar.

The uproar increased when Hamilton, somewhat shaken by the incident, gave the next batter a base on balls, and the broad smiles which had suffused the faces of Robbie and McRae began to fade.

"Is Hamilton going up, do you think?" asked the Giant manager, anxiously.

“Looks something like it,” replied Robbie, “but he’ll probably brace. You see Denton’s talking to him now, to give him a chance to rest up a little.”

The third baseman had strolled over to Hamilton on pretense of discussing some point of play, but the crowd saw through the subterfuge, and shouts of protest went up:

“Hire a hall!”

“Write him a letter!”

“Play ball!”

Not a bit flustered by the shouts, Denton took his time, and after encouraging his team mate sauntered slowly back to his position.

But Hamilton’s good right arm had lost its cunning. His first ball was wild, and the batter, seeing this, waited him out and was given a pass. His comrades moved up and the bags were full, with none out and the heaviest sluggers of the team coming to the bat.

McRae and Brennan had been holding an earnest conference, and now on a signal from them Hamilton came in from the box.

“It’s no use,” said McRae to Brennan, while the crowd howled in derision. “We’ll have to play our trump and put Matson in to hold them down.”

“But he hasn’t warmed up,” said Brennan dubiously.

“That makes no difference,” replied McRae. “I’d rather put him in cold than anyone else warm.”

“All right; do as you please,” responded the other manager.

McRae called over to where Joe was sitting. The crack pitcher had been watching the progress of the game with keen interest, although making comparatively few comments. As McRae approached Joe, the crowd howled louder than ever at Hamilton.

“Why don’t you learn how to pitch?”

“Say, let us send one of the high-school boys into the box for you!”

“Too bad, old man, but I guess we’ve got your goat all right!”

“I guess you know what I want, Joe,” cried McRae. “I want you to get in the box for us.”

“All right, Mac,” was the young pitcher’s answer.

“And, Joe,” went on the other earnestly, “try to think for the next five minutes that you’re pitching for the pennant.”

“I’ll do anything you say,” was Joe’s reply; and then he drew on his glove and walked out upon the ball field.

“Hello! what do you know about that?”

“Matson is going to pitch for them!”

“I guess they’ve enough of that other dub!”

“Oh, Hamilton isn’t a dub, by any means,” replied one of the spectators sharply. “He’s a good player, but a pitcher can’t always be at his best.”

“But just you wait and see how we do up Matson!” cried a local sympathizer.

At a signal the next man to bat stepped away from the plate, and Joe had the privilege of warming up by sending three hot ones to the catcher.

“He’ll put ’em over all right enough!” cried one of his friends.

“That’s what he will!” returned another.

“Not much! He’ll be snowed under!”

“This is our winning day!”

So the cries continued until the umpire held up his hand for silence.

“He’s going to make an announcement!” cried a number of the spectators.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” roared the umpire, removing his cap, “Matson now pitching for the All-Americans.”

A howl went up from the stands, made up in about equal parts of derision and applause. Derision because the All-American team must, they figured, be scared to death when they had to send their greatest player into the game. Whether they won or lost it was a great compliment to the Denver team. The applause came from the genuine sportsmen who knew the famous pitcher by reputation and welcomed the chance to see him in action.

The three men on the bases were dancing about like dervishes in the hope of rattling the newcomer. They did not know Joe.

Never cooler than when the strain was greatest and the need most urgent, Joe bent down to pick up the ball. As he did so, he touched it, apparently accidentally, against his right heel.

It was a signal meant for Denton, the third baseman, who was watching him like a hawk.

Joe took up his position in the box, took a grip on the ball, but instead of delivering it to the batter turned suddenly on his left heel, as though to snap it down to first. The Denver player at that bag, who had taken a lead of several feet, made a frantic slide back to safety.

But the ball never got to first, for Joe had swung himself all the way round and shot the ball like a bullet to Denton at third. The local player at third had been watching eagerly the outcome of the supposed throw to first and was caught completely unawares.

Down came Denton’s hand, clapping the ball on his back, while the victim stood dazed as though in a trance.

It was the prettiest kind of “inside work,” and even the home crowd went into convulsions of laughter as the trapped player came sheepishly in from third to the bench.

McRae was beaming, and Robbie’s rubicund face became several degrees redder under the strain of his emotion.

“Say, is that boy class, John?” Robbie gurgled, as soon as he could speak.

“Never saw a niftier thing on the ball field,” responded McRae warmly. “When that boy thinks, he runs rings around lightning.”

“And he’s thinking all the time,” chimed in Jim.

But the peril was not yet over. The man at the most dangerous corner had been disposed of, yet there was still a man on first and another on second. A safe hit would tie the game at least, and possibly win it.

Joe wound up deliberately and shot a high fast one over the plate. It came so swiftly that the batter did not offer at it, and looked aggrieved when the umpire called it a strike.

The next was a crafty outcurve which went as a ball. The batsman fouled off the next.

With two strikes on and only one ball called, Joe was on “easy street” and could afford to “waste a few.” Twice in succession he tempted the batsman with balls that were wide of the plate, but the batter was wary and refused them.

Now the count was “two and three,” and the crowd broke into a roar.

“Good eye, old man!” they shouted to the batter.

“You’ve got him in a hole!”

“It only takes one to do it!”

“He’s got to put it over!”

With all the force of his sinewy arm, Joe “put it over.”

The batsman made a wicked drive at it and sent it hurtling to the box about two feet over Joe’s head.

Joe saw it coming, leaped into the air and speared it with his gloved hand. The men on bases had started to run, thinking it a sure hit. Joe wheeled and sent the ball down to Burkett at first.

“Look at that!”

“Some speed, eh?”

“I should say so.”

“Matson has got them going!”

The man who had left the bag strove desperately to get back, but he was too late. That rattling double play had ended the game with the All-American team a victor by a score of four to three.

Joe’s fingers tingled as he pulled off the glove, for that terrific drive had stung. The crowd had been stunned for a moment by the suddenness with which the game and their hopes of victory had gone glimmering. But it had been a remarkable play and the first silence was followed by a round of sportsmanlike applause—though of course it was nothing to what would have greeted the victory of the home team.

“Fine work, Matson!”

“Best I ever saw!”

“You’re the boy to do it.”

“Best pitcher in the world!”

Joe found himself the center of a joyous crowd when he reached his own bench. All were jubilant that they had escaped the humiliation of being whipped by a minor league team.

“You’ve brought home the bacon, Joe!” chortled McRae.

“We all did,” replied Joe. “But we almost dropped it on the way!” he added, with a grin.

CHAPTER XII

A DASTARDLY ATTACK

The tourists’ train was scheduled to leave Denver at eleven-thirty that night, so that there was ample time after the game for a leisurely meal and a few hours for recreation for any of the party that felt so inclined.

Some went to the theater, others played cards, while others sat about the lobby of the leading hotel and discussed the exciting events of the afternoon’s game.

As for Joe and Jim, their recreation took the form of long letters to two charming young ladies whose address, by coincidence, happened to be Riverside. Both seemed to have much to write about, for it was nearly ten o'clock before the bulky letters were ready for mailing.

"Give them to me and I'll take them down to the hotel lobby and mail them," said Jim, as they rose from the writing table.

"I don't know," replied Joe, as he looked at his watch. "Perhaps the last collection for the outgoing eastbound mail has already been made. What do you say to going down to the post-office itself and dropping them in there? Then they'll be sure to go."

"All right," Jim acquiesced. "It's a dandy night anyway for a walk and I'd like to stretch my legs a little. Come along."

They went out into the brilliantly lighted streets, which at that hour were still full of people, and turned toward the post-office which was about half a mile distant.

As they were passing a corner, Jim suddenly clutched Joe's arm.

"Did you see that fellow who went into that saloon just now?" he asked, indicating a rather pretentious café.

"No," said Joe, dryly. "But it isn't such an unusual thing that I'd pay a nickel to see it."

"Quit your fooling," said Jim. "If that fellow wasn't Bugs Hartley, then my eyes are going back on me."

"You're dreaming," Joe retorted. "What in the world would Bugs be doing in Denver?"

"Panhandling, maybe," returned Jim. "Drinking, certainly. But it isn't what he's doing that interests me. It's the fact that he's here."

"Let's take a look," suggested Joe, impressed by his friend's earnestness.

They went up to the swinging door, pushed it open and looked in. There were perhaps a dozen men in the place, but Hartley was not among them.

"Barking up the wrong tree, Jim," chaffed Joe.

"Maybe," agreed Jim a little perplexed, "but if it wasn't Bugs it was his double."

They reached the post-office and after mailing their letters turned back towards the hotel.

"It's taken us a little longer than I thought," remarked Jim, looking at his watch. "We won't have any more than time to get our traps together and get down to the train."

"This looks like a short cut," said Joe, indicating a side street which though rather dark and deserted cut into the main thoroughfare, as they could see by the bright lights at the further end. "We'll save something by going this way."

They had gone perhaps a couple of blocks when they reached a part of the street which had no dwelling houses on it. On one side was a factory, dark and forbidding, and on the side where the young men were walking was a high board fence enclosing a coal yard.

"Wait a minute, Jim," said Joe. "It feels as though my shoe lace had come untied."

He stooped down to fasten the lace, and just as he did so, a jagged piece of rock came whizzing past where his head had been a second before and crashed against the fence.

Joe straightened up with a jerk.

"Who threw that?" he exclaimed.

Jim's face was white at the peril his friend had so narrowly escaped.

"Somebody who knew how to throw," he cried, "and I can make a guess at who it was. There he is now!" he shouted, as he caught sight of a dim figure slinking away in the darkness on the

further side of the factory.

They darted across the street in pursuit, but when they turned the corner there was no one to be seen. Several alleys branched off from the street, up any one of which the fugitive might have made his escape. Although they tried them one after the other they could find no trace of the rascal.

Baffled and chagrined, they made their way back to the scene of the attack. Joe picked up the piece of rock and weighed it in his hand.

“About half a pound,” he judged. “And look at those rough edges! It would have been all up with me, if it had landed.”

“Do you notice that that’s about the weight of a baseball?” asked Jim significantly. “And it went for your head as straight as a bullet. It would have caught you square if you hadn’t stooped just as you did. You can thank your lucky stars that your shoelace came untied. That fellow knew just how to throw, as I said before.”

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“You don’t mean,” replied Joe, “that Bugs——”

“Just that,” affirmed Jim grimly. “Now maybe you’ll believe me when I say that I saw him to-night. That skunk thought that I had seen him, and slipped into the saloon to get out of sight. Probably he went out through a rear door and has been following us ever since.”

“But why——” began Joe.

“Why?” repeated Jim. “Why does a crazy man do crazy things? Just because he is crazy. He doesn’t have to have a reason. If he thinks you’ve injured him he’s just as bitter as though you really had. Hughson’s tip was a good one, Joe. The fellow’s deadly dangerous. It’s only luck that he isn’t a murderer this minute.”

“It’s good for him I didn’t lay my hands on him,” replied Joe. “I wouldn’t have hit him, because I don’t think he’s responsible for what he does. But I’d have had him put where he couldn’t do any more mischief for a while.”

“It gives me the creeps to think of what a close call that was,” said Jim, as they walked along.

“Don’t say anything about it to the boys,” cautioned Joe. “The thing would get out, and before we knew it the folks at home would have heard of it. And they wouldn’t have an easy minute for all the rest of the trip.”

They made quick time to the hotel, and as most of their luggage had remained on the train, they had only to gather a few things together in a small hand bag and start out for the station.

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Their special train had been standing on a side track a few hundred yards east of the main platform. They were picking their way toward it across a network of tracks, when, just as they rounded the corner of a freight car, they came face to face with Hartley.

They almost dropped their handbags at the unexpectedness of the meeting. But if they were startled, Bugs was frightened and turned on his heel to run. In an instant Joe had him by the collar in a grip of iron, while Jim stood on the alert to stop him should he break away.

“Let me go!” cried Hartley in stifled tones, for Joe’s grip was almost choking him.

“Not until you tell me why you tried to murder me to-night,” said Joe, grimly.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” snarled Bugs, trying to wrench himself loose from Joe’s hold on his collar.

“You know well enough,” replied his captor. “Own up.”

“You might as well, Bugs,” put in Jim. “We’ve got the goods on you.”

“You fellows are crazy,” replied Bugs. “I’ve never laid eyes on you since I saw you in Chicago. And you can’t prove that I did either.”

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“You’re the only enemy I have in the world,” declared Joe. “And the man who threw that rock at me to-night was a practiced thrower. Besides, you’re all in a sweat—that’s from running away when we chased you.”

“Swell proof that is,” sneered Hartley. “Tell that to a judge and see what good it will do you.”

The point was well taken, and Joe and Jim knew in their hearts that they had no legal proof, although they were morally certain Bugs was guilty. Besides, they had no time to have him arrested, for their train was scheduled to start in ten minutes.

“Now listen, Bugs,” said Joe, at the same time shaking him so that his teeth rattled. “I know perfectly well that you’re lying, and I’m giving you warning for the last time. You’ve had it in for me from the time you doped my coffee and nearly put me out of the game altogether. Ever since that you’ve bothered me, and to-night you’ve tried to kill me. I tell you straight, I’ve had enough of it. If I didn’t think that your brain was twisted, I’d thrash you now within an inch of your life. But I’m telling you now, and you let it sink in, that the next time you try to do me, I’m going to put you where the dogs won’t bite you.”

He dug his knuckles into Bugs’ neck and gave him a fling that sent him several yards away. The fellow kept his feet with an effort, and then with a muttered threat slunk away into the darkness.

They watched him for a minute, and then picked up their handbags and started toward the train.

“Hope that’s the last we see of him,” remarked Joe.

“So do I,” Jim replied. “But we felt that way before and he’s turned up just the same. I won’t feel easy till I know that he’s behind the bars.”

“He’s usually in front of the bars,” joked Joe. “But I’m glad anyway that we had a chance to throw a scare into him. He knows now that we’ll be on our guard and perhaps even he will have sense enough to let us alone.”

Jim consulted his watch.

“Great Scott!” he ejaculated.

“What’s the matter, Jim?”

“We haven’t any time to spare if we want to catch that train.”

“All right, let’s run for it.”

As best they could, they began sprinting in the direction of the railroad station, but their handbags were somewhat heavy, and this impeded their progress. Then, turning a corner, they suddenly found themselves confronted by a long sewer trench, lit up here and there by red lanterns.

“We’ve got to get over that trench somehow!” cried Joe.

“Can you jump it?” questioned Jim anxiously.

“I’m going to try,” returned the crack pitcher.

He threw his handbag to the other side of the sewer trench, and then, backing up a few steps, ran forward and took the leap in good shape. His chum followed him, but Jim might have slipped back into the sewer trench had not Joe been watching, and grabbed him by one hand.

“Gosh, that was a close shave!” panted Jim, when he felt himself safe.

“Don’t waste time thinking about it. We have still a couple of blocks to go,” Joe returned, and set off once more on the run, with Jim at his heels.

Soon they rounded another corner, and came in sight of the railroad station. There stood their train, and the conductor was signaling to start.

“Wait! Wait!” yelled Joe. But in the general confusion around the railroad station nobody

seemed to notice him.

“We’ve got to make that train—we’ve just got to!” cried Joe, and dashed forward faster than ever, with Jim beside him.

They scrambled up the steps just as a warning whistle sounded; and a few moments later the train drew out on its climb over the Rockies.

CHAPTER XIII

DANGER SIGNALS

The travelers were now in the most picturesque part of their journey, and the magnificent views that spread before them as they topped the ridges of the continent and dropped down on the other side into the land of flowers and eternal summer were a source of unending interest and pleasure.

“I’ll tell you what, Joe,” remarked Jim: “I never had an idea that this section of our country was so truly grand.”

“It certainly is magnificent scenery,” was Joe’s answer. “Just look at those mountain tops, will you? Some height there, believe me!”

“Yes. And just see the depth of some of those canyons, will you? Say! if a fellow ever fell over into one of those, he’d never know what happened to him.”

“I’ve been watching this particular bit of scenery for some time,” remarked Joe. “It somehow had a familiar look to it, and now I know why.”

“And why is it, Joe?”

“I’ll tell you. Some time ago I saw a moving picture with the scene laid in the Rocky Mountains, and, unless I’m greatly mistaken, some of the scenes were taken right in this locality.”

“Was that a photo-play called ‘The Girl From Mountain Pass?’” questioned another player who was present.

“It was.”

“Then you’re right, Matson; because I was speaking about that film to the conductor of this train, and he said that some of the pictures were taken right around here. His train was used in one of the scenes.”

This matter was talked over for several minutes, but then the conversation changed; and, presently, the chums went off to talk about other matters.

Joe and Jim were lounging in the rear of the observation car, talking over the stirring events of the night before, when McRae happened along and dropped into a seat beside them.

“Some game that was yesterday, boys,” he remarked genially. “Those Denver fellows were curly bears, but we trimmed them just the same.”

“Yes,” grinned Jim. “But we weren’t comfortable while we were doing it.”

“They sure did worry us,” acquiesced Joe. “They made us know at least that we’d been in a fight.”

“It was that ninth-inning work of yours that pulled us through, Joe,” declared McRae. “That stunt you pulled of whirling on your heel and shooting it over to third was a pretty bit of inside stuff. And there wasn’t anything slow either about spearing that ball that Thompson hit.”

“I’d have let the fielders take care of that,” admitted Joe, “if there hadn’t been so much at stake. My hand stung for an hour afterward. But I’d have hated to let those fellows crow over us.”

“That fellow, Alvarez, that Thorpe rang in on us was a sure-enough pitcher,” observed McRae. “I’d sign him up in a minute if it weren’t for that dark skin of his. But it wouldn’t work. We had a second baseman like that one time, and although he was a rattling good player it nearly broke up the team. It’s too bad that color should stand in the way of a man’s advancement, but it can’t be helped.

“By the way,” he continued, drawing a paper from his pocket, “here’s something that may interest you. It’s the official record of the National League of the pitching averages for this season. It made me feel good when I read it and you’ll see the reason why.”

He handed them the paper, which they opened eagerly to the sporting page.

Joe’s heart felt a thrill of satisfaction as he saw that his name stood at the head of the list, and Jim, too, was elated, as he noted that although this was his first year in a major league his name was among the first fifteen—a rare distinction for a “rookie.”

“Some class to the Giants, eh?” grinned McRae. “There’s sixty names in that list and no single team has as many in the first twelve as we have. That average of yours, Joe, of 1.53 earned runs per game is a hummer. Hughson is close on your heels with 1.56. The Rube, you see, is eighth in the list with 1.95, and Jim’s eleventh with 2.09. I tell you, boys, that’s class, and to cap it all we won the pennant.”

“Two pennants, you mean,” corrected Jim with a smile.

“And neither one to be sneezed at,” grinned Joe.

“We sure had a great season,” observed McRae. “If we start next year with the same team we ought to go through the league like a prairie fire. I have every reason to think that Hughson will be in tip-top shape when the season opens, and if he is, there won’t be any pitching staff that can hold a candle to ours. But——”

He paused uncertainly and looked at Joe as though he wanted to speak to him privately. Jim saw the look and took the hint.

“I guess I’ll go into the smoker and see what the rest of the fellows are doing, if you’ll excuse me,” he said, rising and strolling back.

McRae greeted his departure with evident satisfaction.

“I’m glad to have a chance to talk to you alone, Joe,” he said. “You’re my right bower and I can talk to you more freely than to anyone else, except Hughson. I don’t mind telling you that this new league is worrying me a lot.”

“What is it?” asked Joe with quick interest. “Anything happened lately?”

“Plenty,” replied McRae. “I’ve kidded myself with the idea that the thing was going to peter out of its own accord. Every few seasons something of the kind crops up, but it usually comes to nothing. Usually the men who put up the coin get scared when they see what a big proposition it is they’ve tackled and back out. Sometimes, too, they go about it in such a blundering way that it’s bound to fail from the start.

“But this time it’s different. They’ve got barrels of money behind them, and they’re spending it like water. There’s one of them named Fleming, whose father is a millionaire many times over,

and he seems to have money to burn. They certainly are making big offers to star players all over the country. You saw the way they came at you, and they're doing the same in other places. There isn't a paper that I pick up that doesn't give the name of some big player that they're tampering with. The last one I saw was Altman of the Chicago White Sox. I guess though, that is a wrong steer, for Altman has come out flat for his old team and denies any intention of jumping his contract."

"Bully for Nick!" exclaimed Joe. "I guess I helped to queer that deal. I saw Westland talking to him, and he seemed to have him going, but I put a few things straight to Nick and he seems to have come to his senses before it's too late."

"There's Munsey of the Cincinnati, he's left his reservation," continued McRae. "He's the crack shortstop of the country. They've got a line out, too, for Wilson of the Bostons, and you know they don't make any better outfielders than he is. In fact, they're biting into the teams everywhere, and none of them know where they're at. If I'd known they were going at it so seriously, and hadn't got so far in my preparations for this trip, I think I wouldn't have gone on this world's tour. It looks to me as though the major leagues would be backed up against the wall and fighting for their lives before this winter's over."

"It may not be as bad as you think," said Joe consolingly. "Even if they get a lot of the stars, there will be a great many left. And, besides, they may have trouble in finding suitable grounds to play on."

"But they will," declared McRae. "They've got the refusal of first-class locations in every big city of the major league. I tell you, there's brains behind this new league and that's what's worrying me. I don't know whether it's Fleming——"

"No," interrupted Joe, smiling contemptuously, as he thought of the dissipated young fellow whom he had thrashed so soundly. "It isn't Fleming. He's got money enough, but there's a vacuum where his brains ought to be."

"Then it's his partners," deduced McRae. "And their brains with his money make a strong combination."

"Well," comforted Joe, "there's one good thing about this trip, anyway. You've got the Giants out of reach of their schemes."

McRae looked around to see if anyone were within earshot, and then leaned over toward Joe.

"Don't fool yourself," he said earnestly. "I'm afraid right now there are traitors in the camp!"

CHAPTER XIV

A WEIRD GAME

Baseball Joe was startled and showed it plainly.

"What do you mean?" he asked, as his mind ran over the names of his team-mates.

"Just what I say," replied McRae. "I tell you, Joe, somebody's getting in his fine work with our boys and I know it."

"Where's your proof?" asked Joe. "I hate to think that any of our fellows would welch on their

contracts.”

“So do I,” returned McRae. “We’ve been like one big family, and I’ve always tried to treat the boys right. I’ve got a rough tongue, as everybody knows, and in a hot game I’ve called them down many a time when they’ve made bonehead plays. But at the same time I’ve tried to be just, and I’ve never given any of them the worst end of the deal. They’ve been paid good money, and I’ve carried them along sometimes when other managers would have let them go.”

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“You’ve been white all right,” assented Joe warmly. He recalled an occasion when a miff by a luckless center-fielder had lost a World Series and fifty thousand dollars for the team, and yet McRae had “stood the gaff” and never said a word, because he knew the man was trying to do his best.

“I’m telling this to you, Joe,” went on McRae, “because I want you to help me out. You’ve proved yourself true blue when you were put to the test. I know you’ll do all you can to hold the boys in the traces. They all like you and feel that they owe you a lot because it was your pitching that pulled us through the World’s Series. Besides, they’ll be more impressed by what you say than by the talk I’d give them. They figure that I’m the manager and am only looking after my own interests, and for that reason what I say has less effect.”

“I’ll stand by you, Mac,” returned Joe, “and help you in any way I can. Who are the boys that you think are trying to break loose?”

“There are three of them,” replied McRae. “Iredell, Curry and Burkett, and all three of them are stars, as you know as well as I do.”

“They’re cracks, every one of them,” agreed Joe. “And they’re among the last men that I’d suspect of doing anything of the kind. What makes you think they’ve been approached?”

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“A lot of things,” replied McRae. “In the first place, I have noticed that they are stiff and offish in their manner when I speak to them. Then, too, I’ve come across them several times lately with their heads together, and when they saw me coming they’d break apart and start talking of something else, as if I had interrupted them. Beside that, all three have struck me lately for a raise in salary next season.”

“That’s nothing new for ball players,” said Joe, with a smile.

“No,” admitted McRae, an answering smile relieving the gravity of his face for the moment. “And I stand ready of my own accord to give the boys a substantial increase on last year’s pay because of their winning the pennant. But what these three asked for was beyond all reason, and made me think there was a nigger in the woodpile. They either had had a big offer from somebody else and were using that as a club to hold me up with, or else they were just trying to give themselves a better excuse for jumping.”

“How long do their contracts have to run?” asked Joe.

“Iredell has one year more and Curry and Burkett are signed up for two years yet,” replied the Giants’ manager. “Of course I could try to hold them to their contracts, but you know as well as I do that baseball contracts are more a matter of honesty than of legal obligation. If a man is straight, he’ll keep it, if he’s crooked, he’ll break it. And you know what a hole it would leave in the Giant team if those three men went over the fence. There isn’t a heavier slugger in the team than Burkett, except Larry. His batting average this year was .332, and as a fielding first baseman he’s the class of the league.”

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“You’re right there,” acquiesced Joe, as he recalled the ease and precision with which Burkett took them on either side and dug them out of the dirt. “He’s saved a game for me many and many a time.”

“As for Iredell,” went on McRae, “he hasn’t his equal in playing short and in covering second as the pivot for a double play. And nobody has played the infield as Curry does since I’ve been manager of the team.”

"It would certainly break the Giants all up to lose the three of them," agreed Joe. "But we haven't lost them yet. Remember that the game isn't over till the last man is out in the ninth inning."

"I know that. You've helped me win two fights this year, Joe, one for the championship of the league and the other for the championship of the world. Now I'm counting on you to help me win a third, perhaps the hardest of them all."

"Put 'er there, Mac," said Joe, extending his hand. "Shake—I'm with you till the cows come home."

"Of course, they'll be willing to put up big money, Joe. You know that already."

"It doesn't make a particle of difference, Mac, how much money they put up," returned the crack pitcher warmly. "There isn't enough cash in the U. S. treasury to tempt me."

"I know that, Joe. And I only wish that I could be as certain of the rest of the players."

"Well, of course, I can't speak for the others. But you can be sure that I'll use my influence on the right side every time. Some of them may weaken and break away, but I doubt very much if they'll be any of your main-stays. If I were you, Mac, I wouldn't let this worry me too much."

"Yes, I know it's getting on my nerves, Joe, because, you see, it means so much to me. But having you on my side has braced me up a good deal," went on the manager.

They shook hands warmly, and McRae, evidently encouraged and braced by the talk with his star pitcher, made his way back to his own immediate party.

The teams were slated to play in Salt Lake City and in Ogden. In both places they "cleaned up" easily, and it was not until a few days later when they reached the slope that they encountered opposition that made them exert themselves to win.

At Bakersfield, with Jim in the box, the game went to eleven innings before it was finally placed to the credit of the Giants by a score of three to two. The 'Frisco team also put up a stiff fight for eight innings, but were overwhelmed by a storm of hits which rained from Giant bats in the ninth.

The game with Oakland was the last on the schedule before the teams left for the Orient, and an enormous crowd was in attendance.

Joe was in the box for the All-American team. He was in fine form, and held the home team down easily until the fifth inning, but the Oaklands also, undaunted by the reputation of their adversaries, and under the guidance of a manager who had formerly been a famous first baseman of the Chicago team, were also out to win if possible, and with first-class pitching and supported by errorless fielding, they held their redoubtable opponents on even terms.

At the end of the fifth, neither team had scored, although the Giants had threatened to do so on two separate occasions. A singular condition developed in the sixth. It was the Giants' turn at bat and Curry had reached first on a clean single to right. A neat sacrifice by Joe advanced him to second. A minute later he stole third, sliding feet first into the bag and narrowly escaping the ball in the third baseman's hand.

With only one out and Larry coming to the bat, the prospects for a run were bright.

Larry let the first go by, but swung at the second, which was coming straight to the plate. His savage lunge caught the ball on the underside, and it went soaring through the air to a tremendous height.

Both the second and third baseman started for the ball. It looked as though neither would be able to reach it, and Curry ran half-way down the line between third and home, awaiting the result. If the ball were caught he figured that he would easily have time to get back to third. If it were dropped, he could make home and score.

The third baseman got under the descending ball, but it was coming from such a height that it was difficult to judge. It slipped through his fingers, but instead of falling to the ground, went plump into the pocket of his baseball shirt.

He tugged desperately to get it out, at the same time running toward Curry, who danced about on the line between third and home in an agony of indecision. Was the ball caught or not? If it were, he would have to return to third. If it were not, he must make a break for home.

The teams were all shouting now, while the crowd went into convulsions. The third baseman reached Curry and grabbed him with one hand, while with the other he frantically tried to get the ball from his pocket and clap it on him. But the ball stuck, and in the mixup both players fell to the ground and rolled over and over.

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Larry, in the meanwhile, was tearing round the bases, but he himself wasn't sure whether he was really out or whether he ought to strike for home. He reached third and pulled up there, still in the throes of doubt. He could have easily gone on past the struggling combatants, but in that case, if Curry were finally declared not out, Larry would also be out for having passed him and got home first.

On the other hand, if Curry should finally escape and get back to third, one of them would still be out because he was occupying the bag to which his comrade was entitled. He did not really know whether he was running for exercise or to score a run.

It was the funniest mixup that even the veteran players had ever seen on a ball field, and as for the crowd they were wild with joy.

The third baseman, finding that Curry was about to get away from him and unable to get the ball out of his pocket, finally threw his arms about him and hugged him close in the wild hope that some part of the protruding ball would touch his prisoner's person and thus put him out.

The sight of those burly gladiators, locked in a fond embrace, threatened the sanity of the onlookers, but the farce was ended when Curry finally wriggled out from the anaconda grasp of his opponent and took a chance for the plate.

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Then there was a hot debate, as the umpire, himself laughing until the tears ran down his face, tried to solve the situation. Had Curry been touched by the ball, or had he not? Had the ball been caught or not?

Players on both sides tugged at him as they debated the matter *pro* and *con*.

"I don't know what that umpire's name is," grinned Jim to Joe, who was weak with laughter, "but I know what it ought to be."

"What?" asked Joe.

"Solomon," chuckled Jim.

CHAPTER XV

THE BEWILDERED UMPIRE

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But whatever the umpire's name might have been, he only resembled Solomon in one respect. He was inclined to compromise and cut the play in two, giving one part to the major leaguers

and the other to the Oakland team.

He was not to blame for being bewildered, for the baseball magnates who had framed the rules had never contemplated the special case of a player catching the ball in his pocket.

Between the opposing claims he pulled out his book and scanned it carefully but with no result.

“It’s easy enough,” rasped McRae. “He tried to catch a ball and muffed it. It goes for a hit and Curry scores.”

“Not on your life,” barked Everett, the manager of the Oakland team. “He got the ball and it never touched the ground.”

“Got it,” sneered McRae. “This is baseball, not pool. He can’t pocket the ball.”

There was a laugh at this, and Mackay, the third baseman, looked a little sheepish. The baited umpire suggested that the whole play be called off and that Curry go back to third while Larry resumed his place at the bat.

Larry set up a howl at this, as he saw his perfectly good three-baser go glimmering.

“Oh, hire a hall,” snapped Everett. “Even if the umpire decides against the catch it was only an error and you ought to have been out anyway.”

“You can’t crawl out of it that way,” said McRae to the umpire. “A play is a play and you’ve got to settle it one way or the other, even if you settle it wrong.”

The umpire hesitated, wiped his brow and finally decided that the ball was caught. That put Larry out, and he retreated, growling, to the bench, while Everett grinned his satisfaction.

“That’s all right, Ump,” said the latter. “But how about Curry? Mackay put the ball on him all right and that makes three out.”

“Say, what do you want, the earth?” queried McRae. “He didn’t put the ball on him. He didn’t have the ball to put. It was in his pocket all the time.”

“Of course I put the ball on him,” declared Mackay. “I must have. When I fell on him I hit him everywhere at once.”

The umpire finally decided that Mackay had not put the ball on Curry, and the red-headed right-fielder chuckled at the thought of the run he had scored.

“That makes it horse and horse,” said the umpire. “Get back to your places.”

If he thought he was at the end of his troubles he was mistaken, for Everett suddenly cried out:

“Look here. You said that Mackay caught that ball, didn’t you?”

“That’s what I said,” snorted the umpire.

“Well, then,” crowed Everett triumphantly, “why didn’t Curry go back to third and touch the bag before he lit out for home? He has to do that on a caught fly ball, hasn’t he?”

The umpire looked fairly stumped. Here was something on which the rules were explicit. It was certain that Curry should have returned to the base and it was equally certain that he hadn’t. Mackay had caught him half-way between third and home.

But McRae was equal to the occasion.

“Suppose he did have to,” he cried. “You said that Mackay hadn’t touched him and he’s free to go back yet.”

“And I’m free to touch him with the ball,” Mackay came back at him.

“But the ball isn’t in play,” put in Robbie, adding his mite to the general confusion. “You called time when you came in to settle this.”

“Who wouldn’t be an umpire?” laughed Jim to Joe, as he saw the look of despair on that

worried individual's face.

"The most glorious mixup I ever saw on the ball field," answered Joe.

"How happy he could be with either were 'tother dear charmer away," chuckled Jim, pointing to the two pugnacious disputants on either side of the umpire.

"Curry's out—Curry isn't out. Love me—love me not," responded Joe.

By this time the crowd had got over their laugh and impatiently demanded action. The umpire cut the Gordian knot by sending Curry back to third, where he and Mackay chaffed each other and the game went on.

It was not much of a game after that, however, as the laughable incident had put all the players in a more or less frivolous mood. It finally ended in a score of six to three in favor of the All-Americans, and the teams made a break for the showers.

"The last game we play on American soil for many moons," remarked Joe, as, having bathed and dressed, the two young athletes strolled toward their hotel.

"And every one of them a victory," observed Jim. "Not a single mark on the wrong side of the ledger!"

"That game at Denver was the closest call we had," said Joe. "The trip so far has been a big money-maker, too. McRae was telling me yesterday that we'd already topped ninety-five thousand, and there was ten thousand in that crowd to-day if there was a penny."

"I guess Mac won't have any trouble in buying steamship tickets," laughed Jim. "By the way, we haven't had a look at the old boat yet. Let's go down to-morrow and inspect her."

"Why not make it the day after to-morrow?" suggested Joe. "The girls will be here by that time and we'll take them with us."

"That will suit me, Joe."

"I've been thinking of something, Jim," went on the crack pitcher, after a pause. "It won't be long now before we leave America. What do you say if we do a little shopping, and buy some things for ourselves and for the girls?"

"Say, that's queer! I was thinking the same thing." Jim paused for a moment. "Won't it be fine to have the others with us again?"

"Yes; I'll be very glad to see Mabel, and glad to see Clara, too. I suppose you've been getting letters pretty regularly, eh, Jim?"

"I don't believe I've been getting any more letters than you have, Joe," returned the other.

"Well, you're welcome to them, Jim. I wish you luck!" said Joe, and placed a hand on his chum's shoulder. For a moment they looked into each other's eyes, and each understood perfectly what was passing in the other's mind. But Jim just then did not feel he could say too much.

"I'll be glad to see Reggie again, too," remarked Joe, after a moment of silence. "He's something of a queer stick, but pretty good at that."

"Oh, he's all right, Joe," answered Jim. "As he grows older and sees more of the seamy side of life, he'll get some of that nonsense knocked out of him."

They ate their supper that night with a sense of relaxation to which they had long been strangers. For the first time since they had gone to the training camp at Texas in the spring, they were out of harness. There had been the fierce, tense race for the pennant that had strained them to the utmost.

Then, with only a few days intervening, had come the still more exciting battle for the championship of the world. They had won and won gloriously, but even then they had not felt

wholly free, for the long trip across the continent which they had just finished was then before them, and although this struggle had been less close and important, it had still kept them on edge and in training.

But now their strenuous year had ended. Before them lay a glorious trip around the world, a voyage over summer seas, a pilgrimage through lands of mystery and romance, the fulfillment of cherished dreams, and with them were to go the two charming girls who represented to them all that was worth while in life and who even now were hurrying toward them as fast as steam could bring them.

“This is the end of a perfect day,” hummed Jim, as he sat back and lighted a cigar.

“You’re wrong there, Jim,” replied Joe, with a smile. “The perfect day will be to-morrow.”

“Right you are!”

Yet little did Baseball Joe and his chum dream of the many adventures and perils which lay ahead of them.

CHAPTER XVI

PUTTING THEM OVER

As the two baseball players sauntered down the corridor after supper they chanced upon Iredell. He was sitting at a reading table, intent upon a letter which had attached to it what looked like an official document of some kind.

It was a chance for which Joe had been looking, and he gave Jim a sign to go on while he himself dropped into a seat beside the famous shortstop.

“How are you, Dell, old boy?” he said, genially.

“Able to sit up and take nourishment,” replied the other, at the same time thrusting the document into his pocket with what seemed like unnecessary haste.

“Most of the boys are that way,” laughed Joe. “There are just two things that every ball player is ready to do, take nourishment and nag the umpire.”

Iredell laughed as he bit off the end of a cigar.

“That poor umpire got his this afternoon,” he said. “With McRae on one side and Everett on the other I thought he’d be pulled to pieces.”

“He was sure up against a hard proposition,” agreed Joe. “The next hardest was in a play that happened when I was on the Pittston team. A fellow poled out a hit that went down like a shot between left and center. A lot of carriages were parked at the end of the field and a big coach dog ran after the ball, got it in his mouth and skipped down among the carriages where the fielders couldn’t get at him. It would have doubled you up to have seen them coaxing the brute to be a good dog and give the ball up. In the meantime, the batter was tearing around the bases and made home before the ball got back.”

“And how did his Umps decide it?” asked Iredell, with interest.

“He was flabbergasted for a while,” replied Joe, “but he finally called it a two-base hit and let it

go at that.”

“An umpire’s life is not a happy one,” laughed Iredell. “He earns every dollar that he gets. I suppose that’s what some of us fellows will be doing, too, when we begin to go back.”

“It will be a good while before you come to that, Dell,” Joe replied. “You’ve played a rattling game at short this year, and you’re a fixture with the Giants.”

“I don’t know about that,” said the shortstop slowly. “Fixtures sometimes work loose, you know.”

“It won’t be so in this case,” said Joe, purposely misunderstanding him. “McRae wouldn’t let go of you.”

“Not if he could help it,” responded Iredell.

“Well, he doesn’t have to worry about that just yet,” said Joe. “How long does your contract have to run?”

“A year yet,” replied Iredell. “But contracts, you know, are like pie crust, they’re easily broken.”

“What do you mean by that?” demanded Joe sharply.

“Oh, nothing, nothing at all,” said Iredell, a little nervously, as though he had said more than he intended. “But to tell the truth, Joe, I’m sore on this whole question of contracts. It’s like a yoke that galls me.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” responded Joe. “A good many folks would like to be galled that way. A good big salary, traveling on Pullmans, stopping at the best hotels, posing for pictures, and having six months of the year to ourselves. If that’s a yoke, it’s lined with velvet.”

“But it’s a yoke, just the same,” persisted Iredell stubbornly. “Most men in business are free to accept any offer that’s made to them. We can’t. We may be offered twice as much as we’re getting, but we have to stay where we are just the same.”

“Well, that’s simply because it’s baseball,” argued Joe. “You know just as well as I do that that’s the only way the game can be carried on. It wouldn’t last a month if players started jumping from one team to another, or from one league to another. The public would lose all interest in it, and it’s the public that pays our salaries.”

“Pays our salaries!” snapped Iredell. “Puts money in the hands of the owners, you mean. They get the feast and we get the crumbs. What’s our measly salary compared with what they get? I was just reading in the paper that the Giants cleaned up two hundred thousand dollars this year, net profit, and yet it’s the players that bring this money in at the gate.”

“Yes,” Joe admitted. “But they are the men who put up the capital and take the chances. Suppose they had lost two hundred thousand dollars this year. We’d have had our salaries just the same.”

Just then Burkett and Curry came along and dropped into seats beside the pair.

“Hello, Red,” greeted Joe, at the same time nodding to Burkett. “How are your ribs feeling, after that bear hug you got this afternoon?”

Curry grinned.

“That’s all right,” he said. “But he never touched me with the ball. And that umpire was a boob not to give me the run.”

“What were you fellows talking about so earnestly?” asked Burkett, with some curiosity.

“Oh, jug-handled things like baseball contracts,” responded Iredell.

“They’re the bunk all right,” declared Burkett, emphatically.

“Bunk is right,” said Curry.

“What’s the use of quarreling with your bread and butter?” asked Joe good-naturedly.

“What’s the use of bread and butter, if you can have cake and ought to have it?” Iredell came back at him.

“Cake is good,” agreed Joe, “but the point is that if a man has agreed to take bread and butter, it’s up to him to stand by his agreement. A man’s word is the best thing he has, and if he is a man he’ll hold to it.”

“You seem to be taking a lot for granted, Joe,” said Burkett, a little stiffly. “Who is talking of breaking his word? We’ve got a right to talk about our contracts, haven’t we, when we think the owners are getting the best end of the deal?”

“Sure thing,” said Joe genially. “It’s every man’s privilege to kick, but the time to kick is before one makes an agreement, not when kicking won’t do any good.”

“Maybe it can do some good,” said Curry significantly.

“How so?” asked Joe innocently. “No other club in the American or National League would take us if we broke away from the Giants.”

“There are other leagues,” remarked Iredell.

“Surely. The minors,” replied Joe, again purposely misunderstanding. “But who wants to be a busher?”

“There’s the All-Star League that’s just forming,” suggested Burkett, with a swift look at his two companions.

“All-Star,” repeated Joe, a little contemptuously. “That sounds good, but where are they going to get the stars?”

“They’re getting them all right,” said Iredell. “The papers are full of the names of players who have jumped or are going to jump.”

“You don’t mean players,” said Joe. “You mean traitors.”

The others winced a little at this.

“‘Traitors’ is a pretty hard word,” objected Curry.

“It’s the only word,” returned Joe stiffly.

“You can’t call a man a traitor who simply tries to better himself,” remarked Burkett defensively.

“Benedict Arnold tried to better himself,” returned Joe. “But it didn’t get him very far. The fellows that jumped, in the old Brotherhood days, thought they were going to better themselves, but they simply got in bad with the public and nearly ruined the game. This new league will promise all sorts of things, but how do you know it will keep them? What faith can you put in men who try to induce other men to be crooked?”

“Well, you know, with most men business is business, as they put it.”

“I admit business is business. But so far as I am concerned, it is no business at all if it isn’t on the level,” answered Joe earnestly. “A great many men think they can do something that is shady and get away with it, and sometimes at first it looks as if they were right about it. But sooner or later they get tripped up and are exposed.”

“Well, everybody has got a right to make a living,” grumbled Curry.

“Sure he has—and I’m not denying it.”

“And everybody has got a right to go into baseball if he feels like investing his money that

way.”

“Right again. But if he wants to make any headway in the great national game, he has got to play it on the level right from the start. If he doesn’t do that, he may, for a certain length of time, hoodwink the public. But, as I said before, sooner or later he’ll be exposed; and you know as well as I do that the public will not stand for any underhand work in any line of sports. I’ve talked, not alone to baseball men, but also to football men, runners, skaters, and even prize fighters, and they have all said exactly the same thing—that the great majority of men want their sports kept clean.”

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There was no reply to this and Joe rose to his feet.

“But what’s the use of talking?” he added. “Let the new league do as it likes. There’s one bully thing, anyway, that it won’t touch—our Giants. Whatever it does to the other teams, we will all stick together. We’ll stand by Robbie and McRae till the last gun’s fired. So long, fellows, see you later.”

He strode off down the corridor, leaving three silent men to stare after his retreating figure thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XVII

“MAN OVERBOARD”

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Baseball Joe found Jim waiting for him near the clerk’s desk.

“Been having quite a confab,” remarked the latter.

“Yes,” replied Joe carelessly. “Burkett and Red came along and we had a fanfest.”

The next day was the first of their real vacation, and they spent the morning strolling about the city and marveling at the quick recovery it had made from the earthquake. They had a sumptuous dinner on the veranda of the Cliff House, where they had a full view of the famous harbor and watched the seals sporting on the rocks.

The commerce of the port was in full swing, and out through the Golden Gate passed great fleets with their precious argosies bound for the Orient, for immobile China, for restless and awakened Japan, for the islands of the sea, for the lands of the lotus and the palm, of minaret and mosque and pagoda, for all the realms of mystery and romance that lie beneath the Southern Cross.

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It would have been a wrench to tear themselves away had it been any other day than this, but to-day was the one to which they had looked eagerly forward through all the month of exhibition playing, since they had left the quiet home at Riverside, and they kept looking at their watches to see if it were not time to go to the train and meet the girls.

They were at the station long before the appointed time, and when at last the Overland Flyer drew in they scanned each Pullman anxiously to catch a sight of two charming faces.

They were not kept long in suspense, for down the steps of the second car tripped Clara and Mabel, looking more wonderfully alluring than ever, although a month before neither Jim nor Joe would have admitted that such a thing were possible.

Reggie, too, was there, dressed “to the limit” as usual, and with his supposed English accent twice as pronounced as ever.

But Reggie for the moment did not count, compared with the lovely charges whom he had brought across the continent. Of course, the boys felt grateful to him, but their eyes and their thoughts were fastened on his two charming companions.

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“I’m awfully glad you’ve got here at last,” cried Joe, as he rushed up to Mabel and caught her by both hands. He would have liked very much to have kissed her, but did not dare do it in such a public place.

“Oh, what a grand trip we’ve had!” declared Clara, as she shook hands first with Jim and then with her brother. “I never had any idea our country was so big and so magnificent.”

“That’s just what Joe and I were remarking on our trip across the Rockies,” answered Jim. He could not take his eyes from the face of his chum’s sister. Clara looked the picture of health, showing that the trip from her little home town had done her a world of good.

But if Clara looked good, Mabel looked even better—at least in the eyes of Joe. He could not keep his gaze from her face. And she was certainly just as glad to see him.

“Ye-es, it was quite a trip, don’t you know,” remarked Reggie. “I met several bally good chaps on the way, so the time passed quickly enough. But I’m glad to be here, and hope that before long we’ll be on shipboard.”

“Oh, I’m so excited to think that I’m going to take a real ocean trip!” burst out Clara. “Just to think of it—a girl like me going around the world! I never dreamed I’d get that far.”

“And just think of the many queer sights we’ll see!” broke in Mabel. “And the queer people we’ll meet!”

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The girls were all on the *qui vive* with excitement in their anticipation of the delightful trip that lay before them, and there were no pauses in their conversation on the way to the hotel.

Here they were introduced to the other members of the party, which by this time had increased to large proportions, for beside the ladies who had accompanied the players across the continent, many others had followed the same plan as Mabel and Clara and joined their friends in San Francisco. Altogether, there were more than a hundred of the tourists, of whom perhaps a third were women.

All were out for a good time, and the atmosphere of good will and jollity was infectious. There was an utter absence of snobbery and affectation, and the boys were delighted to see how quickly the girls fell into the spirit of the gathering and with their own fun and high spirits added more than their quota to the general hilarity.

That night there was a big banquet given to the tourists by the railroad officials who had had the party in charge from the beginning and by some of the leading citizens of San Francisco. It was a jolly occasion, where for once in affairs of the kind the “flowing bowl” was notable for its absence. The stalwart, clear-eyed athletes who, with their friends, were the guests of the occasion, had no use for the cup that both cheers and inebriates.

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A striking feature of the table decorations was a cake weighing one hundred and twenty-five pounds, on whose summit was a bat and ball, and whose frosted slopes were accurate representations of the Polo Grounds and the baseball park at Chicago. It is needless to say how pronounced a hit this made with the “fans” of both sexes. It was a great send-off to the globe-encircling baseball teams.

The next day, Joe and Jim took the girls down to the pier to see the ship on which they were to sail. It was a splendid craft of twenty thousand tons and sumptuously fitted up. The girls exclaimed at the beauty of her lines and the superb decoration of the cabins and saloons.

“The *Empress of Japan!*” read Clara, as she scanned the name on the steamer’s stern.

“Most fittingly named,” said Jim gallantly, “since she carries two queens.”

“What a pretty compliment,” said Clara, as she flashed a radiant look at Jim.

“I’m afraid,” said Mabel, “that Jim’s been practising on some of the nice girls in the party.”

“Have I, Joe?” appealed the accused one. “Haven’t I been an anchorite, a senobite, an archimandrite——”

“Goodness, I thought you were bad,” laughed Clara. “But now I know you’re worse.”

“Keep it up, old man, as long as the ‘ites’ hold out,” said Joe. “I guess there are plenty more in the dictionary. But honest, girls, Jim hasn’t looked twice at any girl since he came away from Riverside.”

“I’ve looked more than twice at one girl since yesterday,” Jim was beginning, but Clara, flushing rosily, thought it was high time to change the subject.

The next day, with all the party safely on board, the ship weighed anchor, threaded its way through the crowded commerce of the bay and then, dropping its tug, turned its prow definitely toward the east and breasted the billows of the Pacific.

“The last we’ll see of Old Glory for many months,” remarked Joe, as, standing at the rail, they watched the Stars and Stripes floating out from the flag-pole on the top of the government station.

“Not so long as that,” corrected Jim. “We will still be on the soil of God’s country when we reach Hawaii seven days from now.”

The first two days of the voyage passed delightfully. The girls proved good sailors, and had the laugh on many of the so-called stronger sex, who were conspicuous by their absence from the table during that period.

On the afternoon of the third day out, Joe and Mabel were pacing the deck with Jim and Clara at a discreet distance behind them. It was astonishing how willing each pair was not to intrude upon the other.

Suddenly there was a tumult of excited exclamations near the stern of the vessel, and then above it rose a shout that is never heard at sea without a chill of terror.

“Man overboard!”

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CHAPTER XVIII

ONE STRIKE AND OUT

The two young baseball players and the girls joined the throng that was racing toward the stern.

A number of people were pointing wildly over the port side at a small object some distance behind the ship.

They followed the pointing fingers and saw the head of a man who was swimming desperately toward the receding ship.

The steamer, which had been taking advantage of the favorable weather and had been ploughing

ahead under full steam, found it hard to stop, although orders had been given at once to shut off steam.

It was maddening to the onlookers to see the distance increase between the giant ship and that bobbing, lonely speck far out in the waste of waters.

With all the celerity possible the great steamer swung round in a circle and bore down upon the struggling swimmer, while at the same time preparations were made to lower a boat as soon as they should be near enough.

“They’re going to save him!” cried Mabel, half-sobbing in her excitement. “Oh, Joe, they’re going to save him after all!”

It seemed as though there were no doubt of this now, for the man was evidently a strong swimmer and seemed to be maintaining himself without great effort, and it was certain that within the next few minutes the boat, already filled with oarsmen and swaying at the davits, ready to be lowered, would reach him.

Suddenly Clara, with a stifled scream, clutched at Jim’s arm.

“Oh, Jim!” she cried, “what is that? Look, look——”

Jim looked and turned pale under his tan.

“Great heavens!” he cried. “It’s a shark!”

The cry was taken up by scores.

“A shark! A shark!”

There, cleaving the water and coming toward the swimmer like an arrow at its mark, was a great black dorsal fin which bespoke the presence of the pirate of the seas.

The steamer had lessened speed in order to lower its boat, but the momentum under which it was carried it within twenty yards of the castaway.

Almost instantly the ship’s boat struck the water, and the sinewy backs of the sailors bent almost double as they drove it toward the swimmer.

From the crowded deck they could see his face now, pale and dripping, but lighted with a gleam of hope as he saw the boat approaching. But the horrified onlookers saw something else, that ominous, awful fin, that came rushing on like a relentless fate toward its intended prey.

Some of the women were sobbing, others almost fainting, while the men, pale and with gritted teeth, groaned at their helplessness.

It was a question now of which would reach the luckless man first, the boat or the shark. The boat was nearer and the men were rowing like demons, but the shark was swifter, coming on like an express train.

There must have been something in those faces high above him that warned the man of some impending peril. He cast a swift look behind him, and then in frantic terror redoubled his efforts to reach the boat.

“Oh, Joe, they’ll be too late! They’ll never reach him in time!” sobbed Mabel. “Oh, can’t we do anything to help him?”

Joe, as frantic as she, looked wildly about him. His eyes fell on a heavy piece of iron, left on the deck by some seaman who had been repairing the windlass. Like a flash he grabbed it.

It seemed as though the swimmer were doomed, and a gasp of horror went up from the spectators as they saw that the boat would be too late.

For now the fin had disappeared, and they saw a hideous shape take form as the monster came into plain sight, a foot beneath the surface, and turned over upon its back to seize its prey.

Then Joe took a chance—a long chance, a desperate chance, an almost hopeless chance—and yet, a chance.

With all the force of his powerful arm he sent the jagged piece of iron hurtling at the fiendish open jaws.

And the chance became a certainty.

The missile crashed into the monster's nose, its most sensitive point. The brute was so near the surface that the thin sheet of water was no protection.

The effect was startling. There was a tremendous plunging and leaping that lashed the waters into foam, and then the crippled monster sank slowly into the ocean depths.

The next instant the ship's boat had reached the castaway, and strong arms pulled him aboard, where he sank panting and exhausted across a thwart.

It had all happened with the speed of light. There was a moment of stunned surprise, a gasp from the crowd, and then a roar went up that swelled into a deafening thunder of applause.

Joe had reversed the baseball rule of "three strikes and out." This time it was just one strike—and the shark was out!

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CHAPTER XIX

BRAXTON JOINS THE PARTY

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The passengers crowded around Joe in wild delight and exhilaration, reaching for his hand, pounding him on the back, vociferous in their praise and congratulations, until he was almost ready to pray to be rescued from his friends.

Mabel, starry-eyed, slipped a hand within his arm and the pressure was eloquent. Jim almost wrenched his arm from the shoulder, and Clara hugged her brother openly.

Naturally, Joe's great feat appealed especially to the baseball players of the party. They felt that he had honored the craft to which they belonged. He had justified his reputation as the star pitcher of the country, and they felt that they shared in the reflected glory.

"Great Scott, Joe!" beamed Larry. "You put it all over his sharklet that time."

"Straight over the plate!" chuckled Burkett.

"Against the rules, though," grinned Denton. "You know that the 'bean ball' is barred."

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The rescued man had now been brought on board. He had been too excited and confused to understand how he had been snatched from the jaws of death—and such a death!

He proved to be a member of the crew, a Lascar, whose knowledge of the English language was limited, and whose ignorance of the great national game was fathomless.

But when he had recovered and had learned the name of his rescuer, he sought Joe out and thanked him in accents that were none the less sincere because broken and imperfect, and from that time on throughout the trip he was almost doglike in his devotion.

A few days more and the ship reached Hawaii, that far-flung outpost of Uncle Sam's

dominions, which breaks the long ocean journey between America and Japan.

The hearts of the tourists leaped as the ship drew near the harbor and they caught sight of the Stars and Stripes, floating proudly in the breeze.

"I never knew how I loved that flag before," cried Mabel enthusiastically.

"The most beautiful flag that floats," chimed in Clara.

"The flag that stands for liberty everywhere," remarked Jim.

"Yes," was Joe's tribute. "The flag that when it has gone up anywhere has never been pulled down."

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As the ship drew near the shore the beauty of the island paradise brought exclamations of delight from the passengers who thronged the steamer's rails.

The harbor was a scene of busy life and animation. The instant the ship dropped anchor she was surrounded by native boats, paddled by Hawaiian youngsters, who indulged in exhibitions of diving and swimming that were a revelation of skill.

"They've got it all over the fishes when it comes to swimming," remarked Jim with a grin. "Cough up all your spare coin, Joe, and see these little beggars dive for it."

They tossed coin after coin into the transparent waters and swiftly as each piece sank, the young swimmer was swifter. Every one was caught before it reached bottom, and came up clutched in some dusky hand or shining between ivory teeth.

"I'll be bankrupt if this keeps up long," laughed Joe.

"Yes," said Jim. "You'll wish you'd joined the All-Star League and copped that twenty thousand."

"How do they ever do it?" marveled Clara.

"In the blood I suppose," replied Joe. "Their folks throw them into the water when they're babies, and like puppies, they have to swim or drown."

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"They're more at home in the water than they are on land," remarked Jim. "Those fellows will swim out in the ocean and stay there all day long."

"I should think they'd be afraid of sharks," remarked Mabel, with a shudder, as she thought of the recent incident in which that hideous brute had figured.

"Sharks are easy meat for them," replied Jim. "You ought to pity the sharks instead of wasting it on these fellows. Give them a knife, and the shark hasn't a Chinaman's chance."

"Not even a knife," chimed in Joe. "A stick sharpened at both ends is enough."

"A stick?" exclaimed Mabel, wonderingly.

"Sure thing," replied Joe. "They simply wait until the shark turns over to grab them and then thrust it right into the open jaws. You've no idea how effective that can be."

"It's a case of misplaced confidence," laughed Jim. "The poor trustful shark lets his jaws come together with a snap, or rather he thinks he does, and instead of a nice juicy human, those guileless jaws of his close on the two ends of the pointed stick and stay there. He can't close his mouth and he drowns."

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"Poor thing," murmured Clara involuntarily, while the boys put up a shout. "I don't care," she added, flushing. "I'm always sorry for the underdog——"

"That's why she's taken such a fancy to you, Jim, old man," laughed Joe.

"Well, as long as pity is akin to——" began Joe, when Mabel, tired with laughing, interrupted him:

“But suppose the stick should break,” she said.

“Then there would be just one less native,” answered Jim, solemnly. “By the way, Joe,” he added, “speaking of sharks—what’s the difference between a dog and a shark?”

“Give it up,” replied Joe promptly.

“Because,” chuckled Jim, “a dog’s bark is worse than his bite, but a shark’s bite is—is—worse than his—er——”

“Go ahead,” said Joe bitterly, while the girls giggled. “Perpetrate it. What shark has a bark?”

“A dog-faced shark,” crowed Jim triumphantly.

“Of all the idiots,” lisped Reggie, joining them at the rail. “Pon honor, you know, I never heard such bally nonsense.”

The gibe that followed this remark was cut short by the approach of the lighter on which the passengers were to be carried to the shore.

They were to spend two days in Hawaii while the steamer discharged its cargo, but they would have gladly made it two weeks or two months.

Only one game was played, and that was between the Giant and the All-American teams. There was no native talent which was quite strong enough to stand a chance against the seasoned veterans, although Hawaii boasts of many ball teams.

There was a big crowd present, made up chiefly of government officials and representatives of foreign commercial houses from all over the world who had established branches on the island.

The contests between the two teams had been waxing hotter and hotter, despite the fact that there was nothing at stake except the pleasure of winning.

But this was enough for these high-strung athletes, to whom the cry “play ball” was like a bugle call. The fight was close from start to finish, and resulted in a victory for the All-Americans by a score of three to two.

“That makes it ‘even Stephen,’” chortled Brennan to his friend and rival, McRae. “We’ve won just as many games as you have, now.”

“It’s hoss and hoss,” admitted McRae. “But just wait; what we’ll do to you fellows before we get to the end of the trip will be a crime.”

The time that still remained before the steamer resumed its journey was one of unalloyed delight. The scenery was wonderful and the weather superb.

Jim and Joe hired a touring car and with Joe at the wheel—it is unnecessary to state who sat beside him—they visited all the most picturesque and romantic spots in that glorious bit of Nature’s handiwork.

“Do you remember our last ride in an automobile, Mabel?” asked Joe with a smile, as she snuggled into the seat beside him.

“Indeed I do,” replied Mabel. “It was the day that horrid Fleming carried me off and you chased us.”

“I caught you all right, anyway,” Joe replied.

“Yes,” said Mabel saucily. “Only to spend all your spare moments afterward in regretting it.”

Joe’s reproachful denial both in words and looks was eloquent.

They visited the famous volcano with its crater Kilauea, and watched in awe and wonder the great sea of flame that surged hideously and writhed like a chain of fiery serpents.

They saw the famous battlefield where Kamehameha, “the Napoleon of the Pacific,” had won

the great victory that made him undisputed ruler of the island. They saw the steep precipice where the three thousand Aohu, fighting to the last gasp, had made their final stand, and had at last been driven over the cliff to the death awaiting them below.

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It was with a feeling of genuine regret that they finally bade farewell to the enchanting island and again took ship to pursue their journey.

A large number of new passengers had come on board at Honolulu, and among them was a man who soon attached himself to the baseball party. He was tall and distinguished in appearance, smooth and plausible in his conversation, and seemed to be thoroughly versed in the great national game.

His ingratiating manners soon made him a favorite with the women of the party also, and he spared no pains to deepen this impression.

Reggie liked him immensely, largely, no doubt, owing to the hints that Braxton, which was the stranger's name, had dropped of having aristocratic connections. He had traveled widely, and the names of distinguished personages fell from his lips with ease and familiarity.

"How do you like the new fan, Joe?" Jim asked, a day or two later.

"I can't say that I'm stuck on him much," responded Joe. "He seems to be pretty well up in baseball dope, and that in itself I suppose ought to be a recommendation, to a ball player especially, but somehow or other, he doesn't hit me very hard."

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"I think he's very handsome," remarked Mabel, with a mischievous glance at Joe, and that young man's instinctive dislike of the newcomer became immediately more pronounced.

"He seems very friendly and pleasant," put in Clara. "Why don't you like him, Joe?"

"How can I tell?" replied her brother. "I simply know I don't."

CHAPTER XX

IN MIKADO LAND

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But if Braxton sensed the slight feeling of antipathy which Joe felt for him, he gave no sign of it, and Joe himself, who wanted to be strictly just, took pains to conceal it.

Braxton had a fund of anecdotes that made him good company, and the friendship that Reggie felt for him made him often a member of Joe's party.

"Fine fellow, that Mr. Matson of yours," he remarked one afternoon, when he and Reggie and Mabel were sitting together under an awning, which the growing heat of every day, as the vessel made its way deeper into the tropics, made very grateful for its shade and coolness.

"Indeed he is," remarked Mabel, warmly, to whom praise of Joe was always sweet.

"He's a ripper, don't you know," agreed Reggie.

"Not only as a man but as a player," continued Braxton. "Hughson used to be king pin once, but I think it can be fairly said that Matson has taken his place as the star pitcher of America. Hughson's arm will probably never be entirely well again."

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“Joe thinks that Hughson is a prince,” remarked Mabel. “He says he stands head and shoulders above everybody else.”

“He used to,” admitted Braxton. “For ten years there was nobody to be compared with him. But now it’s Matson’s turn to wear the crown.”

“Have you ever seen Joe pitch?” asked Mabel.

“I should say I have,” replied Braxton. “And it’s always been a treat to see the way he did his work. I saw him at the Polo Grounds when in that last, heartbreaking game he won the championship for the Giants. And I saw him, too, in that last game of the World’s Series, when it seemed as though only a miracle could save the day. That triple play was the most wonderful thing I ever beheld. The way he nailed that ball and shot it over to Denton was a thing the fans will talk over for many years to come.”

“Wasn’t it great?” cried Mabel, enthusiastically, at the same time privately resolving to tell all this to Joe and show him how unjust he was in feeling the way he did toward this generous admirer.

“The fact is,” continued Braxton, “that Matson’s in a class by himself. He’s the big cog in the Giant machinery. It’s a pity they don’t appreciate him more.”

“Why, they do appreciate him!” cried Mabel, her eyes opening wide with wonder. “Mr. McRae thinks nothing’s too good for him.”

“Nothing’s too good except money,” suggested Braxton.

“They give him plenty of that, too,” put in Mabel, loyally.

“He gets a ripping salary, don’t you know,” put in Reggie. “And he almost doubled it in this last World’s Series.”

“A man’s worth what he can get,” returned Braxton. “Now, of course, I don’t know and perhaps it might be an impertinence for me even to guess what his salary is, but I should say that it isn’t a bit more than ten thousand a year.”

“Oh, it isn’t anything like that,” said Reggie, a little chop fallen.

Braxton raised his eyebrows in apparent surprise.

“I didn’t think the Giants were so niggardly,” he remarked, with a touch of contempt. “It’s simply robbery for them to hold his services at such a figure. Mr. Matson could demand vastly more than that.”

“Where?” asked Reggie. “He’s under contract with the Giants and they wouldn’t let him go to any other club.”

“Why doesn’t he go without asking leave?” asked Braxton.

“But no other club in the big leagues would take him if he broke his contract with the Giants,” said Mabel, a little bewildered.

“I’ve heard there was a new league forming,” said Braxton, carelessly. “Let’s see, what is it they call it? The All-Star League. There would be no trouble with Matson’s getting an engagement with them. They’d welcome him with open arms.”

“They’ve already tried to get him,” cried Mabel, proudly.

“Is that so? I suppose they made him a pretty good offer. I’ve heard they’re doing things on a big scale.”

“It was a wonderful offer,” said Mabel.

“It certainly was, ’pon honor,” chimed in Reggie.

“Would it be indiscreet to ask the amount?” said Braxton.

"I don't think there's any bally secret 'bout it," complied Reggie. "They offered him twenty thousand dollars to sign a contract and fifteen thousand dollars a year for a three years' term. Many a bank or railroad president doesn't get that much, don't you know?"

"And Matson refused it?" asked Braxton, incredulously.

"How could he help it?" replied Mabel. "His contract with the Giants has two years yet to run."

"My dear young lady," said Braxton, "don't you know that a baseball contract isn't as binding as the ordinary kind? In the first place, it's one-sided, and that itself makes it worthless."

"In what way is it so one-sided?" asked Mabel.

"Well, just to take one instance," replied Braxton. "A baseball club may engage a man for a year and yet if it gets tired of its bargain, it can let him go on ten days' notice. That doesn't seem fair, does it?"

"No-o, it doesn't," admitted Mabel slowly.

"It would be all right," continued Braxton, "if the player also could leave his club by giving ten days' notice. But he can't. That's what makes it unfair. The club can do to the player what the player can't do to the club. So the supposed contract is only a bit of paper. It's no contract at all."

"Not in the legal sense, perhaps," said Reggie, dubiously.

"Well, if not in the legal sense, then in no sense at all," persisted Braxton. "The law is supposed to be based on justice, isn't it, and to do what is right?"

"Of course," he went on, "it's none of my business; but if I were in Mr. Matson's place, I shouldn't hesitate a moment in going where my services were in the most demand."

Mabel felt there was sophistry somewhere in the argument, but could hardly point out where it was.

"I wouldn't like to be quoted in this matter, of course," said Braxton, suavely. "And it might be just as well not to mention to Mr. Matson that I have spoken about it. He might think I was trying to pry into his affairs."

As Joe and Jim came up just then from the engine-room of the ship which they had been inspecting, the subject, of course, was dropped, and after a while Braxton strode away with a self-satisfied smile on his lips.

The travelers were now in the heart of the typhoon region but luckily for them it was the winter season when such storms are least frequent and although they met a half gale that for two days kept them in their cabins, they were favored on the whole by fair weather and at the appointed time dropped anchor in the harbor of Yokohama.

Now they were on the very threshold of the Oriental world of whose wonders they had heard and dreamed, and all were on tiptoe with curiosity and interest.

The sights and scenes were as strange almost as though they were on another planet. Everything was new to their young blood and unjaded senses in this "Land of the Rising Sun."

The great city itself, teeming with commerce and busy life, had countless places of interest, but far more enchanting were the trips they took in the jinrikishas drawn by tireless coolies which carried them to the little dreaming, rustic towns with their tiny houses, their quaint pagodas, their charming gardens and their unhurried life, so different from the feverish, restless tumult of western lands.

"Really, this seems to be a different world from ours," was Clara's comment.

"It certainly is vastly different from anything we have in America," replied Mabel.

"It's interesting—I'll admit that," said Joe. "Just the same, I like things the way we have them

much better.”

“To me these people—or at least a large part of them—seem to lead a dreamlike existence,” was Jim’s comment. “They don’t seem to belong to the hurry and bustle of life such as we know it.”

“And yet there is noise enough, goodness knows!” answered Clara.

“I think I really prefer the good old U. S. A., don’t you know,” drawled Reggie. “There may be society here, but really it’s so different from ours that I shouldn’t like to take part in it.”

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“Yes, there is plenty of noise, but, at the same time, there is a good deal of calm and quiet,” said Joe.

But the calm and quiet that seemed to be prevailing features of Japanese life were wholly absent from the ball games where the visiting teams met the nines of Keio and Waseda Universities.

The Giants were to play the first named team, while later on the All-Americans were slated to tackle the Waseda men.

In the first game the contrast was laughable between the sturdy Giant players and their diminutive opponents.

“What are we playing against?” laughed Larry to Denton. “A bunch of kids?”

“It would take two of them to make a mouthful,” grinned Denton.

“I feel almost ashamed of myself,” chimed in Burkett. “We ought to tackle fellows of our own size.”

“You don’t find many of that kind in Japan,” said Joe. “But don’t you hold these fellows too cheap. They may have a surprise in store for us.”

The snap and vim that the Japs put into their practice before the game seemed to add point to his prophecy. They shot the ball around the bases with a speed and precision that would have done credit to seasoned veterans and made McRae, who watched them keenly, give his men a word of caution.

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“Don’t get too gay, boys,” he warned.

The game that followed was “for blood.” The universities had poured out their crowds to a man to cheer their players on to victory.

And for the first five innings the scales hung in the balance. The Keio pitcher had a world of speed and a tantalizing drop, and only two safe hits were made off him. Behind him his team mates fielded like demons. No ball seemed too hard for them to get, and even when a Giant got to first base he found it difficult to advance against the accurate throwing to second of the Jap catcher.

At the bat the home players were less fortunate. They hit the ball often enough but they couldn’t “lean against it” with the power of their sturdier rivals.

They were skillful bunters, however, and had the Giant players “standing on their heads” in trying to field the balls that the clever Jap players laid deftly in front of the plate.

By these tactics they scored a run in the sixth inning, against which the Giants had only a string of goose eggs.

“It’s like a bear against a wildcat,” muttered Robbie to McRae, as the little Jap scurried over the plate.

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“And it looks as if the wildcat might win,” grunted the Giant manager, not at all pleased at the possibility.

“Not a bit of it,” denied Robbie sturdily. “A good big man is better than a good little man any time.”

And his faith was justified when, in the seventh inning, the Giants, stung by the taunts of their manager, really woke up and got into action. A perfect storm of hits broke from their bats and had the Japanese players running after the ball until their tongues hung out.

Five runs came in and it was “all over but the shouting.” There was not much shouting, however, for the home crowd had seen its dream of victory shattered.

But though the Giants won handily in the end by a score of six to two, it had been a red-hot game, and had taken some of the conceit out of the major leaguers. It was a tip, too, to the All-Americans, who, when they played the Waseda team a little later, went in with determination to win the game from the start and trimmed their opponents handsomely.

“Those Japs are the goods all right,” conceded McRae, when at last they were ready to embark for Hongkong.

“You’re right they are,” agreed Robbie.

“We call ourselves the world’s champions,” grinned Jim. “But, after all, we’re only champions of the United States. The time may come when there will be a real World’s Series and then the pennant will mean something more than it does now.”

“It would be some big jump between the games,” said Joe.

“Lots of queer things happen,” said Larry sagely. “The time yet may come when the umpire will take off his hat, bow to the crowd and say—

“Ladies and gentlemen: the batteries for to-day’s game are Matsuda and Nagawiki for the All-Japans, Matson and Mylert for the All-Americans.”

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CHAPTER XXI

RUNNING AMUCK

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If Japan had been a revelation to the tourists, China was a still greater one. For Japan, however much she clung to the dreamy life of former times, had at last awakened and was fast adapting herself to modern, civilized conditions.

If Japan was still half dreaming, China was sound asleep. This, of course, was not true of the foreign quarter, where the great English government buildings and commercial houses might have been those of Paris or London.

But just behind this lay the real China, looking probably the same as three hundred thousand years ago. The little streets, so narrow in places that the houses almost touched and a carriage could not pass! That strange medley of sounds and smells and noises! Here a tinker mending his pans on the sidewalk! There a dentist, pulling a tooth in the open street, jugglers performing their tricks, snake charmers exhibiting their slimy pets.

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There was a bewildering jumble of trades, occupations and amusements, so utterly different from what the tourists had ever before seen that it held their curiosity unabated and their interest stimulated to its highest pitch during the period of their stay.

“Everything is so topsy turvy!” exclaimed Mabel, as she threaded the noisome streets, clinging close to Joe’s arm. “I feel like Alice in Wonderland.”

“It’s not surprising that things should be upside down when we’re in the Antipodes,” laughed Joe.

“If we saw men walking on their heads it would seem natural out here,” said Jim. “All that a Chinaman wants to know is what other people do, then he does something different.”

“Sure thing,” said Joe. “See those fellows across the street. They’re evidently old friends and each one is shaking hands with himself.”

“You can’t dope out anything here,” said Jim. “When an American’s puzzled he scratches his head—the Chinaman scratches his foot. We wear black for mourning, they wear white. We pay the doctor when we’re sick——”

“If the doctor’s lucky,” interrupted Joe.

“They pay him only while they’re well. They figure that it’s to his interest then to keep them well. We think what few brains we have are in our head. The Chinaman thinks they’re in the stomach. Whenever he gets off what he thinks is a good thing he pats his stomach in approval. We put a guest of honor on our right, the Chinaman puts him on his left.”

“Anything else?” asked Clara laughingly.

“Lots of things,” replied Joe. “And we’ll probably find them out before we go away.”

As they passed a corner they saw a man standing there, rigged out in a queer fashion. About him was what seemed to be a tree box, from which only his head protruded.

“Why is he going around that way?” asked Mabel, curiously.

“You wouldn’t care to know that,” said Joe, hurrying her along, but Mabel was not to be disposed of in so cavalier a fashion.

“But I do want to know,” she persisted.

“Might as well tell her,” said Jim, “and let her suffer.”

“Well,” said Joe, reluctantly, “that fellow’s being executed.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Mabel, in horror.

“Just that,” replied Joe. “That thing that looked like a tree box is what they call a cangue. They put him in there so that he’s standing on thin slabs of wood that just enable him to keep his head above that narrow opening around his neck. Every little while they take one of the slabs of wood from underneath him; then he has to stand on tiptoe. By and by his feet can’t touch the slabs at all, and then he chokes to death.”

The girls shuddered and Mabel regretted her ill-timed curiosity.

“What a hideous thing!” exclaimed Clara.

“And what cruel people!” added Mabel.

“One of the most cruel on God’s earth,” replied Jim. “You see in all this crowd there is nobody looking at that fellow with pity. They don’t seem to have the slightest tincture of it.”

“Let’s go back to our hotel,” pleaded Mabel. “I’ve seen all I want to for to-day.”

The games at Hong Kong were interesting and largely attended. There was one rattling contest between the major leaguers that after an eleventh-inning fight was won by the Giants.

A few days later a second game was played in which a picked team from the visitors opposed a nine of husky “Jackies” selected from the United States battleships that lay in the harbor.

To make the game more even, the Giants loaned them a catcher and second baseman, and a contest ensued that was full of fun and excitement.

Of course, the Jackies were full of naval slang, and sometimes their talk was utterly

unintelligible to the landsmen. At the end of the third inning the Giants had three runs to their credit, while the boys from the navy had nothing.

“Say there, Longneck, we’ve got to get some runs,” howled one Jackie to his mate. “Give ’em a shot from a twelve-inch gun!”

“Aye! aye! Give it ’em.”

In the next inning the Jackies took a brace, and, as a consequence, got two runs. Immediately they and their friends began to cheer wildly.

“Down with the pirates!”

“Let’s feed ’em to the sharks!”

“A double portion of plum duff for every man on our side who makes a run!” cried one enthusiastic sailor boy.

Several of the Jackies were quite good when it came to batting the ball, but hardly any of them could do any efficient running, for the reason that they got but scant practice while on shipboard. The way that some of them wobbled around the bases was truly amusing, and set the crowd to laughing loudly.

“Our men don’t like this running,” declared one sailor, who sat watching the contest. “If, instead of running around those bases, you fellows had to climb a mast, you’d see who would come out ahead.”

The Jackies managed to get two more runs, due almost entirely to the lax playing of the Giants. This, however, was as far as they were able to go, and, when the game came to an end, the score stood 12 to 5 in favor of the Giants.

A visit to Shanghai followed, where only one game was played, and this by a rally in the last inning went to the All-Americans, thus keeping the total score of won and lost even between the rival teams.

They spent a few more days in sightseeing, and then set sail for the Philippines, glad at the prospect of soon being once more under the flag of their own country.

“Look at those queer little boats!” exclaimed Mabel, as they stood at the rail while the ship was weighing anchor and looked at the native sampans with their bright colors and lateen sails as they darted to and fro like so many gaudy butterflies.

“What are those things they have on each side of the bow?” asked Clara. “They look like eyes.”

“That’s what they are,” replied Jim, seriously.

Clara looked at him to see if he were joking.

“Honest to goodness, cross my heart, hope to die,” returned Jim.

“But why do they put eyes there?” asked Clara, mystified.

“So that the boat can see where it’s going,” replied Jim.

“Well,” said Mabel, with a gasp, “whatever else I take away from this country, I’ll have a choice collection of nightmares.”

The steamer made splendid weather of the trip to the Philippines, and in a few days they were steaming into Manila bay. Their hearts swelled with pride as they recalled the splendid achievement of Admiral Dewey, when, with his battle fleet, scorning mines and torpedoes, like Farragut at Mobile, he had signaled for “full speed ahead.”

“That fellow was the real stuff,” remarked Jim.

“As good as they make them,” agreed Joe. “And foxy, too. Remember how he kept that cable cut because he didn’t want the folks at Washington to queer his game. He had his work cut out

and he wasn't going to be interfered with."

"Something like Nelson, when his chief ran up the signal to withdraw," suggested Denton. "He looked at it with that blind eye of his and said he couldn't see it."

"Dewey was a good deal like Nelson," said Joe. "Do you remember how he trod on the corns of that German admiral who tried to butt in?"

"Do I?" said Jim. "You bet I do."

The party met with a warm welcome when they went ashore at Manila. American officers and men from the garrison thronged the dock to meet the veterans of the diamond, whose coming had been widely heralded.

Many of them knew the players personally and all knew them by reputation.

The baseball teams went to their hotel and after they were comfortably settled in their new quarters, the two chums accompanied by the girls went out for a stroll. But they had not gone far before they were startled by excited shouts a little way ahead of them and saw groups of people scattering right and left in wild panic and confusion.

Down the street came a savage figure, running with the speed of a hare, and holding in either hand a knife with which he slashed savagely right and left at all that stood in his way.

His eyes were flaming with demoniacal fury, foam stood out upon his lips, and from those lips issued a wailing cry that ended in a shriek:

"Amuck! Amuck!"

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CHAPTER XXII

TAKING A CHANCE

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There was a scream from the frightened girls and a gasp from the young men as they saw this messenger of death bearing down upon them.

They knew at a glance what had happened. A Malay, yielding to the insidious mental malady that seems peculiar to his race, had suddenly gone mad and started out to kill. That he himself would inevitably be killed did not deter him for a moment. He wanted to die, but he wanted at the same time to take as many with him as possible.

He had made his offering to the infernal gods, had blackened his teeth and anointed his head with cocoa oil, and had started out to slay.

With his eyes blazing, his head rolling from side to side like a mad dog, and with that blood-chilling cry coming from his foam-flecked lips, he was like a figure from a nightmare.

For a moment the Americans stood rooted to the spot. That instant past, Baseball Joe, as usual, took the lead.

"Look after the girls, Jim!" he cried, and started full tilt toward the awful figure that came plunging down the street.

Mabel and Clara screamed to him to stop, but he only quickened his pace, running like a deer,

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as though bent on suicide. The Malay saw him coming, and for a second hesitated. He had seen everyone else scurry from him in fear. What did this man mean by coming to meet him?

It was just this instant of indecision upon which Joe had counted, and like a flash he seized it.

When within twenty feet of the Malay, Joe launched himself into the air, and came down flat on the hard dirt road, as he had done many a time before when sliding to base.

The Malay, confused by the unlooked-for action, slashed down at him. Had Joe gone straight toward him, the knife would have been buried in him. But here again his quickness and the tactics of the ballfield came into play.

Instead of going straight toward his antagonist, his slide had been a “fall away.”

Many a time when sliding to second he had thrown himself this way out of the reach of the ball, while his extended hand just clutched the bag.

So now, his sinewy arm caught the Malay by the leg, while his body swung round to the right. Down went the Malay with a crash, his blood-stained knives clattering on the ground and the next instant Joe was on his back.

His hands closed upon the man’s throat with an iron grip.

But there was no more fight left in the would-be murderer. The fall had jarred and partially stunned him. In an instant Jim had joined Joe, other men came rushing up; and the danger was over.

The crazed man was secured with ropes and carried away, while Joe, perspiring, panting and covered with dust, received the enthusiastic congratulations of the rapidly gathering crowd.

“Pluckiest thing I ever saw in my life!” exclaimed the colonel of the army command, who had witnessed the exploit.

“That fall-away slide of yours was great, Joe!” cried Larry Barrett, who had come up. “I never saw a niftier one on the ballfield.”

“You made the bag all right!” grinned Denton.

“He never touched you!” chuckled Burkett.

“If he had it would have been some touch,” declared McRae, as he picked up one murderous-looking knife and passed it round for inspection.

It was a wicked weapon, nearly a foot in length, with a handle so contrived as to get all the weight behind the stroke and a wavy blade capable of inflicting a fearful wound.

“Has a bowie knife skinned a mile!” ejaculated Curry, expressing the general sentiment.

Joe hated to pose as a hero but it was some time before the crowd would let him get away and rejoin the girls who were waiting for him.

All the plaudits of the throng were tame compared with what he read in the eyes of Mabel and his sister.

The baseball teams stayed nearly a week in Manila, making short excursions in the suburbs as far as it could be done with safety. Two games were played, one between the Giants and All-Americans, which resulted in favor of the latter, and another between the Giants and a picked nine from the army post.

Many of Uncle Sam’s army boys had been fine amateur players and a few had come from professional teams, so that they were able to put up a gallant fight, although they were, of course, no match for the champions of the world.

“But they certainly put up a fine game,” was Joe’s comment. “They had two pitchers who had some good stuff in ’em.”

“That’s just what I was thinking,” returned Jim.

“One of those pitchers used to play ball on a professional team from Los Angeles,” said McRae, who was standing near. “I understand he had quite a record.”

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“I wonder what made him give up pitching and join the army,” remarked Jim curiously.

“Oh, I suppose it was the love of adventure,” answered the manager.

“That might be it,” said Joe. “Some fellows get tired of doing the same thing, and when they have a chance to leave home and see strange places, they grab it.”

While warming up prior to this last game, Joe’s attention was attracted by a muscular Chinaman, who was standing in the crowd that fringed the diamond, interestedly watching the players at practice. He recognized him as a famous wrestler who had taken part in a bout at a performance the night before and who had thrown his opponents with ease.

“Some muscles on that fellow,” Joe remarked to Jim.

“Biggest Chink I ever saw,” replied Jim, “and not a bit of it is fat either. He’d make a dandy highbinder. You saw what he did to the Terrible Turk in that match last night. He just played with him. And the Turk was no slouch either.”

“Look at those arms,” joined in Larry, gazing with admiration at the swelling biceps of the wrestler. “What a slugger he’d make if he knew how to play ball. He’d break all the fences in the league.”

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“He sure would kill the ball if he ever caught it on the end of his bat,” declared Red Curry.

“I’ve half a mind to give him a chance,” laughed Joe.

“Go ahead,” grinned Larry. “I’d like to see him break his back reaching for one of your curves.”

“He might land on it at that,” replied Joe. “A wrestler has to have an eye like a hawk.”

He beckoned to the wrestler, who came toward him at once with a smile on his keen but good-natured face.

“Want to hit the ball?” asked Joe, piecing out his question by going through the motions of swinging a bat that he picked up.

The wrestler “caught on” at once, and the smile on his face broadened into a grin as he nodded his head understandingly.

“Me tly,” he said in the “pidgin English” he had picked up in his travels, and reached out his hand for the bat.

“Have a heart, Joe,” laughed Larry. “Don’t show the poor gink up before the crowd. At any rate let me show him how it’s done.”

“All right,” responded Joe. “You lead off and he can follow.”

Larry took up his position at the plate and motioned to the wrestler to watch him. The latter nodded and followed every motion.

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Joe put over a swift high one that Larry swung at and missed. He “bit” again at an outcurve with no better result.

“Look out, Larry,” chaffed Jim, “or it’s you that will be shown up instead of the Chink.”

A little nettled, Larry caught the next one full and square and it sailed far out into right field.

“There,” he said complacently, as he handed the bat to the wrestler, “that’s the way it’s done.”

The latter went awkwardly to the plate and a laugh ran through the crowd at the unusual sight.

Joe lobbed one over and the Chinaman swung listlessly a foot below the ball.

“Easy money,” laughed Denton.

“Where’s that good eye you said this fellow had?” sang out Willis.

The second ball floated up to the plate as big as a balloon, and again the wrestler whiffed, coming nowhere near the sphere.

But as Joe wound up for the third ball, the listlessness vanished from the Chinaman. A glint came into his eyes and every muscle was tense.

The ball sped toward the plate. The wrestler caught it fair “on the seam” with all his powerful body behind the blow.

The ball soared high and far over center field, looking as though it were never going to stop. In a regular game it would have been the easiest of home runs.

The wrestler sauntered away from the plate with the same bland smile on his yellow face while the crowd cheered him. He had turned the tables, and the laugh was on Joe and his fellow players.

“But why,” asked Jim, after the game had resulted in a victory for the visitors by a one-sided score, and he was walking back with Joe to the hotel, “did he make such a miserable flunk at the first two balls? Was he kidding us?”

“Not at all,” grinned Joe. “It’s because the Chinamen are the greatest imitators on earth. He saw that Larry missed the first two and so he did the same. He thought it was part of the game!”

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CHAPTER XXIII

AN EMBARRASSED RESCUER

On the long trip to Australia the tourists encountered the most severe storm of the journey. In fact, it was almost equal to the dreaded typhoon, and there were times when, despite the staunchness of the vessel, the faces of the captain and the officers were lined with anxiety.

After two days and nights, however, of peril, the storm blew itself out and the rest of the journey was made over serene seas and under cloudless skies.

One night after the girls had retired, Joe and Jim, together with McRae and Braxton, were sitting in the smoking room. The conversation had been of the kind that always prevails when baseball “fans” get together.

After a while Jim accompanied McRae to the latter’s cabin to discuss some details of Jim’s contract for the coming season, leaving Joe and Braxton as the sole occupants of the room.

Joe had never been able to overcome the instinctive antipathy that he had felt toward Braxton from the first, but he had kept this under restraint, and Braxton himself, though he might have suspected this feeling, was always suave and urbane.

There was no denying that he was good company and always interesting. In an apparently accidental way, Braxton, who had been scribbling aimlessly upon some pieces of paper that lay on the table, led the talk toward the subject of handwriting.

“It’s a gift to write a good hand,” he remarked. “It’s got to be born in you. Some men can do it

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naturally, others can't. I'm one of the fellows that can't. I'll bet Horace Greeley himself never wrote a worse hand than I do."

"I've heard that he was a weird writer," smiled Joe.

"The worst ever," rejoined Braxton. "I've heard that he wrote to his foreman once, ordering him to discharge a printer who had set up a bad copy. The printer hated to lose his job and an idea struck him. He got hold of the letter discharging him and took it to Greeley, who didn't know him by sight, and told him it was a letter of recommendation from his last employer. Greeley tried to read it, but couldn't, so he said he guessed it was all right and told him he was engaged."

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Joe laughed, and Braxton tossed over to him a sheet of paper on which he had written his name.

"Greeley has nothing on me," he said. "If you didn't know my name was Braxton, I'll bet you wouldn't recognize these hen tracks."

"You're right," said Joe. "I'm no dabster myself at writing and I can sympathize with you."

"It couldn't be as bad as this," challenged Braxton, slipping a pen over to Joe, together with a fresh piece of paper.

"No," said Joe, as he took up the pen, "I guess at least you could make mine out."

He scribbled his name and Braxton picked up the paper with a laugh.

"I win," he said. "You're bad, but I'm worse. You see I am proud even of my defects."

He dropped the subject then and talked of other things until Joe, stifling a yawn, excused himself and went to his cabin.

The reception of the party in Australia went far beyond their expectations. That remote continent has always been noted for its sporting spirit and although of course the English blood made cricket their favorite game, the crowds were quick to detect and appreciate the merits of the great American pastime.

As a rule they would not concede that the batting was any better than that shown by their own cricketers, but there was no question as to the superiority of the fielding.

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The lightning throws, the double plays, the marvelous catches in the outfield and the speed shown on the bases were freely admitted to be far and away beyond that shown by their elevens. And the crowds grew larger and larger as the visiting teams made their triumphal progress through the great cities of Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne.

Inspired by their reception and put upon their mettle by the great outpouring of spectators, the teams themselves played like demons. One might almost have thought that they were fighting for the pennant.

They were so evenly matched that first one and then the other was on top, and by the time they reached Melbourne the Giants were only one game in the lead of the total that had been played since the trip began.

Melbourne itself with its romantic history and magic growth proved very attractive. But Joe was destined to remember it for very different reasons.

While walking with Jim one day outside the town near the Yarra Yarra river, they were startled by hearing a cry for help, and racing toward the sound they saw a young girl struggling in the water.

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Trained by their vocation to act quickly, they threw off their coats, plunging into the water almost at the same instant. They swam fiercely, lashed on by that frantic wail, sounding fainter each time it was repeated.

The race for a life was almost neck and neck until Joe, showing his tremendous reserve

strength, shot ahead at the very end, grasping the struggling figure as it was sinking for the last time.

Jim helped, and together they brought the rescued girl—the long dank black hair testified to her sex—back to shore, where a group of the native blacks, attracted by the cries, had gathered to welcome them.

Dripping and exhausted, the two heroes of the occasion staggered up the bank while willing hands relieved them of their burden.

“Let’s beat it,” whispered Jim, as the crowd of natives closed around the unconscious object of their heroism, “while the going’s good. If that girl ever finds out that you rescued her she’ll want to attach herself to you for life. That seems to be the fool custom of these parts.”

“She’d find it pretty hard work,” said Joe, with a wry smile. “Besides, we don’t even know that the girl’s alive. It would be pretty heartless to clear out without learning.”

“Oh, all right,” said Jim, uneasily. “But remember, if there are any consequences you’ve got to take ’em.”

At that moment the crowd opened and the boys saw a remarkably good-looking black girl standing dizzily and supported by another native who might have been her father.

She looked dazedly from one to the other of the young men and Jim promptly “stepped out from under.”

“It’s him,” said Jim, neglecting grammar in his eagerness to shift the burden of credit to Joe’s broad shoulders. “He did it all.”

The girl walked unsteadily up to Joe and said, submissively: “My life is yours! Me your slave!”

Joe started, stared, and gulped, then turned to Jim to make sure he was awake, and not a victim of some bad dream. But Jim had suddenly acquired a peculiar form of hysteria, and with a choking sound turned his back upon his friend.

“N-no,” stuttered Joe, gently pushing the girl away, “no want.”

Another explosion from Jim did not serve to improve Joe’s state of mind. His face was fiery red, and his voice husky.

“Me slave!” persisted the girl stubbornly.

Then Joe turned and fled, manfully fighting a desire to shout with laughter one moment, and groan with dismay the next.

Two very much subdued baseball players crept in at the side door of the hotel, and scurried along the corridor toward their rooms, hoping ardently to meet no one on the way. It was with a sigh of relief that they slipped inside, locked the door, and repaired the ravages that the waters of the Yarra Yarra had made upon their clothing.

A few moments later, with self respect considerably improved, they sauntered down to the writing room, where they found the two girls looking more distractingly pretty than ever, engaged in folding the last of their letters.

“Oh, back so soon?” queried Mabel, looking up.

“Goodness, how the time has flown,” said Clara. “It seems as though you had just gone. Have you another stamp, Mabel dear? I have used mine all up.”

“Say, you’re complimentary,” remarked Jim, dryly. “It’s great to be missed like that.”

“Well, we’ll miss something more if we don’t get a move on,” said Joe, practically. “How about some lunch, girls?”

After luncheon the quartette sauntered out for a walk up Elizabeth street to the post-office. The

boys were just congratulating themselves that their uncomfortable, though piquant, experience of the morning was a thing definitely of the past, when it happened!

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Joe felt a touch on his arm, and, looking down, saw, to his horror, the black girl.

“Me yours!” she cried, eagerly.

Joe muttered savagely beneath his breath, and held the girl off at arm’s length, his misery increasing as, with a quick side glance, he saw the growing indignation in Mabel’s eyes.

“Me yours!” repeated the girl, with the maddening monotony of a phonograph.

But just then, when Joe was at his wit’s end, help came from an unexpected quarter. A big black man, glowering threateningly, elbowed his way through the curious group that had gathered about them, grasped the girl by the arm, and dragged her away. There was no mistaking the jealousy that prompted the action. Joe drew a deep sigh of deliverance, while Jim was crimson with suppressed laughter.

Mabel was the only one, except Joe himself, who could not see the joke. There were two pink spots in her cheeks, her eyes were very bright, her head was held high, and poor Joe had some explaining to do before the party left Australia, which they did soon after, and started on their journey to Ceylon.

They reached Colombo in Ceylon, the island of spices, the richest gem in the Indian ocean, and disembarked late one afternoon. At the hotel in the English quarter, while the women of the party went to their rooms to refresh themselves and dress for dinner, the men, after a hasty toilet, went into the lobby of the hotel where, as always, their first thought was to get hold of the papers from home.

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Joe’s eyes fell on a New York paper and he snatched it up eagerly and turned to the sporting page for the latest news of the diamond. He gave a startled exclamation as he saw the bold headline that stretched across the top of the page:

“*Joe Matson, the Pitching King, Signs with the All-Star League!*”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BLOW FALLS

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Baseball Joe’s first sensation was one of unutterable surprise, followed a moment later by fierce indignation.

“What’s the matter, Joe?” asked Jim, coming up behind him.

“Matter enough!” growled Joe, thrusting the offending paper under his comrade’s nose. “Look at this!”

Jim looked and gave a long whistle of surprise.

“What does it mean?” he ejaculated, as his eyes went from the headlines to the story, which covered the greater part of the page.

“Mean?” snorted Joe. “It means a stab in the back. It means that those skunks are trying to do by lying what they couldn’t do by bribery. It means that while we’re thousands of miles away

they are trying to gull the public and get other ball players to jump their contracts by a barefaced lie like this. I wish I had hold of the fellow who's doing this—I'd make him sweat for it!"

"Of course it's a lie," assented Jim, "and a lie out of whole cloth. But what beats me is why they should do it? It's bound to be a boomerang."

They sat down side by side and read the paper together, and the more they read the more bewildered they became.

For the story was circumstantial. It went into minute details. It embraced interviews with the backers of the new league, who confirmed it without hesitation. One of the paragraphs read as follows:

"Nothing in years has created such a sensation in the world of sport as the news just made public that Matson, the star pitcher of the Giants, had jumped the fold and landed in the All-Star League. It was known that overtures were made to this great pitcher at the end of his last season, when his magnificent work created a record in the National League that will probably never be surpassed. It was understood, however, that these offers, though coupled with a tremendous bonus and salary, had been definitely rejected. For that reason the news that he has reconsidered and jumped to the All-Stars comes like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. The major leaguers are in consternation, while the new league naturally is jubilant at this acquisition to their ranks. Matson is a popular idol among his fellow players and it is believed that many stars who have been wavering in their allegiance to the old leagues will follow his example."

The rest of the page was devoted to a recital of Joe's achievements in pitching the Giants to the Championship of the National League and, later, to the Championship of the World.

The two friends stared at each other in amazement and rage, and just then McRae and Robbie, together with a group of other players, came hurrying up, holding other papers which, though in different words, told substantially the same story.

There was a babel of excited questions and exclamations, and Joe felt a sharp pang go through him, as for the first time in his experience with the manager of the Giants, he saw in McRae's eyes a shadow of distrust.

"Isn't this the limit?" asked McRae, as he crushed the paper in his hand, threw it to the floor and trampled on it in disgust and anger.

"It sure is," replied Joe. "I've had lies told about me before but never one that touched me on the raw like this."

"It's a burning outrage," cried Denton indignantly.

"What they expect to make out of it is beyond me," declared Robbie. "They ought to know that they can't get away with it."

"But in the meantime it will have done its work," Willis pointed out. "What if it is contradicted later on? By that time they'll have a dozen stars signed and they should worry. As long as it's believed that Joe has jumped, it's just as good for them as though he had."

"That's the worst of it," agreed Joe bitterly. "Of course I'll send a cable contradicting it, but the lie has got a head start and a lot of damage has been done. What do you suppose my friends in America are thinking about me just now?"

"Don't worry about that, Joe," comforted Jim. "Your real friends won't believe it, and for the rest it doesn't matter. Nobody that really knows you believes you would jump your contract."

"Whoever got that story up was foxy, though," commented Mylert, the burly catcher of the Giants. "There are no 'ifs or ands' about it like most phony stories where the fellow's trying to

hedge in case someone comes back at him. It sounds like straight goods. It's the most truthful looking lie I ever saw."

"But it's a lie just the same!" cried Joe desperately. "All you fellows know I wouldn't throw the Giants down, don't you?" he asked, as his eyes swept the circle of fellow players who were gathered around him.

There was a murmur of assent, but it was not as hearty as Joe could have wished. If there was not distrust, there was at least bewilderment, for the story bore all the earmarks of truth.

"You know it, don't you, Mac?" repeated Joe, this time addressing directly the Giant leader.

For a fraction of a second McRae hesitated. Then he threw doubt to the winds and gripped Joe's hand with a heartiness that warmed the latter's heart.

"Of course, I know it, Joe!" he exclaimed emphatically. "I don't deny that for a moment the paper had me going. But in my heart I know it's a lie. So just send your cable and then let's forget it. Those fellows are just making a rope to hang themselves with. We'll make it warm for them when we get back to the States."

"You ought to sue the papers for libel," growled Robbie.

"There won't be any suing," said Joe heatedly. "Just let me have five minutes alone with the fellow that started this and that's all I'll ask."

He hurried down with Jim to the cable office and a few minutes later this message buzzed its way across the seas:

"Report that I have signed with the All-Star League absolutely false. Will give a thousand dollars to charity if anyone can produce contract.

"JOSEPH MATSON."

"That ought to hold them for a while," commented Jim.

"It ought," said Joe gloomily. "But you know the old saying that 'a lie will go round the world while truth is getting its boots on.'"

Still he felt better, and by the time he got back to the hotel and met the girls, he had so far regained his usual poise that he could tell them all about it with some measure of self-control.

"Why, Joe! how could they dare do such a thing as that?" exclaimed Mabel, her eyes flashing fire.

"It's about the meanest thing I ever heard of!" cried his sister.

"They ought to be sued for libel, don't you know," broke in Reggie. "If you sued them, Joe, you might get quite heavy damages."

"It's a pity you can't put somebody in jail for it," was Mabel's further comment.

"Yes, that's what ought to happen!" cried Clara.

Both of the girls were wild with indignation. Although Mabel at one time, influenced by the arguments of Braxton that Joe was not really bound by a one-sided contract, had spoken to him about it in a guarded way, Joe had shown her so clearly his moral obligation that he had convinced her absolutely. And now she was angry clear through at the blow in the dark that had been launched against him.

"Who could have done such a contemptible thing?" she cried.

"It must have been that horrid Westland!" exclaimed Clara.

"Maybe," agreed her brother. "I rather hope it was."

"Why?" asked Jim curiously.

“Because,” gritted Joe through his teeth, “he’s a big fellow and I won’t be ashamed to hit him.”

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CHAPTER XXV

THE COBRA IN THE ROOM

Ceylon was a land of wonders to the tourists. Here they were in the very heart of the Orient. Rare flowers and strange plants grew in glorious profusion, the air was odorous with a thousand scents, and it was hard for them to realize that at that very moment America might be suffering from zero weather or swept by blizzards. Here life moved along serenely and dreamily, lulled by the sound of birds and drone of locusts, wrapped in the warm folds of eternal summer.

“It’s an earthly Eden!” murmured Clara, as she and Jim walked along one of the main streets of Colombo, followed at a little distance by Joe and Mabel.

“Yes,” replied Jim with a laugh, “and not even the snake is missing.”

He pointed to a group of natives and Europeans on the other side of the street who were gathered about a snake charmer.

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“Ugh, the horrid things!” exclaimed Clara with a shudder.

“Let’s go over and take a look,” suggested Jim.

Clara demurred at first and so did Mabel. They were used to seeing snakes behind a network of wire and glass, and they did not relish the idea of standing within a few feet of the crawling serpents in the open street. But curiosity, added to the urgings of the young men, finally conquered, and they joined the throng on the other side.

The performer, an old man with bronzed face, was squatting on his haunches playing a weird tune on a reedy instrument resembling a flute. Before him was upreared a monstrous specimen of the deadly cobra species, swaying gently to and fro and keeping time to the music. Its malignant eyes looking out from the broad head whose markings resembled a pair of spectacles had lost something of their fiery sparkle, and a slight haze spread over them, as though the creature were under a spell.

The music continued and two other snakes crawled out as if in response to a call and joined their companion in his swaying, rhythmic dance. Then the tune changed, the snakes uncoiled, and the performer took them up without the slightest fear and put them back in the basket.

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“Suppose they should bite him!” exclaimed Mabel.

“He’s had their fangs drawn already,” returned Joe. “The old rascal’s taking no chances.”

“They say that a man lasts about half an hour after one of those fellows nips him,” observed Jim. “Somebody was telling me that over twenty thousand natives are bitten by them every year.”

A little further down the street, another fakir was giving an exhibition. He placed a small native boy in a basket that was a tight fit and put down the basket cover. Then after making mysterious signs and muttering invocations, the fakir drew a long sword and plunged it through the basket from end to end. A scream of pain came from within, and when the sword was withdrawn it was red. Again and again this was repeated until the screams died away. Then the fakir lifted up

the cover and the boy sprang out safe and sound, and, showing his white teeth in a smile, went around collecting coins from the bystanders.

They wandered further among the bazaars, making purchases of curios as presents for the folks at home and adding to their personal stock of mementos. Jim secured among other things a cane made of a rare Indian wood, which while light was exceedingly strong and so pliable that it could be bent almost double like a Damascus blade.

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But through all the chaff and fun of the day Joe was unhappy and restless. What he had read in the paper from home about himself poisoned everything for him.

He had always tried to be perfectly straight and honorable in all his business relations. His word had ever been as good as his bond. Now, at one stroke, he saw his reputation damaged perhaps beyond mending. All over the United States he had been pictured as a contract-breaker. He could see the incredulity of his friends turning gradually to contempt. He fancied he could hear them saying:

“So Joe has fallen for that game, has he? Well, they say that every man has his price. No doubt Joe’s price was high, but they found out what it was and bought him.”

Of course he had denied it, but he knew how people smiled when they read denials. And months must pass before he could get back to America and try to hunt out the author or authors of the story.

He tried to hide his mood under a cover of light talk and banter, but the others felt it and sympathized with him, though all refrained from mentioning what each of them was thinking.

All through the day his gloom persisted, and when night came and he had retired to the room that he and Jim occupied together he felt that it would be impossible for him to sleep.

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“There’s no use talking,” said Jim with a yawn, as he set his cane so that it rested against the footboard and threw off his coat preparing to undress, “sight-seeing’s the most tiring work there is. I feel more done up to-night than if I had been pitching in a hard game.”

“I’m tired too,” agreed Joe, “but I don’t feel the least bit like sleep.”

Jim was asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. But Joe tossed about restlessly for what seemed to him to be hours. The night was very warm and all the windows were open to get what breath of air might be stirring.

A broad veranda ran all around the building, not more than two feet below the windows, and from the ground to the veranda rose a luxuriant tangle of vines and flowers.

The moon was at the full and its light flooded a part of the room, leaving the rest in deep shadow.

Joe at last dropped off into a doze from which he woke with a start.

He had heard nothing, but he had an uneasy consciousness that something was wrong.

He glanced over at Jim who was peacefully sleeping. Then he raised himself on his elbow and his glance swept the room.

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Nothing seemed amiss in the lighted part, but in a darkened corner the shadow seemed to be heavier than usual. It was as though it were piled in a mass instead of being evenly distributed.

Then to Joe’s consternation *the shadow moved*, reached the edge of moonlight, rose higher and higher with a sickening swaying motion. From a hideous head two sparks of fire glowed balefully and Joe knew that he was in the presence of a giant cobra!

CHAPTER XXVI

IN THE SHADOW OF THE PYRAMIDS

Joe's blood chilled with horror and his heart seemed for a moment to stop beating.

He did not dare to move and scarcely to breathe. He might have been a statue, so rigid was his attitude. He knew that the least movement would provoke an attack on the part of the deadly reptile.

On the other hand, if he kept perfectly quiet, there was the chance of the snake gliding away through the window, which had evidently been its means of entering the room.

Whether the serpent saw him or not, Joe could not tell. The head swayed for a minute or two, while the glowing eyes seemed to take in every corner of the room. Then the coils unwound and with a slithering sound the snake began to crawl across the floor.

But instead of seeking the window it was gliding towards the bed!

If he had had a revolver Joe would have had a chance, for at such close range he could scarcely have missed. Even a knife to hurl, though only a forlorn hope, might have pinned the snake to the floor. But he was utterly without a weapon of any kind.

Suddenly he remembered the cane that his chum had leaned against the footboard a few hours earlier.

He reached down stealthily and his hand closed upon it.

He did not dare to wake Jim for fear that the latter might leap from the bed and perhaps land squarely on the gliding death that was somewhere in the room. He had lost sight of it, but he could still hear the dragging body and it seemed to be now under the bed. At any instant that awful head might rise on either side prepared to strike.

Gripping the cane until his fingers seemed to dig into it, Joe had a moment of awful suspense.

The gliding sound had ceased. Then from the side nearest Jim a hideous head arose within a foot of the sleeping man's face.

Like a flash the tough cane hissed through the air with all Joe's muscle back of it. It caught the reptile full in the neck and sent it half way across the room where it lay writhing.

In an instant Joe had leaped to the floor, raining blows upon the head and floundering coils, until at last the reptile straightened out and lay still.

"What's the matter?" cried Jim, awakened by the tumult and jumping out of bed.

He turned pale as he saw the snake stretched out on the floor and Joe who, now that the awful strain was over, was leaning against the wall as limp as a rag.

Jim turned on the light and they viewed the monster, standing at a respectful distance from the head.

"He seems dead enough, but you can never be sure of a snake," said Joe, after in a few hurried words he had told of his experience. "Suppose, Jim, you get that Malay's knife out of my trunk and we'll make certain."

Jim brought the kriss, which Joe had kept as a memento of his struggle with the maniac, and with one stroke severed the cobra's head from his body.

"That knife never did a better bit of work," he commented as he washed it off. "Now let's get

this thing out of the window and clear up the mess.”

They got through the repugnant work as soon as possible and then made a careful search of the room.

“That fellow may have had a mate,” remarked Joe, “and one experience of this kind is enough for a lifetime. I’ve always felt a little doubtful about those stories of people whose hair turned gray in a single night, but it’s easy enough to believe it now.”

“We’ll close the window too,” said Jim, suiting the action to the word and letting the upper sash down only for an inch or two. “That’s the way that fellow must have crawled in. It’s pretty hot in here but I’d rather die of heat than snake bites.”

They went back to bed but not to sleep, for they were too thoroughly wrought up by their narrow escape.

“You must have hit that fellow an awful crack,” said Jim. “You sure batted .300 in the Ceylon League.”

“Broke his neck, I guess,” responded Joe. “It’s lucky it wasn’t a missed strike for I wouldn’t have had time for another one.”

“Don’t let’s say anything to the girls about it,” suggested Jim. “Not until we get away from India anyway. They’d be seeing snakes all the rest of the time we’re here.”

It was lucky that neither of them was slated to pitch the next day, for they would scarcely have been in condition after their night’s experience. A game had been arranged between the visiting teams at a date three days later. By that time Joe was in his usual superb form and easily carried off the victory for his team. This put the Giants “on velvet,” for they now had a clear lead of two over the All-Americans.

But the satisfaction that this would have usually given Joe was lacking now. Victory had ceased to be sweet since the receipt of that newspaper from home.

Perhaps it was because of his sensitive condition that he thought he detected a subtle change in the conduct of his team mates towards him. While perfectly friendly in their relations with him, they did not “let themselves go” when in his presence, as formerly. There was no boisterous clapping on the back, no jolly sparring or wrestling. There seemed to be a little holding in, a feeling of reserve, a something in the back of their minds that they did not care for him to see.

This joyous freemasonry of sport had always been especially pleasant to Joe and for that reason he felt its absence the more keenly.

But what exasperated him most was that if the old standbys of the club were a trifle cool, Iredell, Curry and Burkett went to the other extreme and were more cordial than ever before. It was as though they were welcoming a newcomer to their ranks. They knew that they were under suspicion of planning to jump their contracts in the spring, and the apparent evidence that so renowned a player as Joe was planning to do the same thing made them hail him as a reinforcement.

Where formerly they had often ceased talking when he approached them and made him feel that he was an intruder, they now greeted him warmly, although they did not yet feel quite sure enough to broach the subject of their own accord.

“All little pals together,” hummed Iredell significantly on one occasion with a sidelong glance at Joe.

“Just what do you mean by that?” asked Joe sharply.

“Just what I say,” replied Iredell innocently. “What is there wrong about that? Aren’t we Giants pals to each other?”

“Of course we are, as long as we stay Giants,” replied Joe. “But that wasn’t what you meant,

Dell, and you know it.”

“Now, don’t get red-headed, Joe,” put in Curry soothingly. “You must have got out of bed on the wrong side this morning. Dell didn’t mean any harm.”

“Tell me one thing,” said Joe. “Do any of you fellows believe for one minute that story in the paper?”

He looked from one to the other, but none of them looked him straight in the eye.

“You know that I’ve denied it,” went on Joe, as they kept silent, “and if after that you still believe the story it’s the same as saying that I lie. And no one can call me a liar and get away with it.”

He stalked away leaving them dumbfounded.

“Do you think he really has jumped his contract?” asked Burkett.

“I don’t know,” replied Iredell dubiously.

“He’s got me guessing,” muttered Curry.

And the trio were still guessing when several weeks later the party reached Egyptian soil, prepared to play the most modern of games before the most ancient of monuments—baseball in the very shadow of the Pyramids!

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CHAPTER XXVII

THE SIGNED CONTRACT

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“If old Pharaoh could only see us now!” chortled Jim, as the teams lined up for their first game.

“He’d probably throw a fit,” grinned Denton.

“Not a bit of it,” said Joe. “He’d probably be up in the grandstand, eating peanuts and singing out once in a while to ‘kill the umpire.’”

“And he’d do it too,” laughed Jim. “I’ll bet an umpire in those days would have had a hard job to get life insurance. It would have been good dope to get a tip before the game as to just what team Pharaoh wanted to win.”

“I think you men are awfully irreverent,” reproved Mabel, who, with Clara, was seated in the first row in the stand right behind the players’ bench and had overheard the conversation.

“Not at all,” laughed Jim. “It’s a big compliment to Pharaoh to suggest that he would have been a baseball fan if he hadn’t been born too soon. It puts him on a level with the President of the United States.”

The teams were playing on the cricket field used by the English residents, and not far off the Pyramids reared their stately heads toward the sky. It was a strange conjunction of the past and the present, and all were more or less impressed by it.

“Well, I must confess that in my wildest dreams of seasons gone by, I never supposed that I would be pitching here in Egypt in the shadow of the pyramids,” remarked Joe.

“It certainly takes a fellow back to ancient days,” put in Jim. “Just imagine playing before a

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crowd of those old Egyptians!”

“Well, they had fun in their day just as well as we have,” said McRae. “Just the same, they didn’t know how good baseball is.”

“They didn’t even know anything about yelling to kill the umpire when a wrong decision was given,” remarked Joe, with a grin, and at this there was a general laugh.

There was a big outpouring of Europeans and visiting Americans, and under the inspiration of their interest and applause both teams played brilliantly. It was a hammer-and-tongs contest from start to finish, and resulted in the first tie of the trip, neither team being able to score, although the game went to eleven innings.

“Still two ahead,” McRae said to Brennan, as they left the grounds after the game. 222

“We’re gunning for you,” retorted Brennan good-naturedly, “and we’ll get you yet. You’ve had all the breaks so far, but our turn has got to come.”

“Tell that to the King of Denmark,” laughed McRae. “We’ve got your number, old man.”

The party “did” Egypt thoroughly, visiting Cairo, Thebes and Memphis, climbing the Pyramids, sailing on the Nile, viewing the temples of Karnak and Philae, the statue of Memnon, and countless other places of interest in this cradle of the world’s civilization. And it was a tired but happy crowd that finally assembled at Alexandria to take ship for Naples, their first stopping place on the continent of Europe.

Braxton was no longer with the party, having left it at Ceylon, and others had dropped away here and there. But in the main the members were the same as at the beginning. Their health had been excellent, and only a few things had occurred to mar the pleasure of the trip.

The discomfort that Joe had felt had largely worn away with the passing of time. Every day was bringing him nearer the time when with the opening of the season he would actually appear on the diamond wearing a Giant uniform, and thus effectually dispose of the slander that had troubled him.

There had just been time enough to receive some of the earliest papers from America that had been published after the receipt of his denial. That denial had evidently produced a great effect, coupled as it was with the offer to give a thousand dollars to charity if the new league could produce any contract signed by him. “Money talks,” and the paper intimated that the All-Star League had the next move and that it would be “in bad” with the public if it failed to make its statements good. 223

“They’ll have a hot time doing it,” grinned Joe.

“I’m wondering how they’ll dodge it,” remarked Jim.

“By getting out a new lie to bolster up the old one probably,” conjectured Joe.

The latest papers from America had come on board just as the steamer left Alexandria, and in the hurry of getting aboard and settling down in their new quarters it was after supper that night before Joe hurried to the smoking room to have a look at them.

“Got a thousand dollars handy, Joe?” inquired Denton, as Joe came near him.

“Because, if you have, the All-Star League wants it,” added Larry.

“What do you mean?” asked Joe, all the old discomfort and apprehension coming back to him. 224

“Read this,” replied Larry, handing him a paper opened at the sporting page.

Joe read:

“All-Star League Calls Matson’s Bluff. Produces Signed Contract. Facsimile of Contract Shown Below.”

And staring right out at him was the photographic reproduction of a regulation baseball contract and at the bottom was written the name: "Joseph Matson."

Joe stared at it as though he were in a dream. Here was the old blow at his reputation, this time with redoubled force. Here was what claimed to be the actual contract. But it was not the body of the contract that held his attention. The thing that made him rage, that gave him a sense of furious helplessness, that put his brain in a whirl, was this:

He knew that that was his signature!

No matter how it came there, it was his. A man's name can seldom be so skilfully forged that it can deceive the man himself. It may get by the cashier of the bank, but when it is referred back to the man who is supposed to have written it, that man knows instinctively whether he ever wrote it. Perhaps he cannot tell why he knows it, but he knows it just the same.

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So Joe *knew* that it was his signature that was photographed on that contract. But he also knew another thing just as certainly.

He had never signed that contract!

Both things contradictory. Yet both things true.

Larry and Denton were watching him closely. Joe looked up and met their eyes. They were two of his oldest and warmest friends on the Giant team and had always been ready to back him through thick and thin. Confidence still was in their gaze, but with it was mixed bewilderment almost equal to Joe's own.

Before anything further could be said, McRae and Robbie joined the group.

"Well, Joe, there's the contract," said McRae.

"It seems to be a contract all right," replied Joe. "I haven't had time to read what it says, but that doesn't matter anyway. The only important thing is that I never signed that contract."

"That seems to be a pretty good imitation of your signature at the bottom there," chimed in Robbie.

"It's even better than that," said Joe, taking the bull by the horns. "It isn't even an imitation. It's my own signature."

Both Robbie and McRae looked at him as if they thought he was crazy.

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"I don't get you, Matson," said McRae, a little sternly. "And it seems to me it's hardly a time for joking. There's the contract. You say you didn't sign it, and yet you admit that the name at the bottom is your own signature. How do you explain it?"

"I don't pretend to explain it," replied Joe. "There's crooked work somewhere that I've got to ferret out. Somehow or other my name, written by me, has gotten on the bottom of that contract. But I never put it there. Some rascal has, and when I find him, as I will, may Heaven have mercy on him, for I won't!"

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CHAPTER XXVIII

WHIRLWIND PITCHING

“A fellow who would do a thing like that is taking long chances,” said McRae doubtfully.

“And how could he do it?” put in Robbie. “The name would have to be cut from one piece of paper and pasted on another, wouldn’t it?”

“Even admitting that they might get your name from a check or letter, I don’t see how a thing like that could stand inspection for a minute,” chimed in Willis. “Even if it were so well done that an eye couldn’t detect it, a microscope would give it away.”

“And you can bet that the reporters who hunted up this thing haven’t overlooked any bets,” said Brennan. “They knew that the signature was the nub of the whole thing and if there was anything phony about the paper they’d have got next at once.”

“It’s a horrible mixup!” cried Joe, who felt that he was being enmeshed in a net of circumstantial evidence which he might find it impossible to break. “Let me read the story first from end to end. Then, perhaps, I’ll find some clue that will solve the mystery.”

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He plunged at once into the reading, but the more he read the worse the matter looked.

He found that a nation-wide interest had been excited by his denial and his challenge. The officers of the All-Star League had been besieged by reporters, who had made it clear to them that they must prove their statement that Matson had signed with them or else stand convicted before the American public, on whose favor they depended for support in the coming season, of being slanderers and liars.

Mr. Beckworth Fleming, the president of the All-Star League, had shown a little hesitation in responding to these demands. This, perhaps, was natural enough, since no business organization cares to have the terms of its contracts blazoned forth to the world, perhaps to the benefit of its rivals. Still, under all the circumstances, Mr. Fleming had finally decided to permit a photographic copy to be made of the contract in order to establish the good faith of the new league. This had been done and facsimiles had been sent to all the leading newspapers of the United States.

There was no question that the contract was genuine. It had been submitted to bank cashiers who were familiar with Mr. Matson’s writing, and they had pronounced it his signature beyond the shadow of a doubt. The paper had been examined under powerful glasses and found to be a single piece. Everything was in proper form, and it was clearly up to Mr. Matson to explain what seemed to be explainable only in one way, namely, that he had signed the contract.

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There were many worthy charities that could find a good use for the thousand dollars that the great pitcher had so rashly offered.

This was the gist of the story in all the papers. There were various suggested explanations. One paper hinted that men had been known to sign papers when they had dined and wine too well.

Another thought that the denial was purely a “diplomatic” one. Others ventured the hypothesis that the whole thing was an advertising dodge, designed to set the country agog with excitement and stimulate big audiences for the coming season.

But underneath all the suppositions one thing seemed to be unquestioned by the papers, and that was that Joe had signed a contract to play with the All-Star League and had left the Giants in the lurch.

Joe felt as though the ground were slipping from beneath his feet. He was perfectly innocent, and yet he already stood convicted in the public mind of having done a thing that he loathed and abhorred. And the worst of it was that he had not the slightest clue to the scoundrel or scoundrels who had brought this thing about.

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“It’s beyond me, Mac,” he said at last in despair, as he looked up and saw the Giants’ manager’s eyes fixed upon him as though they would read into his soul. “They seem to have a strangle hold on me. And yet as black as things look I tell you straight, Mac, that you know

every bit as much about this as I do.”

“That’s all right, Joe,” returned McRae. “I’ll admit I’m flabbergasted. Who wouldn’t be? There’s a plot here somewhere, and the fox that planned it has been mighty cunning in covering up his tracks. But there never yet was a lie that didn’t have a weak point somewhere, and soon or late we’ll find it.”

Mabel and Clara, as well as Jim, were beside themselves with anger at the dastardly trick. They racked their brains to find the explanation, but every time they came up against a blank wall.

“I certainly can’t understand it, Joe,” said Mabel, for at least the tenth time.

“Well, I can’t understand it myself, Mabel,” he replied.

“Are you sure you didn’t sign that contract, thinking it was something else—an order for something, or something like that?” questioned Clara. 231

“I’m not in the habit of signing anything without knowing what it is,” said the crack pitcher. “If any of those fellows had brought such a thing to me to sign, I would have handed it back and given the fellow a piece of my mind. No, there is something else in all this, though what it is I haven’t the faintest idea.”

“It’s too bad we’re so far away from those fellows just at present,” put in Jim. “If we were close by we might interview them, and find out some of the details that are as yet missing. And then maybe somebody would get a broken head,” he added vigorously.

“Oh, Jim! would you break anybody’s head?” burst out Clara in horror.

“I sure would if he was trying to put Joe in such a hole as this!” returned the young man promptly. “Maybe you don’t understand what a black eye this is calculated to give your brother.”

“Oh, yes, I can understand that well enough,” sighed Joe’s sister.

“I think it’s the meanest thing that ever could possibly happen!” burst out Mabel. “And I don’t wonder that Jim is angry enough to break somebody’s head for it,” and she looked lovingly at Joe.

“Oh, I suppose it will come out all right in the end,” answered Joe. But he said this merely to ease Mabel’s mind. Secretly he was afraid that he was in for some real trouble. 232

It was early spring when they landed in Naples, but the winter had been prolonged more than usual and it was too cold to play. At Monte Carlo and Nice, however, they were able to get in two games, both of which were won by the All-Americans. This put the teams again on an equality as to games won and lost, and revived the hopes of the All-Americans that they might still come out ahead in the series.

They made but a short stay in Paris, and the weather was so inclement that games were out of the question. But it would have taken more than bad weather to prevent the shopping and sightseeing that all had been looking forward eagerly to in the great French capital, and they enjoyed their visit to the full.

In London they met with the greatest welcome of their trip. They played at Lord’s Oval, the most famous grounds in the United Kingdom, and before an audience that included the most distinguished people in the realm, including the king himself.

The American colony, too, was there almost to a man, and the United States ambassador lent his presence to the occasion.

It was the most distinguished audience, probably, that had ever witnessed a baseball game. 233

And here it was that Joe did the most brilliant pitching of the trip. His tireless arm mowed down his opponents inning after inning. They came to the bat only to go back to the bench. His mastery of the ball seemed almost uncanny, and as inning after inning passed without a hit

being made, it began to look as though he were in for that dream of all pitchers—a no-hit game.

Brennan, the Chicago manager, fidgeted restlessly on the bench and glowered as his pets were slaughtered. He tried all the tactics known to clever managers, but in vain. It was simply a day when Baseball Joe was not to be denied.

His comrades, too, gave him brilliant support and nothing got away from them, so that when finally the last man up in the ninth inning in the All-American team lifted a towering skyscraper that Joe caught without stirring from his tracks, a pandemonium of cheers forced him to remove his cap and bow to the applauding crowds again and again.

Not a man had scored, not a man had been passed, not a man had reached first, not a man had hit safe. Joe had won the most notable game in his whole career!

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RUINED CASTLE

With London as their center the teams made flying trips to Edinburg, Glasgow and Dublin. In all three places they received a royal welcome, for the fame of that great game in London had spread throughout the nation and all were eager to see the hero of that occasion.

Under other circumstances Joe would have been jubilant, for he was at the very height of his reputation, the girl he loved was with him, as well as his only sister and his closest friend, but ever in his thoughts like the spectre at the feast was that matter of the signed contract—the abominable thing that smirched his reputation and branded him to the world as false to his word and bond.

Again and again he sought to find the key to the mystery. It seemed like some monstrous jugglery, something akin to the fakir's tricks that he had witnessed at Colombo where the impossible had seemed so clearly possible.

Try as he would he could find no explanation of the puzzle and his friends were equally powerless to suggest a solution.

The game at Dublin, which commenced auspiciously for the Giants, was turned into a rout by a rally of the All-Americans in the ninth. A rain of bingles came from their bats and they won easily with six runs to spare.

“Got it in the neck that time, old man,” said Joe to Jim, after the game. “But we can't always win. What do you say to getting a buzz wagon and taking a little spin out into the country? The girls will be getting ready for that reception at the Viceroy's castle, and they'll be too busy dolling up to care what becomes of us.”

“Good idea,” said Jim, and the two friends made their way to a public garage, secured a good car together with a driver, and whirled away into the open country.

They had made perhaps twenty miles through the beautiful Irish scenery when Joe called Jim's attention to a cloud bank forming in the west.

“Better skip back, old man,” he said. “We're due for a wetting if we don't.”

“Plenty of time yet,” objected Jim. “Those look to me just like wind clouds. Let's see a little bit

more of Ireland.”

They went on perhaps five miles further and then Jim found that his confidence was misplaced. The clouds grew blacker, an ominous muttering was heard in the sky and a jagged flash of lightning presaged the coming storm. 236

“You see I was right,” said Joe. “In this open car we’ll be drenched to the skin. Turn around, Mike,” he said to the driver, “and let’s see how fast this old boat of yours can travel in getting back to Dublin. Throw her into high and give her all you’ve got.”

The driver obeyed and the car fairly purred as it sped back toward the city. But fast as it was, the storm was faster. Great raindrops pattered down, and they looked anxiously about for shelter.

“What’s that place up there, Mike?” asked Jim, pointing to a rambling stone structure on an elevation perhaps a hundred yards from the road.

“Tis the castle o’ the last o’ the O’Brian’s, hivin rist his sowl,” replied Mike. “But they do be sayin’ the place is hanted, an’ ’tis a brave man that would be shtepin’ inside the dhure.”

“I’m a brave man, then,” cried Jim. “For I’ll face a dozen ghosts before I would this storm. Turn in, Mike, and we’ll wait there till the rain is over.”

With a muttered protest Mike did as directed, and a moment later the young men stepped jauntily through the ruined portal, while Mike, shocked at their temerity, crossed himself and, throwing an oilskin over his head, crouched low in his seat, preferring the discomfort of the open to the unknown terrors that might lurk beyond the doorway of the ruined castle. 237

The friends had scarcely stepped inside before the rain came down in torrents.

“Lucky we got here just as we did,” remarked Joe, as they leaned up against the masonry of the ruined hall and looked out at the cloudburst.

“It surely was,” agreed Jim. “I wish we had a little more light. It’s as dark as Egypt in here.”

“I’ve got my pocket flashlight with me,” said Joe, reaching toward his hip pocket. “But listen, what’s that?”

“I didn’t hear anything,” returned Jim, a little nervously, it must be admitted.

The two ball players kept perfectly still for a minute and heard what seemed to be the murmur of voices a room or two away.

“Can it be that the last of the O’Brians is rambling about the castle?” whispered Jim, with a feeble attempt at raillery.

“More likely some travelers stormbound like ourselves,” returned Joe practically. “Let’s take a squint at them.”

They tiptoed their way through the hall to a room opening on the right. The door, half broken from its hinges, was standing open, and in the darkness they saw the tips of two lighted cigars. 238

As this was not at all ghostly and they did not care to intrude, they were about to retire as softly as they had come, when Joe was startled by hearing his own name. Jim’s hand shot out and clenched his friend’s arm, and they stood there like statues.

“That was a slick trick you put over on Matson,” said a voice which Joe recognized instantly as belonging to Beckworth Fleming. He had heard that voice before when he had made its owner kneel in the dirt of the road and beg Mabel’s pardon for his insolence.

“I think myself it was rather clever,” drawled another familiar voice, that of Braxton. “He fell for it like a lamb.”

“He’s a pretty keen chap usually, too,” remarked Fleming. “How is it you caught him napping?”

“I picked out just the right time,” said Braxton complacently. “And I don’t deny that luck helped me a little. If McRae and Barclay hadn’t gone away just the time they did, it might not have worked. But I got him talking about handwriting, and the first thing you know he’d scribbled his name on the blank sheet. I took good care that only the bottom of the sheet was where he could reach it. Then I slipped the paper into my pocket, sent it to you to have the contract printed above the signature, and you know the rest.”

“Easy meat,” chuckled Fleming.

“Too easy,” chortled Braxton. “It makes me laugh every time I think of it.”

Joe stepped into the room, followed by Jim.

“I do a little laughing myself sometimes,” Joe said coldly. “And this is one of the times!”

CHAPTER XXX

BROUGHT TO BOOK—CONCLUSION

There was a gasp of dismay and astonishment, as the conspirators jumped to their feet from the windowsill upon which they had been sitting.

At the same instant Joe drew the flashlight from his pocket and illumined their startled faces.

“Don’t move!” he commanded. “Jim, you keep them covered.”

Jim took up his station in the doorway, and in the insufficient light the rascals could not see whether he had a weapon or not.

“What do you mean by this?” blustered Fleming, in a voice that he tried to make brave, but that quavered despite himself.

“It means,” said Joe grimly, “that one of you men is in for the licking of his life. Don’t tremble so, Fleming,” he added contemptuously. “I’ve already thrashed you once and I don’t care to soil my hands with you again. But I’ve been aching for months to get my fingers on the man that made me out a liar and a contract-breaker. I have him now,” he added, with a steely glance at Braxton.

“Here, Jim,” he continued, stepping back, “take this flash. I’ve got some work to do.”

With a quick wrench he tore off his coat.

“You’d better be careful,” said Braxton—no longer the suave and polished trickster, but pale as chalk and trembling like a leaf. “This is assault and battery, and you’ll answer to the law.”

“Put up your hands,” said Joe curtly. “You’re as big a man as I am, but you’ve got to prove which is the better one. And you, Jim, keep your eye on Fleming and stand by to see fair play.”

Even a rat will fight when cornered and Braxton, seeing no alternative, threw off his coat and made a desperate rush at Joe. Joe met him with a clip to the jaw that shook him from head to foot. Then he sailed in and gave the scoundrel what he had promised—the thrashing of his life.

Braxton tried foul tactics, butted and kicked and tried to gouge and bite, but Joe’s powerful arms worked like windmills, his fists ripping savagely into Braxton’s face and chest. All the

pent-up indignation and humiliation of the last few weeks found vent in those mighty blows, and soon, too soon to suit Joe, the man lay on the floor, whining and half-sobbing with shame and pain.

“Get up, you cur!” said Joe, as he pulled on his coat. “I’m not through with you yet.”

“You’re not going to hit him again, are you?” asked Fleming, while Braxton staggered painfully to his feet.

“No,” said Joe. “I guess he’s had enough.”

“You said it!” cried Jim admiringly. “If ever a man was trimmed to the queen’s taste he’s that man.”

“But I’m going to nail, right now, the lies you fellows have been spreading,” continued Joe, eyes alight with the thought of his coming vindication. “You’ve got to sign a written confession of the part you’ve played in this dirty business.”

“We w-will, w-when we get back to town,” stammered Fleming.

“No, you won’t,” cried Joe. “You’ll do it right here and now.”

“B-but we haven’t any writing materials,” suggested Braxton, through his swollen lips.

“I’ve got paper and a fountain pen!” exclaimed Jim eagerly. “This light is rather dim, but probably Mike has got the automobile lamps going by this time and that’ll be light enough.”

“Come along!” cried Joe sternly, and his crest-fallen opponents knew him too well by this time to resist.

They went out into the open and found that the rain had almost stopped. As Jim had prophesied, the automobile lamps were gleaming through the dusk. Like every Irishman, Mike dearly loved a scrap, and his eyes lighted with a mixture of eagerness and regret as he looked at Braxton and realized what he had been missing.

“Begorra!” he cried in his rich brogue, “’tis a lovely shindy ye’ve been after havin’.”

With the paper resting on his knee and Jim’s fountain pen in his hand, Joe wrote out the story of the trickery and fraud that had been practiced in getting his signature. When he had covered every important point, he held out the pen to Braxton.

The latter hesitated, and Joe’s fist clenched till the knuckles were white. Braxton knew what that fist was capable of and hesitated no longer. He wrote his name under the confession and Fleming followed suit. Then Jim affixed his name as a witness, and Michael O’Halloran happily added his.

“Now,” said Jim, as he folded the precious paper and stowed it safely in his pocket, “you fellows clear out. I suppose that’s your car that we saw standing a little way down the road. I don’t think either of you will care to mix in my affairs again.”

They moved away with an assumption of bravado they were far from feeling and were lost in the darkness.

“And now, Mike,” said Joe with a jubilant ring in his voice, as they leaped into the car, “let her go. Drive to Dublin as if the ghost of the last of the O’Brians were at your back!”

And Mike did.

The two baseball players found the girls impatiently awaiting them, and wondering rather petulantly what had become of them. Joe seized Mabel in his arms and whirled her about the room like a dancing dervish, paying no heed to her laughing protests.

Jim would have liked to do the same to Joe’s sister, but did not quite dare to—yet.

“Are you boys crazy?” demanded Mabel, as soon as she could get her breath.

“Yes,” said Joe promptly. “You’ll be, too, when you see this.”

He flourished the paper before their faces and in disjointed sentences, frequently broken by interruptions, told them of all that had happened since they had left them after the game.

No need of telling how they felt when the boys had finished. There was no happier party that night in all Ireland.

Then, leaving the delighted girls for a few minutes, the boys hunted up McRae. They found him glum and anxious, talking earnestly with Robbie in the lobby of the hotel. One glance at the young men’s faces made the pair jump wondering to their feet.

“For the love of Pete, let’s have it, Joe!” cried McRae. “What’s happened?”

“Plenty!” exulted Joe. “We’ve put the All-Star League out of business!”

“What!” cried McRae, as he snatched the paper that Joe held out to him and devoured its contents, while Robbie peered eagerly over his shoulder.

Then, as they realized what it meant, they set up a wild whoop which made the other members of the team, scattered about the lobby, come running, followed a scene of mad hilarity, during which no one seemed to know what he said or did.

That night the cable carried the news to New York, and from there to every city in the United States. It sounded the death knell of the All-Star League, and it went to pieces like a house of cards. The American public will stand for much, but for nothing so gross and contemptible as that had been.

The trip wound up in a blaze of glory with the Giants just one game to the good in the hot series of games that had been played. They had a swift and joyous journey home, and when they separated on the dock in New York, McRae’s hearty grip of Baseball Joe’s hand fairly made the latter wince.

“Good-bye, old man,” he said. “You’ve stood by me like a brick. You’ll be on hand when the bell rings.”

“Joe will hear other bells before that,” grinned Jim, as he looked at Mabel, who flushed rosily.

“What’s that?” asked McRae with a twinkle in his eye.

“Wedding bells,” replied Jim.

THE END

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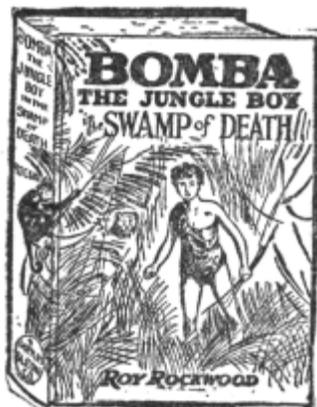
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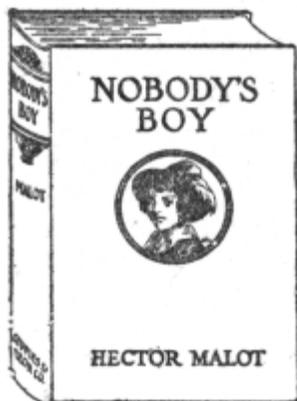
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