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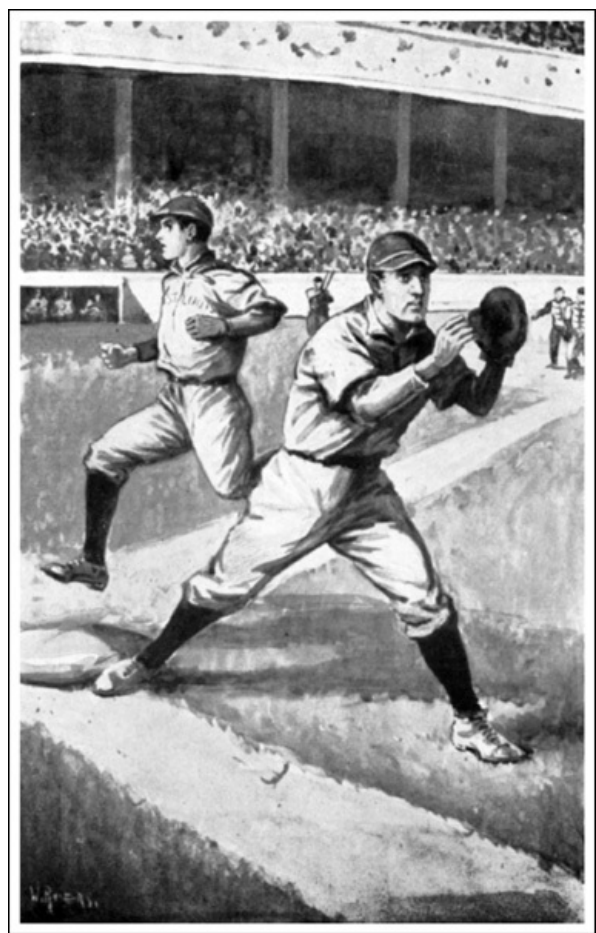
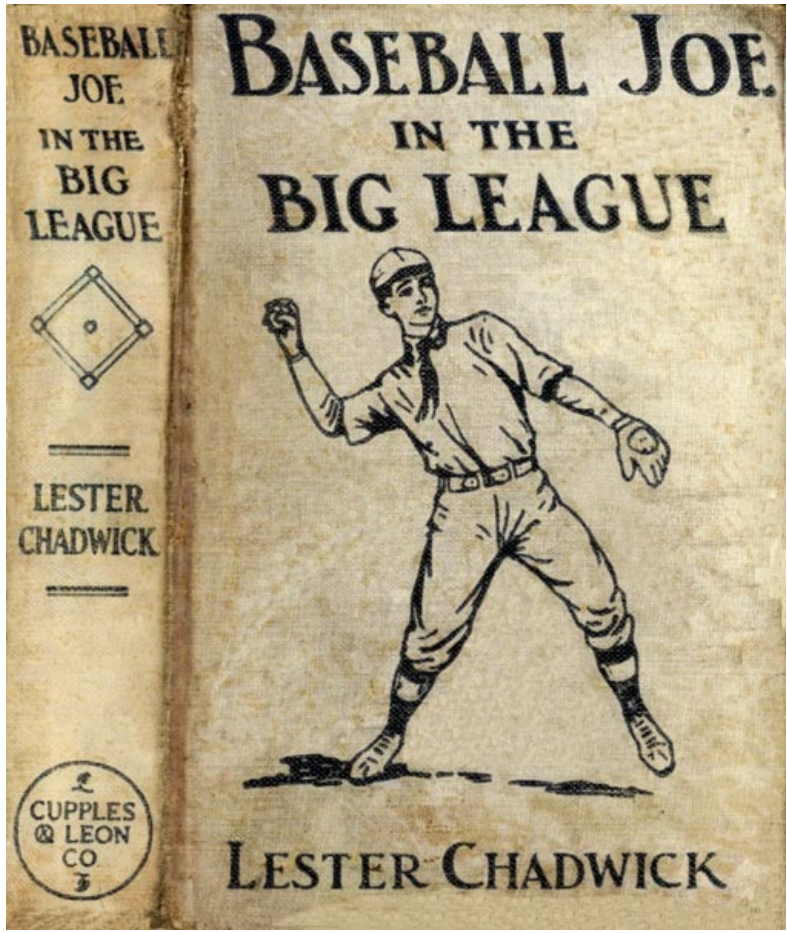
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**BASEBALL JOE**  
**in the**  
**BIG LEAGUE**

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HE BEAT THE BALL BY A NARROW MARGIN, AND WAS DECLARED SAFE. [Page 245.](#)

Baseball Joe in  
the Big League

OR

A Young Pitcher's Hardest Struggles

*By* LESTER CHADWICK

AUTHOR OF  
"BASEBALL JOE OF THE SILVER STARS," "BASEBALL  
JOE AT YALE," "BASEBALL JOE IN THE CENTRAL  
LEAGUE," "THE RIVAL PITCHERS," "THE  
EIGHT-OARED VICTORS," ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED*

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**Baseball Joe in the Big League**

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## BASEBALL JOE IN THE BIG LEAGUE

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### CHAPTER I

#### TWO LETTERS

"WHEW!" whistled Joe Matson, the astonishment on his bronzed face being indicated by his surprised exclamation of:

"Well, what do you know about that, Sis?"

"What is it, Joe?" asked his sister Clara, as she looked up from a letter she was reading to see her brother staring at a sheet of paper he had just withdrawn from an envelope, for the morning mail had been delivered a few minutes before. "What is it?" the girl went on, laying aside her own correspondence. "Is it anything serious—anything about father's business? Don't tell me there is more trouble, Joe!"

"I'm not going to, Clara. It isn't trouble, but, if what he says is true, it's going to make a big difference to me," and Joe looked out of the window, across a snowy expanse of yard, and gazed at, without consciously seeing, a myriad of white flakes swirling down through the wintry air. [2]

"No, it isn't exactly trouble," went on Joe, "and I suppose I ought to be corkingly glad of it; but I hadn't counted on leaving the Central Baseball League quite so soon."

"Oh, Joe! Have you lost your place?" exclaimed Clara. "And just after you have done so well, too; and helped them win the pennant! I call that a shame! I thought baseball men were better 'sports' than that."

"Listen to her—my little sister using slang!" laughed Joe.

"'Sports' isn't slang," defended Clara. "I've heard lots of girls use it. I mean it in the right sense. But have you really lost your place on the team, Joe?"

"Well, not exactly, Sis, but I'm about to, I'm afraid. However, I guess I may as well make the best of it, and be glad. I sure can use the extra money!"

"I certainly don't know what you're talking about," went on Clara, with a helpless look at her big, handsome brother, "and I suppose you'll take your own time in telling me. But I *would* like to know what it all means, Joe. And about extra money. Who's going to give it to you?"

"Nobody. I'll have to earn it with this pitching arm of mine," and the young baseball player swung it around, as though "winding-up" for a swift delivery. [3]

"Look out, Joe!" cried Clara, but she gave the warning too late.

At that moment Mrs. Matson entered the room with a jug of water, which she intended pouring on a window-box of flowers. Joe's arm struck the jug a glancing blow, and sent it flying, the water spraying over the floor, and the jug itself falling, and cracking into many pieces.

For a moment there was a momentous silence, after two startled screams—one each from Mrs. Matson and Clara. Then Joe cried gaily:

"Out at first! Say, Momsey, I hope I didn't hit you!"

"No, you didn't," and she laughed now. "But what does it all mean? Are you practicing so early in the season? Oh, my carpet! It will be ruined!" she went on, as she saw the water. "But I'm glad I didn't bring in a good jug. Did you hurt your hand?"

"Nary a hurt," said Joe, with a smile. "Ha! I'll save *you* from a wetting!" he exclaimed, as he stooped quickly and picked up an unopened letter, the address of which was in a girlish hand.

"Get the mop, while you're at it," advised Clara. A little later Joe had sopped up the water, and quiet was restored.

"And now suppose you tell us all about it," suggested Mrs. Mason. "Why were you practicing gymnastics, Joe?" and she smiled at her athletic son. [4]

"I was just telling Clara that my pitching arm was likely to bring me in more money this year, Momsey, and I was giving it a twirl, when you happened to get in my way. Now I'll tell you all about it. It's this letter," and Joe held out the one he had been reading.

"Are you sure it isn't the *other*?" asked Clara, with a sly look at her brother, for she had glanced at the writing on the unopened envelope Joe had picked up from the floor. "Let me read that other letter, Joe," she teased.

"A little later—maybe!" he parried. "But this one," and he fluttered the open sheet in his hand, "this one is from Mr. Gregory, manager of the Pittston team, with whom I have the honor to be associated," and Joe bowed low to his mother and sister. "Mr. Gregory gives me a bit of news. It is nothing less than that the manager of the St. Louis Nationals is negotiating for the services of yours truly—your humble servant, Joseph Matson," and again the young ball player bowed, and laughed.

"Joe, you don't mean it!" cried his sister. "You're going to belong to a major league team!" for Clara was almost as ardent a baseball "fan" as was her brother.

"Well, it looks like it, Sis," replied Joe, slowly, as he glanced at the letter again. "Of course it isn't settled, but Mr. Gregory says I'm pretty sure to be drafted to St. Louis." [5]

"Drafted!" exclaimed his mother. "That sounds like war times, when they used to draft men to go to the front. Do you mean you haven't any choice in the matter, Joe?"

"Well, that's about it, Momsey," the young man explained. "You see, baseball is pretty well organized. It has to be, to make it the success it is," he added frankly, "though lots of people are opposed to the system. But I haven't been in it long enough to find fault, even if I wanted to—which I don't."

"But it seems queer that you can't stay with the Pittston team if you want to," said Mrs. Matson.

"I don't know as I want to," spoke Joe, slowly, "especially when I'll surely get more money with St. Louis, besides having the honor of pitching for a major league team, even if it isn't one of the top-notchers, and a pennant winner. So if they want to draft me, let them do their worst!" and he laughed, showing his even, white teeth.

"You see," he resumed, "when I signed a contract with the Pittstons, of the Central League, I gave them the right to control my services as long as I played baseball. I had to agree not to go to any other team without permission, and, in fact, no other organized team would take me unless the Pittston management released me. I went into it with my eyes open." [6]

"And, you see, the Pittston team, being one of the small ones, has to give way to a major league team. That is, any major league team, like the St. Louis Nationals, can call for, or draft, any player in a smaller team. So if they call me I'll have to go. And I'll be glad to. I'll get more money and fame.

"That is, I hope I will," and Joe spoke more soberly. "I know I'm not going to have any snap of it. It's going to be hard work from the word go, for there will be other pitchers on the St. Louis team, and I'll have to do my best to make a showing against them.

"And I will, too!" cried Joe, resolutely. "I'll make good, Momsey!"

"I hope so, my son," she responded, quietly. "You know I was not much in favor of your taking up baseball for a living, but I must say you have done well at it, and after all, if one does one's best at anything, that is what counts. So I hope you make good with the St. Louis team—I suppose 'make good' is the proper expression," she added, with a smile.

"It'll do first-rate, Momsey," laughed Joe. "Now let's see what else Gregory says."

He glanced over the letter again, and remarked: [7]

"Well, there's nothing definite. The managers are laying their plans for the Spring work, and he says I'm being considered. He adds he will be sorry to lose me."

"I should think he would be!" exclaimed Clara, a flush coming into her cheeks. "You were the best pitcher on his team!"

"Oh, I wouldn't go as far as to say that!" cried Joe, "though I appreciate your feeling, Sis. I had a good bit of luck, winning some of the games the way I did. Well, I guess I'll go look up some St. Louis records, and see what I'm expected to do in the batting average line compared with them," the player went on. "The St. Louis team isn't a wonder, but it's done pretty fair at times, I believe, and it's a step up for me. I'll be more in line for a place on the New York Giants, or the Philadelphia Athletics if I make a good showing in Missouri," finished Joe.

He started from the room, carrying the two letters, one of which he had not yet opened.

"Who's it from?" asked Clara, with a smile, as she pointed to the heavy, square envelope in his hand.

"Oh, one of my many admirers," teased Joe. "I can't tell just which one until I open it. And, just

to satisfy your curiosity, I'll do so now," and he proceeded to slit the envelope with his pocket-knife.

"Oh, it's from Mabel Varley!" he exclaimed.

"Just as if you didn't know all the while!" scoffed Clara. "You wouldn't forget her handwriting so soon, Joe Matson."

"Um!" he murmured, non-committally. "Why, this is news!" he cried, suddenly. "Mabel and her brother Reggie are coming here!"

"Here!" exclaimed Clara. "To visit us?"

"Oh, no, not that exactly," Joe went on. "They're on a trip, it seems, and they're going to stop off here for a day or so. Mabel says they'll try to see us. I hope they will."

"I've never met them," observed Clara.

"No," spoke Joe, musingly. "Well, you may soon. Why!" he went on, "they're coming to-day—on the afternoon express. I must go down to the station to meet them, though the train is likely to be late, if this snow keeps up. Whew! see it come down!" and he went over to the window and looked out.

"It's like a small blizzard," remarked Clara, "and it seems to be growing worse. Doesn't look much like baseball; does it, Joe?"

"I should say not! Say, I believe I'll go down to the station, anyhow, and see what the prospects are. Want to come, Sis?"

"No, thank you. Not in this storm. Where are the Varleys going to stop?"

[9]

"At the hotel. Reggie has some business in town, Mabel writes. Well, I sure will be glad to see him again!"

"*Him? Her*, you mean!" laughed Clara. "Oh, Joe, you *are* so simple!"

"Humph!" he exclaimed, as he put the two letters into his pocket—both of great importance to him. "Well, I'll go down to the station."

Joe was soon trudging through the storm on the way to the depot.

"The St. Louis 'Cardinals!'" he mused, as he bent his head to the blast, thinking of the letters in his pocket. "I didn't think I'd be in line for a major league team so soon. I wonder if I can make good?"

Thinking alternately of the pleasure he would have in seeing Miss Mabel Varley, a girl in whom he was more than ordinarily interested, and of the new chance that had come to him, Joe soon reached the depot. His inquiries about the trains were not, however, very satisfactorily answered.

"We can't tell much about them in this storm," the station master said. "All our trains are more or less late. Stop in this afternoon, and I may have some definite information for you."

And later that day, when it was nearly arrival time for the train on which Mabel and Reggie were to come, Joe received some news that startled him.

[10]

"There's no use in your waiting, Joe," said the station master, as the young ball player approached him again. "Your train won't be in to-day, and maybe not for several days."

"Why? What's the matter—a wreck?" cried Joe, a vision of injured friends looming before him.

"Not exactly a wreck, but almost as bad," went on the official. "The train is stalled—snowed in at Deep Rock Cut, five miles above here, and there's no chance of getting her out."

"Great Scott!" cried Joe. "The express snowed in! Why, I've got friends on that train! I wonder what I can do to help them?"

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## CHAPTER II

[11]

### TO THE RESCUE

JOE MATSON looked so worried at the information imparted by the station master that the latter asked him:

"Any particular friends of yours on that train?"

"Very particular," declared the young ball player. "And I hope no harm comes to them."

"Well, I don't know as any great harm will come," went on the station master. "The train's snowed in, and will have to stay there until we can get together a gang of men and shovel her out. It won't be easy, for it's snowing harder every minute, and Deep Rock Cut is one of the worst places on the line for drifts. But no other train can run into the stalled one, that's sure. The only thing is the steam may get low, and the passengers will be cold, and hungry."

"Isn't there any way to prevent that?" asked Joe, anxiously.

"I s'pose the passengers could get out and try to reach some house or hotel," resumed the railroad man, "but Deep Rock Cut is a pretty lonely place, and there aren't many houses near it. The only thing I see to do would be for someone to go there with a horse and sled, and rescue the passengers, and that would be *some* job, as there's quite a trainload of them."

"Well, I'm going to try and get *my* friends that way, anyhow!" cried Joe. "I'll go to the rescue," and he set off for home through the storm again, intending to hire a rig at a livery stable, and do what he could to take Mabel and her brother from the train.

And, while Joe is thus making his preparations, I will tell my new readers something about the previous books of this series, in which Joe Matson, or "Baseball Joe," as he is called, has a prominent part.

The initial volume was called "Baseball Joe of the Silver Stars; Or, The Rivals of Riverside," and began with my hero's career in the town of Riverside. Joe joined the ball team there, and, after some hard work, became one of the best amateur pitchers in that section of the country. He did not have it all easy, though, and the fight was an uphill one. But Joe made good, and his team came out ahead.

"Baseball Joe on the School Nine; Or, Pitching for the Blue Banner," the second book in the series, saw our hero as the pitcher on a better organized team than were the Silver Stars. Joe had taken a step forward. He did not make the school nine without a struggle, for he had rivals, and a strong effort was made to keep him out of the game.

But Joe proved his worth, and when a critical time came he pitched to victory, thus defeating the plans of his enemies.

It was quite a step forward for Joe to go to Yale from Excelsior Hall, where he had gotten his early education.

Naturally Joe wanted to play on the Yale team, but he had to wait some time before his ambition was gratified. In "Baseball Joe at Yale; Or, Pitching for the College Championship," I related how, after playing during his freshman year on the class team, Joe was picked as one of the pitchers for the varsity.

Then, indeed, he was proud and happy, but he knew it would not be as easy as it had been at Excelsior Hall. Every step upward meant harder work, but Joe welcomed the chance.

And when finally the deciding game came—the one with Princeton at the Polo Grounds, New York—Joe had the proud distinction of pitching for Yale—and he pitched to victory.

Joe's ambition, ever since he had taken an interest in baseball, had been to become a professional player. His mother had hoped that he would become a minister, or enter one of the more learned professions, but, though Joe disappointed her hopes, there was some compensation.

"Better let the boy have his own way," Mr. Matson had said. "I would rather see him a good ball player than a half-rate lawyer, or doctor; and, after all, there is good money to be made on the diamond."

So, when Joe received an offer from the manager of one of the minor league professional teams, he took it. In "Baseball Joe in the Central League; Or, Making Good as a Professional Pitcher," the fourth volume of the series, I related Joe's experiences when he got his start in organized baseball. How he was instrumental in bringing back on the right path a player who had gone wrong, and how he fought to the last, until his team won the pennant—all that you will find set down in the book.

I might add that Joe lived with his father, mother, and sister in the town of Riverside, where Mr. Matson was employed in the Royal Harvester Works, being an able inventor.

Joe had many friends in town, one in particular being Tom Davis, who had gone to Excelsior Hall with him. Of late, however, Joe had not seen so much of Tom, their occupations pursuing divergent paths.

It was while Joe was on his way to join the Pittston team, of the Central League, that he made the acquaintance of Reggie Varley, a rich, and somewhat dudish, young man; and the acquaintance was made in an odd manner. For Reggie practically accused Joe of knowing something of some jewelry that was missing from a valise.

Of course Joe did not take it, but for some time the theft remained quite a mystery, until Joe solved the secret. From then on he and Reggie were good friends, and Reggie's sister Mabel and Joe were—



Oh, well, what's the use of telling on a fellow? You wouldn't like it yourself; would you?

The baseball season came to an end, and the Pittston team covered itself with glory, partly due to Joe's good pitching. Cold weather set in, and the players took themselves to their various Winter occupations, or pleasures. Joe went home, to wait until the training season should open, in preparation for league games on the velvety, green diamonds.

Several weeks of inaction had passed, the holidays were over, Winter had set in with all earnestness, and now we find Joe hurrying along, intent on the rescue of Reggie and his sister from the snow-stalled train.

"I hope they will not freeze before I get to them," thought Joe, as he staggered through the blinding snow. "They can't, though, for there'll be sure to be steam for some hours yet. I guess I'll stop home, and get something to eat for them, and a bottle of coffee. I'll put it in one of those vacuum flasks, and it will keep hot." [16]

So intent was Joe on his rescue that, for the time, he gave no more thought to the matter of joining the St. Louis nine, important as that matter was to him.

"I'd better get a team of horses, and a light sled," he mused, as he turned in the direction of the livery stable. "There will be some heavy going between here and Deep Rock Cut, and I'll need a good team to pull through."

A little later he was leaving his order with the proprietor.

"I'll fix you up, Joe," said the stable boss, who was a baseball "fan," and a great admirer of our hero. "I'll give you the best team in the place, and they'll get you through, if any horses can. I expect I'll have other calls, if, as you say, the train is stalled, for there'll likely be other folks in town who have friends aboard her. But you've got the first call, and I'm glad of it."

"I'll be back in a little while," called Joe, as he hurried off. "I'm going around to my house to put up some lunch and coffee."

"Good idea! I'll have everything ready for you when you come back."

On Joe hurried once more, through the swirl of white flakes that cut into his face, blown on the wings of a bitter wind. He bent his head to the blast, and buttoned his overcoat more closely about him, as he fought his way through the drifts. [17]

It had been snowing since early morning, and there were no signs to indicate that the storm was going to stop. It was growing colder, too, and the wind seemed to increase in violence each hour. Though it was only a little after one o'clock in the afternoon, it was unusually dark, and Joe realized that night would soon be at hand, hastened by the clouds overhead.

"But the snow will make it light enough to see, I guess," reasoned Joe. "I hope I can keep to the road. It wouldn't be much of a joke to get Reggie and Mabel out of the train, into the comfortable sled, and then lose them on the way home."

Quickly explaining to his mother and sister his plan of going for the two friends in the stalled train, Joe hastily put up some sandwiches, while Clara made coffee and poured it into the vacuum bottle.

"Perhaps you'd better bring them here, Joe, instead of taking them to the hotel," suggested his mother. "Mabel will be wet and cold, perhaps, and I could make her more comfortable here than she would be at the hotel. We have room enough." [18]

"She can share my room," proposed Clara.

"That's good of you," and Joe flashed a grateful look at his sister. "I hope you will like Mabel," he added, softly.

"I guess I will; if you do," laughed Clara.

"Well, I sure do," and Joe smiled.

Then, with a big scarf to wrap about his neck, and carrying the basket of food and coffee, Joe set out for the livery stable, to start to the rescue.

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## CHAPTER III

### AN UPSET



"HERE you are, Joe. Best team in the stable. I could have hired 'em out twice over since you went; but I wouldn't do it. Other folks have got the scare, too, about friends on the stalled train," and the livery boss handed Joe the reins of a pair of prancing horses, hitched to a light, but strong cutter.

"Thanks, Mr. Blasser," said Joe. "I'll take good care of 'em."

"And hold 'em in a bit at the start," advised the man. "They haven't been out for a couple of days, and they're a bit frisky. But they'll calm down after a while."

With a jingle of bells, and a scattering of the snow from their hoofs, the horses leaped forward when Joe gave them their heads, and down the whitened street they trotted, on the way to Deep Rock Cut.

This was a place where the railroad went through a rocky defile, about a mile long. It had been the scene of more than one wreck, for there was a dangerous curve in it, and in the Winter it was a source of worry to the railroad men, for the snow piled high in it when there was a storm of more than usual severity. In the Summer a nearby river sometimes rose above its banks, and filled the cut with water, washing out the track. [20]

Altogether Deep Rock Cut was a cause of much anxiety to the railroad management, but it was not practical to run the line on either side of it, so its use had been continued.

"And very likely it's living up to its reputation right now," mused Joe, as he drove down the main street, and then turned to another that would take him out of the town, and to a highway that led near Deep Rock Cut. "It sure must be living up to its reputation right now, though, of course, the storm is to blame.

"Whew! It certainly does blow!" he commented, as he held the reins in one hand, and drew more closely about his throat the muffler he had brought with him. "Stand to it, ponies!" Joe called to the sturdy steeds. They had started off at a lively pace, but the snow soon slowed them down. They started up again, however, at the sound of Joe's voice, and settled down into a steady pull that took them over the ground at a good pace.

Now that he was actually on the way to the rescue Joe allowed his thoughts to go back to the baseball letter that was in his pocket, next to the one from Mabel. [21]

"I wonder how they came to pick me out?" he mused, as he recalled the possibility that he would go to St. Louis. "They must have had a scout at some of the Central League games, though generally the news of that is tipped off beforehand.

"That must have been the way of it, though," he went on, still communing with himself. "I don't know that I played so extra well, except maybe at the last, and then—then I just *had* to—to make good. Well, I'm glad they picked me out. Wonder if any other members of the Pittston team are slated to go? Can't be, though, or Gregory would have told me of it.

"And I wonder how much more salary I'll get? Of course I oughtn't to think too much about money, for, after all, it's the game I like. But, then, I have to live, and, since I'm in organized baseball, I want to be at the top of the heap, the same as I would if I were a lawyer, or a doctor. That's it—the top of the heap—the New York Giants for mine—if I can reach 'em," and he smiled quizzically.

"Yes, I guess lots of the fellows would give their eye teeth to have my chance. Of course, it isn't settled yet," Joe told himself, "but there must have been a good foundation for it, or Gregory wouldn't have taken the trouble to write to me about it." [22]

Joe found the road to Deep Rock Cut fully as bad, in the matter of snowdrifts, as he had expected. It was rather slow going when he got to the open country, where the wind had full sweep, and progress, even on the part of the willing horses, was slower.

Joe picked out the best, and easiest, route possible, but that was not saying much, and it was not until nearly three o'clock, and growing quite dark, that he came within sight of the cut. Then the storm was so thick that he could not see the stalled train.

"I'll have to leave the team as near to it as I can get, and walk in to tell Reggie and Mabel that I've come for them," Joe decided.

The highway crossed the railroad track a short distance from the end of the cut nearest Riverside, and Joe, halting a moment to listen, and to make sure no trains were approaching, drove over the rails.

"Though there isn't much danger, now, of a train getting through that," he said to himself, as he saw the big drift of snow that blocked the cut. Behind that drift was the stalled train, he reflected, and then, as he looked at the white mound, he realized that he had made a mistake.

"I can never get through that drift myself," he said. "I'll have to drive up to the other end of the cut, by which the engine and cars entered. Stupid of me not to have thought of that at first." [23]

He turned his horses, and again sought the highway that led along the cut, parallel to it, and about a quarter of a mile distant. Joe listened, again hoping he could hear the whistle of the approaching rescue-train, for at the station he had been told one was being fitted out, and would carry a gang of snow shovelers. But the howl of the wind was all that came to his ears.

"This means another mile of travel," Joe thought, as he urged on the horses. "It will be pitch dark by the time I get back to town with them. I hope Mabel doesn't take cold. It sure is bitter."

Joe found the going even harder as he kept on, but he would not give up now.

"There's one consolation," he reasoned, "the wind will be at our backs going home. That will make it easier."

The road that crossed the track at the other end of Deep Rock Cut was farther from the beginning of the defile, and Joe, leaving the horses in a sheltering clump of trees, struggled down the track, the rails of which were out of sight under the snow.

"I wonder if Mabel can walk back?" he said aloud. "If not I guess Reggie and I can carry her. It's pretty deep. I didn't get here any too soon."

[24]

Something dark loomed up before him, amid the wall of white, swirling flakes.

"There's the train!" exclaimed Joe, in relief.

It was indeed the rear coach of the stalled passenger train, and, a moment later, Joe was climbing the snow-encumbered steps. It proved to be the baggage car, and, as Joe entered, he surprised a number of men who were smoking, and playing cards on an upturned trunk.

"Hello!" exclaimed one of them, in surprise at the sight of the ball player. "Where'd you come from? Is the rescue-train here?"

"Not yet," Joe answered. "I came to take a couple of friends into town."

"Say, I wish I had a friend like you!" cried the man, with a laugh. "I sure would like to get into town; but I don't dare start out and tramp it—not with my rheumatism. How much room have you got in your airship?"

"I came in a cutter," responded Joe, with a smile.

"Say, you got some grit!" declared the man. "I like your nerve!"

"Oh, Joe's got plenty of nerve—of the right sort!" called a brakeman, and Joe, nodding at him, recognized a railroad acquaintance who had been present at some of the town ball games.

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"A couple of my friends are in one of the coaches, Mr. Wheatson," explained Joe. "I'm going to drive back with them."

"Go ahead and look for 'em," invited the brakeman. "The train is yours, as far as I'm concerned. I guess we're tied up here all night."

"They're going to start out a rescue-train," Joe informed the men in the baggage car, for the telegraph wires had gone down after the first message, telling of the stalled train, had been sent.

"That's good news," replied one of the men. "Well, all we can do is to stay here, and play cards. It's nice and warm in here, anyhow."

"Yes, it will be until the coal for the engine gives out," spoke a player, who seemed to take a rather gloomy view of matters. "And what are we going to do about supper? I'd like to know that!"

Joe wished he could have brought along enough food for all the stranded passengers, but this was impossible. He went on through the train, and presently came to where Mabel and her brother were seated in the parlor car, looking gloomily out at the storm.

"Well!" exclaimed Joe, with a smile, as he stood just back of them. They both turned with a flash, and a look of pleased surprise came over the faces of Reggie and his sister as they saw him.

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"Joe Matson!" cried Reggie, jumping up, and holding out his hand. "Where in the world did you come from? I didn't know you were on this train."

"I wasn't," laughed Joe. "I just boarded it, and I've come for you," he added, as he gave Mabel his hand.

"Oh, but I'm glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "Isn't this just perfectly awful, to be snowed in like this! And they tell us there's no chance of getting out to-night."

"There is for you," remarked Joe, quietly.

"How?" asked Reggie, quickly. "Did they push the relief-train through?"

"I'm all the relief-train there is," announced Joe, and he told about having the cutter in readiness.

"Say, that's fine of you!" cried Reggie. "Shall we go with him, Mabel?"

"Well, I rather guess so," she answered. "I couldn't stay here another hour."

"It won't be much fun traveling through the storm," Joe warned his friends. At this Reggie looked a bit doubtful, but his sister exclaimed:

"I don't mind it! I love a storm, anyhow, and I just can't bear sitting still, and doing nothing."

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Besides, there isn't a thing to eat aboard this train, for they took off the dining car right after lunch."

"I brought along a little something. It's in the cutter," Joe said. "I didn't bring it in here for fear the famished passengers would mob me for it," he added, with a smile. "Well, if you're willing to trust yourself with me, perhaps we'd better start," he went on. "It is getting darker all the while, and the snow is still falling."

"I'll be ready at once!" cried Mabel. "Reggie, get down the valises; will you, please? Can you take them?" she asked of Joe.

"Oh, yes—room for them in the cutter," he assured her.

The other passengers looked on curiously, and enviously, when they heard where Reggie and his sister were going. But, much as Joe would have liked to take them all to a place of comfort, he could not. The three went back to the baggage car, and, saying good-bye to the card-players, stepped out into the storm.

"I guess your brother and I had better carry you, Mabel," suggested Joe, as he saw the deep snow that led along the track to where he had left the cutter.

"Indeed you'll not—thank you!" she flashed back at him. "I have on stout shoes, and I don't mind the drifts." She proved it by striding sturdily through them, and soon the three were at the cutter, the horses whinnying impatiently to be gone. [28]

"Have some hot coffee and a sandwich," invited Joe, as he got out the basket, and served his guests.

"Say, you're all right!" cried Reggie. Mabel said nothing, but the look she gave Joe was reward enough.

The coffee in the vacuum bottle was warm and cheering, and soon, much refreshed from the little lunch, and bundled up well in the robes Joe had brought, Reggie and his sister were ready for the trip to town.

"Step along!" cried the young baseball player to the horses, and glad enough they were to do so. Out to the highway they went, and it was not until they were some distance away from the cut that Joe noticed how much worse the going was. The snow was considerably deeper, and had drifted high in many more places.

"Think you can make it?" asked Reggie, anxiously.

"Well, I'm going to make a big try!" responded Joe. "I've got a good team here."

Half an hour later it was quite dark, but the white covering on the ground showed where the road was faintly outlined. Joe let the horses have their heads, and they seemed to know they were going toward their stable, for they went along at a good pace. [29]

"There's a bad drift!" exclaimed Joe as, ahead of him, he saw a big mound of snow. He tried to guide the horses to one side, and must have given a stronger pull on the reins than he realized. For the steeds turned sharply, and, the next moment, the cutter suddenly turned over on its side, spilling into the snow the three occupants.

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## CHAPTER IV

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### AN APPEAL

"Look out there!"

"See if you can grab the horses, Reggie!"

"Mabel, are you hurt?"

Fast and excitedly came the exclamations, as Joe managed to free himself from the entanglement of robes and lines. Then he stood up, and, giving a hasty glance to see that Mabel and her brother were extricating themselves (apparently little if any hurt), the young pitcher sprang for the heads of the horses, fearing they might bolt.

But, as if the steeds had done mischief enough; or, possibly because they were well trained, and had lost most of their skittishness in the cold, they stood still.

"For which I'm mighty glad!" quoth Joe, as he looked to see that no part of the harness was

broken, a fact of which he could not be quite sure in the darkness.

"Are you all right, Mabel?" called Joe, as he stood at the heads of the animals.

"All right, Joe, yes, thank you. How about yourself?"

"Oh, I haven't a scratch. The snow is soft. How about you, Reggie?"

"Nothing worse than about a peck of snow down my neck. What happened, anyhow?"

"Hit a drift and turned too suddenly. I guess you'll wish I had left you in the train; won't you?"

"No, indeed!" laughed Mabel. "This isn't anything, nor the first upset I've been in—Reggie tipped us over once."

"Oh, that was when I was first learning how to drive," put in the other youth, quickly. "But can we go on, Joe?"

"I think so. Nothing seems to be broken. We'll have to right the sled, though. I wonder if the horses will stand while we do it? I wouldn't like them to start up, but——"

"Let me hold them!" begged Mabel. "I'm not afraid, and with me at their heads you boys can turn the sled right side up. It isn't tipped all the way over, anyhow."

She shook the snow from her garments, and made her way to where Joe stood, holding the reins close to the heads of the horses. It was still snowing hard, and with the cold wind driving the flakes into swirls and drifts, it was anything but pleasant. Had they been left behind by the horses running away, their plight would have been dangerous enough.

"Perhaps I can help you," suddenly called a voice out of the storm, and Joe and the others turned quickly, to see whence it had come.

The snow-encrusted figure of a man made its way over the piles of snow, and stood beside Joe.

"I'll hold the horses for you," the stranger went on. "You seem to have had an accident. I know something about horses. I'll hold them while you right the sled."

"Thanks," said Joe, and, as he spoke, he wondered where he had heard that voice before. He knew he had heard it, for there was a familiar ring to it. But it was not light enough to make out the features of the man. Besides, he was so wrapped up, with a slouch hat drawn low over his face, and a scarf pulled up well around his neck, that, even in daylight, his features would have been effectually concealed.

"I guess they won't need much holding," Joe went on, all the while racking his brain to recall the voice. He wanted to have the man speak again, that he might listen once more.

And the unknown, who had appeared so suddenly out of the storm, did not seem to have anything to conceal. He spoke freely.

"Don't worry about the horses," he remarked. "I can manage them."

"They won't need a lot of managing," responded Joe. "I guess they've had pretty nearly all the tucker taken out of them in the storm. It was pretty hard coming from Riverside."

"Are you from there?" the man asked rather quickly.

"Yes," answered Joe, "and we're going back."

"Then I'm glad I met you!" the man exclaimed, and Joe, who had half formed an opinion as to his identity, changed his mind, for the voice sounded different now. "Yes, I'm glad I met you," the stranger went on. "I was looking for someone to ask the road to Riverside, and you can tell me. I guess I lost my way in the storm. I heard your sleigh-bells, and I was heading for them when I heard you upset. You can show me the shortest road to Riverside; can't you?"

"We can do better than that," spoke Joe, trying, but still unsuccessfully, to get a look at the man's face. "We've got plenty of room in the sled, and you can ride back with us, once we get it on the runners again. Come on, Reggie, give me a hand, if you will, and we'll get this cutter right side up with care."

"If it needs three of you, I can take my place at the horses," suggested Mabel, who was standing beside Joe, idly looking through the fast-gathering darkness at the stranger.

"Oh, the two of us can easily do it," said the young ball player. "It isn't heavy. Come on, Reggie. Better stand a bit back, Mabel. It might slip," he advised.

Joe and his friend easily righted the sleigh, while the stranger stood at the heads of the horses, who were now quiet enough. Then, the scattered robes having been collected, and the baggage picked up, all was in readiness for a new start.

Joe tucked the warm blanket well around Mabel, and then called to the stranger:

"Get up on the front seat, and I'll soon have you in Riverside. It isn't very far now."

"Thanks," said the man, briefly. "This is better luck than I've had in some time."

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For a while, after the mishap, none of the occupants of the cutter spoke, as the willing horses pulled it through the big drifts of snow. Joe drove more carefully, taking care not to turn too suddenly, and he avoided, as well as he could, the huge heaps of white crystals that, every moment, were piling higher.

Reggie was snuggling down in the robes, and Mabel, too, rather worn out by the events of the day, and the worry of being snowed in, maintained silence.

As for Joe, he had all he could do to manage the horses in the storm, though the beasts did not seem inclined to make any more trouble. The man on the seat beside him appeared wrapped, not only in his heavy garments, but in a sort of gloomy silence, as well. He did not speak again, and Joe was still puzzling over his identity. [35]

"For I'm sure I've met him before, and more than once," reasoned Joe. "But then I've met so many fellows, playing ball all around the country, that it's no wonder I can't recall a certain voice. Maybe I'll get a chance to have a good look at him later."

"You'll come right to our house," said Joe, turning to speak to Mabel and Reggie. "Mother said so."

"Oh, but we have our rooms engaged at the hotel," objected the other youth.

"That doesn't matter. You can go there later, if you like. But mother insisted that I bring you home," Joe went on. "You can be more comfortable there—at least, until you get over this cold trip."

"It's perfectly lovely of your mother," declared Mabel. "But I don't want to put her to so much inconvenience."

"It isn't any inconvenience at all," laughed Joe. "She wants to meet you, and so does my sister Clara."

"And I want to meet them," responded Mabel, with a blush that was unseen in the darkness.

"Well, have it your own way," said Reggie, who was, perhaps, rather too much inclined to give in easily. Life came very easy to him, anyhow. "It's very nice of you to put us up, Joe. By the way, how is your father since the operation?" [36]

"Oh, he has almost entirely recovered. His eyesight is better than ever, he says."

"How lovely!" cried Mabel. "And how lucky it was, Joe, that your share of the money your team got for winning the pennant helped to make the operation possible."

"Yes, I sure do owe a debt of gratitude to baseball," admitted the young pitcher.

"Do you play ball?" suddenly asked the man on the seat beside Joe.

"Yes, I play at it," was the modest answer.

"Amateur or professional?"

"Professional. I am with the Central League."

Was it fancy, or did the man give a sudden start, that might indicate surprise? Joe could not be sure.

"I suppose you'll be at it again this year, Joe," put in Reggie.

"Oh, yes. But I may change my club. I'll tell you about it later. We'll soon be at the house. Is there any special place I can take you to, in Riverside?" asked Joe of the stranger.

"Well, I'm looking for a young fellow named Matson," was the unexpected answer.

"Matson?" cried Joe. "Why, that's my name!"

"Joe Matson?" the man exclaimed, drawing slightly away in order, possibly, to get a better look at the young player. [37]

"I'm Joe Matson—yes. Are you looking for me?"

"I was, and I'm glad I found you!" the man exclaimed. "I've got a very special request to make of you. Is there some hotel, or boarding house, where I could put up, and where I could see you—later?" he asked, eagerly.

"Why, yes, there are several such places in town," said Joe, slowly, trying, harder than ever, to place the man who had so unexpectedly appeared.

"Take me to a quiet one—not too high-priced," requested the man in a low voice. "I want to see you on a very particular matter—that is, it's particular to me," he added, significantly. "Will you come and see me—after you take care of your friends?"

"Why, yes, I guess so—perhaps to-morrow," replied Joe, for he did not fancy going out in the storm again that night. "But why can't you stop off at my house now?" he asked.

"No, I don't want to do that," the man objected. "I'd rather you would come to see me," and

there was a note of appeal in his voice.

"Very well, I'll see you to-morrow," Joe promised, wondering if this man's seeking of him had any connection with his possible draft to the St. Louis Cardinals.

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## CHAPTER V

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### THE THREAT

"HERE'S a boarding house that will suit you, I think," announced Joe, a little later, as he stopped the horses in front of a sort of hostelry of good reputation. It was not as large nor as stylish as some of the other places in Riverside, but Joe bore in mind the man's request to be taken to a moderate-priced establishment.

"Thanks," said the stranger. "Then you'll come here to see me to-morrow? I'll be in all day."

"I'll call in the afternoon, Mr.—er——" and Joe hesitated. "I don't believe I caught your name," he said, significantly.

"No, I didn't mention it, but it's Shalleg," was the answer.

"Oh, of the Clevefield team!" exclaimed the young player, knowing now where he had heard the voice before.

"Yes, of the Clevefield team," admitted Mr. Shalleg, repeating the name of one of the nines forming the Central League, and which team Joe's club had met several times on the diamond.

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"I was trying, ever since you spoke, to recall where I'd met you before," went on Joe, "but you had me guessing. I'm glad to meet you again. I suppose you're going to stay with the League this coming season?"

"I—er—I haven't quite made my plans," was the somewhat hesitating answer. "I've been looking about. I was over in Rocky Ford this morning, seeing a friend, and I happened to recall that you lived in Riverside, so I came on, but lost my way in the storm. I didn't recognize you back there, where you had the upset."

"The lack of recognition was mutual," laughed Joe, puzzling over what Shalleg's object could be in seeking him. "Well, I must get these folks in out of the storm," Joe went on. "I'll see you to-morrow, Mr. Shalleg."

The latter alighted from the cutter, and entered the boarding house, while Joe turned the heads of the horses toward his own home.

"I guess you'll be glad to get indoors," he said to Reggie and Mabel.

"Well, it's pretty cold," Reggie admitted, "though I suppose my sister will say she likes it."

"I do!" declared Mabel. "But it isn't so nice when it's dark," she confessed.

They were now on the principal street of Riverside, and the lamps from the shop windows gleamed dimly on the swirling flakes, and drifts of snow.

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A little later Joe pulled up in front of his own house, and escorted the visitors into the cheery living room.

"Here they are, Mother—Clara!" he called, as Mrs. Matson and her daughter came out to welcome their guests.

"I am glad to see you," said Clara, simply, as she kissed Mabel—and one look from the sister's eyes told Joe that Clara approved of his friends.

"Where's father?" asked Joe.

"Bathing his eyes," replied his mother. "He'll be here presently," for Mr. Matson had recently undergone an operation on his eyes, after an accident, and they still needed care.

Soon a merry party was gathered about the supper table, where the events of the day were told, from the receipt by Joe of the two letters, to the rescue from the stalled train, and the accident in the snow.

"But I sure would like to know what it is Shalleg wants," mused Joe, who had come back from leaving the horses at the livery stable. "I sure would."

"Didn't he give you any hint?" asked Clara.

"No. But perhaps he wants some advice about baseball matters. I'm getting to be some pumpkins, you know, since St. Louis is after me!" cried Joe, with simulated pride. [41]

"Oh, do tell us about it!" cried Mabel, and Joe related the news of the draft that would probably take him to the big league.

Reggie and Mabel spent the night at Joe's house. The storm kept up through the hours of darkness, and part of the next day, when it stopped, and the sun came out. Old Sol shone on a scene of whiteness, where big drifts of snow were piled here and there.

"I wonder how the stalled train is faring?" remarked Mabel, after breakfast. "We'll have to get our trunks away from it, somehow, Reggie."

"Yes, I suppose so," he said. "And I've got to look after those business matters. I think we had better go to the hotel," he added.

"Very well," assented Joe. "I'll go down to the station with you, and we'll see about your baggage."

"I'll stay here until you boys come back," decided Mabel, who had taken as great a liking to Clara, as the latter had to her.

Joe and Reggie found that the train was still stalled in the snow drift, but a large force of shovelers was at work, and the prospect was that the line would be opened that afternoon. Thereupon Reggie went to the hotel to arrange about his own room, and one for his sister. [42]

"And I'll go see Shalleg," decided Joe. "Might as well get it over with, though I did tell him I wouldn't come until afternoon. I'm anxious to know what it's all about."

"He's making a sort of mystery of it," observed Reggie.

"Somewhat," admitted Joe, with a smile.

Greatly to his relief (for Joe was anxious to get the matter over with) he found Shalleg at the boarding house when he called.

"Come up to my room," invited the baseball player. "It's warmer than down in the parlor."

In his room he motioned Joe to a chair, and then, looking intently at the young pitcher, said:

"Matson, do you know what it is to be down and out?"

"Down and out? What do you mean?"

"I mean to have few friends, and less money. Do you know what that means?"

"Well, not personally," said Joe, "though I can't boast of a superfluity of money myself."

"You've got more than I have!" snapped Shalleg.

"I don't know about that," said Joe, slowly, wondering whither the conversation was leading.

"Your team won the pennant!" cried the man, and Joe, as he caught the odor of his breath, realized what made Shalleg's manner so excited. The man was partially intoxicated. Joe wished he had not come. "Your team won the pennant," Shalleg went on, "and that meant quite a little money for every player. You must have gotten your share, and I'd like to borrow some of you, Matson. I'm down and out, I tell you, and I need money bad—until I can get on my feet again." [43]

Joe did not answer for a moment, but mentally he found a reason for Shalleg's being "off his feet" at present. Bad habits, very likely.

"Can you let me have some money—until Spring opens?" proceeded Shalleg. "You'll be earning more then, whether I am or not, for I don't know that I'm going back with Clevefield. I suppose you'll play with the Pittston team?"

"I don't know," answered Joe, preferring to reply to that question first. He wanted time to think about the other.

"You don't know!" Shalleg exclaimed, in surprise.

"No. I hear I am to be drafted to the St. Louis Nationals."

"The St. Louis Nationals!" cried Shalleg. "That team! Why, that team is the one I——"

He came to a sudden halt.

"What is it?" asked Joe, wonderingly.

"I—er—I—er—well, never mind, now. Can you let me have—say, two hundred dollars?" [44]

"Two hundred dollars!" cried Joe. "I haven't that much money to spare. And, if I had, I don't know that I would be doing my duty to my father and mother to lend it."

"But I need it!" cried Shalleg. "Did you ever know what it was to be down and out?"



"Well, I've seen such sad cases, and I'm sorry for you," spoke Joe, softly. He thought of John Dutton, the broken-down pitcher whose rescue, from a life of ruin, had been due largely to our hero's efforts, as told in the volume immediately preceding this.

"Being sorry isn't going to help," sneered Shalleg, and there was an ugly note in his voice. "I need money! You must have some left from your pennant winnings."

"I had to spend a large sum for my father's operation," said Joe. "He has had bad luck, too. I really have no money to spare."

"That's not so—I don't believe you!" snapped Shalleg. "You must have money, and I've got to get some. I've been begging from a lot of fellows who played ball with me, but they all turned me down. Now you're doing the same thing. You'd better be careful. I'm a desperate man!"

"What do you mean?" asked Joe, in some alarm, for he thought the fellow meditated an attack. Joe looked to see with what he could defend himself, and he noted, though with no cowardly satisfaction, that the door to the hall was close at hand. [45]

"I mean just what I say. I'm desperately in need of money."

"Well, I'm very sorry, but I'm not in a position to be able to help you," said Joe, firmly. "Why don't you go to the manager of your team, and get him to give you an advance on your salary? That is often done. I'm sure if you told him your need he'd do it."

"No, he wouldn't!" growled Shalleg. "I've got to borrow it somewhere else. Then you won't let me have it?" and he glowered at Joe.

"I can't, even if I would."

"I don't believe it!" snarled the other. "And now I tell you one thing. I'm a bad man to be bad friends with. If you don't let me have this money it will be the worse for you."

"I guess you are forgetting yourself," returned Joe, quietly. "I did not come here to be threatened, or insulted. I guess you are not yourself, Mr. Shalleg. I am sorry, and I'll bid you good day."

With that Joe walked out, but not before the infuriated man called after him:

"And so you're going to St. Louis; are you? Well, look out for me, that's all I've got to say! Look out for Bill Shalleg!" and he slammed the door after Joe.

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## CHAPTER VI

### A WARNING

JOE MATSON'S brain was in a whirl as he left the boarding house where Shalleg had made his strange threat. The young pitcher had never before gone through such an experience, and it had rather unnerved him.

"I wonder what I'd better do?" he mused, as he walked along the street, where many men were busy clearing away the snow. "I don't like to report what he said to me to any of the baseball authorities, for it would look as though I was afraid of him. And I'm not!" declared Joe, sturdily. "Shalleg wasn't himself, or he wouldn't have said such things. He didn't know quite what he was doing, I guess."

But, the more Joe thought of it, as he trudged along, the more worried he became.

"He has a very bad temper, and he might do me some injury," mused Joe. "But, after all, what *can* he do? If he stays on the Clevefield team, and I go to St. Louis, we'll be far enough apart. I guess I won't do anything about it now."

But the youth could not altogether conceal the emotions that had swayed him during the strange interview. When, a little later, he called at the hotel to see if Reggie and his sister had comfortable rooms, his face must have showed something unusual, for Mabel asked: [47]

"Why, Joe, what is the matter?"

"Matter? Nothing," he replied, with a laugh, but it was rather forced.

"You look as though—something had happened," the girl went on. "Perhaps you haven't recovered from your efforts to rescue us from the stalled train last night."

"Oh, yes, I'm all over that," declared Joe, more at his ease now.

"It was awfully good of you," proceeded Mabel. "Just think; suppose we had had to stay in that train until now?"

"Oh, they've been relieved by this time," spoke Joe.

"Yes, but they had to stay there all night. I can't thank you enough for coming after us. Are you sure there is nothing the matter?" she insisted. "You haven't had bad news, about not making the St. Louis team; have you?"

"No, indeed. I haven't had any news at all since that one letter from Mr. Gregory. And no news is good news, they say."

"Not always," and she smiled.

"Are you comfortable here?" asked Joe, as he sat in the parlor between the bedrooms of brother and sister. [48]

"Oh, yes. And Reggie likes it very much. He has a lot of business to attend to. Father is putting more and more on his shoulders each year. He wants him finally to take it up altogether. Reggie doesn't care so much for it, but it's good for him," and she smiled frankly at Joe.

"Yes, work is good," he admitted, "even if it is only playing baseball."

"And that sometimes seems to me like hard work," responded Mabel.

"It is," Joe admitted. "How long do you stay in Riverside?"

"Three or four days yet. Why?"

"Because there'll be good sleighing, and I thought perhaps you'd like to go out for a ride."

"I shall be delighted!"

"Then I'll arrange for it. Won't you come over to the house this evening?"

"I have an engagement," she laughed.

Joe looked disappointed. Mabel smiled.

"It's with your sister," she said. "I promised to come over and learn a new lace pattern."

"I'm just crazy about fancy work myself!" and Joe laughed in turn. "It's as bad as the new dances. I guess I'll stay home, too."

"Do," Mabel invited. And when Joe took his leave some of the worry caused by Shalleg's threat had passed away. [49]

"I guess I'll say nothing about it," mused our hero. "It would do no good, and if father and mother heard about it they might worry. I'll just fight it out all alone. I guess Shalleg was only a 'bluff,' anyhow. He may be in desperate straits, but he had no right to make threats like that."

Riverside was storm-bound for several days, and when she was finally dug out, and conditions were normal, there was still plenty of snow left for sleighing. Joe planned to take Mabel for a ride, and Reggie, hearing of it, asked Clara to be his guest.

Two or three days passed, and Joe neither saw nor heard any more of Shalleg, except to learn, by judicious inquiry, that the surly and threatening fellow had left the boarding house to which Joe had taken him.

"I guess he's gone off to try his game on some other players in the League," thought the young pitcher. "I hope he doesn't succeed, though. If he got money I'm afraid he'd make a bad use of it."

There came another letter from Mr. Gregory, in which he told Joe that, while the matter was still far from being settled, the chances were that the young pitcher would be drafted to St. Louis.

"I will let you know, in plenty of time, whether you are to train with us, or with the big league," the manager of the Pittston team wrote. "So you will have to hold yourself in readiness to do one or the other." [50]

"They don't give you much choice; do they?" spoke Reggie, when Joe told him this news. "You've got to do just as they tell you; haven't you?"

"In a measure, yes," assented Joe. "Baseball is big business. Why, I read an article the other day that stated how over fifty million persons pay fifteen million dollars every year just to see the games, and the value of the different clubs, grounds and so on mounts up to many millions more."

"It sure is big business," agreed Reggie. "I might go into it myself."

"Well, more than one fortune has been made at it," observed Joe.

"But I don't like the idea of the club owners and managers doing as they please with the players. It seems to take away your freedom," argued the other lad.

"Well, in a sense I suppose it does," admitted Joe. "And yet the interests of the players are always being looked after. We don't have to be baseball players unless we want to; but, once we sign a contract, we have to abide by it.

"Then, too, the present organization has brought to the players bigger salaries than they ever got before. Of course we chaps in the minor leagues aren't bid for, as are those in the big leagues. But we always hope to be." [51]

"It seems funny, for one manager to buy a player from another manager," went on Reggie.

"I suppose so, but I've grown sort of used to it," Joe replied. "Of course the players themselves don't benefit by the big sum one manager may give another for the services of a star fielder or pitcher, but it all helps our reputations."

"Is the St. Louis team considered pretty good?" Reggie wanted to know.

"Well, it could be better," confessed Joe, slowly. "They reached one place from the top of the second division last season, but if I play with them I'll try to pull them to the top of the second half, anyhow," he added, with a laugh. "The Cardinals never have been considered so very good, but the club is a money-maker, and we can't all be pennant winners," he admitted, frankly.

"No, I suppose not," agreed Reggie. "Well, I wish you luck, whatever you do this Summer. If I ever get out to St. Louis I'll stop off and see you play."

"Do," urged Joe. He hoped Mabel would come also.

When Joe reached home that afternoon his mother met him in the living room, and said quickly: [52]

"Someone is waiting for you in the parlor, Joe."

"Gracious! I hope it isn't Shalleg!" thought the young pitcher. "If he has come here to make trouble——" And his heart sank.

But as he entered the room a glad smile came over his face.

"Hello, Charlie Hall!" he cried, at the sight of the shortstop of the Pittston team, with whom Joe had been quite chummy during the league season. "What good wind blows you here?"

"Oh, you know I'm a traveling salesman during the Winter, and I happened to make this town to-day. Just thought I'd step up and see how you were."

"Glad you did! It's a real pleasure to see you. Going back at the game in the Spring, I expect; aren't you?"

"Sure. I wouldn't miss it for anything. But what's this I hear about you?"

"I don't know. Nothing to my discredit, I hope," and Joe smiled.

"Far from it, old man. But there's a rumor among some of the old boys that you're to be drafted to the Cardinals. How about it?"

"Well, Gregory told me as much, but it isn't all settled yet. Say, Charlie, now you're here, I want to ask you something." [53]

"Fire ahead."

"Do you know a fellow named Shalleg?"

Charlie Hall started.

"It's queer you should ask me that," he responded, slowly.

"Why?" Joe wanted to know.

"Because that's one of the reasons I stopped up to talk to you. I want to warn you against Shalleg."

"Warn me! What do you mean?" and Joe thought of the threats the man had made.

"Why, you know he's out of the Clevefield team; don't you?"

"No, I didn't know it," replied Joe. "But go on. I'll tell you something pretty soon."

"Yes, he's been given his unconditional release," went on Charlie. "He got to gambling, and doing other things no good ball player can expect to do, and keep in the game, and he was let go. And I heard something that made me come here to warn you, Joe. There may be nothing in it, but Shalleg——"

There came a knock at the door of the parlor, and Joe held up a warning hand.

"Wait a minute," he whispered.

## CHAPTER VII

[54]

### BASEBALL TALK

THERE was silence for a moment, following Joe's warning, and then the voice of his mother was heard:

"Joe, you're wanted on the telephone."

"Oh, all right," he answered in a relieved tone. "I didn't want her to hear about Shalleg," he added in a whisper to Charlie. "She and father would worry, and, with his recent sickness, that wouldn't be a good thing for him."

"I should say not," agreed the other ball player.

"I'll be right there, Mother," went on Joe, in louder tones and then he went to the hall, where the telephone stood. It was only a message from a local sporting goods dealer, saying that he had secured for Joe a certain glove he had had made to order.

Joe went back to his chum, and the baseball talk was renewed.

"What were you going to say that Shalleg was up to?" asked Joe.

"As I was saying," resumed Charlie, "there may be nothing in the rumor, but it's the talk, in baseball circles, that Shalleg has been trying his best, since being released, to get a place with the Cardinals."

[55]

"You don't mean it!" cried Joe. "That accounts for his surprise, and perhaps for his bitter feeling against me when I told him there was a chance that I would go to St. Louis."

"Probably," agreed Charlie. "So, having heard this, and knowing that Shalleg is a hard character, I thought I'd warn you."

"I'm glad you did," returned Joe warmly. "It was very good of you to go to that trouble. And, after the experience I had with Shalleg, I shouldn't wonder but what there was something in it. Though why he should be vindictive toward me is more than I can fathom. I certainly never did anything to him, except to refuse to lend him money, and I actually had to do that."

"Of course," agreed Charlie. "But I guess, from his bad habits, his mind is warped. He is abnormal, and your refusal, coupled with the fact that you are probably going to a team that he has tried his best to make, and can't, simply made him wild. So, if I were you, I should be on the lookout, Joe."

"I certainly will. It's queer that I met Shalleg the way I did—in the storm. It was quite an unusual coincidence. It seems he had been to Rocky Ford, a town near here, to see if he could borrow money from somebody there—at least so he said. Then he heard I lived here, and he started for Riverside, and got lost on the way, in the storm. Altogether it was rather queer. I never was so surprised in my life as when, after riding with me for some time, the man said he was looking for me."

[56]

"It *was* queer," agreed Charlie. "Well, the only thing to do, after this, is to steer clear of him. And, after all, it may only be talk."

"Yes," assented Joe, "and now let's talk about something pleasant. How are you, anyhow? What are your plans for the coming season? And how are all the boys since we played the last pennant game?"

"Gracious!" exclaimed Charlie with a laugh. "You fire almost as many questions at a fellow as a lawyer would."

Then the two plunged into baseball talk, which, as it has no special interest for my readers, I shall omit.

"Have you anything special to do?" asked Joe, as Charlie and he came to a pause in recalling scenes and incidents, many of which you will find set down in the previous book of this series.

"No. After I clean up all the orders I can here I will have a few days' vacation," replied Hall.

[57]

"Good!" cried Joe. "Then spend them with me. Reggie Varley and his sister are here for a while—you remember Reggie; don't you, Charlie?"

"As well as you remember his sister, I reckon," was the laughing rejoinder.

"Never mind that. Then I'll count on you. I'll introduce you to a nice girl, and we'll get up a little sleigh-riding party. There'll be a fine moon in a couple of nights."

"Go as far as you like with me," invited Charlie. "I'm not in training yet, and I guess a late oyster supper, after a long ride, won't do me any particular harm."

Charlie departed for the hotel, to get his baggage, for he was going to finish out the rest of his stay in Riverside as Joe's guest, and the young pitcher went to get the new glove, about which he had received the telephone message.

It was a little later that day that, as Clara was passing her brother's room, she heard a curious, thumping noise.

"I wonder what that is?" she murmured. "Sounds as though Joe were working at a punching bag. Joe, what in the world are you doing?" she asked, pausing outside his door.

"Making a pocket in my new glove," he answered. "Come on in, Sis. I'm all covered with olive oil, or I'd open the door for you." [58]

"Olive oil! The idea! Are you making a salad, as well?" she asked laughingly, as she pushed open the portal.

She saw her brother, attired in old clothes, alternately pouring a few drops of olive oil on his new pitcher's glove, and then, with an old baseball pounding a hollow place in the palm.

"What does it mean?" asked Clara.

"Oh, I'm just limbering up my new glove," answered Joe. "If I'm to play with a big team, like the St. Louis Cardinals, I want to have the best sort of an outfit. You know a ball will often slip out of a new glove, so I'm making a sort of 'pocket' in this one, only not as deep as in a catcher's mitt, so it will hold the ball better."

"But why the olive oil?"

"Oh, well, of course any good oil would do, but this was the handiest. The oil softens the leather, and makes it pliable. And say, if you haven't anything else to do, there's an old glove, that's pretty badly ripped; you might sew it up. It will do to practice with."

"I'll sew it to-morrow, Joe. I've got to make a new collar now. Mabel and I are going to the matinee, and I want to look my best."

"Oh, all right," agreed Joe easily. "There's no special hurry," and he went on thumping the baseball into the hollow of the new glove. [59]

"Well, Joe, is there anything new in the baseball situation?" asked Mr. Matson of his son a little later. The inventor, whose eyesight had been saved by the operation (to pay for which most of Joe's pennant money went) was able to give part of his time to his business now.

"No, there's not much new, Dad," replied the young player. "I am still waiting to hear definitely about St. Louis. I do hope I am drafted there."

"It means quite an advance for you; doesn't it, Joe?"

"Indeed it does, Dad. There aren't many players who are taken out of a small league, to a major one, at the close of their first season. I suppose I ought to be proud."

"Well, I hope you are, Joe, in a proper way," said Mr. Matson. "Pride, of the right sort, is very good. And I'm glad of your prospective advance. I am sure it was brought about by hard work, and, after all, that is the only thing that counts. And you did work hard, Joe."

"Yes, I suppose I did," admitted the young pitcher modestly, as he thought of the times he pitched when his arm ached, and when his nerves were all unstrung on account of the receipt of bad news. "But other fellows worked hard, too," he went on. "You've *got* to work hard in baseball." [60]

"Will it be any easier on the St. Louis team?" his father wanted to know.

"No, it will be harder," replied Joe. "I might as well face that at once."

And it was well that Joe had thus prepared himself in advance, for before him, though he did not actually know it, were the hardest struggles to which a young pitcher could be subjected.

"Yes, there'll be hard work," Joe went on, "but I don't mind. I like it. And I'm not so foolish as to think that I'm going to go in, right off the reel, and become the star pitcher of the team. I guess I'll have to sit back, and warm the bench for quite a considerable time before I'm called on to pull the game out of the fire."

"Well, that's all right, as long as you're there when the time comes," said his father. "Stick to it, Joe, now that you are in it. Your mother didn't take much to baseball at first, but, the more I see of it, and read of it, the more I realize that it's a great business, and a clean sport. I'm glad you're in it, Joe."

"And I am too, Dad."

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## THE QUARREL

"ARE we all here?"

"Oh, what a glorious night!"

"Did you ever see such a moon!"

"Looks about as big as a baseball does when you're far from first and the pitcher is heaving it over, to tag you out!"

This last observation from Joe Matson.

"Oh, what an unpoetical remark to make!"

That from Mabel Varley.

There came a chorus of laughter, shouts, good-natured jibes, little shrieks and giggles from the girls, and chuckles from the young men.

"Well, let's get started," proposed Joe.

It was the occasion of the sleigh ride that Joe had gotten up, ostensibly for the enjoyment of a number of his young friends, but, in reality for Mabel, who, with her brother, was still staying on in Riverside, for the Varley business was not yet finished.

It was a glorious, wintry night, and in the sky hung the silvery moon, lighting up a few fleecy clouds with glinting beams, and bringing into greater brightness the sparkling snow that encrusted the earth.

[62]

"Count noses," suggested Charlie Hill, who, with a young lady to whom Joe had introduced him a day or so before, was in the sleighing party.

"I'll help," volunteered Mabel, who, of course, was being escorted by Joe, while Reggie had Clara under his care. Mabel and Joe made sure that all of their party were present. They were gathered in the office of the livery stable, whence they were to start, to go to a hotel about twelve miles distant—a hotel famous for its oyster suppers, as many a sleighing party, of which Joe had been a member, could testify. Following the supper there was to be a little dance, and the party, properly chaperoned, expected to return some time before morning.

"Yes, I guess we're all here," Joe announced, as he looked among the young people. And it was no easy task to make sure, for they were constantly shifting about, going here and there, friends greeting friends.

Four sturdy horses were attached to a big barge, in the bottom of which had been spread clean straw, for it was quite frosty, and, in spite of heavy wraps and blankets, feet would get cold. But the straw served, in a measure, to keep them warm.

[63]

"All aboard!" cried Charlie Hill, who had made himself a general favorite with all of Joe's friends. "All aboard!"

"Why don't you say 'play ball'?" asked Mabel, with a laugh. "It seems to me, with a National Leaguer with us, the least we could do would be to make that our rallying cry!" Mabel was a real "sport."

"I'm not a big leaguer yet," protested Joe. "Don't go too strong on that. I may be turned back into the bushes."

"Not much danger," commented Charlie, as he thought of the fine work Joe had done in times past. Joe was a natural born pitcher, but he had developed his talents by hard work, as my readers know.

Into the sled piled the laughing, happy young folks, and then, snugly tucked in, the word was given, and, with a merry jingle of bells, away they went over the white snow.

There were the old-time songs sung, after the party had reached the open country, and had taken the edge off their exuberance by tooting tin horns. "Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party," "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," "Old Black Joe"—all these, and some other, more modern, songs were sung, more or less effectively. But, after all, it was the spirit and not the melody that counted.

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On over the snowy road went the big sled, pulled by the willing horses, who seemed all the more willing because of the joyous party they were dragging along.

"Look out for this grade-crossing," remarked Joe to the driver, for they were approaching the railroad.

"I will, Joe," the man replied. "I have good occasion to remember this place, too."

"So have I," spoke Mabel, in a low voice to her escort. "There is where we were snowed in; isn't

it?" she asked, nodding in the direction of Deep Rock Cut.

"That's the place," replied Joe.

"Yes, sir, I have occasion to remember this place," went on the driver. "And I'm always careful when I cross here, ever since, two years ago, I was nearly run down by a train. I had just such a load of young folks as I've got now," he went on.

"How did it happen?" asked Reggie, as the runners scraped over the bare rails, a look up and down the moon-lit track showing no train in sight.

"Well, the party was making quite a racket, and I didn't hear the whistle of the train," resumed the driver. "It was an extra, and I didn't count on it. We were on our way home, and we had a pretty narrow escape. Just got over in time, I tell you. The young folks were pretty quiet after that, and I was glad it happened on the way home, instead of going, or it would have spoiled all their fun. And, ever since then, whether I know there's a train due or not, I'm always careful of this crossing." [65]

"It makes one feel ever so much safer to have a driver like him," spoke Mabel to Clara.

"Oh, we can always trust Frank," replied Joe's sister.

Laughing, shouting, singing and blowing the horns, the party went on its merry way, until the hotel was reached.

Everything was in readiness for the young people, for the arrangements had been made in advance, and soon after the girls had "dolled-up," as Joe put it, by which he meant arranged their hair, that had become blown about under the scarfs they wore, they all sat down to a bountifully-spread table.

"Reminds me of the dinner we had, after we won the pennant," said Charlie Hall.

"Only it's so different," added Joe. "That was a hot night."

Talk and merry laughter, mingled with baseball conversation went around the table. Joe did not care to "talk shop," but somehow or other, he could not keep away from the subject that was nearest his heart. Nor could Charlie, and the two shot diamond discussion back and forth, the others joining in occasionally. [66]

The meal was drawing to an end. Reggie Varley, pouring out a glass of water, rose to his feet.

"Friends and fellow citizens," he began in a sort of "toastmaster voice."

"Hear! Hear!" echoed Charlie, entering into the spirit of the occasion.

"We have with us this evening," went on Reggie, in the approved manner of after-dinner introductions, "one whom you all well know, and whom it is scarcely necessary to name——"

"Hear! Hear!" interrupted Charlie, pounding on the table with his knife handle.

All eyes were turned toward Joe, who could not help blushing.

"I rise to propose the health of one whom we all know and love," went on Reggie, "and to assure him that we all wish him well in his new place."

"Better wait until I get it," murmured Joe, to whom this was a great surprise.

"To wish him all success," went on Reggie. "And I desire to add that, as a token of our esteem, and the love in which we hold him, we wish to present him this little token—and may it be a lucky omen for him when he is pitching away in the big league," and with this Reggie handed to Joe a stick-pin, in the shape of a baseball, the seams outlined in diamonds, and a little ruby where the trademark would have been. [67]

Poor Joe was taken quite by surprise.

"Speech! Speech!" came the general cry.

Joe fumbled the pin in his fingers, and for a moment there was a mist before his eyes. This little surprise had been arranged by Reggie, and he had quietly worked up the idea among Joe's many young friends, all of whom had contributed to the cost of the token.

"Go on! Say something!" urged Mabel, at Joe's side.

"Well—er—well, I—er—I don't know what to say," he stammered, "except that this is a great surprise to me, and that I—er—I thank you!"

He sat down amid applause, and someone started up the song "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!"

It was sung with a will. Altogether the affair was successfully carried out, and formed one of the most pleasant remembrances in the life of Baseball Joe.

After the presentation, others made impromptu speeches, even the girls being called on by Reggie, to whom the position of toastmaster particularly appealed.

The supper was over. The girls were in the dressing room, donning their wraps, and Joe and [68]



Reggie had gone to the office to pay the bill.

The proprietor of the hotel was in the men's room, and going there Joe was greeted by name, for the hotel man knew him well.

"Everything satisfactory, Mr. Matson?" the host asked, and at the mention of Joe's name, a rough-looking fellow, who was buying a cigar, looked up quickly.

"Yes, Mr. Todd, everything was fine," replied Joe, not noticing the man's glance. "Now we'll settle with you."

"No hurry," said the proprietor. "I hear you're going to leave us soon—going up to a higher class in baseball, Joe."

"Well, there's some talk of it," admitted our hero, and as he took out the money to make the payment, the rough-looking man passed behind him. Joe dropped a coin, and, in stooping to pick it up, he moved back a step. As he did so, he either collided with the man, who had observed him so narrowly, or else the fellow deliberately ran into Joe.

"Look out where you're walking! You stepped on my foot!" exclaimed the man in surly tones. "Can't you see what you're doing? you country gawk!"

"I beg your pardon," spoke Joe quietly, but a red flush came into his face, and his hands clenched involuntarily.

"Huh! Trying to put on high society airs; eh?" sneered the other. "I'll soon take that out of you. I say you stepped on me on purpose." [69]

"You are mistaken," said Joe, still quietly.

"Huh! Do you mean to say I'm sayin' what ain't so?" demanded the other.

"If you like to put it that way; yes," declared Joe, determined to stand upon his rights, for he felt that it had not been his fault.

"Be careful," warned Reggie, in a low voice.

"Say, young feller, I don't allow nobody to say that to me!" blustered the fellow, advancing on Joe with an ugly look. "You'll either beg my pardon, or give me satisfaction! I'll——"

"Now here. None of that!" interposed the proprietor. "You aren't hurt, Wessel."

"How do you know? And didn't he accuse me of——"

"Oh, get out. You're always ready to pick a quarrel," went on the hotel man. "Move on!"

"Well, then let him beg my pardon," insisted the other. "If he don't, I'll take it out of him," and his clenched fist indicated his meaning only too plainly.

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## CHAPTER IX

 [70]

### JOE IS DRAFTED

FOR a moment Joe stood facing the angry man—unnecessarily angry, it seemed—since, even if the young ball player had trod on his foot, the injury could not have amounted to much.

"I told you once that I was sorry for having collided with you, though I do not believe it was my fault," spoke Joe, holding himself in check with an effort. "That is all I intend to say, and you may make the most of it."

"I'll make the most of you, if you don't look out!" blustered the man. "If you'll just step outside we can settle this little argument to the queen's taste," and he seemed very eager to have Joe accept his challenge.

"Now see here! There'll be no fighting on these premises," declared the hotel proprietor, with conviction.

"No, we'll do it outside," growled the man.

"Not with me. I don't intend to fight you," said Joe as quietly as he could.

"Huh! Afraid; eh?"

"No, not afraid." [71]

"Well, you're a coward and a——"

"That will do, Wessel. Get out!" and the proprietor's voice left no room for argument. The man slunk away, giving Joe a surly look, and then the supper bill was paid, and receipted.

"Who was he?" asked Joe, when the fellow was out of sight.

"Oh, I don't know any good of him," replied the hotel man. "He's been hanging around town ever since the ball season closed."

"Is he a player?" Joe inquired.

"No. I'm inclined to think he's a gambler. I know he was always wanting to make bets on the games around here, but no one paid much attention to him. You don't know him; do you?"

"Never saw him before, as far as I recollect," returned Joe slowly. "I wonder why he wanted to pick a quarrel with me? For that was certainly his object."

"It was," agreed Reggie, "and he didn't pay much attention to you until he heard your name."

"I wonder if he could be——?" began Joe, and then he hesitated in his half-formed question. Reggie looked at his friend inquiringly, but Joe did not proceed.

"Don't say anything about this to the girls," requested Joe, as they went upstairs.

"Oh, no, of course not," agreed Reggie. "He was only some loafer, I expect, who had a sore head. Best to keep it quiet." [72]

Joe was more upset by the incident than he liked to admit. He could not understand the man's motive in trying so hard to force him into a fight.

"Not that I would be afraid," reasoned Joe, for he was in good condition, and in splendid fighting trim, due to his clean living and his outdoor playing. "I think I could have held my own with him," he thought, "only I don't believe in fighting, if it can be avoided."

"But there was certainly something more than a little quarrel back of it all. Wessel is his name; eh? I must remember that."

Joe made a mental note of it, but he little realized that he was to hear the name again under rather strange circumstances.

"What's the matter?" asked Mabel, on the way home in the sleigh, drawn by the prancing horses with their jingling bells.

"Why?" parried Joe.

"You are so quiet."

"Well—I didn't count on so much happening to-night."

"You mean about that little pin? I think it's awfully sweet."

"Did you help pick it out?" asked Joe, seeing a chance to turn the conversation.

"Yes. Reggie asked me what I thought would be nice, and I chose that." [73]

"Couldn't have been better," declared Joe, with enthusiasm. "I shall always keep it!"

They rode on, but Joe could not shake off the mood that had seized him. He could not forget the look and words of the man who endeavored to force a quarrel with him—for what object Joe could only guess.

"I'm sure there's something the matter," insisted Mabel, when the song "Jingle Bells!" had died away. "Have I done anything to displease you?" she asked, for she had "split" one dance with Charlie Hall.

"No, indeed!" cried Joe, glad that he could put emphasis into his denial. "There's nothing really the matter."

"Unless you're sorry you're going away out to Missouri," persisted the girl.

"Well, I am sorry—that is, if I really have to go," spoke the young ball player sincerely. "Of course it isn't at all certain that I will go."

"Oh, I guess it's certain enough," she said. "And I really hope you do go."

"It's pretty far off," said Joe. "I'll have to make my headquarters in St. Louis."

"Reggie and I expect to be in the West a good part of the coming Summer," went on Mabel, in even tones. "It's barely possible that Reggie may make his business headquarters in St. Louis, for papa's trade is shifting out that way." [74]

"You don't mean it!" cried Joe, and some of his companions in the sleigh wondered at the warmth of his tone.

"Oh, yes, I do," said Mabel. "So I shall see you play now and then; for I'm as ardent a 'fan' as I

ever was."

"That's good," returned Joe. "I'm glad I'm going to a major league—that is, if they draft me," he added quickly. "I didn't know you might be out there."

From then on the thought of going to St. Louis was more pleasant to Joe.

The sleigh ride was a great success in every particular. The young people reached home rather late—or, rather early in the morning, happy and not too tired.

"It was fine; wasn't it?" whispered Clara, as she and her brother tip-toed their way into the house, so as not to awaken their parents.

"Dandy!" he answered softly.

"Weren't you surprised about the pin?"

"Of course I was."

"But you don't seem exactly happy. Is something worrying you? I heard Mabel ask you the same thing."

"Did you?" inquired Joe, non-committally.

"Yes. Is anything the matter?"

"No, Sis. Get to bed. It's late."

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Clara paused for a moment. She realized that Joe had not answered her question as she would have liked.

"But I guess he's thinking of the change he may have to make," the sister argued. "Joe is a fine fellow. He certainly has gone ahead in baseball faster than he would have done in some other line of endeavor. Well, it's good he likes it.

"And yet," she mused, as she went to her room, "I wonder what it is that is worrying him?"

If she could have seen Joe, at that same moment, sitting on the edge of a chair in his apartment, moodily staring at the wall, she would have wondered more.

"What was his game?" thought Joe, as he recalled the scene with the man at the hotel. "What was his object?"

But he could not answer his own question.

Joe's sleep was disturbed the remainder of that night—short as the remainder was.

At breakfast table, the next morning, the story of the jolly sleigh ride was told to Mr. and Mrs. Matson. Of course Joe said nothing of the dispute with the surly man.

"And here's the pin they gave me," finished the young player as he passed around the emblem that had been so unexpectedly presented to him.

His mother was looking at it when the doorbell rang, and the maid, who answered it, brought back a telegram.

[76]

"It's for Mr. Joseph," she announced.

Joe's face was a little pale as he tore open the yellow envelope, and then, as he glanced at the words written on the sheet of paper, he exclaimed:

"It's settled! I'm drafted to St. Louis!"

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## CHAPTER X

[77]

### OFF TO ST. LOUIS

FOR a few seconds, after Joe's announcement, there was silence in the room. Then, as the realization of what it meant came to them, Clara was the first to speak.

"I'm *so* glad, Joe," she said, simply, but there was real meaning in her words.

"And I congratulate you, son," added Mr. Matson. "It's something to be proud of, even if St. Louis isn't in the first division."

"Oh, they'll get there, as soon as I begin pitching," declared Joe with a smile.

Mrs. Matson said nothing for a while. Her son, and the rest of the family, knew of her objection to baseball, and her disappointment that Joe had not entered the ministry, or some of the so-called learned professions.

But, as she looked at the smiling and proud face of her boy she could not help remarking:

"Joe, I, too, am very glad for your sake. I don't know much about sporting matters, but I suppose this is a promotion."

"Indeed it is, Mother!" Joe cried, getting up to go around the table and kiss her. "It's a fine promotion for a young player, and now it's up to me to make good. And I will, too!" he added earnestly. [78]

"Is that all Mr. Gregory, your former manager, says in the telegram?" asked Mr. Matson.

"No, he says a letter of explanation will follow, and also a contract to sign."

"Will you get more money, Joe?" asked Clara.

"Sure, Sis. I know what you're thinking of," Joe added, with a smile at the girl, as he put his stick-pin in his scarf. "You're thinking of the ring I promised to buy you if I got this place. Well, I'll keep my word. You can go down and get measured for it to-day."

"Oh, Joe, what a good brother you are!" she cried.

"Then you really will get more money?" asked Mrs. Matson, and her voice was a bit eager. Indeed Joe's salary, and the cash he received as his share of the pennant games, had been a blessing to the family during Mr. Matson's illness, for the inventor had lost considerable funds.

"Yes, I'll get quite a bit more," said Joe. "I got fifteen hundred a year with the Pittstons, and Mr. Gregory said I ought to get at least double that if I go with St. Louis. It will put us on Easy Street; won't it, Momsey?" [79]

"It will be very welcome," she replied, with a sigh, but it was rather a happy sigh at that. She had known the pinch of hard times in her day, had Mrs. Matson.

"I'd have to be at the game of lawyering or doctoring a long while, before I'd get an advance like this," went on Joe, as he read the telegram over a second time. And then he put it carefully in his pocket, to be filed away with other treasures, such as young men love to look at from time to time; a faded flower, worn by "Someone," a letter or two, a—but there, I promised not to tell secrets.

The first one who knew of his promotion, after the folks at home, was Mabel. Joe made some excuse to call at the hotel. Reggie was out on business, but Joe did not mind that.

"Oh, I'm so glad—for your sake, Joe!" exclaimed Mabel warmly. "I hope you make a great reputation!"

"It won't be from lack of trying," he said, with a smile. "And I do hope you can get out to St. Louis this Summer."

"We expect to," she answered. "I have been there with Reggie several times."

"What sort of a place is it?" asked Joe eagerly, "and where does my team play?" he inquired, with an accent on the "my." [80]

"There are two major league teams in St. Louis," explained Mabel, who, as I have said, was an ardent "fan." She was almost as good as a boy in this respect. "The National League St. Louis team, or the 'Cardinals,' as I suppose you know they are nicknamed, plays on Robison Field, at Vandeventer and Natural Bridge road. I've often been out there to games with Reggie, but I'll look forward to seeing them now, with a lot more pleasure," she added, blushing slightly.

"Thanks," laughed Joe. "I guess I'll be able to find my way about the city. But, after all, I'll be likely to strike it with the team, for I'll probably have to go South training before I report in St. Louis."

"It isn't hard to find your way about St. Louis," went on Mabel. "Just take a Natural Bridge line car, and that'll bring you out to Robison Field. Or you can take a trunk line, and transfer to Vandeventer. But the best way is the Natural Bridge route. Is there anything else you'd like to know?" she asked, with a smile. "Information supplied at short notice. The Browns, or American League team, play at Grand and Dodier—"

"Oh, I'm not interested in them!" interrupted Joe. "I'm going to stick to my colors—cardinal." [81]

"And I'll wear them, too," said Mabel in a low voice, and the blush in her cheeks deepened. Already she was wearing Joe's color.

"This is our last day here," the girl went on, after a pause.

"It is?" cried Joe in surprise. "Why, I thought—"

"I'm sorry, too," she broke in with. "You have given Reggie and me a lovely time. I've enjoyed

myself very much."

"Not half as much as *I* have," murmured Joe.

Reggie came in a little later, and congratulated the young player, and then Charlie Hall added his good wishes. It was his last day in town also, and he and the Varleys left on the same train, Joe and his sister going to the station to see them off.

"If you get snowed in again, just let me know," called Joe, with a laugh, as the train pulled out. "I'll come for you in an airship."

"Thanks!" laughed Mabel, as she waved her hand in a final good-bye.

As Joe was leaving the station a train from Rocky Ford pulled in, and one of the passengers who alighted from it was the ill-favored man who had endeavored to pick a quarrel with Joe at the hotel the night before.

The fellow favored the young player with a surly glance, and seemed about to approach him. Then, catching sight of Clara at her brother's side, he evidently thought better of it, and veered off. [82]

Joe's face must have showed his surprise at the sight of the man, for Clara asked:

"Who is that fellow, Joe? He looked at you in such a peculiar way. Do you know him?"

Joe was glad he could answer in the negative. He really did not know the man, and did not want to, though it certainly seemed strange that he should encounter him again.

"He seems to know you," persisted Clara, for the man had looked back at Joe twice.

"Maybe he thinks he does, or maybe he wants to," went on the pitcher, trying to speak indifferently. "Probably he's heard that I'm the coming twirling wonder of the Cardinals," and he pretended to swell up his chest, and look important.

"Nothing like having a good opinion of yourself," laughed Clara.

That afternoon's mail brought Joe a letter from Mr. Gregory, in which the news contained in the telegram was confirmed. It was also stated that Joe would receive formal notice of his draft from the St. Louis team, and his contract, which was to be signed in duplicate.

"I wish he'd said something about salary," mused our hero. "But probably the other letter, from the St. Louis manager, will have that in, and the contract will, that's certain." [83]

The following day all the details were settled. Joe received formal notice of his draft from the Pittstons to the St. Louis Cardinals. He was to play for a salary of three thousand dollars a year.

In consideration of this he had to agree to certain conditions, among them being that he would not play with any other team without permission from the organized baseball authorities, and, as long as he was in the game, and accepted the salary, he would be subject to the call of any other team in the league, the owners of which might wish to "purchase" him; that is, if they paid the St. Louis team sufficient money.

"I wonder what they'll consider me worth, say at the end of the first season?" said Joe to Clara.

"What a way to talk!" she exclaimed. "As if you were a horse, or a slave."

"It does sound a bit that way," he admitted, "and some of the star players bring a lot more than valuable horses. Why, some of the players on the New York Giants cost the owners ten and fifteen thousand dollars, and the Pittsburgh Nationals paid \$22,500 for one star fellow as a pitcher. I hope I get to be worth that to some club," laughed Joe, "but there isn't any danger—not right off the bat," he added with a smile. [84]

"Well, that's a part of baseball I'm not interested in," said Clara. "I like to see the game, but I watch it for the fun in it, not for the money."

"And yet there has to be money to make it a success," declared Joe. "Grounds, grandstands and trips cost cash, and the owners realize on the abilities of the players. In return they pay them good salaries. Many a player couldn't make half as much in any other business. I'm glad I'm in it."

Joe signed and returned the contract, and from then on he was the "property" of the St. Louis team, and subject to the orders of the owners and manager.

A few days later Joe received his first instructions—to go to St. Louis, report to the manager, and then go South to the training camp, with the team. There his real baseball work, as a member of a big league, would start.

Joe packed his grip, stowing away his favorite bat and his new pitcher's glove, said good-bye to his family and friends in Riverside, and took a train that eventually would land him in St. Louis, at the Union Depot.

The journey was without incident of moment, and in due time Joe reached the hotel where he had been told the players were quartered. [85]

"Is Mr. Watson here?" he asked the clerk, inquiring for the manager.

"I think you'll find him in the billiard room," replied the clerk, sizing up Joe with a critical glance. "Here, boy, show this gentleman to Mr. Watson," went on the man at the register.

"Do you know him by sight?" he asked.

"No," replied Joe, rather sorry he did not.

"I know him!" exclaimed the bellboy, coming forward, with a cheerful grin on his freckled face. "He sure has a good ball team. I hope they win the pennant this year. Are you one of the players?" he asked.

"One of the new ones," spoke Joe, modestly enough.

"Gee! Dat's great!" exclaimed the lad admiringly. "There's 'Muggins' Watson over there," and he pointed to a man in his shirt sleeves, playing billiards with a young fellow whom Joe recognized, from having seen his picture in the papers, as 'Slim' Cooney, one of the St. Louis pitchers.

"Mr. Watson?" inquiringly asked Joe, waiting until the manager had made, successfully, a difficult shot, and stood at rest on his cue.

"That's my name," and a pair of steel-blue eyes looked straight at our hero. "What can I do for you?"

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"I'm Joe Matson, and——"

"Oh, yes, the new recruit I signed up from Pittston. Well, this is the first time I've seen you. Took you on the report of one of my men. Glad to meet you," and he held out a firm hand. "Slim," he went on to his opponent at billiards, "let me make you acquainted with one of your hated rivals—Joe Matson. Matson, this is our famous left-hand twirler."

Joe laughed and shook hands. He liked the manager and the other player. I might state, at this point, that in this book, while I shall speak of the players of the Cardinals, and of the various National League teams, I will not use their real names, for obvious reasons. However, if any of you recognize them under their pseudonyms, I cannot help it.

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## CHAPTER XI

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### GOING DOWN SOUTH

"WELL, are you going to help us win the pennant, Matson?" asked Manager Watson, when he had introduced Joe to a number of the other St. Louis players, who were lounging about the billiard room. It was a cold and blustery day outside, and the hotel, where the team had lately taken up quarters, ready for the trip to the South, offered more comfort than the weather without.

"I'm going to do my best," replied Joe modestly, and he blushed, for most of the other players were older than he, many of them seasoned veterans, and the heroes of hard-fought contests.

"Well, we sure do need help, if we're to get anywhere," murmured Hal Doolin, the snappy little first baseman. "We sure do!"

"You needn't look at me!" fired back Slim Cooney. "I did my share of the work last season, and if I'd had decent support——"

"Easy now, boys!" broke in Mr. Watson. "You know what the papers said about last year—that there were too many internal dissensions among the Cardinals to allow them to play good ball. You've got to cut that out if I'm going to manage you."

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I might add that Sidney Watson, who had made a reputation as a left-fielder, and a hard hitter on the Brooklyn team, had lately been offered the position as manager of the Cardinals, and had taken it. This would be his first season, and, recognizing the faults of the team, he had set about correcting them in an endeavor to get it out of the "cellar" class. Quarrels, bickerings and disputes among the players had been too frequent, he learned, and he was trying to eliminate them.

"Have a heart for each other, boys," he said to the men who gathered about him, incidentally to covertly inspect Joe, the recruit. "It wasn't anybody's fault, in particular, that you didn't finish in the first division last season. But we're going to make a hard try for it this year. That's why I've let some of your older players go, and signed up new ones. I'm expecting some more boys on in a few days, and then we'll hike for the Southland and see what sort of shape I can pound you into."

"Don't let me keep you from your game," said Joe to the manager. "Oh, I'll let Campbell finish it for me, he's better at the ivories than I am," and Watson motioned for the centre fielder to take the cue. "I'll see what sort of a room we can give you," the manager went on. "Nothing like being comfortable. Did you have a good trip?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Contract satisfactory, and all that?"

"Oh, yes. And, by the way, Mr. Watson, if it isn't asking too much I'd like to know how you came to hear of me and sign me up?"

"Oh, I had scouts all over last fall," said the manager with a smile. "One of them happened to see you early in the season, and then he saw the game you pitched against Clevefield, winning the pennant. You looked to him like the proper stuff, so I had you drafted to our club."

"I hope you won't repent of your bargain," observed Joe, soberly.

"Well, I don't think I will, and yet baseball is pretty much of a chance game after all. I've often been fooled, I don't mind admitting. But, Matson, let me tell you one thing," and he spoke more earnestly, as they walked along a corridor to the lobby of the hotel. "You mustn't imagine that you're going in right off the reel and clean things up. You'll have to go a bit slow. I want to watch you, and I'll give you all the opportunity I can."

"But you must remember that I have several pitchers, and some of them are very good. They've been playing in the big leagues for years. You're a newcomer, and, unless I'm much mistaken, you'll have a bit of stage fright at first. That's to be expected, and I'm looking for it. I won't be disappointed if you fall down hard first along. But whatever else you do, don't get discouraged and—don't lose your nerve, above all else."

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"I'll try not to," promised Joe. But he made up his mind that he would surprise the manager and make a brilliant showing as soon as possible. Joe had several things to learn about baseball as it is played in the big leagues.

"I guess I'll put you in with Rad Chase," said Manager Watson, as he looked over the page of the register, on which were the names of the team. "His room is a good one, and you'll like him. He's a young chap about your age."

"Was he in there?" asked Joe, nodding toward the billiard room, where he had met several of the players.

"No. I don't know where he is," went on the manager. "Is Rad out?" he asked of the clerk.

That official, stroking his small blonde mustache, turned to look at the rack. From the peg of room 413 hung the key.

"He's out," the clerk announced.

"Well, you might as well go up and make yourself at home," advised the manager. "I'll tell Rad you're quartered with him. Have his grip taken up," went on Mr. Watson to the clerk.

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"Front!" called the young man behind the desk, and when the same freckle-faced lad, who had pointed out to Joe the manager, came shuffling up, the lad took our hero's satchel, and did a little one-step glide with it toward the elevator.

"Tanks," mumbled the same lad, as Joe slipped a dime into his palm, when the bellboy had opened the room door and set the grip on the floor by the bed. "Say, where do youse play?" he asked with the democratic freedom of the American youth.

"Well, I'm supposed to be a pitcher," said Joe.

"Left?"

"No, right."

"Huh! It's about time the Cardinals got a guy with a right-hand delivery!" snorted the boy. "They've been tryin' southpaws and been beaten all over the lots. Got any speed?"

"Well, maybe a little," admitted Joe, smiling at the lad's ingenuousness.

"Curves, of course?"

"Some."

"Dat's th' stuff! Say, I hopes you make good!" and the lad, spinning the dime in the air, deftly caught it, and slid out of the room.

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Joe looked after him. He was entering on a new life, and many emotions were in conflict within him. True, he had been at hotels before, for he had traveled much when he was in the Central League. But this time it was different. It seemed a new world to him—a new and big world—a much more important world.

And he was to be a part of it. That was what counted most. He was in a Big League—a place of which he had often dreamed, but to which he had only aspired in his dreams. Now it was a



reality.

Joe unpacked his grip. His trunk check he had given to the clerk, who said he would send to the railroad station for the baggage. Then Joe changed his collar, put on a fresh tie, and went down in the elevator. He wanted to be among the players who were to be his companions for the coming months.

Joe liked Rad Chase at once. In a way he was like Charlie Hall, but rather older, and with more knowledge of the world.

"Do you play cards?" was Rad's question, after the formalities of introduction, Joe's roommate having come in shortly after our hero went down.

"Well, I can make a stab at whist, but I'm no wonder," confessed Joe.

"Do you play Canfield solitaire?"

"Never heard of it."

"Shake hands!" cried Rad, and he seemed relieved.

"Why?" asked Joe.

"Well, the fellow I roomed with last year was a fiend at Canfield solitaire. He'd sit up until all hours of the morning, trying to make himself believe he wasn't cheating, and I lost ten pounds from not getting my proper sleep."

"Well, I'll promise not to keep you awake that way," said Joe with a laugh.

"Do you snore?" Rad wanted next to know.

"I never heard myself."

Rad laughed.

"I guess you'll do," he said. "We'll hit it off all right."

Joe soon fell easily into the life at the big hotel. He met all the other players, and while some regarded him with jealous eyes, most of them welcomed him in their midst. Truth to tell, the St. Louis team was in a bad way, and the players, tired of being so far down on the list, were willing to make any sacrifices of professional feeling in order to be in line for honors, and a share in the pennant money, providing it could be brought to pass that they reached the top of the list.

Joe spent a week at the hotel while Manager Watson was arranging matters for the trip South. One or two players had not yet arrived, "dickers" being under way for their purchase.

But finally the announcement was made that the start for the training camp, at Reedville, Alabama, would be made in three days.

"And I'm glad of it!" cried Rad Chase, as he and Joe came back one evening from a moving picture show, and heard the news. "I'm tired of sitting around here doing nothing. I want to get a bat in my hands."

"So do I," agreed Joe. "It sure will be great to get out on the grass again. Have you ever been in Reedville?"

"No, but I hear it's a decent place. There's a good local team there that we brush up against, and two or three other teams in the vicinity. It'll be lively enough."

"Where do you like to play?" asked Joe.

"Third's my choice, but I hear I'm to be soaked in at short. I hate it, too, but Watson seems to think I fill in there pretty well."

"I suppose a fellow has to play where he's considered best, whether he wants to or not," said Joe. "I hope I can pitch, but I may be sent out among the daisies for all that."

"Well, we've got a pretty good outfield as it is," went on Rad. "I guess, from what I hear, that you'll be tried out on the mound, anyhow. Whether you stick there or not will be up to you."

"It sure is," agreed Joe.

A box-party was given at the theatre by the manager for the players, to celebrate their departure for the South. The play was a musical comedy, and some of the better known players were made the butt of jokes by the performers on the stage.

This delighted Joe, and he longed for the time when he would be thought worthy of such notice. The audience entered into the fun of the occasion, and when the chief comedian came out, and, in a witty address, presented Manager Watson with a diamond pin, and wished him all success for the coming season, there were cheers for the team.

"Everybody stand up!" called Toe Barter, one of the veteran pitchers. "Seventh inning—everybody stretch!"

The players in the two boxes arose to face the audience in the theatre, and there were more

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cheers. Joe was proud and happy that he was a part of it all.

That night he wrote home, and also to Mabel, telling of his arrival in St. Louis, and all that had happened since.

"We leave for the South in the morning," he concluded.

The departure of the players on the train was the occasion for another celebration and demonstration at the depot. A big crowd collected, several newspaper photographers took snapshots, and there were cheers and floral emblems.

Joe wished his folks could have been present. Compared to the time when he had gone South to train for the Pittston team, this was a big occasion.

A reporter from the most important St. Louis paper was to accompany the team as "staff correspondent," for St. Louis was, and always has been, a good "fan" town, and loyal to the ball teams.

"All aboard!" called the conductor.

There were final cheers, final good-byes, final hand-shakes, final wishes of good luck, and then the train pulled out. Joe and his teammates were on their way South.

It was the start of the training season, and of what would take place between that and the closing Joe little dreamed.

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## CHAPTER XII

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### THE QUARRELING MAN

QUITE a little family party it was the St. Louis players composed as they traveled South in their private car, for they enjoyed that distinction. This was something new for Joe, as the Pittston team was not blessed with a wealthy owner, and an ordinary Pullman had sufficed when Joe made his former trip. Now it was travel "de luxe."

The more Joe saw of Rad Chase the more he liked the fellow, and the two soon became good friends, being much in each other's company, sharing the upper and lower berths by turns in their section, eating at the same table, and fraternizing generally.

Some of the older players were accompanied by their wives, and after the first few hours of travel everyone seemed to know everyone else, and there was much talk and laughter.

"Can't you fellows supply me with some dope?" asked a voice in the aisle beside the seats occupied by Joe and Rad. "I've gotten off all the departure stuff, and I want something for a lead for to-morrow. Shoot me some new dope; will you?"

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"Oh, hello, Jim!" greeted Rad, and then, as Joe showed that he did not recognize the speaker, the other player went on: "This is the *Dispatch-Times's* staff correspondent, Jim Dalrymple. You want to be nice to him, Joe, and he'll put your name and picture in the paper. Got anything you can give him for a story?"

"I'm afraid not," laughed Joe.

"Oh, anything will do, as long as I can hang a lead on it," said Dalrymple hopefully. "If you've never tried to get up new stuff every day at a training camp of a ball team, you've no idea what a little thing it takes to make news. Now you don't either of you happen to have a romance about you; do you?" he inquired, pulling out a fold of copy paper. (Your real reporter never carries a note book. A bunch of paper, or the back of an envelope will do to jot down a few facts. The rest is written later from memory. Only stage reporters carry note books, and, of late they are getting "wise" and abstaining from it.)

"A romance?" repeated Joe. "Far be it from me to conceal such a thing about my person."

"But you *have* had rather a rapid rise in baseball; haven't you, Joe?" insinuated Rad. "You didn't have to wait long for promotion. Why not make up a yarn about that?" went on Rad, nodding at the reporter.

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"Sure I'll do it. Give me a few facts. Not too many," the newspaper man said with a whimsical smile. "I don't want to be tied down too hard. I like to let my fancy have free play."

"He's all right," whispered Rad in an aside to Joe. "One of the best reporters going, and he always gives you a fair show. If you make an error he'll debit you with it, but when you play well

he'll feature you. He's been South with the team a lot of times, I hear."

"But I don't like to talk about myself," objected Joe.

"Don't let that worry you!" laughed Rad. "Notoriety is what keeps baseball where it is to-day, and if it wasn't for the free advertising we get in the newspapers there would not be the attendance that brings in the dollars, and lets us travel in a private car. Don't be afraid of boosting yourself. The reporters will help you, and be glad to. They have to get the stuff, and often enough it's hard to do, especially at the training camp."

In some way or other, Joe never knew exactly how, Dalrymple managed to get a story out of him, about how Joe had been drafted, how he had begun playing ball as a boy on the "sand lots," how he had pitched Yale to victory against Princeton, and a few other details, with which my readers are already familiar. [100]

"Say, this'll do first rate!" exulted the reporter, as he went to a secluded corner to write his story, which would be telegraphed back to his daily newspaper. "I'm glad I met you!" he laughed.

Dalrymple was impartial, which is the great secret of a newspaper reporter's success. Though he gave Joe a good "show," he also "played up" some of the other members of the team. So that when copies of the paper were received later, they contained an account of Joe's progress, sandwiched in between a "yarn" of how the catcher had once worked in a boiler factory, where he learned to catch red-hot rivets, and how one of the outfielders had inherited a fortune, which he had dissipated, and then, reforming, had become a star player. So Joe had little chance to get a "swelled head," which is a bad thing for any of us.

The first part of the journey South was made in record time, but after the private car was transferred to one of the smaller railroad lines there were delays that fretted the players.

"What's the matter?" asked Manager Watson of the conductor as that official came through after a long stop at a water tank station, "won't the cow get off the track?" and he winked at the players gathered about him. [101]

"That joke's a hundred years old," retorted the ticket-taker. "Think up a new one! There's a freight wreck ahead of us, and we have to go slow."

"Well, as long as we get there some time this week, it will be all right, I reckon," drawled the manager.

Reedville was reached toward evening of the second day, and the travel-weary ball-tossers piled out of their coach to find themselves at the station of a typical Southern town.

Laziness and restfulness were in the air, which was warm with the heat of the slowly setting sun. There was the odor of flowers. Colored men were all about, shuffling here and there, driving their slowly-ambling horses attached to rickety vehicles, or backing them up at the platform to get some of the passengers.

"Majestic Hotel right this yeah way, suh! Right over yeah!" voiced the driver of a yellow stage. "Goin' right up, suh!"

"That's our place, boys," announced the manager. "Pile in, and let me have your checks. I'll have the baggage sent up."

Joe and the others took their place in the side-seated stage. A little later, the manager having arranged for the transportation of the trunks, they were driven toward the hotel that was to be their headquarters while in the South. [102]

They were registering at the hotel desk, and making arrangements about who was to room with who, when Joe heard the hotel clerk call Mr. Watson aside.

"He says he's with your party, suh," the clerk spoke. "He arrived yesterday, and wanted to be put on the same floor with your players. Says he's going to be a member of the team."

"Huh! I guess someone is bluffing you!" exclaimed the manager. "I've got all my team with me. Who is the fellow, anyhow?"

"That's his signature," went on the clerk, pointing to it on the hotel register.

"Hum! Wessel; eh?" said Mr. Watson. "Never heard of him. Where is he?"

"There he stands, over by the cigar counter."

Joe, who had heard the talk, looked, and, to his surprise, he beheld the same individual who had tried to pick a quarrel with him the night of the sleigh ride.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### UNDER SUNNY SKIES

"THAT man!" exclaimed Mr. Watson, as he gave the stranger a quick glance. "No, I don't know him, and he certainly isn't a member of my team. He isn't going to be, either; as far as I know. I'm expecting some other recruits, but no one named Wessel."

Joe said nothing. He was wondering if the man would recognize him, and, perhaps, renew that strange, baseless quarrel. And, to his surprise, the man did recognize him, but merely to bow. And then, to Joe's further surprise, the individual strolled over to where the manager and some of the players were standing, and began:

"Is this Mr. Watson?"

"That's my name—yes," but there was no cordiality in the tone.

"Well, I'm Isaac Wessel. I used to play short on the Rockpoint team in the Independent League. My contract has expired and I was wondering whether you couldn't sign me up."

"Nothing doing," replied Mr. Watson, tersely. "I have all the material I need."

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"I spoke to Mr. Johnson about it," naming one of the owners of the St. Louis team, "and he said to see you."

"Did he tell you to tell me to put you on?"

"No, I wouldn't go so far as to say that," was the hesitating reply.

"And did he say I was to give you a try-out?"

"Well, he—er—said you could if you wanted to."

"Well, I *don't* want to," declared the manager with decision. "And I want to say that you went too far when you told the clerk here you belonged to my party. I don't know you, and I don't want anything to do with a man who acts that way," and Mr. Watson turned aside.

"Well, I didn't mean any harm," whined Wessel. "The—er—I—er—the clerk must have misunderstood me."

"All right. Let it go at that," was all the answer he received.

"Then you won't give me a chance?"

"No."

The man evidently realized that this was the end, for he, too, turned aside. As he did so he looked sneeringly at Joe, and mumbled:

"I suppose you think you're the whole pitching staff now?"

Joe did not take the trouble to answer. But, though he ignored the man, he could not help wondering what his plan was in coming to the training camp. Could there be a hidden object in it, partly covered by the fellow's plea that he wanted to get on the team?

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"Do you often have cases like that, Mr. Watson?" Joe asked the manager when he had a chance.

"Like what, Matson?"

"Like that Wessel."

"Oh, occasionally. But they don't often get as fresh as he did. The idea of a bush-leaguer thinking he could break into the majors like that. He sure had nerve! Well, now I hope we're all settled, and can get to work. We've struck good weather, anyhow."

And indeed the change from winter to summer was little short of marvelous. They had come from the land of ice and snow to the warm beauty of sunny skies. There was a feeling of spring in the air, and the blood of every player tingled with life.

"Say, it sure will be great to get out on the diamond and slam the ball about; won't it?" cried Joe to Rad Chase, as the two were unpacking in their hotel room.

"That's what! How are you on stick work?"

"Oh, no better than the average pitcher," replied Joe, modestly. "I had a record of .172 last season."

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"That's not so worse," observed Rad.

"What's yours?" asked Joe.

"Oh, it runs around .250."

"Good!" cried Joe. "I hope you get it up to .300 this year."

"Not much chance of that. I was picked because I'm pretty good with the stick—a sort of pinch hitter. But then that's not being a star pitcher," he added, lest Joe feel badly at the contrast in their batting averages.

"Oh, I'm far from being a star, but I'd like to be in that class. There's my best bat," and he held out his stick.

"Oh, you like that kind; eh?" spoke Rad. "Well, I'll show you what I favor," and then the two plunged into a talk that lasted until meal time.

The arrival of the St. Louis team in the comparatively small town of Reedville was an event of importance. There was quite a crowd about the hotel, made up mostly of small boys, who wanted a chance to see the players about whom they had read so much.

After the meal, as Joe, Rad and some of the others strolled out for a walk about the place, our hero caught murmurs from the crowd of lads about the entrance.

"There's 'Toe' Barter," one lad whispered, nodding toward a veteran pitcher. [107]

"Yes, and that fellow walking with him is 'Slim' Cooney. He pitched a no-hit, no-run game last year."

"Sure, I know it. And that fellow with the pipe in his mouth is 'Dots' McCann, the shortstop. He's a peach!"

And so it went on. Joe's name was not mentioned by the admiring throng.

"Our turn will come later," said Rad, with a smile.

"I guess so," agreed his chum, somewhat dubiously.

Reedville was a thriving community, and boasted of a good nine, with whom the St. Louis team expected to cross bats a number of times during the training season. Then, too, in nearby towns, were other teams, some of them semi-professional, who would be called on to sacrifice themselves that the Cardinals might have something to bring out their own strong and weak points.

"Let's go over to the grounds," suggested Joe.

"I'm with you," agreed Rad.

"Say, you fellows won't be so anxious to head for the diamond a little later in the season," remarked "Doc" Mullin, one of the outfielders. "You'll be only too glad to give it the pass-up; won't they?" he appealed to Roger Boswell, the trainer and assistant manager. [108]

"Well, I like to see young fellows enthusiastic," said Boswell, who had been a star catcher in his day. But age, and an increasing deposit of fat, had put him out of the game. Now he coached the youngsters, and when "Muggins," as Mr. Watson was playfully called, was not on hand he managed the games from the bench. He was a star at that sort of thing.

"Go to it, boys," he advised Joe and Rad, with a friendly nod. "You can't get too much baseball when you're young."

The diamond at Reedville was nothing to boast of, but it would serve well enough for practice. And the grandstand was only a frail, wooden affair, nothing like the big one at Robison Field, in St. Louis.

Joe and Rad walked about the field, and longed for the time when they would be out on it in uniform.

"Which will be about to-morrow," spoke Rad, as Joe mentioned his desire. "We'll start in at light work, batting fungo and the like, limbering up our legs, and then we'll do hard work."

"I guess so," agreed Joe.

The weather could not have been better. The sun shone warmly from a blue sky, and there was a balmy spiciness to the southern wind. [109]

Rad and Joe walked about town, made a few purchases, and were turning back to the hotel when they saw "Cosey" Campbell, the third baseman, standing in front of a men's furnishing store.

"I say, fellows, come here," he called to the two. They came. "Do you think that necktie is too bright for a fellow?" went on Campbell, pointing to a decidedly gaudy one in the show window.

"Well, it depends on who's going to wear it," replied Rad, cautiously.

"Why, I am, of course," was the surprised answer. "Who'd you s'pose?"

"I didn't know but what you were buying it to use for a foul line flag," chuckled Rad, for Campbell's weakness for scarfs was well known. He bought one or two new ones every day, and, often enough, grew dissatisfied with his purchase before he had worn it. Then he tried to sell it to some other member of the team, usually without success.

"Huh! Foul flag!" grunted Campbell. "Guess you don't know a swell tie when you see it. I'm

going to get it," he added rather desperately, as though afraid he would change his mind.

"Go ahead. We'll go in and see fair play," suggested Joe, with a smile.

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The tie was purchased, and the clerk, after selling the bright scarf, seeing that Campbell had a package in his hand, inquired:

"Shall I wrap them both up together for you?"

"If you don't mind," replied the third baseman. And, in tying up the bundle, the one Campbell had been carrying came open, disclosing three neckties more gaudy, if possible, than the one he had just purchased.

"For the love of strikes!" cried Rad. "What are you going to do; start a store?"

"Oh, I just took a fancy to these in a window down street," replied Campbell easily. "Rather neat; don't you think?" and he held up a red and green one.

"Neat! Say, they look like the danger signals in the New York subway!" cried Rad. "Shade your eyes, Joe, or you won't be able to see the ball to-morrow!"

"That shows how much taste you fellows have," snapped Campbell. "Those are swell ties."

But the next day Joe heard Campbell trying to dispose of some of the newly purchased scarfs to "Dots" McCann.

"Go ahead, 'Dots,' take one," pleaded the baseman. "You need a new tie, and I've got more than I want. This red and green one, now; it's real swell."

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"Go on!" cried the other player. "Why I'd hate to look at myself in a glass with that around my neck! And you'd better not wear it, either—at least, not around town."

"Why not?" was the wondering answer.

"Because you might scare some of the mules, and there'd be a runaway. Tie a stone around it, Campbell, and drown it. It makes so much noise I can't sleep," and with that McCann walked off, leaving behind him a very indignant teammate.

That night notice was given that all the players would assemble at the baseball diamond in uniform next morning.

"That's the idea!" cried Joe. "Now for some real work."

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## CHAPTER XIV

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### HARD WORK

THE rooms of the ball players were all in one part of the hotel, along the same hall. Joe and Rad were together, near the stairway going down.

That night, their first in the training camp, there was considerable visiting to and fro among the members of the team, and some little horse-play, for, after all, the players were like big boys, in many respects.

Rad, who had been in calling on some of his fellow players, came back to the room laughing.

"What's up?" asked Joe, who was writing a letter.

"Oh, Campbell is still trying to get rid of that hideous tie we helped him purchase. He wanted to wish it on to me."

"And of course you took it," said Joe, with a smile.

"Of course I did *not*. Well, I guess I'll turn in. We'll have plenty to do to-morrow."

"That's right. I'll be with you as soon as I finish this letter."

But Rad was sound asleep when Joe had finished his correspondence, and slipped downstairs to leave it at the desk for the early mail. Joe looked around the now almost deserted lobby, half expecting to see the strange man, Wessel, standing about. But he was not in sight.

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"I wonder what his game is, after all?" mused Joe. "I seem to have been running into two or three queer things lately. There's Shalleg, who bears me a grudge, though I don't see why he should, just because I couldn't lend him money, and then there's this fellow—I only hope the two

of them don't go into partnership against me. I guess that's hardly likely to happen, though."

But Joe little realized what was in store for him, and what danger he was to run from these same two men.

Joe awakened suddenly, about midnight, by hearing someone moving around the room. He raised himself softly on his elbow, and peered about the apartment, for a dim light showed over the transom from the hall outside. To Joe's surprise the door, which he had locked from the inside before going to bed, now stood ajar.

"I wonder if Rad can be sick, and have gone out?" Joe thought. "Maybe he walks in his sleep."

He looked over toward his chum's bed, but could not make out whether or not Rad was under the covers. Then, as he heard someone moving about the apartment he called out:

"That you, Rad?"

Instantly the noise ceased, to be resumed a moment later, and Joe felt sure that someone, or something, went past the foot of his bed and out into the hall.

"That you, Rad?" he called again.

"What's that? Who? No, I'm here," answered the voice of his chum. "What's the matter?"

Joe sprang out of bed, and in one bound reached the corridor. By means of the one dim electric lamp he saw, going down the stairs, carrying a grip with him, the mysterious man who had tried to quarrel with him. He was evidently taking "French leave," going out in the middle of the night to "jump" his hotel bill.

"What's up?" asked Rad, as he, too, left his bed. "What is it, Joe?"

The young pitcher came back into the room, and switched on a light. A quick glance about showed that neither his baggage, nor Rad's, had been taken.

"It must have been his own grip he had," said Joe.

"His? Who do you mean—what's up?" demanded Rad.

"It was Wessel. He's sneaking out," remarked Joe in a low voice. "Shall we give the alarm?"

"No, I guess not. We don't want to be mixed up in a row. And maybe he's going to take a midnight train. You can't tell."

"I think he was in this room," went on Joe.

"He was? Anything missing?"

"Doesn't seem to be."

"Well, then, don't make a row. Maybe he made a mistake."

"He'd hardly unlock our door by mistake," declared Joe.

"No, that's so. Did you see him in here?"

"No, but I heard someone."

"Well, it wouldn't be safe to make any cracks. Better not make a row, as long as nothing is gone."

Joe decided to accept this advice, and went back to bed, after taking the precaution to put a chair-back under the knob, as well as locking it. It was some time before he got to sleep, however. But Rad was evidently not worried, for he was soon in peaceful slumber.

Rad's theory that Wessel had gone out in the middle of the night to get a train was not borne out by the facts, for it became known in the morning that he had, as Joe suspected, "jumped" his board bill.

"And he called himself a ball player!" exclaimed Mr. Watson in disgust. "I'd like to meet with him again!"

"Maybe you will," ventured Joe, but he did not know how soon his prediction was to come to pass.

"Well, boys, we'll see how we shape up," said the manager, a little later that morning when the members of the team, with their uniforms on, had assembled at the ball park. "Get out there and warm up. Riordan, bat some fungoes for the boys. McCann, knock the grounders. Boswell, you catch for—let's see—I guess I'll wish you on to Matson. We'll see what sort of an arm he's got."

Joe smiled, and his heart beat a trifle faster. It was his first trial with the big league, an unofficial and not very important trial, to be sure, but none the less momentous to him.

Soon was heard the crack of balls as they bounded off the bats, to be followed by the thuds as they landed in the gloves of the players. The training work was under way.

"What sort of ball do you pitch?" asked the old player pleasantly of Joe, as they moved off to a

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space by themselves for practice.

"Well, I've got an in, an out, a fadeaway and a spitter."

"Quite a collection. How about a cross-fire?"

"I can work it a little."

"That's good. Now let's see what you can do. But take it easy at first. You don't want to throw out any of your elbow tendons so early in the season." [117]

"I guess not," laughed Joe.

Then he began to throw, bearing in mind the advice of the veteran assistant manager. The work was slow at first, and Joe found himself much stiffer than he expected. But the warm air, and the swinging of his arm, limbered him up a bit, and soon he was sending in some swift ones.

"Go slow, son," warned Boswell. "You're not trying to win a game, you know. You're getting a little wild."

Joe felt a bit chagrined, but he knew it was for his own good that the advice was given.

Besides the pitching and batting practice, there was some running around the bases. But Manager Watson knew better than to keep the boys at it too long, and soon called the work off for the day.

"We'll give it a little harder whack to-morrow," he said. And then Joe, as he went to the dressing rooms, overheard the manager ask Boswell:

"What do you think of Matson?"

"Oh, he's not such a wonder," was the not very encouraging reply. "But I've seen lots worse. He'll do to keep on your string, but he's got a lot to learn. It's a question of what he'll do when he faces the big teams, and hears the crowd yelling: 'He's rotten! Take him out!' That's what's going to tell." [118]

"Yes, I suppose so. But I heard good reports of him—that gameness was one of his qualities."

"Well, he'll need it all right," declared the veteran player.

Then Joe passed on, not wanting to listen to any more. Truth to tell, he rather wished he had not heard that much. His pride was a little hurt. To give him credit, Joe had nothing like a "swelled head." He knew he had done good work in the Central League, and there, perhaps, he had been made more of than was actually good for him. Here he was to find that, relatively, he counted for little.

A big team must have a number of pitchers, and not all of them can be "first string" men. Some must be kept to work against weak teams, to spare the stars for tight places. Joe realized this.

"But if hard work will get me anywhere I'm going to arrive!" he said to himself, grimly, as the crowd of players went back to the hotel.

The days that followed were given up to hard and constant practice. Each day brought a little more hard work, for the time was approaching when practice games must be played with the local teams, and it was necessary that the Cardinals make a good showing. [119]

Life in the training camp of a major league team was different than Joe had found it with the Pittstons. There was a more business-like tone to it, and more snap.

The newspaper men found plenty of copy at first, in chronicling the doings of the big fellows, telling how this one was working up his pitching speed, or how that one was improving his batting. Then, too, the funny little incidents and happenings about the diamond and hotel were made as much of as possible.

The various reporters had their own papers sent on to them, and soon, in some of these, notably the St. Louis publications, Joe began to find himself mentioned occasionally. These clippings he sent home to the folks. He wanted to send some to Mabel, but he was afraid she might think he was attaching too much importance to himself, so he refrained.

Some of the reporters did not speak very highly of Joe's abilities, and others complimented him slightly. All of them intimated that some day he might amount to something, and then, again, he might not. Occasionally he was spoken of as a "promising youngster."

It was rather faint praise, but it was better than none. And Joe steeled himself to go on in his own way, taking the well-intentioned advice of the other baseball players, Boswell in particular. [120]

Joe had other things besides hard work to contend against. This was the petty jealousy that always crops up in a high-tensioned ball team. There were three other chief pitchers on the nine, Toe Barter, Sam Willard and Slim Cooney. Slim and Toe were veterans, and the mainstays of the team, and Sam Willard was one of those chaps so often seen in baseball, a brilliant but erratic performer.

Sometimes he would do excellently, and again he would "fall down" lamentably. And, for some reason, Sam became jealous of Joe. Perhaps he would have been jealous of any young pitcher

who he thought might, in time, displace him. But he seemed to be particularly vindictive against Joe. It started one day in a little practice game, when Sam, after some particularly wild work, was replaced by our hero.

"Huh! Now we'll see some real pitching," Sam sneered as he sulked away to the bench.

Joe turned red, and was nervous as he took his place.

Perhaps if Joe had made a fizzle of it Willard might have forgiven him, but Joe, after a few rather poor balls, tightened up and struck out several men neatly, though they were not star batters. [121]

"The Boy Wonder!" sneered Willard after the game. "Better order a cap a couple of sizes larger for him after this, Roger," he went on to the coach.

"Oh, dry up!" retorted Boswell, who had little liking for Willard.

And so the hard work went on. The men, whitened by the indoor life of the winter, were beginning to take on a bronze tan. Muscles hardened and become more springy. Running legs improved. The pitchers were sending in swifter balls, Joe included. The fungo batters were sending up better flies. The training work was telling.

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## CHAPTER XV

 [122]

### ANOTHER THREAT

"PLAY ball!"

"Batter up!"

"Clang! Clang!"

The old familiar cries, and the resonant sound of the starting gong, were heard at the Reedville diamond. It was the first real game of the season, and it was awaited anxiously, not only by the players, but by Manager Watson, the coach, and by the owners back home. For it would give a "line" on what St. Louis could do.

Of course it was not a league contest, and the work, good, bad or indifferent, would not count in the averages. Joe hoped he would get a chance to pitch, at least part of the game, but he was not likely to, Boswell frankly told him, as it was desired to let Barter and Cooney have a fairly hard work-out on this occasion.

"But your turn will come, son," said the coach, kindly. "Don't you fret. I think you're improving, and, to be frank with you, there's lots of room for it. But you've got grit, and that's what I like to see."

Reedville was a good baseball town, which was one of the reasons why Manager Watson had selected it as his training camp. The townspeople were ardent supporters of the home team, and they welcomed the advent of the big leaguers. In the vicinity were also other teams that played good ball. [123]

The bleachers and grandstand were well filled when the umpire gave his echoing cry of:

"Play ball!"

The ball-tossers had been warming up, both the Cardinals and the home team, which proved to be a husky aggregation of lads, with tremendous hitting abilities, provided they could connect with the ball. And that was just what the St. Louis pitchers hoped to prevent.

"Willard, you can lead off," was the unexpected announcement of Mr. Watson, as he scanned his batting order. "McCann will catch for you. Now let's see what you can do."

"I'll show 'em!" exclaimed the "grouchy" pitcher as he unbuttoned his glove from his belt. He had been warming up, and had come to the bench, donning a sweater, with no hope of being put in the game at the start off. But, unexpectedly, he had been called on.

"Play ball!" cried the umpire again.

Joe wished, with all his heart, that he was going in, but it was not to be.

In order to give the home team every possible advantage, they were to go to bat last. And there was some little wonder when the first St. Louis player faced the local pitcher. There were cries of [124]

encouragement from the crowd, for Robert Lee Randolph—the pitcher in question—had aspirations to the big league. He was a tall, lanky youth, and, as the Cardinal players soon discovered, had not much except speed in his box. But he certainly had speed, and that, with his ability, or inability, to throw wildly, made him a player to be feared as much as he was admired.

He hit three players during the course of the game, and hit them hard.

"If they can't beat us any other way they're going to cripple us," said Rad grimly to Joe, as they sat on the bench.

"It does look that way; doesn't it?" agreed our hero.

The game went on, and, as might have been expected, the St. Louis team did about as they pleased. No, that is hardly correct. Even a country aggregation of players can sometimes make the finest nine of professionals stand on its mettle. And, in this case, for a time, the contest was comparatively close.

For Mr. Watson did not send in all his best players, and, from the fact that his men had not been in a game since the former season closed, whereas the Reedville team had been at the game for two months or more, the disadvantage was not as great as it might have seemed. [125]

But there was one surprise. When Willard first went in he pitched brilliantly, and struck out the local players in good order, allowing only a few scattering hits.

Then he suddenly went to pieces, and was severely pounded. Only excellent fielding saved him, for he was well backed-up by his fellow players.

"Rexter will bat for you, Willard," said Manager Watson, when the inning was over. "Cooney, you go out and warm up."

"What's the matter. Ain't I pitching all right?" angrily demanded the deposed one.

"I'm sorry to say you're not. I'm not afraid of losing the game, but I don't want any more of this sort of stuff going back home," replied the manager, as he nodded over to where the newspaper reporters were chuckling among themselves over the comparatively poor exhibition the St. Louis Cardinals had so far put up.

So Willard went to the bench, while crafty Cooney, with his left-hand delivery, went to warm up. And how Joe did wish *he* would get a chance!

But he did not, and the game ended, as might have been expected, with the Cardinals snowing under their country opponents. [126]

Hard practice followed that first exhibition game, and there were some shifts among the players, for unexpected weakness, as well as strength had by this time developed in certain quarters.

"I wonder when I'll get a chance to show what I can do?" spoke Joe to Rad, as they were on their way back to the hotel, after a second contest with Reedville, in which our hero had still stuck to the bench.

"Oh, it's bound to come," his chum told him. Personally, he was joyful, for he had been given a try-out, and had won the applause of the crowd by making a difficult play.

"Well, it seems a long time," grumbled Joe, with a sigh.

The practice became harder, as the opening of the season drew nearer. Some recruits joined the Cardinals at their training camp, and further shifts were made.

Joe was finally given a chance to pitch against a team from Bottom Flats—a team, by the way, not as strong as the Reedville nine. And that Joe made good was little to his credit, as he himself knew.

"I could have fanned them without any curves," he told Rad afterward.

"Well, it's good you didn't take any chances," his chum said. "You never can tell." [127]

Again came a contest with Reedville, but Joe was not called on. Toe Barter, who had gained his nickname from the queer habit he had of digging a hole for his left foot, before delivering the ball, opened the contest, and did so well that he was kept in until the game was "in the refrigerator." Then Joe was given his chance, but there was little incentive to try, with the Cardinals so far ahead.

Nevertheless, our hero did his best, and to his delight, he knocked a two-bagger, sliding to second amid a cloud of dust, to be decided safe by the umpire, though there was a howl of protest from the "fans."

The Cardinals won handily, and as Joe was walking to the club house with Rad, eagerly talking about the game, he saw, just ahead of him in the crowd of spectators a figure, at the sight of which he started.

"That looks like Shalleg," he said, half aloud.

"What's that?" asked Rad.

"Oh, nothing. I just thought I saw someone I knew. That is, I don't exactly know him, but——"

At that moment the man at whose back Joe had been looking turned suddenly, and, to our hero's surprise, it was Shalleg. The man, with an impudent grin on his face, spoke to a companion loudly enough for Joe to hear. [128]

"There's the fellow who wouldn't help me out!" Shalleg exclaimed. "He turned me down cold. Look at him."

The other turned, and Joe's surprise was heightened when he saw Wessel, the man who had tried to quarrel with him, and who had "jumped" his bill at the hotel.

"Oh, I know him all right," Wessel responded to Shalleg. "I've seen him before."

Joe and Rad, with the two men, were comparatively alone now. The attitude and words of the fellows were so insulting that Joe almost made up his mind to defy them. But before he had a chance to do so Shalleg snapped out:

"You want to look out for yourself, young man. I'll get you yet, and I'll get even with you for having me turned down. You want to look out. Bill Shalleg is a bad man to have for an enemy. Come on, Ike," and with that they turned away and were soon lost in the throng.

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## CHAPTER XVI

[129]

### JOE'S TRIUMPH

"WELL, what do you know about that?" cried Rad, with a queer look at Joe.

"I don't know what to think about it, and that's the truth," was the simple but puzzled answer.

"But who are they—what do they mean? The idea of them threatening you that way! Why, that's against the law!"

"Maybe it is," agreed Joe. "As for who those men are, you know Wessel, of course."

"Yes. The fellow who jumped his board bill at the hotel. Say, I guess the proprietor would like to see him. He has nerve coming back to this town. I've a good notion to tell the hotel clerk he's here. Mr. Watson would be glad to know it, too, for he takes it as a reflection on the team that Wessel should claim to be one of us, and then cheat the way he did."

"Maybe it would be a good plan to tell on him," agreed Joe.

"And who's the other chap, and why did he threaten you?" his chum asked. [130]

"That's another queer thing," the young pitcher went on. "He's angry at me, as near as I can tell, because I had to refuse him a loan," and he detailed the circumstances of his meeting with Shalleg.

"But it's odd that he and Wessel should be chumming together. I've said little about it, but I've been wondering for a long time why Wessel quarreled with me. I begin to see a light now. It must have been that Shalleg put him up to it."

"A queer game," admitted Rad. "Well, I think I'll put the hotel proprietor wise to the fact that he can collect that board bill from Ike Wessel."

But Joe and Rad found their plans unexpectedly changed when they went to put them into effect. They were a little late getting back to the hotel from the grounds, as Joe had some purchases to make. And, as the two chums entered the lobby, they saw standing by the desk the two men in question. Mr. Watson was addressing Shalleg in no uncertain tones.

"No, I tell you!" he exclaimed. "I won't have you on the team, and this is the last time I'll tell you. And I don't want you hanging around, either. You don't do us any good."

"Is that your last word?" asked Shalleg, angrily. [131]

"Yes, my last word. I want you to clear out and leave us alone."

"Huh! I guess you can't keep me away from games!" sneered Shalleg. "This is a free country."

"Well, you keep away from my club," warned Mr. Watson, with great firmness. "I wouldn't have you as a bat-tender."

The flushed and ill-favored face of Shalleg grew more red, if that were possible, and he

growled:

"Oh, don't let that worry you. Some day you may be glad to send for me to help pull your old club out of the cellar. Someone has been talking about me, that's the trouble; and if I find out who it is I'll make 'em sweat for it!" and he glared at Joe, who was too amazed at the strange turn of affairs to speak.

Then the two cronies turned and started out of the hotel lobby. But Rad was not going to be foiled so easily. He slipped over to the clerk and whispered:

"Say, that's the fellow who jumped his board bill, you know," and he nodded at Wessel.

"Yes, I know," the clerk replied. "He just came in to settle. He apologized, and said he had to leave in a hurry," and the clerk winked his eye to show how much belief he placed in the story. [132]

"Hum!" mused Rad. "That's rather queer. He must have wanted to square matters up so he could come back to town safely."

"Looks so," returned the clerk.

Joe talked the matter over with his roommate, as to whether or not it would be advisable to tell Mr. Watson how Shalleg had threatened the young pitcher, and also whether to speak about the queer actions of Wessel.

"But I think, on the whole," concluded Joe, "that I won't say anything; at least not yet a while. The boss has troubles enough as it is."

"I guess you're right," agreed Rad.

"But what about him being in our room that night?" asked Joe. "I wonder if I hadn't better speak of that?"

"Oh, I don't know as I would," replied his chum. "In the first place, we can't be absolutely sure that it was he, though I guess you're pretty certain. Then, again, we didn't miss anything, and he could easily claim it was all a mistake—that he went in by accident—and we'd be laughed at for making such a charge."

"Probably," agreed Joe. "As you say, I can't be dead sure, though I'm morally certain."

"One of the porters might have opened our door by mistake," went on Rad. "You know the hotel workers have pass-keys. Better let it drop." And they did. Joe, however, often wondered, in case Wessel had entered his room, what his object could have been. But it was not until some time later that he learned. [133]

Shalleg and his crony were not seen around the hotel again, nor, for that matter, at the ball grounds, either—at least during the next week.

Practice went on as usual, only it grew harder and more exacting. Joe was made to pitch longer and longer each day, and, though he did not get a chance to play in many games, and then only unimportant ones, still he was not discouraged.

There were many shifts among the out and infield staff, the manager trying different players in order to get the best results. The pitching staff remained unchanged, however. Some more recruits were received, some of them remaining after a gruelling try-out, and others "falling by the wayside."

In addition to pitching balls for Boswell to catch, and doing some stick work, Joe was required to practice with the other catchers of the team.

"I want you to get used to all of them, Matson," said the manager. "There's no telling, in this business, when I may have to call on my youngsters. I want you to be always ready."

"I'll try," promised Joe, with a smile.

"You're coming on," observed Boswell, after a day of hard pitching, which had made Joe's arm ache. "You're coming on, youngster. I guess you're beginning to feel that working in a big league is different than in a minor; eh?" [134]

"It sure is!" admitted Joe, rubbing his aching muscles.

"Well, you're getting more speed and better control," went on the veteran. "And you don't mind taking advice; that's what I like about you."

"Indeed I'd be glad of any tips you could give me," responded Joe, earnestly.

He did indeed realize that there was a hard road ahead of him, and he was a little apprehensive of the time when he might be called on to pitch against such a redoubtable team as the Giants.

"Most folks think," went on Boswell, "that the chief advantage a pitcher has over a batter is his speed or his curves. Well, that isn't exactly so. The thing of it is that the batter has to guess whether the ball that's coming toward him is a swift straight one, or a comparatively slow curve. You see, he's got to make up his mind mighty quickly as to the speed of the horsehide, and he can't always do it."

"Now, if a batter knew in advance just what the pitcher was going to deliver—whether a curve or a straight one, why that batter would have a cinch, so to speak. You may be the best twirler in the league, but you couldn't win your games if the batters knew what you were going to hand them—that is, knew in advance, I mean."

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"But that's what signals are for," exclaimed Joe. "I watch the catcher's signals, and if I think he's got the right idea I sign that I'll heave in what he's signalled for. If not, I'll make a switch."

"Exactly," said the old player, "and that's what I'm coming to. If your signals are found out, where are you? Up in the air, so to speak. So you want to have several sets of signals, in order to change them in the middle of an inning if you find you're being double-crossed. There's lots of coaches who are fiends at getting next to the battery signs, and tipping them off to their batters. Then the batters know whether to step out to get a curve, or lay back to wallop a straight one. The signal business is more important than most players think."

Joe believed this, and, at his suggestion, and on the advice of Boswell, a little later, a new signal system was devised between the pitchers and catchers. Joe worked hard to master it, for it was rather complicated. He wrote the system out, and studied it in his room nights.

"Well, boys, a few weeks more and we'll be going home for the opening of the season," said Mr. Watson in the hotel lobby one day. "I see the Boston Braves are about through training, the Phillies are said to be all primed, and the Giants are ready to eat up all the rest of us."

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"Whom do we open with?" asked Joe.

"The Cincinnati Reds," answered the manager. "The exact date isn't set yet, but it will be around the last of April. We've got some hard games here yet. I'm going to play some exhibitions on the way up North, to break you in gradually."

More hard work and practice, and the playing of several games with the Reedville and other local nines soon brought the time of departure nearer.

"This is our last week," Mr. Watson finally announced. "And I'm going to put you boys up against a good stiff proposition. We'll play the Nipper team Saturday, and I want to warn you that there are some former big leaguers on it, who can still hit and run and pitch, though they're not qualified for the big circuit. So don't go to the grounds with the idea that it'll be a cinch. Play your best. Of course I know you will, and win; but don't fall down!"

Joe hoped he would be called on to pitch, but when the game started, before the biggest crowd that had yet assembled at the Reedville grounds, the umpire announced the Cardinal battery as Slim Cooney and Rob Russell.

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"Play ball!" came the signal, and the game was under way.

To make the contest a little more even the St. Louis team were to bat first, giving the visitors the advantage of coming up last in the ninth inning.

"Doolin up!" called the score keeper, and the lanky left-handed hitter strolled up to the plate, while Riordan, who was on deck, took up a couple of bats, swinging them about nervously to limber his arms.

"Strike one!" bawled the umpire, at the first delivery of the visiting pitcher.

Doolin turned with a look of disgust and stared at the arbiter, but said nothing. There was an exchange of signals between catcher and pitcher, and Joe watched to see if he could read them. But he could not.

"Ball," was the next decision, and this time the pitcher looked pained.

It got to be three and two, and the St. Louis team became rather interested.

Doolin swung at the next with vicious force—and missed.

"Strike three—batter's out!" announced the umpire, as the ball landed with a thud in the deep pit of the catcher's mitt.

Doolin threw down his bat hard.

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"What's he got?" whispered Riordan, as he went forward.

"Aw, nothing so much! This light bothers me, or I'd have hit for a three-sacker, believe me!"

Riordan smiled, but he did little better. He hit, but the next man flied out. Rad was up next and hit a twisting grounder that just managed to evade the shortstop, putting Rad on first and advancing Riordan.

But that was the end. The next man was neatly struck out, and a goose-egg went up in St. Louis's frame.

"Got to get 'em, boys," announced the manager grimly, as the team went to the field.

Cooney did not allow a hit that inning, but he was pounded for two when he was on the mound again, St. Louis in the meanwhile managing to get a run, through an error.

"Say, this is some little team," declared Boswell admiringly.

"I told you they were," replied the manager. "I want to see our boys work."

And work they had to.

The best pitcher in the world has his off days, and the best pitcher in the world may occasionally be pounded, as Slim Cooney was hit that day. How it happened no one could say, but the Nippers began to slide ahead, chiefly through hard hitting and excellent pitching. [139]

"This won't do," said Manager Watson as the sixth inning saw the score tied. "Matson, go out and warm up. I'm going to see what you can do. I'm taking a chance, maybe; but I'll risk it."

Joe's heart beat fast. Here was his chance. Willard, who sat near him on the bench, muttered angrily under his breath.

"If I can only do something!" thought Joe, anxiously.

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## CHAPTER XVII

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### "PLAY BALL!"

"COME on, Joe, I'll catch for you," good-naturedly offered Doc Mullin, who had been "warming" the bench, Russell being behind the bat. "That'll give Rob a chance to rest, and he can take you on just before we go out."

"Thanks," replied the young pitcher, and, flushing with pleasure, in this his triumph, though it was but a small one, he went out to the "bull-pen," to get some practice.

"Huh! He'll make a fine show of us!" sneered Willard.

"He can't make a much worse show than we've made of ourselves already," put in Cooney quickly. "I sure am off my feed to-day. I don't know what makes it."

"Trained a little too fine, I guess," spoke the manager. "We'll take it a bit easy after this."

"Speed 'em in, Joe. Vary your delivery, and don't forget the signals," advised Mullin, as the two were warming up. "And don't get nervous. You'll do all right."

"I'm sure I hope so," responded Joe.

He was getting more confidence in himself, but at that, when he stood on the mound, and had the ball in his hand he could not help a little twinge of "stage fright," or something akin to it. [141]

The batter stepped back, to allow the usual interchange of balls between pitcher and catcher, and then, when Joe nodded that he was ready, moved up to the plate, where he stood, swinging his bat, and waiting for the first one.

The catcher, Russell, signalled for a swift, straight one, and, though Joe would rather have pitched his fadeaway, he nodded his head to show that he accepted.

The ball whizzed from Joe's hand, and he felt a wave of apprehension, a second later, that it was going to be slammed somewhere out over the centre field fence. But, to his chagrin, he heard the umpire call:

"Ball one!"

The batter grinned cheerfully at Joe.

"That won't happen again!" thought our hero fiercely.

This time the catcher signalled for a teasing curve, and again Joe signified that he would deliver it. He did, and successfully, too. The batter made a half motion, as though he were going to strike at it, and then refrained, but the umpire called, in tones that were musical to Joe's ear:

"Strike—one!"

"He's feedin' 'em to 'em!" joyfully exclaimed Boswell to the manager. "Joe's feedin' 'em in, all right." [142]

"Too early to judge," replied the cautious manager. "Wait a bit."

But Joe struck out his man, and a little applause came from his fellow players on the bench.

"That's the way to do it, boy!"

"Tease 'em along!"

"We only need two more!"

Thus they called encouragingly to him.

Joe was hit once that half of the inning, and no runs came in. The score was still tie.

"Now, boys, we've got to bat!" said the manager when his team came in. "We need three or four runs, or this game will make us ashamed to go back to St. Louis."

There was a noticeable improvement as the Cardinals went to bat. Tom Dugan slammed out one that was good for three bases, and Dots McCann, by a double, brought in the needed run. The St. Louis boys were themselves again. The fact that the visiting pitcher was "going to pieces" rather helped, too.

The Cardinals were two runs to the good when the inning ended.

"Now we want to hold them there. It's up to you, Joe, and the rest of you boys!" exclaimed Mr. Watson as the leaguers again took the field.

Joe had more confidence in himself now, though it oozed away somewhat when the first man up struck the ball savagely. But it was only a foul, and, though Russell tried desperately to get it, he could not.

It was a case of three and two again, and Joe's nerves were tingling.

"Hit it now, Red!" the friends of the visiting player besought him. "Bang it right on the nose!"

"He hasn't anything on you!"

"Nothing but a slow out!"

"Slam out a home run!"

There was a riot of cries.

Joe calmed himself by an effort, and then sent in his fadeaway. It completely fooled the batter, who struck at it so hard that he swung around in a circle.

"You're out!" called the umpire. Joe's heart beat with pride.

But I must not dwell too long on that comparatively unimportant game, as I have other, and bigger ones, of which to write. Sufficient to say that, though there were a few scattering hits made off Joe, the visitors did not get another run, though they tried desperately in the last half of the ninth.

But it was not to be, and St. Louis had the game by a good margin.

"That's fine work, boys!" the manager greeted them. "Matson, you're coming on. I won't promise to pitch you against the Giants this season, unless all my other pitchers get 'Charlie-horse,'" he went on, "but I'll say I like your work."

"Thanks!" murmured Joe, his heart warming to the praise.

"Congratulations, old man!" cried Rad, as they went to the dressing rooms together. "You did yourself proud!"

"I'm glad you think so. I wonder what sort of a story it will be when I go up against a big league team?"

"Oh, you'll go up against 'em all right!" predicted his chum, "and you'll win, too!"

Preparations for leaving Reedville were made. The training was over; hard work was now ahead for all. Nothing more was seen of Shalleg and Wessel, though they might have been at that last game, for all Joe knew.

In order not to tire his players by a long jump home, especially as they were not to open at once on Robison Field, Manager Watson planned several exhibition games to be played in various cities and towns on the way.

Thus the journey would occupy a couple of weeks.

The players were on edge now, a little rest from the Nipper game having put them in fine trim.

"They're ready for Giants!" energetically declared Boswell, who took great pride in his training work.

"Hardly that," replied the manager, "but I think we can take care of the Cincinnati Reds when we stack up against them on opening day."

The journey North was enjoyed by all, and some good games took place. One or two were a little close for comfort, but the Cardinals managed to pull out in time. Joe did some pitching, though he was not worked as often as he would have liked. But he realized that he was a raw

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recruit, in the company of many veterans, and he was willing to bide his time.

Joe had learned more about baseball since getting into the big league than he ever imagined possible. He realized, as never before, what a really big business it was, involving, as it did, millions of dollars, and furnishing employment to thousands of players, besides giving enjoyment to millions of spectators.

The home-coming of the Cardinals, from their trip up from the South, was an event of interest.

St. Louis always did make much of her ball teams, and though the American Brown nine had arrived a day or so before our friends, and had been noisily welcomed, there was a no less enthusiastic reception for the Cardinals. There was a band, a cheering throng at the station, and a number of reporters, moving picture men and newspaper photographers.

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"Say, it's great; isn't it?" cried Joe to Rad.

"It sure is, old man!"

Joe wrote home an enthusiastic account of it all, and also penned a note to Mabel, expressing the hope that she and her brother would get to St. Louis on the occasion of some big game.

"And I hope I pitch in it," Joe penned.

A day of rest, then a week of practice on their own grounds, brought the opening date nearer for St. Louis. Joe and the other players went out to the park the morning of the opening day of the season. The grounds were in perfect shape, and the weather man was on his good behavior.

"What kind of ball have the Reds been playing?" asked Joe of Rad, who was a "fiend" on baseball statistics.

"Snappy," was the answer. "We'll have our work cut out for us!"

"Think we can do 'em?"

"Nobody can tell. I know we're going to try hard."

"If I could only pitch!" murmured Joe.

The grandstand was rapidly filling. The bleachers were already overflowing. The teams had marched out on the field, preceded by a blaring band. There had been a presentation of a floral horseshoe to Manager Watson.

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Then came some fast, snappy practice on both sides. Joe, who had only a faint hope of being called on, warmed up well. He took his turn at batting and catching, too.

"They look to be a fast lot," observed Joe to Rad, as they watched the Reds at work.

"Oh, yes, they're there with the goods."

The game was called, and, as is often done, a city official pitched the first ball. This time it was the mayor, who made a wild throw. There was laughter, and cheers, the band blared out, and then the umpire called:

"Play ball!"

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## CHAPTER XVIII

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### HOT WORDS

THAT opening game, between the St. Louis Cardinals and the Cincinnati Reds, was not remarkable for good playing. Few opening games are, for the teams have not that fierce rivalry that develops later in the pennant season, and, though both try hard to win, they are not keyed up to the pitch that makes for a brilliant exhibition.

So that opening game was neither better nor worse than hundreds of others. But, as we have to deal mostly with Baseball Joe in this book, I will centre my attention on him.

His feelings, as he watched his fellow players in the field, the pitcher on the mound, and the catcher, girded like some ancient knight, may well be imagined. I fancy my readers, even if they are not baseball players, have been in much the same situation.

Joe sat on the bench, "eating his heart out," and longing for the chance that he had small hopes would come to him. How he wished to get up there, and show what he could do, only he realized.

But it was not to be.

Manager Watson's Cardinals went into the game with a rush, and had three runs safely stowed away in the ice box the first inning, after having gracefully allowed the Reds to score a goose egg.

Then came an uninteresting period, with both pitchers working their heads off, and nothing but ciphers going up on the score board.

"By Jove, old man, do you think we'll win?" asked Cosey Campbell, as he came to the bench after ingloriously striking out, and looked at Joe.

"I don't see why we shouldn't," responded Joe. "We've got 'em going."

"Yes, I know, but you never can tell when we may strike a slump."

"You seem terribly worried," laughed Joe. "Have you wagered a new necktie on the result?"

"No," he answered, "but I am anxious. You see, Matson, there's a girl—I could point her out to you in one of the boxes; but maybe she wouldn't like it," he said, craning his neck and going out from under the shelter of the players' bench and looking at the crowd in the grandstand.

"Oh, that's all right, I'll take your word for it," said Joe, for he appreciated the other's feelings.

"A girl, you understand, Matson. She's here to see the game," went on Campbell. "I sent her tickets, and I told her we were sure to win. She's here, and I'm going to take her out to supper to-night. I've got the stunningest tie——"

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He fumbled in his pocket.

"Thought I had a sample of it here with me," he said. "But I haven't. It's sort of purple—plum color—with a shooting of gold, and it shimmers down into a tango shade. It's a peach! I was going to wear it to-night, but, if we don't win——"

His face showed his misery.

"Oh, cut it out!" advised Rad, coming up behind him. "We can't lose. Don't get mushy over an old tie."

"It isn't an old tie!" stormed Campbell. "It's a new one I had made to order. Cost me five bones, too. It's a peach!"

"Well, you'll wear it, all right," said Joe with a laugh. "I don't see how we can lose."

The Cardinals were near it, though, in the seventh inning, when, with only one out, and three on bases, Slim Cooney was called on to face one of the hardest propositions in baseball.

But he made good, and not a man crossed home plate.

And so the game went on, now and then a bit of sensational fielding, or a pitcher tightening up in a critical place, setting the crowd to howling.

It was nearing the close of the contest. It looked like the Cardinals, for they were three runs to the good, and it was the ending of the eighth inning. Only phenomenal playing, at this stage, could bring the Reds in a winner.

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Some of the crowd, anticipating the event, were already leaving, probably to catch trains, or to motor to some resort.

"Well, it's a good start-off," said Rad to Joe, as he started out to the field, for the beginning of the ninth.

"Yes, but it isn't cinched yet."

"It will be soon."

The Reds were at bat, and Joe, vainly wishing that he had had a chance to show what he could do, pulled his sweater more closely about him, for the day was growing cool.

Then Batonby, one of the reserve players, strolled up to him.

"You didn't get in, either," he observed, sitting down.

"No. Nor you."

"But I've been half-promised a chance in the next game. Say, it's fierce to sit it out; isn't it?"

"It sure is."

"Hear of any new players coming to us?" Batonby wanted to know.

"Haven't heard," said Joe.

The game was over. The Cardinals did not go to bat to end the last inning, having the game by a margin of three runs.

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The players walked across the field to the clubhouse, the spectators mingling with them.

"Did you hear anything about a fellow named Shalleg, who used to play in the Central League, coming to us?" asked Batonby, as he caught up to Joe and Rad, who had walked on ahead.

"No," answered Joe quickly. "That is, I have heard of him, but I'm pretty sure he isn't coming with us."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, I heard Mr. Watson tell him——"

"Say, if I hear you retailing any more stuff about me I'll take means to make you stop!" cried an angry voice behind Joe, and, wheeling around, he beheld the inflamed face of Shalleg, the man in question.

"I've heard enough of your talk about me!" the released player went on. "Now it's got to quit. I won't have it! Cut it out! I'll settle with you, Matson, if I hear any more out of you," and he shook his fist angrily at Joe.

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## CHAPTER XIX

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### JOE GOES IN

BATONBY looked wonderingly, first at Joe, and then at Shalleg. The latter's crony did not seem to be with him.

"What's the row, old top?" asked Batonby easily. "Who are you, anyhow, and what's riled you?"

"Never you mind what's riled me! You'll find out soon enough," was the sharp answer. "I heard you two chaps talking about me, and I want it stopped!"

"Guess you're a little off, sport. I wasn't talking about you, for I haven't the doubtful honor of your acquaintance."

"None of your impudence!" burst out Shalleg. Joe had not yet spoken.

"And I don't want any of yours," fired back Batonby, slapping his glove from one hand to the other. "I say I wasn't talking about you!"

"I say you were. My name is Shalleg!"

Batonby let out a whistle of surprise.

"Is that the one?" he asked of Joe.

The latter nodded.

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"Well, all I've got to say," went on Batonby, "is that I hope you don't get on our team. And, for your information," he went on, as he saw that Shalleg was fairly bursting with passion, "I'll add that all I said about you was that I heard you were trying to get on the Cardinals. As for Matson, he said even less about you."

"That's all right, but you fellows want to look out," mumbled Shalleg, who seemed nonplused on finding that he had no good grounds for a quarrel.

"And I want to add," broke in Joe, who felt that he had a right to say something in his own behalf, "I want to add that I'm about through with hearing threats from you, Mr. Shalleg," and he accented the prefix. "I haven't said anything against you, and I don't expect to, unless you give me cause. You've been following me about, making unjustified remarks, and it's got to stop!"

"Hurray!" cried Batonby. "That's the kind of mustard to give him. Heave at it again, Joe!"

The young pitcher stood facing his enemy fearlessly, but he had said enough. Shalleg growled out:

"Well, somebody's been talking about me to the manager, giving me a bad name, and it's got to stop. If I find out who did it, he'll wish he hadn't," and he glared vindictively at Joe.

"I guess his own actions have given him the bad name," remarked Batonby, as the dismissed player turned aside and walked off to join the throng that had surged away from the little group.

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"That's about it," agreed Joe, as Rad came up and joined them. "Good work, old man!" said our hero, for Rad had done well.

"I came mighty near making an error, though, toward the last," Rad responded. "Guess I'm not

used to such strenuous life as playing nine innings in a big game. My heart was in my throat when I saw that fly ball coming toward me."

"But you froze on to it," said Batonby.

"Hello, what's up?" asked Rad quickly, for Joe's face still showed the emotion he felt at the encounter with Shalleg. "Had a row?" asked Rad.

"Rather," admitted the young pitcher. "Shalleg was on deck again."

"Say, that fellow, and his side partner, Wessel, ought to be put away during the ball season!" burst out Rad. "They're regular pests!"

Joe heartily agreed with him, as he related the circumstances of the last affair. Then the friends passed on to the clubhouse, where the game was played over again, as usual, a "post-mortem" being held on it. Only, in this case the Cardinals, being winners, had no excuses to make for poor playing. They were jubilant over the auspicious manner in which the season had opened.

"Boys. I'm proud of you!" exclaimed Manager Watson as he strolled through. "Do this often enough, and we'll have that pennant sure."

"Yes, a fat chance we have!" muttered Willard, sulkily.

"That's no way for a member of the team to talk!" snapped "Muggins."

Willard did not reply. It was clear that he was disgruntled because he had not had a chance to pitch.

Then the splashing of the shower baths drowned other talk, and presently the players, fresh and shining from their ablutions, strolled out of the clubhouse.

"Got anything on to-night?" asked Rad of Joe, as they reached the hotel.

"Nothing special—why?"

"Let's go down to the Delaware Garden, and hear the Hungarian orchestra. There's good eating there, too."

"I'm with you. Got to write a letter, though."

"Tell her how the game went, I s'pose?" laughed Rad.

"Something like that," agreed Joe, smiling.

He bought an evening paper, which made a specialty of sporting news. It contained an account of the opening game, with a skeletonized outline of the plays, inning by inning. The Cardinals were properly congratulated for winning. Joe wished he could have read his name in the story, but he felt he could bide his time.

Joe and Rad enjoyed their little excursion to the Delaware Garden that evening, returning to the hotel in good season to get plenty of sleep, for they were to play the Reds again the next day. There were four games scheduled, and then the Cardinals would go out on the circuit, remaining away about three weeks before coming back for a series on Robison Field.

The tables were turned in the next game. The Cincinnati team, stinging from their previous defeat, played strong ball. They sent in a new pitcher, and with a lead of three runs early in the contest it began to look bad for the Cardinals.

"I'll get no chance to-day," reasoned Joe, as he saw a puzzled frown on Mr. Watson's face. Joe knew that only a veteran would be relied on to do battle now, and he was right.

Mr. Watson used all his ingenuity to save the game. He put in pinch hitters, and urged his three pitchers to do their best.

Willard was allowed to open the game, but was taken out after the first inning, so fiercely was he pounded. Cooney and Barter had been warming up, and the latter went in next.

"You go warm up, too, Matson," directed Boswell, "though it's doubtful if we'll have to use you."

Joe hoped they would, but it was only a faint hope.

Barter did a little better, but the Reds had a batting streak on that day, and found his most puzzling curves and drops. Then, too, working the "hit and run" feature to the limit and stealing bases, which in several cases was made possible by errors on the part of the Cardinals, soon gave the Reds a comfortable lead of five runs.

"I'm afraid they've got us," grumbled the manager, as he substituted a batter to enable Cooney to go in the game. "You've got to pull us out, Slim," he added.

Slim grinned easily, not a whit disconcerted, for he was a veteran. But though he stopped the winning streak of the Reds, he could not make runs, and runs are what win ball games.

With his best nine in the field the manager tried hard to overcome the advantage of his opponents. It looked a little hopeful in the eighth inning, when there were two men on bases, second and third, and only one out, with "Sluggery" Nottingham at the plate.

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"Now, then, a home run, old man!" pleaded the crowd.

"Soak it on the nose!"

"Over the fence!"

"A home run means three tallies, old man. Do it now!"

Nottingham stood easily at the plate, swinging his bat. There was an interchange of signals between catcher and pitcher—a slight difference of opinion, it seemed. Then the ball was thrown.

There was a resounding crack, and the crowd started to yell.

"Go it, old man, go it!"

"That's the pie!"

"Oh, that's a beaut!"

But it was not. It was a nice little fly, to be sure, but the centre fielder, running in, had it safely before the batter reached first. Then, with Nottingham out, the ball was hurled home to nip the runner at the plate.

Dugan, who had started in from third, ran desperately, and slid in a cloud of dust.

"You're out!" howled the umpire, waving him to the bench.

"He never touched me!" retorted Dugan. "I was safe by a mile!"

"Robber!" shrieked the throng in the bleachers.

"Get a pair of glasses!"

"He was never out!"

The umpire listened indifferently to the tirade. Dugan dusted off his uniform, and, losing his temper, shook his fist at the umpire, sneering:

"You big fat——" and the rest of it does not matter.

"That'll cost you just twenty-five dollars, and you can go to the clubhouse," said the umpire, coolly.

Dugan's face fell, and Manager Watson flushed. He bit his lips to keep from making a retort. But, after all, the umpire was clearly within his rights.

In silence Dugan left the field, and the Reds, who were jubilant over the double play, came in from the diamond.

"The fat's in the fire now, for sure," sighed Rad, "with Dugan out of the game. Hang it all, anyhow!"

"Oh, we can't win every time," and Joe tried to speak cheerfully.

And so the Reds won the second of the first series of games. There was a rather stormy scene in the clubhouse after it was over, and Mr. Watson did some plain talking to Dugan. But, after all, it was too common an occurrence to merit much attention, and, really, nothing very serious had occurred.

The contest between the Reds and Cardinals was an even break, each team taking two. Then came preparations for the Cardinals taking the road. A series of four games with the Chicago Cubs was next in order, and there, in the Windy City, St. Louis fared rather better, taking three.

"I wonder if I'm ever going to get a chance," mused Joe, who had been sent to the "bull-pen" many times to warm up, but as yet he had not been called on.

After games with the Pittsburg Pirates, in which an even break was registered, the Cardinals returned to St. Louis. As they had an open date, a game was arranged with one of the Central League teams, the Washburgs.

"Say, I would like to pitch against them!" exclaimed Joe.

And he had his chance. When the practice was over Manager Watson, with a smile at our hero, said, with a friendly nod:

"Joe, you go in and see what you can do."

Joe was to have his first big chance.

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## STAGE FRIGHT

JOE was a little nervous at first, but it was like being among old friends to work against the Washburg team.

"How's your head, Joe?" asked some of the players whom he knew well, from having associated with them in the Central League.

"Had to get larger sized caps?" asked another.

"Don't you believe it!" exclaimed the Washburg catcher. "Joe Matson isn't that kind of a chap!" and Joe was grateful to him.

The game was not so easy as some of the Cardinal players had professed to believe it would be. Not all of the first string men went in, but they were in reserve, to be used if needed. For baseball is often an uncertainty.

Joe looked around at the grandstands and bleachers as he went out for warm-up practice.

There was a fair-sized crowd in attendance, but nothing like the throng that would have been present at a league game.

"But I'll pitch before a big crowd before I'm through the season!" declared Joe to himself, though it was not clear how this was to be brought about. [163]

Washburg had a good team, and knew how to make everything tell. They led off with a run, which, however, was due to an error on the part of two of the Cardinals. Joe was a little put out by it, for he had allowed only scattering hits that inning.

"Better try to tighten up—if you can," advised Boswell, as our hero came to the bench. "They're finding you a bit."

"They won't—any more!" exclaimed Joe, fiercely.

The Washburg pitcher was a good one, as Joe knew, so it was not surprising that he was not so very badly batted. In fact, it was hard work for the Cardinals to garner three runs during their half of the first inning. But they got them.

Joe had the advantage of knowing considerable about the various batters who faced him, so it was easier than it would have been for another pitcher to deceive them. He varied his delivery, used his fadeaway and his cross-fire, and had the satisfaction of pitching three innings during which he did not allow a hit.

"That's the way to do it!" exclaimed his friend Boswell, the coach. "Hold 'em to that, and you'll have a look-in at a big game, soon." [164]

And Joe did. In vain did the Washburgs send in their best pinch hitters; in vain did they try to steal bases. Twice Joe nipped the man at first, who was taking too big a lead, and once the young pitcher stopped a hot liner that came driving right at him.

Then the story was told, and the Cardinals romped home easy winners. Joe had done well, even though the Washburgs were not exactly big leaguers.

In the weeks that followed, Joe worked hard. There was constant morning practice, when the weather allowed it, and the work on the circuit was exacting. Occasionally Joe went in as relief pitcher, when the game was safe in the "ice box," but the chance he wanted was to pitch against the New Yorks at St. Louis.

For the Giants were at the top of the league now, and holding on to their pennant place with grim tenacity. In turn Joe and his fellow players went to Philadelphia, New York and Boston, eventually playing all around the circuit, but, as yet, the young pitcher had had no real chance to show what he could do.

It was irksome—it was even heart-breaking at times; but Joe had to stand it. Sometimes he felt that he could do better than Barter, Willard and Cooney, the seasoned veterans, and especially was this so when the game went against the Cardinals. [165]

For the St. Louis team was falling sadly behind. They were next to the tail-enders for some time, and the outlook was dubious. The papers alternately roasted and poked fun at the Cardinals, and Manager Watson was urged to "do something."

Various remedies were suggested. New players might be had, and in fact some exchanges were made. Another catcher was imported, from the Detroits, and a new shortstop engaged in a trade. But the pitching staff remained unchanged.

Then some reporter, looking for "copy," saw a chance in Joe, and in a snappy little article reviewed Joe's career, ending with:

"If Mr. Watson wants to see his Cardinals crawl up out of the subway why doesn't he give

Matson a chance? The youngster can pitch good ball, and the line of twirling that has been handed out by the Cardinals thus far this season would be laughable, were it not lamentable."

Of course that article made trouble for Joe, especially with the pitching staff.

"Say, how much did you slip that reporter to pull off that dope about you?" inquired Willard with a sneer.

"What do you mean?" asked Joe indignantly.

"I mean how much coin did you pay him?"

"You know I didn't have anything to do with it!" our hero fired back. "He asked me for my record, and I gave it to him. I didn't know he was going to write that." [166]

"A likely story," grumbled Willard.

The other pitchers did not say so much, but it was clear they did not like the "roasting" they got. But it was not Joe's doing.

There were shifts and re-shifts, there were hard feelings manifested, and gotten over. But nothing could disguise the fact that the Cardinals were in a "slump."

Loyal as the St. Louis "fans" were to their teams, when they were on the winning side, it was not in human nature to love a losing nine.

So that it got to be the fashion to refer to the Cardinals as "losing again." And this did not make for good ball playing, either. There were sore hearts among the players when they assembled in the clubhouse after successive defeats.

Not that the Cardinals lost all the time. No team could do that, and stay in the big league. But they never got to the top of the second division, and even that was not much of an honor to strive for. Still, it was better than nothing.

Joe pitched occasionally, and, when he did there was a little improvement, at times. But of course he was not a veteran, and once or twice he was wild.

Then the paper which bore the least friendliness to the Cardinals took a different tack. It laughed at the manager for sending in a young pitcher when a veteran was needed. [167]

"Say, I'd like to know just what those fellows want me to do!" Mr. Watson exclaimed one day, after a particularly severe roast. "I can't seem to please 'em, no matter what I do."

"Don't let 'em get your goat," advised his coach. "Go on. Keep going. We'll strike a winning streak yet, and mark my words, it will be Joe Matson who'll pull us out of a hole."

"He hasn't done so well yet," objected Mr. Watson, dubiously.

"No, and it's because he hasn't exactly found himself. He is a bit nervous yet. Give him time."

"And stay in the cellar?"

"Well, but what are you going to do?" reasoned the other. "Cooney and Barter aren't pitching such wonderful ball."

"No, that's true, but they can generally pull up in a tight place. I'd send Matson in oftener than I do, only I'm afraid he'll blow up when the crises comes. He is a good pitcher, I admit that, but he isn't seasoned yet. The Central League and the National are a wide distance apart."

"That's true. But I'd like to see him have his chance."

"Well, I'll give it to him. We play Boston next week. They happen to be in the second division just at present, although they seem to be going up fast. I'll let Joe go up against them." [168]

"That won't be as good as letting him go against New York," said Boswell.

"Well, it'll have to do," decided the manager, who could be very set in his ways at times.

The Braves proved rather "easy," for the Cardinals and, as Boswell had indicated, there was little glory for Joe in pitching against them. He won his game, and this, coupled with the fact that the reporter friendly to Joe made much of it, further incensed the other pitchers.

"Don't mind 'em," said Rad, and Joe tried not to.

The season was advancing. Try as the Cardinals did, they could not get to the top of the second division.

"And if we don't finish there I'll feel like getting out of the game," said the manager gloomily, after a defeat.

"Pitch Matson against the Giants," advised the coach.

"By Jove! I'll do it!" cried the manager, in desperation. "We open with New York at St. Louis next week for four games. I'll let Matson see what he can do, though I reckon I'll be roasted and laughed at for taking such a chance."

"Well, maybe not," the coach replied, chuckling.

In the meanwhile Joe had been working hard. Under the advice of Boswell he adopted new training tactics, and he had his arm massaged by a professional between games. He was surprised at the result of the new treatment, and he found he was much fresher after a hard pitching battle than he had been before.

"He thinks he's going to be a Boy Wonder," sneered Willard.

"Oh, cut it out!" snapped Boswell. "If some of you old stagers would take better care of yourselves there'd be better ball played."

"Huh!" sneered Willard.

The Cardinals came back to St. Louis to play a series with New York.

"Wow!" exclaimed Rad as he and Joe, discussing the Giants' record, were sitting together in the Pullman on their way to their home city, "here's where it looks as if we might get eaten up!"

"Don't cross a bridge before you hear it barking at you," advised Joe. "Maybe they won't be so worse. We're on our own grounds, that's sure."

"Not much in that," decided his chum, dubiously.

When Joe reached the hotel he found several letters awaiting him. One, in a girl's handwriting, he opened first.

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"Does she still love you?" laughed Rad, noticing his friend's rapt attention.

"Dry up! She's coming on to St. Louis."

"She is? Good! Will she see you play?"

"Well, I don't know. It doesn't look as though I was going to get a game—especially against New York."

"Cheer up! There might be something worse."

"Yes, I might have another run-in with Shalleg."

"That's so. Seen anything of him lately?"

"No, but I hear he's been writing letters to Mr. Watson, intimating that if the boss wants to see the team come up out of the subway, Shalleg is the man to help."

"Some nerve; eh?"

"I should say so!"

It was a glorious sunny day, perhaps too hot, but that makes for good baseball, for it limbers up the players. The grandstand and bleachers were rapidly filling, and out on the well-kept diamond of Robison Field the rival teams—the Cardinals and the Giants—were practicing.

Mabel Varley and her brother had come to St. Louis, stopping off on business, and Joe had called on them.

"I'm coming out to see you play," Mabel announced after the greetings at the hotel.

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"I'm afraid you won't," said Joe, somewhat gloomily.

"Why not?" she asked in surprise. "Aren't you on the pitching staff?"

"Yes, but perhaps you haven't been keeping track of where the Cardinals stand in the pennant race."

"Oh, yes, I have!" she laughed, and blushed. "I read the papers every day."

"That's nice. Then you know we're pretty well down?"

"Yes, but the season isn't half over yet. I think you'll do better."

"I sure do hope so," murmured Joe. "But, for all that, I am afraid you won't see me pitch to-day. Mr. Watson won't dare risk me, though I think I could do some good work. I'm feeling fine."

"Oh, I do hope you get a chance!" Mabel exclaimed enthusiastically. "Anyhow, I'm going to have one of the front boxes, and there are to be some girl friends with me. You know them, I think—Hattie Walsh and Jean Douglass."

"Oh, yes, I remember them," Joe said. "Well, I hope you see us win, but I doubt it."

And now, as the game was about to start, Joe looked up and saw, in one of the front boxes, Mabel and her friends. He went over to speak to them, as he walked in from practice.

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"For good luck!" said Mabel softly, as she gave him one of the flowers she was wearing.

"Thanks," and Joe blushed.



As yet the battery of the Cardinals had not been announced. Clearly Manager Watson was in a quandary. He and Boswell consulted together, while the players waited nervously. Some of the newspaper reporters, anxious to flash some word to their papers, asked who was to pitch.

"I'll let you know in a few minutes," was the manager's answer.

And then, as the time for calling the game approached, Mr. Watson handed his batting order to the umpire.

The latter stared at it a moment before making the announcement. He seemed a trifle surprised.

"Batteries!" he called through his megaphone. "For New York, Hankinson and Burke—for St. Louis—Matson and Russell."

Joe was to pitch, and in the biggest game he had ever attempted!

There was a rushing and roaring in his ears, and for a moment he could not see clearly.

"Go to it, Matson," said the manager. "I'm going to try you out."

Joe's lips trembled. He was glad his teammates could not know how he felt. Nervously he walked out to the mound, and caught the new ball which the umpire divested of its foil cover and tossed to him. Russell girded himself in protector and mask, and the batter stepped back to allow the usual practice balls.

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Someone in a box applauded. Joe could not see, but he knew it was Mabel.

"Oh, Joe's going to pitch!" she exclaimed to her girl friends. "I hope he strikes them all out!"

"Not much chance," her brother said, rather grimly.

Joe sent the first ball whizzing in. It went so wild that the catcher had to jump for it. There was a murmur from the stands, and some of the Giants grinned at one another.

Russell signalled to Joe that he wanted to speak to him. Pitcher and catcher advanced toward one another.

"What's the matter?" Russell wanted to know, while some in the crowd laughed at the conference. "Got stage fright?"

"Ye—yes," stammered Joe. Poor Joe, he had a bad case of nerves.

"Say, look here!" exclaimed Russell with a intentional fierceness. "If you don't get over it, and pitch good ball, I'll give you the best beating up you ever had when we get to the clubhouse! I'm not going to stand being laughed at because you're such a rotten pitcher! Do you get me!" and he leered savagely at Joe.

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The effect on the young pitcher was like an electric shock. He had never been spoken to like that before. But it was just the tonic he needed.

"I get you," he said briefly.

"It's a good thing you do!" said Russell brutally, and, as he walked back to his place his face softened. "I hated to speak that way to the lad," he murmured to himself, "but it was the only way to get him over his fright."

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## CHAPTER XXI

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### A QUEER MESSAGE

THE next practice ball Joe sent in went cleanly over the plate, and landed with a thud in the catcher's glove. Russell nodded at Joe, to indicate that was what he wanted.

"Play ball!" directed the umpire, and the batter moved up closer to the plate.

Stooping low, and concealing his signal with his big glove, Russell called for a straight, swift ball. Joe gave it, and as it was in the proper place, though the striker did not attempt to hit it, the umpire called:

"Strike—one!"

Indignantly the batter looked around, but it was only done for effect. He knew it was a strike.

"That's the way. Now we've got 'em!" cried Boswell from the coaching line.

"Ball one," was the next decision of the umpire, and Joe felt a little resentment, for he had made sure it went over the plate. But there was little use to object.

A curve was next called for, and Joe succeeded in enticing the batter to strike at it. But the stick missed the horsehide cleanly. It was two strikes. [176]

"Pretty work! Oh, pretty work!" howled Boswell.

A foul next resulted, and Russell missed it by inches. The batter had still another chance. But it availed him little, for Joe fooled him on the next one.

"Good!" nodded the catcher to the young pitcher, and Joe felt his vision clearing now. He looked over toward where Mabel was sitting. She smiled encouragingly at him.

The New Yorks got one hit off Joe that inning, but, though the man on first stole second, after Joe had tried to nip him several times, the other two men struck out, and a goose egg went up in the first frame.

"Well, if you can do that eight more times the game is ours, if we can only get one run," said Manager Watson, as Joe came up to the bench, smiling happily.

"I'll try," was all he said.

But the Cardinals did not get their run that inning, nor the next nor the next nor next. The game ran along for five innings with neither side crossing home plate, and talk of a "pitchers' battle" began to be heard. Joe was pitching remarkably well, allowing only scattering hits. The Giants could not seem to bunch them.

Then, as might have been expected, Joe had a bit of bad luck. There had been hard work for him that day—hard and nervous work, and it told on him. He was hit for a two-bagger, and the next man walked, though Joe thought some of the decisions unfair. [177]

Then the runner attempted to steal third. There was a wild throw, and the man came in, scoring the first run. Joe felt a wave of chagrin sweep over him. He felt that the game was going.

"Tighten up! Tighten up!" he heard Boswell call to him. By a determined effort he got himself well in hand, and then amid the cheers of the crowd he succeeded in striking out the other men up, so that only the one run was in.

But the pace was telling on Joe. He gave two men their base on balls the next time he pitched, and by a combination of circumstances, two more runs were made before the Giants were retired.

"This won't do," murmured Mr. Watson. "I'm afraid I'll have to take Joe out."

"Don't," advised Boswell. "He'll be all right, but if you take him out now you'll break him all up. I think he could have a little better support."

"Possibly. The fielding is a bit shaky. I'll send in Lawson to bat for Campbell."

This change resulted in a marked improvement. With a mighty clout Lawson knocked a home run, and, as there was a man on third, that two. From then on the Cardinals seemed to find themselves. They began coming back in earnest, and everyone "got the habit." Even Joe, proverbially poor hitters as pitchers are supposed to be, did his share, and, by placing a neat little drive, that eluded the shortstop, he brought in another needed run. [178]

"One ahead now! That's fine!" cried Rad to his chum, though Joe "died" on second. "If we can only hold 'em down——" and he looked questioningly at the young pitcher.

"I'll do it!" cried Joe, desperately. [179]

It did not look as though he would, though, when the first man up, after receiving three and two, was allowed to walk. Joe felt a bit shaky, but he steeled himself to hold his nerve. The man at first was a notorious base-stealer, and Joe watched him closely. Twice he threw to the initial sack, hoping to nip him, and he almost succeeded. Then he slammed in a swift one to the batter, only to know that the runner started for second.

But it did him little good to do it, for though he made third, Joe struck out his three men amid a wave of applause.

"One more like that, and we've got the game!" cried Mr. Watson. "It's up to you, Joe. But if you can't stand it I'll send in Slim."

"I'll stand it," was the grim answer, though Joe's arm ached.

And stand it Joe did. He was hit once in that last inning, and one man got his base on balls. And then and there Joe gave a remarkably nery exhibition. He nipped the man on first, and then in quick succession succeeded in fooling the two batters next up. [179]

"That's the eye!"

"The Cardinals win!"

"What's the matter with Joe Matson?"

"He's all right!"

The crowd went wild, as it had a right to do, and Joe's face was as red with pleasure as the nickname of his team. For he had had a large share in defeating the redoubtable Giants, though to the credit of that team be it said that several of its best players were laid up, and, at a critical part in the game their best hitter was ruled out for abusing the umpire.

But that took away nothing from Baseball Joe's glory.

"Oh, I'm so glad you won!" cried Mabel, as he passed her box. "Isn't it glorious?"

"It sure is," he admitted with a smile.

"Can't you take dinner with us at the hotel?" she went on, and Joe blushing agreed. The other girls smiled at him, and Reggie nodded in a friendly manner.

"Great work, old man!" called Mabel's brother. "It was a neat game."

Then Joe hurried off to have a shower, and dress, and in the clubhouse he was hailed genially by his fellow players. [180]

"Good work, Joe!"

"I didn't think you had it in you."

"This sure will make the Giants feel sore."

As for Manager Watson, he looked at Joe in a manner that meant much to the young pitcher.

"I told you so!" said the old coach to the manager, later that day.

"Yes, you did," admitted the latter. "Of course I knew Joe had good stuff in him, but I didn't think it would come out so soon. He may help pull us up out of the cellar yet."

Joe enjoyed the little dinner with Mabel and her friends that night, as he had seldom before taken pleasure in a gathering. Rad was one of the guests, and later they went to the theatre, as there was no game next day.

But if the Cardinals expected to repeat their performance they were disappointed. Joe was started in another contest, and he was glad Mabel was not present, for somehow he could not keep control of the balls, and following a rather poor exhibition, he was taken out after the fourth inning. But it was too late to save the game.

"Never mind, we got one of the four, and it was due to you," consoled Rad, when the series was over. "And you've found out what it is to stack up against the Giants."

Joe had had his "baptism of fire," and it had done him good. The St. Louis team was to take the road again, after a time spent in the home town, where they had somewhat improved their standing. [181]

"Got anything to do this evening?" asked Rad, as they were coming back from the ball park, after a final game with Boston.

"No."

"Then let's go to the Park Theatre. There's a good hot-weather show on."

"I'm with you."

"All right. I've got to go down town, but I'll be back before it's time to go," Rad went on.

Joe dressed, and waited around the hotel lobby for his friend to return. It grew rather late, and Joe glanced uneasily at the clock. He was rather surprised, as he stood at the hotel desk, to hear his name spoken by a messenger boy who entered.

"Matson? There he is," and the clerk indicated our hero.

"Sign here," said the boy, shortly. Joe wondered if the telegram contained bad news from home. Giving the lad a dime tip, Joe opened the envelope with fingers that trembled, and then he read this rather queer message:

"If you want to do your friend Rad a good turn, come to the address below," and Joe recognized the street as one in a less desirable section of the city.

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## IN DANGER

"BAD news?" asked the hotel clerk, as he noticed the look on Joe's face.

"No—yes—well, it's unexpected news," hesitated Joe, as he made up his mind, on the instant, not to tell the contents of the note. He wanted a little time to think. Rapidly he read the message over again. The boy was just shuffling out of the hotel.

"Wait a minute!" Joe called after him. "Where'd you get this note?" the young pitcher asked.

"At de office."

"Yes, I know. But who brought it in?"

"I dunno. Youse'll have to see de manager."

"Oh, all right," Joe assented, and then he turned aside. He was still in a quandary as to what to do.

Once more he read the note.

"If you want to do your friend Rad a good turn," he repeated. "Of course I do, but what does it mean? Rad can't be in trouble, or he'd have sent me some word himself. That isn't a very good neighborhood at night, but I guess I can take care of myself. The trouble is, though, if I go out, and Rad comes back here in the meanwhile, what will happen?"

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Joe was thinking hard, trying to find some solution of the mystery, and then a flash came to him.

"Baseball!" he whispered to himself. "Maybe it is something to do with baseball! Someone may be scouting for Rad, and want to find out, on the quiet, if he's willing to help in making a shift to some other team. They want me to aid them, perhaps."

Joe had been long enough in organized baseball to know that there are many twists and turns to it, and that many "deals" are carried on in what might be considered an underhand manner. Often, when rival organizations in the baseball world are at war, the various managers, and scouts, go to great lengths, and secretly, to get some player they consider valuable.

"Maybe some rival club is after Rad and doesn't want its plans known," mused Joe. "That must be it. They know he and I are chums, and they come to me first. Well, I sure do want to help Rad, but I don't want to see him leave the Cardinals. I guess I'll take a chance and go down there. I'll leave word at the desk that I'll meet Rad at the theatre. That will be the best. I can telephone back to the hotel, after I go to this address, and find out if Rad has been back here. I'll go."

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Stuffing the queer note into his pocket, Joe started off, catching a car that would take him near the address given. Before leaving, he arranged with the hotel clerk to tell Rad that he would meet him at the theatre.

It was a rather dark, and quite lonesome, street in which Joe found himself after leaving the street car. On either side were tall buildings that shut out much of the light by day, while at night they made the place a veritable canyon of gloom. There were big warehouses and factories with, here and there, a smaller building, and some ramshackle dwellings that had withstood the encroachment of business.

Some of these latter had fallen into decay, and others were being used as miserable homes by those who could afford no better. In one or two, saloons held forth, the light from their swinging doors making yellow patches on the dark pavement.

"I wouldn't like to have to live down here," mused Joe, as he picked his way along, looking, as best he could, for the number given in the note. "It's a queer place to appoint a meeting, but I suppose the baseball fellows don't want to be spied on. I'll be glad when I'm through."

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Joe walked on a little farther. The neighborhood seemed to become more deserted and lonesome. From afar off came the distant hum and roar of the city, but all around Joe was silence, broken, now and then, by the sound of ribald laughter from the occasional saloons.

"Ah, here's the place!" exclaimed Joe, as he stood in front of one of the few dwellings in the midst of the factories. "It looks gloomy enough. I wonder who can be waiting to see me here about Rad? Well, there's a light, anyhow."

As Joe approached the steps of the old house he saw, at one side of the door, a board on which were scrawled the words:

*Peerless Athletic Club*

"Hum! Must be a queer sort of club," mused Joe. "I guess they do more exercise with their tongues, and with billiard cues, than with their muscles."

For, as he mounted the steps, he heard from within the click of billiard and pool balls, and the

noise of talk and laughter. It was one of the so-called "athletic" clubs, that often abound in low neighborhoods, where the name is but an excuse for young "toughs" to gather. Under the name, and sometimes incorporation of a "club," they have certain rights and privileges not otherwise obtainable. They are often a political factor, and the authorities, for the sake of the votes they control, wink at minor violations of the law. It was to such a place as this that Joe had come—or, in view of what happened afterward, had been lured would be the more proper term.

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"Well, what do youse want?" asked an ill-favored youth, as Joe entered the poorly lighted hall. The fellow had his hat tilted to one side, and a cigarette was glued to one lip, moving up and down curiously as he spoke.

"I don't know who I want," said Joe, as pleasantly as he could. "I was told to come here to do my friend Rad Chase a favor. I'm Joe Matson, of the Cardinals, and——"

"Oh, yes. He's expectin' youse. Go on in," and the fellow nodded toward a back room, the door of which stood partly open. Joe hesitated a moment, while the youth who had spoken to him went out and stood on the half-rotting steps. Then, deciding that, as he had come thus far, he might as well see the thing through, Joe started for the rear room.

But, as he reached the door, and heard a voice speaking, he hesitated. For what he heard was this:

"S'posin' he don't come?"

"Aw, he'll come all right, Wessel," said another voice. "He sure is stuck on his friend Rad, and he'll want to know what he can do for him. He'll come, all right."

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"Shalleg!" gasped Joe, as he recognized the tones. "It's a trick. He thinks he can trap me here!"

As he turned to go, Joe heard Wessel say:

"There won't be no rough work; will there?"

"Oh, no! Not too rough!" replied Shalleg with a nasty laugh.

Deciding that discretion was the better part of valor, Joe was hastening away when he accidentally knocked over a box in the hall. Instantly the door to the rear room was thrown wide open, giving the young pitcher, as he turned, a glimpse of Shalleg, Wessel and several other men seated about a table, playing cards.

"Who's there?" cried Shalleg. Then, as he saw Joe hurrying away, he added: "Hold on, Matson. I sent for you. I want to see you!"

"But I don't want to see you!" Joe called back over his shoulder.

"Say, this is straight goods!" cried Shalleg, pushing back his chair from the table, the legs scraping over the bare boards of the floor. "It's all right. I've got a chance to do your friend Rad Chase a good turn, and you can help in it. Wait a minute!"

But Joe fled, unheeding. Then Shalleg, seeing that his plans were about to miscarry, yelled:

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"Stop him, somebody!"

Joe was running along the dim hallway. As he reached the outside steps the youth who had first accosted him turned, and made a grab for him.

"What's your hurry?" he demanded. "Hold on!"

Joe did not answer, but, eluding the outstretched hands, made the sidewalk in a jump and ran up the street. He was fleet of foot—his training gave him that—and soon he was safe from pursuit, though, as a matter of fact, no one came after him. Shalleg and his tools were hardly ready for such desperate measures yet, it seemed.

Joe passed a side street, and, looking up it, saw at the other end, a more brilliantly lighted thoroughfare. Arguing rightly that he would be safer there, Joe turned up, and soon was in a more decent neighborhood. His heart was beating rapidly, partly from the run, and partly through apprehension, for he had an underlying fear that it would not have been for his good to have gone into the room where Shalleg was.

"Whew! That was a happening," remarked Joe, as he slowed down. "I wonder what it all meant? Shalleg must be getting desperate. But why does he keep after me? Unless he thinks I am responsible for his not getting a place on the Cardinals. It's absurd to think that, but it does seem so. I wonder what I'd better do?"

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Joe tried to reason it out, and then came the recollection of Rad.

"I'll telephone to the hotel, and see if he's come back," he said. "Then, when I meet him, I'll tell him all that happened. It's a queer go, sure enough."

A telephone message to the hotel clerk brought the information that Rad had telephoned in himself, saying that he had been unexpectedly detained, and would meet Joe at the theatre entrance.

"That's good!" thought our hero. For one moment, after running away from the gloomy house,

he had had a notion that perhaps Rad had also been lured there. Now he knew his friend was safe.

"Sorry I couldn't come back to the hotel for you," Rad greeted Joe, as they met in front of the theatre. "But my business took me longer than I counted on. We're in time for the show, anyhow. It starts a little later in summer."

"That's all right," said Joe. "As a matter of fact I have been away from the hotel myself, for some time."

"So the clerk said. Told me you'd gone out and left a message for me. Say, what's up, Joe? You look as though something had happened," for now, in the light, Rad had a glimpse of his chum's face, and it wore a strange look. [190]

"Something did happen," said Joe in a low voice. "I believe I was in danger. I'll tell you all about it," which he did, in a low voice, between the acts of the play.

It is doubtful if either Joe or Rad paid much attention to what occurred on the stage that evening.

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## CHAPTER XXIII

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### A LAME ARM

"BUT, great Scott, Joe!" exclaimed Rad, when he had been given all the facts of the strange occurrence, "that was a raw sort of deal!"

"I think so myself."

"Why don't you get the police after them?"

"What would be the good? Nothing really happened, and just because I have an idea it would have, if I'd given them the chance to get at me, doesn't make them liable to arrest. I would look foolish going to the police."

"Maybe so. But then there's that note. They didn't have any idea of doing me a good turn. That was almost a forgery."

"The trouble is we can't prove it, though. I think the only thing I can do is to let it go, and be more careful in the future."

"Well, maybe it is," agreed Rad slowly. "But what do you think was their object?"

"I haven't the least idea," replied Joe. "That is, the only thing I can imagine is that Shalleg wanted to scare me; or, perhaps, threaten me for what he imagines I have done to him." [192]

"And that is?" questioned Rad.

"That I've been spreading false reports about him to our manager, in order to keep him off the team. As a matter of fact, I don't believe I have ever mentioned him to Mr. Watson. It's all imagination on Shalleg's part."

"What condition was he in to-night?" asked Rad, as he and Joe were on their way to the hotel after the play.

"As far as I could judge, he was about as he has been most of the time lately—scarcely sober. That, and his gambling and irregular living, took him off the team, you know."

"And he thinks, with that record behind him, that he can get on the Cardinals!" exclaimed Rad. "He's crazy!"

"He's dangerous, too," added Joe. "I'm going to be more careful after this."

"And you thought you were doing me a favor, old man?"

"I sure did, Rad. I thought maybe some scout from another club was trying to secure your valuable services."

"Now you're stringing me!"

"No, I'm not, really. You know there are queer doings in baseball."

"Yes, but none as queer as that. Well, I'm much obliged, anyhow. But after this you stick to me. If there's any danger we'll share it together!" [193]

"Thanks!" exclaimed Joe warmly.

"Going to say anything to the boss about this?" asked Rad, after a pause.

"I think not. Would you?"

"Well, perhaps we might just as well keep still about it," agreed Rad. "We'll see if we can't trap this Shalleg and his crony, and put a stop to their game."

"All they have been is a nuisance, so far," spoke Joe. "But there's no telling when they might turn to something else."

"That's so. Well, we'll keep our weather eyes open."

Joe was not a little unnerved by his experience, and he was glad there was not a game next day.

The Cardinals had crept up a peg. They were now standing one from the top of the second division of clubs, and there began to be heard talk that they would surely lead their column before many more games had been played.

"And maybe break into the first division!" exclaimed Trainer Boswell. "If you keep on the way you've started, Matson, we sure will do it!"

"I'll do my best," responded Joe.

In a series of four games with the Brooklyn Superbas the Cardinals broke even, thus maintaining their position. But they could not seem to climb any higher. Joe's pitching helped a lot, and he was regarded as a coming star. He was acquiring more confidence in himself, and that, in playing big baseball, helps a lot. [194]

Of course I am not saying that Joe did all the work for his team. No pitcher does, but a pitcher is a big factor. It takes batters to make hits and runs, however, and the Cardinals had their share of them. They could have done better with more, but good players brought high prices, and Manager Watson had spent all the club owners felt like laying out.

The other pitchers of the Cardinals worked hard. It must not be imagined that because I dwell so much on Joe's efforts that he was the "whole show."

Far from it. At times Joe had his "off days" as well as did the others, and there were times when he felt so discouraged that he wanted to give it all up, and go back to a smaller league.

But Joe had grit, and he stuck to it. He was determined to make as great a name for himself as is possible in baseball, and he knew he must take the bitter with the sweet, and accept defeat when it came, as it is bound to now and then.

Nor did his determination to overcome obstacles fail of its object. With the other members of the team, Joe played so surprisingly well that suddenly the Cardinals took one of those remarkable "braces" that sometimes come in baseball, and from eighth position the club leaped forward into fifth, being aided considerably by some hard luck on the part of the other teams. In other words, "things broke right" for the Cardinals and the St. Louis "fans" began to harbor hopes of a possible pennant. [195]

Joe had several incentives for doing his best. There were his folks. He wanted to justify his father's faith in him, and also his sister's. Joe knew that his mother, in spite of her kind and loving ways, was secretly disappointed that he had quit his college career to become a baseball player.

"But I'll show her that it's just as honorable as one of the learned professions, and that it pays better in a great many cases," reasoned Joe. "Though of course the money end of it isn't the biggest thing in this world," he told himself. "Still it is mighty satisfactory."

Then there was another reason why Joe wanted to make good. Or, rather, there was another person he wanted to have hear of his success. I guess you know her name.

And so the young pitcher kept on, struggling to perfect himself in the technicalities of the big game, playing his position for all it was capable of. As the season went on Joe's name figured more and more often in the papers. [196]

"He's got reporters on his staff!" sneered Willard.

"Well, I wish we all had," observed Manager Watson. "Publicity counts, and I want all I can get for my players. It's a wonder some of you fellows wouldn't have your name in the papers oftener."

"I don't play to the grandstand," growled the grouchy pitcher.

"Maybe it would help some if you did," the manager remarked quietly.

The baseball practice and play went on. Joe was called on more often now to pitch a game, as Mr. Watson was kind enough to say some of the club's success was due to him, and while of course he was not considered the equal of the veteran pitchers, he was often referred to as a "comer."

What Joe principally lacked was consistency. He could go in and pitch a brilliant game, but he could not often do it two days in succession. In this respect he was not unlike many celebrated young pitchers. Joe was not fully developed yet. He had not attained his full growth, and he had

not the stamina and staying power that would come with added years. But he was acquiring experience and practice that would stand him in good stead, and his natural good health, and clean manner of living, were in his favor.

The Cardinals had come back to St. Louis in high spirits over their splendid work on the road.

"We ought to take at least three from the Phillies," said Boswell, for they were to play four games with the Quaker City nine. "That will help some."

"If we win them," remarked Joe, with a smile.

"Well, we're depending on you to help," retorted the trainer.

Joe only smiled.

There was some discussion in the papers as to who would pitch the first game against the Phillies, and it was not settled until a few minutes before the game was called, when Slim Cooney was sent in.

"I guess Mr. Watson wants to make sure of at least the first one," remarked Joe, as he sat on the bench.

"Oh, you'll get a chance," Boswell assured him. "You want to keep yourself right on edge. No telling when you'll be called on."

It was a close game, and it was not until the eleventh inning that the home team pulled in the winning run. Then, with jubilant faces, the members hurried to the clubhouse.

"Whew!" whistled Cooney, as he swung his southpaw arm about. "I sure will be lame tomorrow."

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"You can have a rest," the manager informed him. "And be sure to have your arm massaged well. This is going to be a stiffer proposition than I thought."

"Did you see him at the game?" asked Rad of Joe, as they walked along together.

"See who?"

"Shalleg."

"No. Was he there?"

"He sure was! I had a glimpse of him over in the bleachers when I ran after that long drive of Mitchell's. He was with that Wessel, but they didn't look my way."

"Humph!" mused Joe. "Well, I suppose he's got a right to come to our games. If he bothers me, though, I'll take some action."

"What?"

"I don't know, yet. But I'm through standing for his nonsense."

"I don't blame you."

If Joe could have seen Shalleg and Wessel talking to a certain "tough" looking character, after the game, and at the same time motioning in his direction, he would have felt added uneasiness.

"Oh, let's go out to some summer garden and cool off," proposed Rad after supper. It was a hot night, and sitting about the hotel was irksome.

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"All right," agreed Joe, and they started for a car. The same "tough" looking character who had been talking with Wessel and Shalleg took the car as well.

Coming back, after sitting through an open-air moving picture performance, Joe and Rad found all the cars crowded. It was an open one, and Joe and Rad had given their seats to ladies, standing up and holding to the back of the seat in front of them. Just beyond Joe was a burly chap, the same one who had left the hotel at the time they did. He kept his seat.

Then, as the car reached a certain corner, this man got up hurriedly.

"Let me past! I want to get off!" he exclaimed, in unnecessarily rough tones to Joe, at the same time pressing hard against him.

"Certainly," the young pitcher replied, removing his hands from the seat in front of him. At that moment the car stopped with a sudden jerk, and the fellow grabbed Joe by the right arm, twisting it so that the ball player cried out, involuntarily.

"Scuse me!" muttered the fellow. "I didn't mean to grab youse so hard. I didn't know youse was so tender," he sneered.

"Seems to me you could have grabbed the seat," objected Joe, wincing with pain.

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The other did not answer, but afterward Rad said he thought he saw him wink and grin maliciously.

"Hurt much?" asked Rad of Joe, as the fellow got off and the car went on again.



"It did for a minute. It's better now."

"It looked to me as though he did that on purpose," said Rad.

"He certainly was very clumsy," spoke one of the ladies to whom Joe and Rad had given their places. "He stepped on my foot, too."

Joe worked his arm up and down to limber the muscles, and then thought little more about the incident. That is, until the next morning. He awoke with a sudden sense of pain, and as he stretched out his pitching arm, he cried out.

"What's the matter?" asked Rad.

"My arm's sore and lame!" complained Joe. "Say, this is tough luck! And maybe I'll get a chance to pitch to-day."

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## CHAPTER XXIV

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### A TIGHT GAME

RAD gave a look at his chum, and then, sliding out of bed, ran to the window.

"No luck!" he exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" asked Joe.

"I mean it isn't raining."

"What has that got to do with it?" the young pitcher wanted to know, as he moved his sore arm back and forth, a little frown of pain showing on his face at each flexing movement.

"Why, if it rained we wouldn't have any game, and you'd get a chance to rest and get in shape. It's a dead cinch that you or Barter will be called on to-day. Willard has 'Charlie-horse,' and he can't pitch. So it's you or Barter."

"Then I guess it will have to be Barter," said Joe with a grimace. "I'm afraid I can't go in. And yet I hate to give up and say I can't pitch. It's tough luck!"

"Does it hurt much?" Rad wanted to know.

"Enough, yes. I could stand it, ordinarily, but every time I move it will make it worse."

"Is it where that fellow pinched you, in getting off the car last night?"

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"He didn't pinch me," said Joe, "it was a deliberate twist."

"Deliberate?" questioned Rad in surprise.

"It sure was!" exclaimed the young pitcher decidedly. "The more I think of it the more I'm certain that he did it deliberately."

"But why should he?" went on Rad. "You didn't prevent him from getting out of the car. There was plenty of room for him to pass. Why should he try to hurt you?"

"I don't know," answered Joe, "unless he was put up to it by——"

"By Jove! Shalleg! Yes!" cried Rad. "I believe you're right. Shalleg is jealous of you, and he wants to see you kept out of the game, just because he didn't make the nine. And I guess, too, he'd be glad to see the Cardinals lose just to make Manager Watson feel sore. That's it, Joe, as sure as you're a foot high!"

"Oh, I don't know as he thought the Cardinals would lose because I didn't pitch," said Joe, slowly, "but he may have been set on me by Shalleg, out of spite. Well, there's no use thinking about that now. I've got to do something about this arm. I think I'll send word that I won't be in shape to-day."

"No, don't you do it!" cried Rad. "Maybe we can fix up your arm. I know how to make a dandy liniment that my mother used on me when I was a small chap."

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"Liniment sounds good," said Joe with a smile. "But I guess I'd better have Boswell look at it. He's got some of his own——"

"Yes, and then you'd have to admit that you're lame, and give the whole thing away!" interrupted Rad. "Don't do it. Leave it to me. There's some time before the game and I can give

you a good rubbing, meanwhile. I'll send out to the drug store, get the stuff made up, and doctor you here.

"There'll be no need to tell 'em anything about it if I can get you into shape, and then, if you're called on, you can go in and pitch. If they think you're crippled they won't give you a chance."

"That's so," admitted Joe.

"Still, you wouldn't go in if you didn't think you could do good work," went on his chum.

"Certainly I would not," agreed Joe. "That would be too much like throwing the game. Well, see what you can do, Rad. I'd like to get a good whack at the fellow who did this, though," he went on, as he worked his arm slowly back and forth.

Rad rang for a messenger, and soon had in from a drug store a bottle of strong-smelling liniment, with which he proceeded to massage Joe's arm. He did it twice before the late breakfast to which they treated themselves, and once afterward, before it was time to report at the park for morning practice.

"Does it feel better?" asked Rad, as his chum began to do some pitching work.

"A whole lot, yes."

It was impossible to wholly keep the little secret from Boswell. He watched Joe for a moment and then asked suddenly:

"Arm stiff?"

"A bit, yes," the pitcher was reluctantly obliged to admit.

"You come in the clubhouse and have it attended to!" ordered the trainer. "I can't have you, or any of the boys, laid up."

Then, as he got out his bottle of liniment, and looked at Joe's arm, one of the ligaments of which had been strained by the cruel twist, Boswell said, sniffing the air suspiciously:

"You've been using some of your own stuff on that arm; haven't you?"

"Yes," admitted Joe.

"I thought so. Well, maybe it's good, but my stuff is better. I'll soon have you in shape."

He began a scientific massage of the sore arm, something of which, with all his good intentions, Rad was not capable. Joe felt the difference at once, and when he went back to practice he was almost himself again.

"How about you?" asked Rad, when he got the chance.

"I guess I'll last out—if I have to pitch," replied Joe. "But it's not certain that I shall go in."

"The Phillies are out to chew us up to-day," went on his chum. "It's going to be a tight game. Don't take any chances."

"I won't; you may depend on that."

There was a conference between Boswell and the manager.

"Who shall I put in the box?" asked the latter, for he often depended in a great measure on the old trainer.

"Let Barter open the ball, and see how he does. It's my notion that he won't stand the pace, for he's a little off his feed. But I want to take a little more care of Matson, and this will give him a couple of innings to catch up."

"Matson!" cried the manager. "Has he——"

"Just a little soreness," said Boswell quickly, for that was all he imagined it to be. He had not asked Joe how it happened, for which the young pitcher was glad. "It'll be all right with a little more rubbing." He knew Joe's hope, and wanted to do all he could to further it.

"All right. Announce Barter and Russell as the battery. And you look after Matson; will you?"

"I sure will. I think Joe can pitch his head off if he gets the chance."

"I hope he doesn't lose his head," commented the manager grimly. "It's going to be a hard game."

Which was the opinion of more than one that day.

Joe was taken in charge by Boswell, and in the clubhouse more attention was given to the sore arm.

"How does it feel now?" asked the trainer, anxiously.

"Fine!" replied Joe, and really the pain seemed all gone.

"Then come out and warm up with me. You'll be needed, if I am any judge."

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To Joe's delight he found that he could send the ball in as swiftly as ever, and with good aim.

"You'll do!" chuckled Boswell. "And just in time, too. There goes a home run, and Barter's been hit so hard that we'll have to take him out."

It was the beginning of the third inning, and, sure enough, when it came the turn of the Cardinals to bat, a substitution was made, and the manager said:

"Get ready, Joe. You'll pitch the rest of the game."

Joe nodded, with a pleased smile, but, as he raised his arm to bend it back and forth, a sharp spasm of pain shot through it. [207]

"Whew!" whistled Joe, under his breath. "I wonder if the effects of that liniment are wearing off? If they are, and that pain comes back, I'm done for, sure. What'll I do?"

There was little time to think; less to do anything. Joe would not bat that inning, that was certain. He took a ball, and, nodding to Rad, who was not playing, went out to the "bull-pen."

"What's up?" asked Rad, cautiously.

"I felt a little twinge. I just want to try the different balls, and find which I can deliver to best advantage to myself. You catch."

Rad nodded understandingly. To Joe's delight he found that in throwing his swift one, the spitter, and his curves he had no pain. But his celebrated fadeaway made him wince when he twisted his arm into the peculiar position necessary to get the desired effect.

"Wow!" mused Joe. "I can't deliver that, it's a sure thing. Well, I'm not going to back out now. I'll stay in as long as I can. But it's going to hurt!"

He shut his teeth, and, trying to keep away from his face the shadow of pain, threw his fadeaway to Rad again.

The pain shot through his arm like a sharp knife.

"But I'll do it!" thought Joe, grimly.

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## CHAPTER XXV

### IN NEW YORK

"THAT'S good," called Rad, as he caught a swift one. "You'll do, Joe." [208]

But only the young pitcher knew what an effort it was going to cost him to stay in that game. And stay he must.

It was time for the Cardinals to take the field. The Phillies were two runs ahead, and that lead must be cut down, and at least one more tally made if the game were to be won.

"Can we do it?" thought Joe. He felt the pain in his arm, but he ground his teeth and muttered: "I'm going to do it!"

The play started off with the new pitcher in the box. The news went flashing over the telegraph wires from the reporters on the ground to the various bulletin boards through the country, and to the newspaper offices. Baseball Joe was pitching for the Cardinals.

But Joe was not thinking of the fame that was his. All he thought of was the effort he must make to pitch a winning game.

Fortunately for him three of the weakest batters on the Phillies faced him that inning. Joe knew it, and so did the catcher, for he did not signal for the teasing fadeaway, for which Joe was very glad. [209]

Joe tried a couple of practice balls, but he did not slam them in with his usual force, at which the man in the mask wondered. He had not heard of Joe's lame arm, and he reasoned that his partner was holding back for reasons best known to himself.

"Ball one!" yelled the umpire when Joe had made his first delivery to the batter. Joe winced, partly with pain, and partly because of the wasted effort that meant so much to him.

"The next one won't be a ball!" he muttered fiercely. He sent in a puzzling curve that enticed the batter.

"Strike one!"

"That's better!" yelled Boswell, from the coaching line. "Serve 'em some more like that, Joe."

And Joe did. No one but himself knew the effort it cost him, but he kept on when it was agony to deliver the ball. Perhaps he should not have done it, for he ran the chance of injuring himself for life, and also ran the chance of losing the game for his team.

But Joe was young—he did not think of those things. He just pitched—not for nothing had he been dubbed "Baseball Joe." [210]

"You're out!" snapped the umpire to the first batter, who turned to the bench with a sickly grin.

Joe faced the next one. To his alarm the catcher signalled for a fadeaway. Joe shook his head. He thought he could get away with a straight, swift one.

But when the batter hit it Joe's heart was in his throat until he saw that it was a foul. By a desperate run Russell caught it. Joe pitched the next man out cleanly.

"That's the way to do it!"

"Joe, you're all right!"

"Now we'll begin to do something!"

Thus cried his teammates.

And from then on the Phillies were allowed but one more tally. This could not be helped, for Joe was weakening, and could not control the ball as well as at first. But the run came in as much through errors on the part of his fellow players as from his own weakness.

Meanwhile the Cardinals struck a batting streak, and made good, bunching their hits. The ending of the eighth inning saw the needed winning run go up in the frame of the Cardinals, and then it was Joe's task to hold the Phillies hitless in their half of the ninth.

How he did it he did not know afterward. His arm felt as though someone were jabbing it with a knife. He gritted his teeth harder and harder, and stuck it out. But oh! what a relief it was when the umpire, as the third batter finished at the plate, called: [211]

"You're out!"

The Cardinals had won! Joe's work for the day was finished. But at what cost only he knew. Pure grit had pulled him through.

"Say, did you pitch with that arm?" asked Boswell in surprise as he saw Joe under the shower in the clubhouse later.

"Well, I made a bluff at it," said Joe, grimly and gamely.

"Well, I'll be Charlie-horsed!" exclaimed the trainer. "Say, you won't do any more pitching for a week! I've got to take you in hand."

Of course the story of Joe's grit got out, and the papers made much of how he had pitched through nearly a full game, winning it, too, which was more, with a badly hurt arm.

"But don't you take any such chances as that again!" cried Manager Watson, half fiercely, when he heard about it. "I can't have my pitchers running risks like that. Pitchers cost too much money!"

This was praise enough for Joe.

And so he had a much-needed rest. Under the care of Boswell the arm healed rapidly, though, for some time, Joe was not allowed to take part in any big games, for which he was sorry. [212]

Whether it was the example of Joe's grit, or because they had improved of late was not made manifest, but the Cardinals took three of the four games with the Phillies, which made Manager Watson gleeful.

"They called us tail-enders!" he exulted, "but if we don't give the Giants a rub before the end of the season I'll miss my guess!"

The Cardinals were on the move again. They went from city to city, playing the scheduled games, winning some and losing enough to keep them about in fifth place. Joe saw much of life, of the good and bad sides. Many temptations came to him, as they do to all young fellows, whether in the baseball game, or other business or pleasure. But Joe "passed them up." Perhaps the memory of a certain girl helped him. Often it does.

The Cardinals came to New York, once more to do battle with the redoubtable Giants.

"But you won't get a game!" declared Manager McGraw to "Muggins" Watson.

"Won't we? I don't know about that. I'm going to spring my colt slab artist on you again."

"Who, Matson?"

"Um," said the manager of the Cardinals.

"Um," responded the manager of the Giants, laughing.

St. Louis did get one game of a double-header, and Joe, whose arm was in perfect trim again, pitched. It was while he was on the mound that a certain man, reputed to be a scout for the Giants, was observed to be taking a place where he could watch the young pitcher to advantage.

"Up to your old tricks; eh, Jack?" asked a man connected with the management of the Cardinals. "Who are you scouting for now?"

"Well, that little shortstop of yours looks pretty good to me," was the drawling answer. "What you s'pose you'll be asking for him."

"He's not for sale. Now if you mentioned the centre fielder, Jack——"

"Nothing doing. I've got one I'll sell you cheap."

"I don't suppose you want to make an offer for Matson; do you?" asked the Cardinal man with a slow wink.

"Oh, no, we've got all the pitchers we can use," the Giant scout responded quickly. It is thus that their kind endeavor to deceive one another.

But, as the game went on, it might have been observed that the Giant scout changed his position, where he could observe Joe in action from another angle.

"Didn't see anything of Shalleg since we struck Manhattan; did you, Joe?" asked Rad, as he and his chum, taking advantage of a rainy day in New York, were paying a visit to the Museum of Natural History. [214]

"No," replied Joe, pausing in front of a glass case containing an immense walrus. "I don't want to see him, either. I'm sure he planned to do me some harm, and I'm almost positive that some of his tools had to do with my sore arm. But I can't prove it."

"That's the trouble," admitted Rad. "Well, come on, I want to see that model of the big whale. They say it's quite a sight."

The rain prevented games for three days, and the players were getting a bit "stale" with nothing to do. Then the sun came out, the grounds dried up and the series was resumed. But the Cardinals were not very lucky.

Philadelphia was the next stopping place, and there, once again, the Cardinals proved themselves the masters of the Quakers. They took three games straight, and sweetened up their average wonderfully, being only a game and a half behind the fourth club.

"If we can only keep up the pace!" said the manager, wistfully. "Joe, are you going to help us do it?"

"I sure am!" exclaimed the young pitcher.

There was one more game to play with the Phillies. The evening before it was scheduled, which would close their stay in the Quaker City, Joe left the hotel, and strolled down toward the Delaware River. He intended to take the ferry over to Camden, in New Jersey, for a friend of his mother lived there, and he had promised to call on her. [215]

Joe did not notice that, as he left the hotel, he was closely followed by a man who walked and acted like Wessel. But the man wore a heavy beard, and Wessel, the young pitcher remembered was usually smooth-shaven.

But Joe did not notice. If he had perhaps he would have seen that the beard was false, though unusually well adjusted.

Joe turned his steps toward the river front. It was a dark night, for the sky was cloudy and it looked like rain.

Joe just missed one ferryboat, and, as there would be some little time before the other left, he strolled along the water front, looking at what few sights there were. Before he realized it, he had gone farther than he intended. He found himself in a rather lonely neighborhood, and, as he turned back a bearded man, who had been walking behind the young pitcher for some time, stepped close to him.

"I beg your pardon," the man began, speaking as though he had a heavy cold, "but could you direct me to the Reading Terminal?" [216]

"Yes," said Joe, who had a good sense of direction, and had gotten the "lay of the land" pretty well fixed in his mind. "Let's see now—how I can best direct you?"

He thought for a moment. By going a little farther away from the ferry he could put the stranger on a thoroughfare that would be more direct than traveling back the way he had come.

"If you wouldn't mind walking along a little way," said the man eagerly. "I'm a stranger here, and——"

"Oh, I'll go with you," offered Joe, good-naturedly. "I'm not in any hurry."

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## CHAPTER XXVI

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### ADRIFT

"THERE," said Baseball Joe, coming to a halt at a dark street corner, the stranger close beside him, "if you go up that way, and turn as I told you to, it will take you directly to the Reading Terminal."

"I don't know how to thank you," mumbled the other. He seemed to be fumbling in his pocket. "I'll give you my card," he went on. "If you are ever in San Francisco——"

But it was not a card that he pulled from the inner pocket of his coat. It was a rag, that bore a strange, faint odor. Joe stepped back, but not quickly enough. He suspected something wrong, but he was too late.

An instant later the stranger had thrown one powerful arm about the young pitcher, and, with his other hand he pressed the chloroform-saturated rag to Joe's nose and mouth.

Joe tried to cry out, and struggled to free himself. But his senses seemed leaving him under the influence of the powerful drug.

At that moment, as though it had been timing itself to the movements of the man who had followed Joe, there drove up a large ramshackle cab, and out of it jumped two men.

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"Did you get him, Wes?" one asked eagerly.

"I sure did. Here, help me. He's gone off. Get him into the cab."

Poor Joe's senses had all but left him. He was an inert mass, but he could hear faintly, and he recognized the voice of Shalleg.

He tried to rouse himself, but it was as though he were in a heavy sleep, or stupor. He felt himself being lifted into a cab. The door slammed shut, and then he was rattled away over the cobbles.

"I wonder what they're going to do with me?" Joe thought. He had enough of his brain in working order to do that. Once more he tried to struggle.

"Better tie him up," suggested a voice he now recognized as that of the fellow who had twisted his arm on the street car.

"Yes, I guess we had," agreed Shalleg. "And then to the Delaware with him!"

Joe was too weak, and too much under the influence of the drug, to care greatly what they did with him—that is, in a sense, though a feeling of terror took possession of him at the words.

"The river!" gasped Wessel. "I thought you said there'd be no violence, Shalleg."

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"And there won't!" promised the leader of the conspirators.

"But you said to tie him, and then to the river with him."

"You don't s'pose I'm going to chuck him in; do you?" was the angry question.

"I don't know."

"Well, I'm not! I'm just going to put him out of the way for a time. I told him I'd get even with him for not helping me out of a hole, and then for spreading reports about me, that kept me from getting a place on the Cardinals, as well as on any other team. I told him I'd fix him!"

So, this was the secret of Shalleg's animosity! He had a fancied grievance against Joe, and was taking this means of gratifying his passion for revenge. Joe, dimly hearing, understood now. He longed to be able to speak, to assure Shalleg that he was all wrong, but they had bound a rag about his mouth, and he could not utter a sound, even had not the chloroform held his speech in check.

"Pass over those ropes," directed Shalleg to his cronies in the cab, which lurched and swayed over the rough stones. The cab held four, on a pinch, and Joe was held and supported by one of the men. The gag in the young pitcher's mouth was made tighter, and ropes were passed about his arms and feet. He could not move.

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"What's the game?" asked Wessel, as the trussing-up was finished.

"Well, I don't want to do him any real harm," growled Shalleg, "but I'm going to put him out of the game, just as I was kept out of it by his tattling tongue. I'm going to make him fail to show up to-morrow, and the next day, too, maybe. That'll put a crimp in his record, and in the Cardinals', too, for he's been doing good work for them. I'll say that about him, much as I hate him!"

Joe heard this plot against him, heard it dimly, through his half-numbed senses, and tried to struggle free from his bonds. But he could not.

On rattled the cab. Joe could not tell in which direction they were going, but he was sure it was along the lonely river front. The effects of the chloroform were wearing off, but the gag kept him silent, and the ropes bound his hands and feet.

"Have any trouble trailing him?" asked Shalleg of Wessel, who had disguised himself with a false beard.

"Not a bit," was the answer. "It was pie! I pretended I had lost my way."

The men laughed. Either they thought Joe was still incapable of hearing them, or they did not care if their identity and plans were known. [221]

A multitude of thoughts rushed through Joe's head. He did not exactly understand what the men were going to do with him. They had spoken of taking him to the river. Perhaps they meant to keep him prisoner on a boat until his contract with the St. Louis team would be void, because of his non-appearance. And Joe knew how hard it would be to get back in the game after that.

True, he could explain how it had happened, and he felt sure he would not be blamed. But when would he get a chance to make explanations? And there was the game to-morrow! He knew he would be called on to pitch, for Mr. Watson had practically told him so. And Joe would not be on hand.

"Aren't we 'most there?" asked Wessel.

"Yes," answered Shalleg, shortly.

"What are we to do?" asked the other.

"You'll know soon enough," was the half-growled reply.

The cab rattled on. Then it came to a stop. Joe could smell the dampness of the river, and he realized that the next act in the episode was about to be played.

He felt himself being lifted out of the cab, and he had a glimpse of a street, but it was too dark to recognize where it was, and Joe was not well enough acquainted with Philadelphia to know the neighborhood. Then a handkerchief was bound over his eyes, and he was in total darkness. [222]

He heard whispered words between Shalleg and the driver of the cab, but could not make out what they were. Then the vehicle rattled off.

"Catch hold of him now," directed Shalleg to his companions. "We'll carry him down to the river."

"To the river!" objected Wessel, and Joe felt a shiver go through him.

"Well, to the boat then!" snapped Shalleg. "Don't talk so much."

Joe felt himself being carried along, and, a little later, he was laid down on what he felt was the bottom of a boat. A moment later he could tell by the motion of the craft that he was adrift on the Delaware.

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## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE RESCUE

FOR a few moments Joe was in a sort of daze. He was extremely uncomfortable, lying on the hard bottom of the boat, and there seemed to be rough water, for the craft swayed, and bobbed up and down.

Joe wondered if he was alone, for he did not hear the noise of oars in the locks, nor did he catch the voices of the three rascals.

But it soon developed that they were with him, for, presently Wessel asked:

"Where are we going with him?"

"Keep still!" snapped Shalleg in a tense whisper. "Do you want someone to hear us?"

"Who, him?"

"No, someone on these ships. We're right alongside of 'em yet. Keep still; can't you!"

Wessel subsided, but one of Joe's questions was answered. There were other problems yet unsolved, though. What were they going to do with him? He could only wait and learn.

The bandage was still over his eyes, and he tried, by wrinkling the skin of his forehead, to work it loose. But he could not succeed. He wished he could have some glimpse, even a faint one, in the darkness, of where he was, though perhaps it would have done him little good. [224]

"Take the oars now," directed Shalleg, after a pause. "I guess it's safe to row out a bit. There aren't so many craft here now. But go easy."

"Hadn't we better show a light?" asked the man who had twisted Joe's arm. "We might be run down!"

"Light nothing!" exclaimed Shalleg, who now spoke somewhat above a whisper. "I don't want some police launch poking her nose up here. It's light enough for us to see to get out of the way if anything comes along. I'm not going to answer any hails."

"Oh, all right," was the answer.

Joe's head was beginning to clear itself from the fumes of the chloroform, and he could think more clearly. He wondered more and more what his fate was to be. Evidently the men were taking him somewhere in a rowboat. But whether he was to be taken wherever they were going, in this small craft, or whether it was being used to transport them to a larger boat, he could not, of course, determine.

The men rowed on for some time in silence.

"It's getting late," ventured Wessel at length.

"Not late enough, though," growled Shalleg. [225]

Joe went over, in his mind, all the events that had been crowded into the last few hours. He had told Rad that he was going to see his mother's friend in Camden, but had given no address.

"They won't know but what I'm staying there all night," he reasoned. "And they won't start to search for me until some time to-morrow. When I don't show up at the game they'll think it's queer, and I suppose they'll fine me. I wouldn't mind that if they only come and find me. But how can they do it? There isn't a clue they could follow, as far as I know. Not one!"

He tried to think of some means by which he could be traced, and rescued by his friends, but he could imagine none. No one who knew him had seen him come down to the ferry, or walk through the deserted neighborhood. And, as far as he knew, no one had seen the bearded stranger accost him.

"I'll just have disappeared—that's all," mused poor Joe, lying on the hard and uncomfortable bottom of the boat.

For some time longer the three men, or rather two of them, rowed on, paying no attention to Joe. Then Shalleg spoke.

"I guess we're far enough down the river," he said. "We can go ashore now."

"And take him with us?" asked Wessel.

"Well, you don't think I'm going to chuck him overboard; do you?" demanded Shalleg. "I told you I wasn't going to do anything violent." [226]

"But what are you going to do?"

"Wait, and you'll see," was the rather unsatisfactory answer.

Joe wished it was settled. He, too, was wondering.

The course of the boat seemed changed. By the motion the men were rowing across a choppy current, probably toward shore. Joe found this to be so, a little later, for the boat's side grated against what was probably a wooden pier.

"Light the lantern," directed Shalleg.

"But I thought you didn't want to be seen," objected Wessel.

"Do as I tell you," was the sharp rejoinder. "We're not going to be seen. We're going to leave the boat."

"And leave him in it?" asked the other man.

"Yes, I'm going to turn him adrift down the river," went on the chief conspirator. "I'll stick a light up, though, so he won't be run down. I don't wish him that harm."



"Are you going to leave him tied?" Wessel wanted to know.

"I sure am!" was the rejoinder. "Think I want him giving the alarm, and having us nabbed? Not much!"

Dimly, from beneath the handkerchief over his eyes, Joe saw the flash as a match was struck, and the lantern lighted. Then he heard it being lashed to some upright in the boat. A little later Joe felt the craft in which he lay being shoved out into the stream, and then he realized that he was alone, drifting down the Delaware, toward the bay, and tied hand and foot, as well as being gagged. He was practically helpless. [227]

"There, I guess that'll teach him not to meddle in my affairs any more!" said Shalleg bitterly. Then Joe heard no more, save the lapping of the waves against the side of the craft.

For a time his senses seemed to leave him under the terrible strain, and when he again was in possession of his faculties he could not tell how long he had been drifting alone, nor had he any idea of the time, save that it was still night.

"Well, I've got to do something!" decided Joe. "I've got to try and get rid of this gag, and yell for help, and to do that I've got to have the use of my hands."

Then he began to struggle, but the men who had trussed him up had done their evil work well, and he only cut his wrists on the cruel bonds. He was on his back, and he wished there was some rough projection in the bottom of the boat, against which he could rub his rope-entangled wrists. But there was none.

How the hours of darkness passed Joe never knew. He was thankful for one thing—that there was a light showing in his boat, for he would not be run down in the darkness by some steamer, or motor craft. By daylight he hoped the drifting boat might be seen, and picked up. Then he would be rescued. Even now, if he could only have called, he might have been saved. [228]

Gradually Joe became aware that morning had come. He could see a film of light beneath the bandage over his eyes. The boat was bobbing up and down more violently now.

"I must be far down the bay," thought Joe.

He was cramped, tired, and almost parched for a drink. He had dozed fitfully through the night, and his eyes smarted and burned under the bandage.

Suddenly he heard voices close at hand, above the puffing of a motorboat.

"Look there!" someone exclaimed. "A boat is adrift. Maybe we can work that into the film."

"Maybe," assented another voice. "Let's go over and see, anyhow. We want this reel to be a good one."

Dimly Joe wondered what the words meant. He heard the voices, and the puffing of the motor coming nearer. Then the latter sound ceased. Some craft bumped gently against his, and a man cried:

"Someone is in this boat!"

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

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### MOVING PICTURES

FOR a moment silence followed the announcement that meant so much to Joe. He could hear murmurs of surprise, and the violent motion of the craft in which he lay, bound helpless and unseeing, told him that the work of rescue was under way. The motor boat, he reflected, must be making fast to the other. The bandage over Joe's eyes prevented him from seeing what went on. Then came a series of exclamations and questions, and, to Joe's surprise, the voices of women and girls mingled with those of men.

"My, look, Jackson!" a man's voice exclaimed. "He's bound, and gagged. There's been some crime here!"

"You're right. We must get him aboard our boat."

Joe could tell, by the motion of the boat which contained him, that some of the rescue party were getting into it to aid him. Then he felt the bandage being taken from his eyes, and the gag from his mouth.

"Hand me a knife, somebody!" called a man. "I'll cut these ropes."

Joe opened his eyes, and closed them again with a feeling of pain. The sudden light of a bright, sunny morning was too much for him.

"He's alive, anyhow," a girl's voice said.

Joe half opened his eyes this time, and saw a strange sight. Alongside his boat was a cabin motor craft, and on the rear deck he could see gathered a number of men, women and girls. What took Joe's attention next was a queer oblong box, with a crank at one side, and a tube projecting from it, mounted on a tripod. Then, as his eyes became more accustomed to the light, Joe saw bending over him in the boat, two men.

One of them had a knife, with which he quickly cut the ropes that bound Joe's arms and feet. It was a great relief.

He sat up and looked about him. The motor boat was a large and fine one, and was slowly drifting down into Delaware Bay, for Joe could see a vast stretch of water on all sides.

"Too bad we can't work this rescue into a scene," spoke one of the men on the motor craft.

Joe looked at him wonderingly, and then at the machine on the bow of the boat. All at once he realized what it was—a moving picture camera. He had seen them before.

"Are you folks in the movies?" he asked as he stood up, with the help of the two men.

"That's what we are," was the answer. "We came out early this morning to do a bit of 'water stuff,' when we saw your boat adrift. We put over to it, and were surprised to see you tied in it. Can you tell us what happened?"

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"Yes," answered Joe, "I was practically kidnapped!"

"Come aboard, and have some coffee," urged a motherly-looking woman of the party.

"Yes, do," added another member of the company. "We have just had breakfast."

The aroma of coffee was grateful to Joe, and soon he was aboard the motorboat, sipping a steaming cup.

"Kidnapped; eh?" remarked one of the men. "Then we'd better save that boat for you. It will be a clue to those who did it."

"Oh, I know who did it, all right," answered Joe, who was rapidly feeling more like himself. "I don't need the boat for evidence. But, since you have been so kind to me, I wish you'd do one thing more."

"Name it," promptly said the man who seemed to be in charge of the company.

"Get me somewhere so I can send word to Philadelphia—to Manager Watson of the St. Louis Cardinals. I want to explain what happened, so he won't expect me in the game to-day."

"Are you a member of the St. Louis team?" asked one of the men, quickly.

"One of the pitchers—my name is Matson."

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The two leading men of the company looked at each other in an odd manner.

"It couldn't have happened better; could it, Harry?" one asked.

Our hero was a trifle mystified until the man called Harry explained.

"You see, it's this way," he said. "My name is Harry Kirk, and this is James Morton," nodding toward the other man. "We manage a moving picture company, most of whom you now see," and he indicated those about him. "We have been doing a variety of stuff, and we want to get some baseball pictures. We've been trying to induce some of the big teams to play an exhibition game for us, but so far we haven't been successful. Now if you would use your influence with your manager, and he could induce some other team to play a short game, why we'd be ever so much obliged."

"Of course I'll do all I can!" cried Joe. "I can't thank you enough for your rescue of me, and the least I could do would be to help you out! I'm pretty sure I can induce Mr. Watson to let his team give an exhibition, anyhow."

"That's all we want—an opening wedge," said Mr. Kirk, "but we couldn't seem to get it. Our finding of you was providential."

"It was for me, anyhow," said Joe. "I don't know what might have happened to me if I had drifted much farther."

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Joe explained how it had happened, and the unreasoning rage of Shalleg toward him.

"He ought to be sent to jail for life, to do such a thing as that!" burst out Mr. Kirk. "You'll inform the police; won't you?"

"I think I had better," said Joe, thoughtfully.

The motor began its throbbing, and the big boat cut through the water, towing the small craft, in which Joe had spent so many uncomfortable hours.

The young pitcher was himself again, thanks to a good breakfast, and when the dock was reached was able to talk to Manager Watson over the telephone. It was then nearly noon, and Joe was in no shape to get in the game that day.

To say that the news he gave the manager astonished Mr. Watson is putting it mildly.

"You stay where you are," directed his chief. "I'll send someone down to see you, or come myself. We'll get after this Shalleg and his gang. This has gone far enough!"

"What about the game to-day?" asked Joe.

"Don't you worry about that. We'll beat the Phillies anyhow, though I was counting on you, Joe. But don't worry."

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## CHAPTER XXIX

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### SHALLEG'S DOWNFALL

PLANS to capture Shalleg and his cronies were carefully made, but were unsuccessful, for, it appeared, the scoundrel and his cronies had fled after putting Joe into the boat.

The moving picture people readily agreed to keep silent about the affair, and Manager Watson said he would explain Joe's absence from the game in a way that would disarm suspicion.

Joe soon recovered from his unpleasant and dangerous experience and, true to his promise, used his influence to induce Mr. Watson to play an exhibition game for the moving picture people.

"Of course we'll do it!" the manager exclaimed. "That would be small pay for what they did for you. I'll see if we can't play the Phillies right here. Of course it will have to be arranged with the high moguls, but I guess it can be."

And it was. The game was not to count in the series, for some changes and new rules had to be adopted to make it possible to get it within the scope of the moving picture cameras. And the picture managers agreed to pay a sum that made it worth while for the players, Joe included, to put up a good game of ball.

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To his delight Joe was selected to pitch for his side, and fully himself again, he "put up a corking good game," to quote his friend Rad.

"Well, I'm not sorry to be leaving Philadelphia," remarked Joe to Rad, when their engagement in the Quaker City was over, and they were to go on to Brooklyn. "I always have a feeling that Shalleg will show up again."

"I only wish he would!" exclaimed Rad.

"I don't!" said Joe, quickly.

"I mean and be captured," his chum added, quickly.

"Oh, that's different," laughed Joe.

Taking three of the four games from the Superbas, two of them on the same day, in a double-header, the St. Louis team added to their own prestige, and, incidentally, to their standing in the league, gaining fourth place.

"I think we have a good chance of landing third place," the manager exulted when they started West. They were to play Chicago in their home town, then work their way to New York for a final set-to with the Giants, and end the season on Robison Field.

And in St. Louis something happened that, for a long time, took Shalleg out of Joe's path.

The first game with Chicago had been a hard one, but by dint of hard work, and good pitching (Joe going in at the fourth inning to replace Barter), the Cardinals won.

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"And we'll do the same to-morrow," good-naturedly boasted Manager Watson, to Mr. Mandell of the Cubs.

"Well, maybe you will, but I have a good chance to put it all over you," said the Chicago manager, and there was that in his manner which caused Mr. Watson to ask quickly:

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. How much chance do you think you'd have to win if our men knew your battery signals?"

"Not much, of course, but the thing is impossible!"

"Is it?" asked the other, quietly. "Not so impossible as you suppose. I have just received an offer to have the signals disclosed to me before the game to-morrow."

"By whom?" cried Manager Watson. "If any of my players is trying to throw the team——"

"Go easy," advised the other with a smile. "It's nothing like that. The offer came from a man, who, I understand, tried unsuccessfully to become a member of the Cardinals."

"Not Shalleg!"

"That's who it was."

"Where can I get him?" asked Mr. Watson, eagerly. "He's wanted on a good deal more serious charge than that. Where can I get him?"

"I thought you might want to see him," said the Chicago manager, "so I put him off. I've made an appointment with him——"

"Which the police and I will keep!" interrupted Mr. Watson.

"Perhaps that would be better," agreed Mr. Mandell.

So the plot for the downfall of Shalleg was laid. It appeared that he had come back to St. Louis, and, by dint of careful watching, and by his knowledge of the game, he had managed to steal the signal system used between the Cardinal pitchers and catchers. This he proposed disclosing to the Chicago team, but of course the manager would have nothing to do with the scheme.

Shalleg had named a low resort for the transfer of the information he possessed, he to receive in exchange a sum of money. He was in desperate straits, it appeared.

The Cubs' manager, Joe and Mr. Watson, with a detective, went to the appointed meeting place. The manager went in alone, but the others were hiding, in readiness to enter at a signal.

"Did you bring the money?" asked Shalleg, eagerly, as he saw the man with whom he hoped to make a criminal "deal."

"I have the money, yes," was the cool answer. "Are you prepared to disclose to me the Cardinal battery signals?"

"Yes, but don't speak so loud, someone might hear you!" whined Shalleg.

"That's just what I want!" cried the manager in loud tones, and that was the signal for the officer to come in. He, Joe and Mr. Watson had heard enough to convict Shalleg.

"Ha! A trap!" cried the released player, as he saw them close in on him. He made a dash to get away, but, after a brief struggle, the detective overpowered him, for Shalleg's manner of life was not such as to make him a fighter.

He saw that it was no use to bluff and bluster, and, his nerve completely gone, he made a full confession.

After his unsuccessful attempt to borrow money of Joe, he really became imbued with the idea that our hero had injured him, and was spreading false reports about him. So he set out to revenge himself on Joe.

It was Shalleg who induced Wessel to pick a quarrel with Joe, hoping to disable the pitcher so he could not play ball that season. It was a mean revenge to plot. And it was Shalleg's idea, in luring Joe to the lonely house, on the plea of helping Rad, to involve him in a fight that might disable, or disgrace, him so that he would have to resign from the Cardinals. Likewise it was a tool of Shalleg's who kept track of Joe, who boarded the same car as did our hero, and who so cruelly twisted his arm, hoping to put him out of the game.

Shalleg denied having induced Wessel to enter Joe's room that night in question, but his denial can be taken for what it was worth. As to Weasel's object, it could only be guessed at. It may have been robbery, or some worse crime.

And then, when all else failed, Shalleg tried the desperate plan of kidnapping Joe, but, as he explained, he did not really intend bodily harm. And perhaps he did not. He was a weak and criminally bad man, but perhaps there was a limit.

"Well, this is the end!" the former ball player said, bitterly, as he was handcuffed, and led away. "I might have known better."

Some time afterward, when the ball season had closed, Shalleg was tried on the charge of mistreating Joe, and was convicted, being sentenced to a long term. His cronies were not caught, but as they were only tools for Shalleg no one cared very much whether or not they were punished.

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## CHAPTER XXX

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### THE HARDEST BATTLE

FILLED to overflowing were the big bleachers. Crowded were the grandstands. Above the noise made by the incoming elevated trains, and the tramp of thousands of feet along the boarded runways leading to the big concrete Brush Stadium at the Polo Grounds, could be heard the shrill voices of the vendors of peanuts, bottled ginger ale and ice cream cones.

Out on the perfect diamond, laid out as though with rule and compass, men in white and other men in darker uniforms were practicing. Balls were being caught, other balls were being batted.

It was a sunny, perfect day, hot enough to make fast playing possible, and yet with a refreshing breeze.

"Well, Joe, are we going to win?" asked Rad, as he and his chum went to the bench after their warm-up work.

"I don't know," answered the young pitcher slowly. "They're a hard team to beat."

It was the final game between the Giants and the Cardinals. To win it meant for the St. Louis team that they would reach third place. And if they did get third position, it was practically certain that they could keep it, for their closing games in St. Louis were with the tail-enders of the league.

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"Are you going to pitch, Joe?"

"I don't know that, either. Haven't heard yet," was the answer.

Just then a messenger came up to Joe.

"There's somebody in that box," he said, indicating one low down, and just back of home plate, "who wants to speak to you."

Joe looked around, and a delighted look came over his face as he saw his father and mother, Clara, and one other.

"Mabel!" exclaimed Joe, and then he hurried over.

"Say, this is great!" he cried, with sparkling eyes. "I didn't know you folks were coming," and he kissed his mother and sister, and wished—but there! I said I wouldn't tell secrets.

"Your father found he had some business in New York," explained Mrs. Matson, "so we thought we would combine pleasure with it, and see you play."

"And they looked me up, and brought me along," added Mabel. "I just happened to be in town. Now we want to see you win, Joe!"

"I don't even know that I'll play," he said, wistfully.

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Joe felt that he could bide his time, and yet he did long to be the one to open the game, as it was an important one, and a record-breaking crowd was on hand to see it.

But it was evident that Manager Watson's choice of a pitcher must be changed. It needed but two innings to demonstrate that, for the Giants got four hits and three runs off Slim Cooney, who, most decidedly, was not in form.

The substitution of a batter was made, and the manager nodded at Joe.

"You'll pitch!" he said, grimly. "And I want you to win!"

"And I want to," replied Joe, as he thought of those in the box watching him.

It was to be Baseball Joe's hardest battle. Opposed to him on the mound for the Giants was a pitcher of world-wide fame, a veteran, well-nigh peerless, who had won many a hard-fought game.

I might describe that game to you in detail, but I will confine myself to Joe's efforts, since it is in him we are most interested. I might tell of the desperate chances the Cardinals took to gain runs, and of the exceptionally good stick work they did, against the redoubtable pitcher of the Giants.

For a time this pitcher held his opponents to scattering hits. Then, for a fatal moment, he went

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up in the air. It was a break that was at once taken advantage of by the Cardinals. They slammed out two terrific hits, and, as there were men on bases, the most was made of them. Two wild throws, something exceptional for the Giants, added to the luck, and when the excitement was over the Cardinals had tied the game.

"Oh, wow!"

"Now, we've got 'em going!"

"Only one run to win, boys!"

"Hold 'em down, Joe!"

Thus came the wild cries from the stands. Excitement was at its height.

There was a hasty consultation between the peerless pitcher and the veteran catcher. They had gone up in the air, but now they were down to earth again. From then on, until the beginning of the ninth inning, the Cardinals did not cross home plate, and they got very few hits. It was a marvelous exhibition of ball twirling.

But if the Giant pitcher did well, Joe did even better, when you consider that he was only rounding out his first season in a big league, and that he was up against a veteran of national fame, the announcement that he was going to be in the game being sufficient to attract a large throng.

"Good work, old man! Good work!" called Boswell, when Joe came to the bench one inning, after having allowed but one hit. "Can you keep it up?"

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"I—I hope so."

It was a great battle—a hard battle. The Giants worked every trick they knew to gain another run, but the score remained a tie. Goose egg after goose egg went up on the score board. The ninth inning had started with the teams still even.

"We've just *got* to get that run!" declared Manager Watson. "We've just *got* to get it. Joe, you are to bat first. See if you can't get a hit!"

Pitchers are proverbially weak hitters. One ingenious theory for it is that they are so used to seeing the ball shooting away from them, and toward the batter, that, when the positions are reversed, and they see the ball coming toward them they get nervous.

"Ball!" was the umpire's first decision in Joe's favor. The young pitcher was rather surprised, for he knew the prowess of his opponent.

And then Joe decided on what might have proved to be a foolish thing.

"I'm going to think that the next one will be a swift, straight one, and I'm going to dig in my spikes and set for it," he decided. And he did. He made a beautiful hit, and amid the wild yells of the crowd he started for first. He beat the ball by a narrow margin, and was declared safe.

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A pinch hitter was up next, and amid a breathless silence he was watched. But the peerless pitcher was taking no chances, and walked him, thinking to get Joe later.

But he did not. For, as luck would have it, Rad Chase made the hit of his life, a three-bagger, and with the crowd going wild, two runs came in, giving the Cardinals the game, if they could hold the Giants down.

And it was up to Joe to do this. Could he?

As Joe walked to the mound, for that last momentous inning, he glanced toward the box where his parents, sister and Mabel sat. A little hand was waved to him, and Joe waved back. Then he faced his first man.

"Thud!" went the ball in Doc Mullin's big mitt.

"Ball!" droned the umpire.

"Thud!" went another. The batter stood motionless.

"Strike!"

The batter indignantly tapped the rubber.

"Crack!"

"You can't get it!" yelled the crowd, as the ball shot up in a foul.

The umpire tossed a new ball to Joe, for the other had gone too far away to get back speedily.

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Joe wet the horsehide, and sent it drilling in. The batter made a slight motion, as though to hit it, but refrained:

"Strike! You're out!" said the umpire, stolidly.

"Why, that ball was——"

"You're out!" and the umpire waved him aside, impatiently.

Joe grinned in delight.

But when he saw the next man, "Home Run Crater," facing him, our hero felt a little shaky. True, the chances were in favor of the Cardinals, but baseball is full of chances that make or break.

"If he wallops it!" thought Joe.

But Crater did not wallop it. In his characteristic manner he swung at the first delivery, and connected with it. Over Joe's head it was going, but with a mighty jump Joe corralled it in one hand, a sensational catch that set the crowd wild. Joe was playing the game of his life.

"Only one more!"

"Strike him out!"

"The game is ours, Joe!"

But another heavy hitter was up, and there was still work for Baseball Joe to do.

To his alarm, as he sent in his first ball, there came to his arm that had been twisted on the car, a twinge of pain.

"My! I hope that doesn't bother me," thought Joe, in anxiety.

"Ball one," announced the umpire.

Joe delivered a straight, swift one. His arm hurt worse, and he gritted his teeth to keep from crying out.

"Strike!" grunted the umpire, and there was some balm for Joe in that.

The batter hit the next one for a dribbler, and just managed to reach first.

"If I could only have managed to get him out!" mused Joe. "I'd be done now. But I've got to do it over again. I wonder if I can last out?"

To his relief the next batter up was one of the weakest of the Giants, and Joe was glad. And even yet a weak batter might make a hit that would turn the tables.

"I've got to do it!" murmured Joe, and he wound up for the delivery.

"Strike!" announced the umpire. Joe's heart beat hard.

"Here goes for the fadeaway," he said to himself, "though it will hurt like fun!"

It did, bringing a remembrance of the old hurt. But it fooled the batter, and there were two strikes on him.

The game was all but over. With two out, and two strikes called, there could be but one result, unless there was to be something that occurs but once in a lifetime. And it did not occur.

"Strike! You're out!" was the umpire's decision, and that was the end. The Cardinals had won, thanks, in a great measure, to Joe Matson's splendid work.

"That's the stuff!"

"Third place for ours!"

"Three cheers for Joe Matson—Baseball Joe!" called his teammates, who crowded around him to clap him on the back and say all sorts of nice things. Joe stood it, blushing, for a moment, and then he made his way over to the box. As he walked along, a certain quiet man who had been intently watching the game said softly to himself.

"He must be mine next season. I guess I can make a trade for him. He'd be a big drawing card for the Giants."

"Oh, Joe, it was splendid! Splendid!" cried Mabel, enthusiastically.

"Fine!" said his father.

"Do you get any extra when your side wins?" asked his mother, while the crowd smiled.

"Well, yes, in a way," answered Joe. "You get treated extra well."

"And it's going to be my treat this time," said Mabel, with a laugh. "I want you all to come to dinner with me. You'll come; won't you, Joe?" she asked, pleadingly.

"Of course," he said.

"And bring a friend, if you like," and she glanced at Clara.

"I'll bring Rad," Joe answered.

They lived the great game over again at the table of the hotel where Mabel was stopping.

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"Is your arm lame?" asked Mrs. Matson, noticing that her son favored his pitching member a trifle.

"Oh, I can finish out the season," said Joe. "The remainder will be easy—only a few more games."

"And then what?" asked Rad.

"Well, a vacation, I suppose, and then get ready for another season with the Cardinals."

But Joe was not destined to remain with the Western team. The horizon was widening, and those of you who wish to follow further the adventures of our hero may do so in the succeeding volume, which will be called "Baseball Joe on the Giants; Or, Making Good as a Ball Twirler in the Metropolis."

In that we shall see how Joe rose to even higher fame, through grit, hard work and ability.

"Well, you turned the trick, old man!" declared Manager Watson, when, a few days later, the team was on the way back to St. Louis. "You did it. I felt sure you could."

"Well, *I* didn't, at one time," was the rejoinder. "My arm started to go back on me."

"Well, there's one consolation, Shalleg and his crowd will never get another chance at you," went on the manager. "Now take care of yourself. I'm only going to let you play one game—the closing one at St. Louis. We won't need our stars against the tail-enders."

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And the Cardinals did not, winning handily with a number of second string men playing.

"Where are you going, Joe?" asked Rad, as they sat in their hotel room one evening, for Joe was "dolling up."

"Out to a moving picture show."

"Moving pictures?"

"Yes. That film of the exhibition game we played in Philadelphia is being shown in town. Come on up."

"Sure," assented Rad; and as they went out together we will take leave of Baseball Joe.

## THE END

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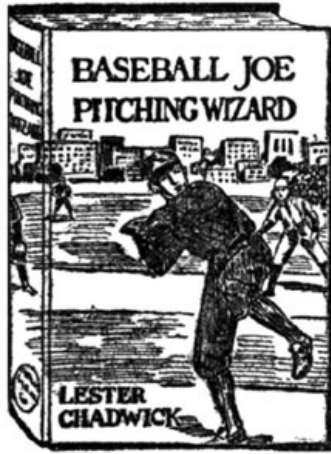
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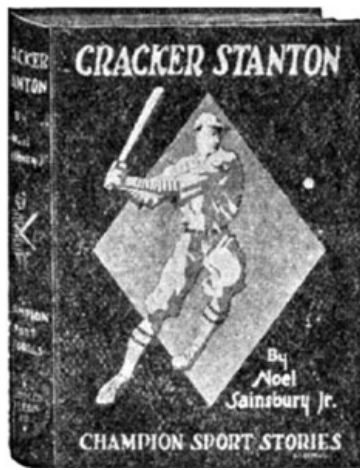
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