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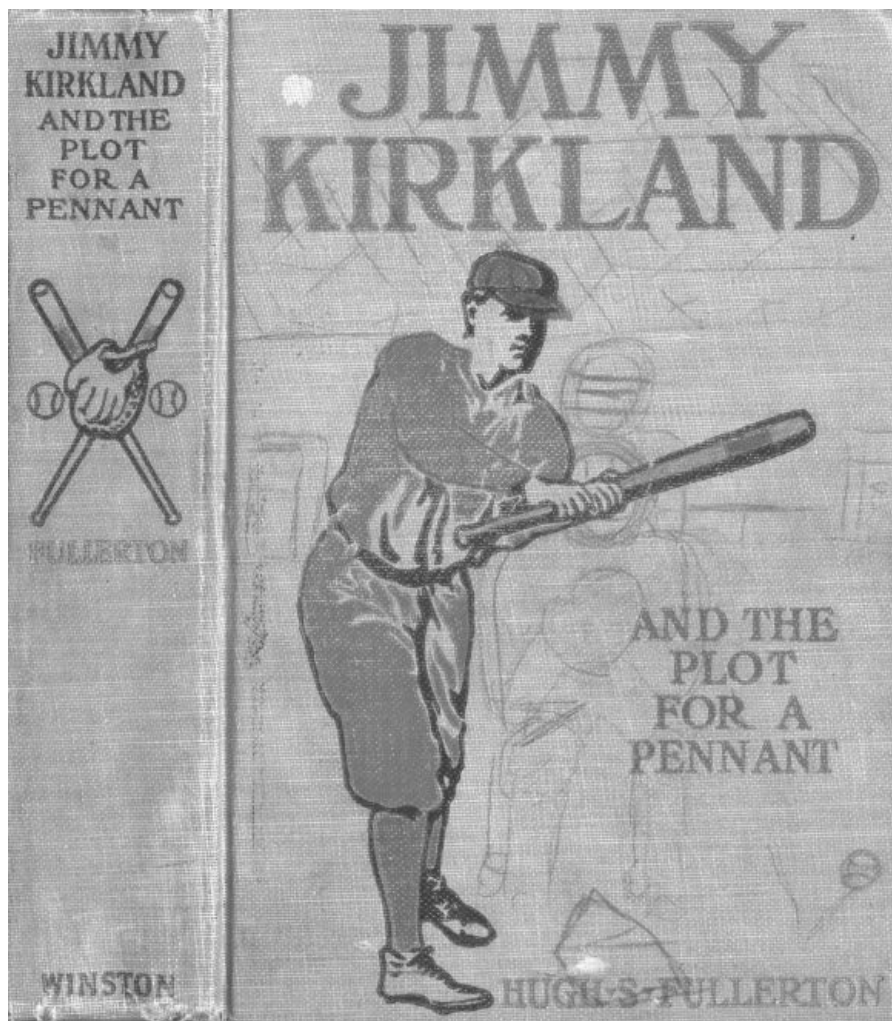
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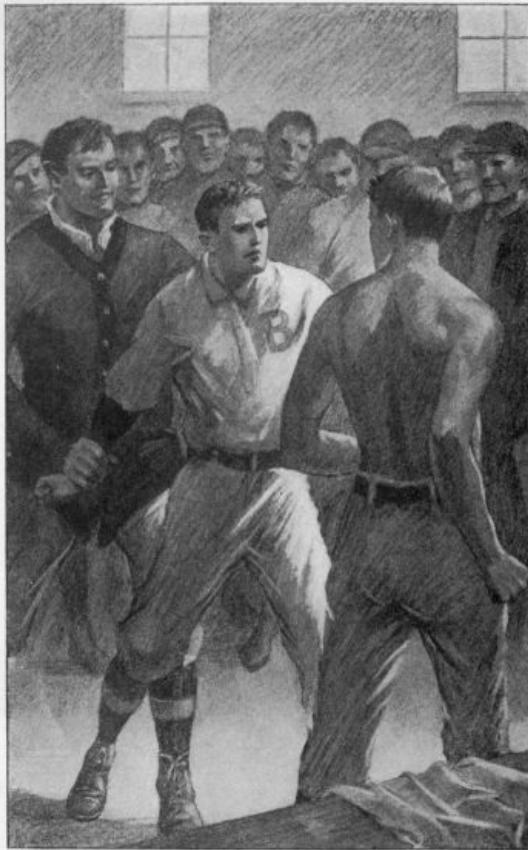
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"Now Kick His Shins"

"Now kick his shins"

JIMMY KIRKLAND

AND THE

PLOT FOR A PENNANT

BY

HUGH S. FULLERTON

ILLUSTRATED BY

CHARLES PAXSON GRAY

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To

CHARLES A. COMISKEY

**The man to whom, more than all others, the honesty
and high standard of professional baseball is
due, this little volume is dedicated with the sincere
regard of a student to his preceptor.**

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JIMMY KIRKLAND AND A PLOT FOR A PENNANT

CHAPTER I

Panthers or Bears?

The defeat in the opening game of the final series of the season between the Panthers and Bears had been a hard blow to the championship hopes of the Bears, and its effect was evident in the demeanor of the players and those associated with them. It was the second week in September. Since early in May the Blues, the Panthers and the Bears, conceded to be the three strongest teams in the league, had struggled day by day almost upon even terms, first one team leading by a narrow margin, then another, until the interest of the country was centered upon the battle for supremacy.

Then, with the Blues holding the lead by the narrowest of margins, Maloney, their premier pitcher, strained his arm, and the Blues, in despair, battled the harder only to overtax the strength of the remaining pitchers, so that the team dropped rapidly into third place, still hoping against hope to get their crippled pitching staff back into condition for the finish.

It seemed that the four-game series between the Bears and Panthers probably would prove the crisis of the year's efforts, and decide the question of supremacy. On the eve of the commencement of that series the Bear hopes had received a shock. Carson, the heaviest batter, the speediest base runner and one of the most brilliant outfielders in the league, had fractured a leg in sliding to a base, and was crippled so seriously that all hope of his recovery in time to play again that year was abandoned.

Until the day the news that Carson could not play again during the season became public, the Bears had been favorites, but with their hardest batter crippled, and Holleran, the substitute, known to be weak against curve pitching, their hope seemed destroyed. Manager William Clancy, of the Bears, his kindly, weather-beaten face wearing a troubled expression, in place of his customary cheerful grin, was investigating. The defeat of the Bears in the first game with the Panthers had revealed to all the vital weakness of the holders of the championship, and Clancy, as he sat nibbling the end of his penholder in the writing room of the hotel, faced a discouraging situation.

Across the table from him a slender girl, attired in a close-fitting street gown, was writing rapidly, covering many sheets of hotel stationery with tall, angular hieroglyphics as she detailed to her dearest friend at home the exciting events of the day.

"Betty," said Manager Clancy, looking up, "if you and Ellen are ever going to get ready you'll have to start."

"I'm ready now, Mr. Clancy," the girl responded brightly, lifting her head until she revealed the perfect curve of her firm chin, and smiled, "I left Mother Clancy in the rooms sewing on some buttons. She will be ready soon."

At that moment a slender youth, easy in movement, almost graceful in his confident carriage, entered the hotel lobby. Something in his bearing gave evidence that he was accustomed to

association with persons of refinement. His closely cropped, curling hair, sandy to the point of redness, attracted attention to his well-formed head, set well upon a pair of shoulders so wide as to give him the appearance of strength, in spite of the slenderness of his waist and the lightness of his body. His face was freckled and the uplift of his nose added to the friendly impression created by his blue eyes. His clothes were almost threadbare and his shoes were worn, but his linen was clean and his appearance neat. The youth hesitated, glancing from group to group of the players, as if trying to decide which one to approach.

"Silent" Swanson, the giant shortstop, who had earned his nickname because he was the noisiest player on the field, was standing talking with "Noisy" Norton, the second baseman, so called because he seldom spoke either on or off the field, and Adonis Williams, the star left-handed pitcher of the team. The newcomer's eyes fell upon this group, and his face lighted as he observed that Williams's hair was only a shade darker than his own. As if deciding quickly, he walked toward the group.

"You are Williams, are you not?" he inquired easily, smiling in a friendly manner.

"That's my name, but most people add a mister to it," responded Williams sneeringly.

The red-headed youth flushed and the smile died out of his eyes.

"I beg pardon, Mister Williams," he said, quietly; "I was seeking Manager Clancy. Perhaps you can tell me where to find him?"

"It isn't very hard to find Clancy," responded Williams. "We can't lose him."

"Perhaps you would be so kind as to point him out to me. I never have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Clancy."

Neither of them had observed that Swanson and Norton had drawn aside to permit the girl who had been in the writing room to pass on her way to the elevator. Evidently she overheard the youth's inquiry, for she hesitated just as Williams laughed in an ugly manner and said:

"If you don't know him you'd better peddle yourself somewhere else. He won't be in a mood to talk to hoboes to-night."

Before the slender youth could speak, the girl stepped forward and said quietly:

"Pardon me, but I overheard you inquiring for Manager Clancy. He is in the writing room."

Her brown eyes flashed with anger, her lips were set tight and her sun-browned cheeks flushed as she passed quickly on toward the elevator, not waiting to respond to the thanks of the slender youth, who had removed his hat quickly to utter his gratitude. Then, turning toward Williams, who stood flushed and angry, his blue eyes narrowed and he said:

"Just for that, I'll kick you on the shins in the club house and dare you to fight."

"What? You will, huh?" spluttered the astounded pitcher.

He would have said more, but before he could recover, the newcomer, smiling oddly, turned and walked toward the writing room and held out his hand to the famous Clancy, for six years leader of the Bears.

The slender youth stood with extended hand while Manager Clancy gazed up from his writing.

"Mr. Clancy?" he asked, smiling.

"Yes. Sit down," responded Clancy, his intention of rebuffing the intruder changing as he saw the smile. "What can I do for you?"

"I read in the evening papers," replied the youth, still smiling easily, "that Carson broke a leg, and that, to win the pennant, you must find an outfielder who can hit."

"Perhaps you also read that I'd like to find a diamond about the size of my head," responded Clancy, sarcastically.

"The paper also said that you might switch Pardridge from third base to the outfield if you could find a hard-hitting infielder."

"Possibly the paper also said that if I found the diamond I'd move my gold mine to make room for it." Clancy restrained himself from further comment, feeling uncertain because of the quiet confidence of his visitor.

There was a pause, the veteran manager studying his caller and the slender youth sat smiling as if expecting Clancy to resume the conversation.

"Well?" said Clancy, glancing at his half-finished letter as if to hint that his time was entirely

too valuable to be wasted discussing academic impossibilities with entire strangers.

"Well," replied the visitor, smiling, "I'm it."

"You're what?" asked the astonished manager.

"The third baseman who can hit."

"When shall I move the gold mine?" Clancy's voice was dangerously quiet.

"To-morrow, if you like."

Clancy sat gazing at his visitor as if undecided as to whether he should explode in wrath, laugh at some joke too deep for him, or believe the slender youth was in earnest.

"Say, kid," he said slowly after studying the youth for a moment, "I admire your nerve, anyhow. If you have half the confidence on a ball field that you have off it, you'll be a wonder. Where did you ever play ball?"

A troubled expression came over the boy's face.

"Mr. Clancy," he said, quietly, "if you take me you'll have to do it without asking questions. I can play ball, and it's up to me to make good at something. All I ask is a chance to prove to you I can play. It will not cost you a cent to find out."

"Done anything?" Clancy asked, sharply.

"Criminal? No," responded the boy, flushing.

"Ever signed a professional contract?"

"No."

Clancy studied him as if trying to decide what to do. Then, raising his voice, he called:

"Oh, Sec. Come here a minute."

A tall man, his hair gray, his face wearing a frown of perpetual worry, came from the hotel lobby.

"Mr. Tabor," said Clancy, without rising, "this is Mr. Jimmie McCarthy, who is to have a try-out with us at third base. Room him with the players. You aren't stopping anywhere else, are you?"

The last question was directed to the surprised youth.

"No—I'm broke," answered the youth, flushing quickly.

"I'll fix you up in a moment," said the secretary in friendly tones as he shook hands with the youth. "Wait until I finish settling up with the baggage man."

The secretary hastened from the room, and the boy turned impulsively to the manager.

"Mr. Clancy," he said in a tone of gratitude, "I want to thank you—I don't know how. I was broke—ball playing is about all I'm good at. How did you know I didn't want to use my own name?"

"I figured you might want to forget it for a time, anyhow," said Clancy. "McCarthy is a good name and it fits your eyes."

"I can't tell you how grateful I am," said the boy impetuously. "I'll make good for you. I've failed trying to make a living. Baseball is the only thing they taught me at college that I'm good at, and when I read that you needed a third baseman I"—

"College man, eh?" asked Clancy quickly. "Well, I won't hold that against you or tip it off. Don't thank me. If you make good I'll be the one to give thanks."

The youth turned to follow the secretary as if to hide a little mist that came into his eyes, and he left Manager Clancy gazing thoughtfully after him and nibbling the end of his penholder.

"It would be a miracle," said Clancy to himself. "But I've got a hunch it will come true. He's bred right—tell it from his looks. He's game, light on his feet; good shoulders, and—and—and a pair of eyes."

CHAPTER II

A Miracle Called McCarthy

Thirty thousand persons, banked in the great grandstands and massed upon the field seats, roared with increasing excitement as from every direction solid streams of humanity poured toward the park to witness the second game of the series between the Bears and the Panthers.

The batting practice of the teams had ended and the Bears trotted out upon the field.

"Who is that red-head practicing at third?" inquired "Chucky" Rice, the veteran reporter of the Panthers.

"Name is McCarthy, a busher Clancy picked up somewhere. He is to have a trial this fall—after the pennant fight is over," said Koerner, of the *Globe*, who traveled with the Bears.

"Looks sweet on ground balls," commented Rice, watching the slender, graceful athlete, who was occupying Pardridge's place at third base. "Where did Clancy find him, Tech?"

The question was addressed to "Technicalities" Feehan, the odd little reporter who had traveled with the Bears for twenty years.

"I have not been informed," responded Feehan, adjusting his glasses and watching McCarthy closely. "He came to the hotel last night and asked for a try-out. Did you see him hit?"

"Yes," replied Rice. "Hits right-handed and he cracked two on the nose. Will he play?"

"Clancy hardly will take a chance with him at this stage," replied Koerner.

McCarthy tossed his glove to the veteran third baseman and ran toward the plate to bat grounders to the infielders. He was not aware of the fact, but Clancy had been watching him keenly during the entire practice and had asked Kennedy, the star catcher, to keep an eye on the recruit and report how he liked his actions.

"Handles himself like a ball player," commented the catcher. "He hit a curve ball {22} with a snap swing that had a lot of drive in it and he gets the ball away like a flash when it hits his hands."

"He takes things easily," said the manager. "I haven't seen him fight a ball yet. Blocks it down and recovers in plenty of time. If this game didn't mean so much"—

The game went against the Bears from the start, the break of the luck seeming always to favor the Panthers. Twice, with runners perched on second and third, Holleran had hit feeble grounders to the infield, one resulting in a runner being caught at the home plate and one in an easy out at first that finished an inning in which the Bears had threatened to amass a half dozen runs.

The seventh inning started with the Panthers leading 3 to 1, and the Bears seemingly beaten beyond hope of recovery. An error, followed quickly by a base on balls and a successful sacrifice bunt put Bear runners on second and third bases with but one out and Holleran coming to the bat. Clancy signaled him, and an instant later Umpire Maxwell announced:

"McCarthy batting for Holleran. McCarthy will play third base, Pardridge in left field."

McCarthy came to the batter's box quickly, swinging a long, light bat. He let a fast ball cut across the plate just at his shoulders and only glanced inquiringly at the umpire when it was called a strike. The next one was a quick-breaking curve, seemingly coming straight at him. He stepped slightly forward, snapped the long bat against the ball and drove it down the left field foul line; two runners sprinted across the plate, and the score was tied.

"That auburn baby can hit them curves," commented Rice. "He certainly called the turn and waded into that one."

The game went into the ninth, then the tenth, the pitchers working harder and harder and the teams batting behind them without a break to bring the victory that meant so much to them.

Jimmy McCarthy was the first batter for the Bears. From an unknown recruit he had become the sensation of the game, and thousands were asking who he was. Twice he had hit Cooke's fast "hook curve," and hit it hard, and Cooke, remembering, shook his head as his catcher signaled for another curve. The recruit watched him, and, with a sudden jerk of his belt, he stepped into position. The first ball was fast and across his shoulders, as Cooke had placed it twice before. This time instead of taking the first strike McCarthy met the ball squarely and drove it on the line over the first baseman's head. He turned first base, going at top speed, although already McKeever, the Panther's right fielder, known as one of the greatest throwers in the league, was in position to field the ball.

The roar that arose from the crowd was chopped short as McCarthy sprinted for second base.

An instant of tense uncertainty was followed by a swelling murmur of protest, disappointment and rage.

From the dust cloud just commencing to settle around second base two forms were emerging, and, as the dust drifted away, the crowd had a glimpse of a tableau. Tommy Meegher, second baseman of the Panthers, was disentangling his stocky form from the knot of arms and legs, and arising from the prostrate body of McCarthy, whose desperate slide had turned a base hit into a two-bagger. Stooping over them, his hands outspread, signifying that the runner had reached the base in safety, was Randy Ransom, crouching, in order better to see under the dust cloud raised by the hurtling bodies of the players.

A salvo of grudging applause greeted McCarthy as he arose and brushed the dust from his gray striped traveling uniform, an outburst that was followed by a frenzied spasm of enthusiasm from the Bear followers.

On the Bears' bench Manager Clancy grinned for the first time in three days.

"I believe that kid will do," he said to Kennedy. "He called the turn on that fast ball, just met it, and turned first on his stride. He slid under Meegher clean. Lay one down now," he added, addressing the order to Norton.

The skill of Noisy Norton as a sacrifice hitter was well known to the spectators in the stands, but better known to the tense, anxious infielders of the Panthers, who crouched, watching his every motion as he came to the batter's position. Norton stepped into position, shortened his hold upon the bat and glanced quickly around the infield as if noting the position of each man. Suddenly he started, as if in surprise, and glanced toward the Bears' bench. Manager Clancy nodded his head affirmatively and again Norton crouched, shortening his grip upon the bat still more, and slowly churned the inoffensive air with it. The Panther infielders, alert to detect the plan of attack to be tried by the Bears, had caught the rapid exchange of glances, and they crept a step or two closer to the batter, poising ready to leap forward to field any ball pushed toward them from Norton's bat.

The plan of assault to be tried seemed clear to the thousands of spectators. It appeared certain that a sacrifice bunt was to be attempted; that the third baseman of the Panthers was to pretend to field the ball, but that, instead, he would return to third base the moment Norton bunted, permitting Cooke, the pitcher, to try to reach the ball in time to throw to third to catch McCarthy there instead of throwing to first to retire Norton.

Cooke pitched fast and straight over the plate, intending to make Norton push the ball back to him, or into the air for a fly out. Norton, however, struck viciously, but without making an effort to hit the ball, swinging his bat in order to handicap the catcher in his effort to catch the ball and make a throw. McCarthy had started at full speed the instant Cooke had commenced to wind up to pitch the ball, and was in full flight toward third base. Before Nixon's throw, delayed and hampered by Norton's tactics in striking, reached third, McCarthy slid behind the base, his feet outstretched to hook the bag as he threw his body outward to prevent Randall, the third baseman, from exercising his deadly skill in blocking runners away from the base.

A moment later Norton drove a long fly to the outfield, and McCarthy, waiting until it was caught, sprinted across the plate with what proved to be the winning run.

"Crossed—and by a busher," lamented Kincaid, of the Panthers, as the teams started off the field after the finish of the game, walking slowly because of the press of humanity overflowing from the stands.

"What do you think of that kid, Slats?" inquired Manager Clancy, as they walked together toward the club house.

"He's a ball player, if he don't swell," responded Hartman, laconically. "He pulled that steal of third wise. He figured we wouldn't expect a busher to try to steal at that stage—and we didn't. He's a wise head for a kid."

"Looks good to me," replied Clancy. "He slipped Norton a signal not to hit, but to let him steal—and I almost fell off the bench when I saw it. I expected him to toss the game away."

"Where'd you get him?" demanded Hartman.

"He wished himself onto me," grinned Clancy. "He told me he could play ball and I believed him."

A swarm of reporters descended upon the headquarters of the visiting team, striving to discover something of the history of the slender, red-haired youngster whose coming had revived the waning pennant hopes of the Bears. McCarthy was not to be found. He had slipped away after dinner without telling anyone his plans. The reporters descended upon Manager Clancy, demanding information concerning his find.

"It's a secret, boys," responded Clancy to their insistent questions. "He is *nom de plume* and *habeas corpus*. The only place I ever heard of him playing ball was in Cognito."

"Suppress the comedy and ease us the legit," pleaded Riley, who wrote theatricals when he was not inventing English in the interest of baseball. "I can't find any record that will fit him."

"Boys," said the veteran manager, growing serious, "I don't know a thing more about him than you do. I don't know where he ever played; it never was in organized ball, or I would know where he comes from and who he is. He strolled in here last night, told me he could play ball and wanted a chance to show me that he could."

"That was considerable demonstration to-day," commented Rice. "How do you know he's square?"

"By looking at him," replied Clancy steadily. "If I needed any more evidence, he was offered \$500 to sign a Panther contract after to-day's game and told them he'd stick to me—and we haven't even talked about salary."

"What'll we call him?" asked one reporter.

"Say," replied Clancy, enthusiastically, "I dreamed last night that I had found a pot of gold wrapped up in a million-dollar bill, with a diamond as big as my hand on top of it. Call him Kohinoor."

So Kohinoor McCarthy sprang into fame in a day as the mystery of the league.

CHAPTER III

Hope for the Bears

The Bears were joyous again. They scuffled, joked, laughed and romped joyously as the team gathered in the railway station to make a hurried departure for the city of the Pilgrims on the evening after the final game of the series with the Panthers. Three victories out of four games played with the Panthers instead of the dreaded three defeats had lifted the Bears back practically to even terms with their rivals. All they had hoped for after the injury of Carson was to divide the series with the Panthers, and it was due to the sudden appearance of Kohinoor McCarthy that the victories were made possible.

All the notoriety that suddenly was thrust upon McCarthy had failed to affect him, although Manager Clancy watched his "find" anxiously, and pleaded with the newspaper men not to spoil him. No trace of the dreaded affliction known as "swelled head" had revealed itself, and because McCarthy was able to laugh over the wild stories printed concerning him, Clancy breathed more easily.

During the celebration McCarthy, who had made it possible, stood apart from the others, feeling a little lonely. McCarthy stood watching them, smiling at their antics with a feeling that he was an intruder. The truth was that the Bears had welcomed him from the start. He had won their admiration on the field and the undying friendship of Silent Swanson by his conduct in the club house on the afternoon after the close of his first game. It was that incident that made for him a chum and an enemy, who were destined to play a big part in his career.

When the players raced off the field after that victory, striving to escape being engulfed in the torrent of humanity that poured from the stands, McCarthy was caught, with a few others, and delayed. When he reached the club house the substitutes and the reserve pitchers already were splashing and spluttering under the showers. McCarthy walked to where Adonis Williams, already stripped to the waist, was preparing to take his shower, and without a word he kicked the pitcher on the shins, a mere rap, but administered so as to leave no doubt as to its purpose.

"Here——. What did you do that for?" demanded Williams.

"I told you in the hotel, when you insulted me, that I'd do it. Will you fight?"

McCarthy's blue eyes had grown narrower, and a colder blue tint came into them.

"I'll break you in pieces, you —— —— —— you," Williams spluttered with rage.

"Drop that talk and fight," challenged McCarthy, stepping into a fighting attitude.

Just then McCarthy received help from an unexpected source. Swanson, the giant of the team, broke through the circle of players that had formed in expectation of seeing a fight.

"You're all right, Bo," he roared, throwing his huge arm around the shoulders of the recruit. "You're perfectly all right, but he won't fight you."

"I'll smash"—

"Naw, you won't, Adonis," said the giant, contemptuously. "I think he can lick you, anyhow, but you had it coming. Now kick his other shin, and after that Adonis will apologize."

The suggestion raised a laugh, and eased the situation. The battle light in McCarthy's face changed to a smile.

"I'll forego the kick," he said. "I had to make good after what I told you in the hotel. I'm perfectly willing to let it drop and be friends."

He extended his hand frankly, but Williams, still scowling, did not take it.

"Never mind the being friends part of it," he said. "But if you don't want trouble, just lay away from me after this."

"Here, young fellow," said Clancy, who had arrived at the club house in time to see the finish of the altercation; "I'll do all the fighting for this club. Understand?"

"Yes," replied McCarthy, slowly, without attempting to explain.

"What do you think of my gamecock, Bill?" asked Swanson, enthusiastically. "Adonis insulted him in the hotel last night and the kid promised to kick him on the shins. He was just making good. He offered to shake hands and call it all off, but Adonis wouldn't do it. He's my roommate from now on. I'll have to take him to keep him from fighting every one."

The giant's remark caused another laugh, as his record for fights during his earlier career as a ball player had given him a reputation which obviated all necessity of fighting.

The majority of the Bears had accepted McCarthy as one of their own kind after that, and Swanson adopted him. With Swanson he seemed at home, but the others found him a trifle shy and retiring. He was friendly with all excepting Williams and Pardridge, who resented his occupation of third base while pretending to be pleased. Yet with the exception of Swanson and Kennedy he made no close friends. The admiration of the rough, big-hearted Swede shortstop for the recruit approached adoration and he was loud and insistent in voicing his praises of McCarthy.

The train which was bearing the Bears away from the city of the Panthers drew slowly out of the great station, plunged through a series of tunnel-like arches under the streets, and rattled out into the suburbs, gathering speed for the long night run. Inside the cars the players were settling themselves for an evening of recreation. Card games were starting, the chess players were resuming their six-month-long contest, and McCarthy sought his berth and sat alone, striving to read. In the berth just ahead of his seat the quartette commenced to sing.

The Bears possessed a quartette with some musical merit and musical knowledge. Kennedy, the quiet, big catcher, had a good baritone voice and it showed training. Norton, who seldom spoke, but always was ready to sing, led, and Swanson was the bass, his voice deep and organ-like, making up in power and richness much that it lost in lack of training. Madden, the tenor, was weak and uncertain yet, as Swanson remarked, "He can't sing much, but he is a glutton for punishment."

When the quartette started to sing, McCarthy dropped his book and sat gazing out into the gathering twilight, listening to the strong, healthy voices. Lights commenced to flash out from the farm houses and the haze settled in waving curtains over the ponds and the lowlands. He was lonely, homesick at thought of other voices and other scenes and the joyousness of his new comrades seemed to depress rather than to lift his spirits.

Berths were being prepared for the night. Already in several the weary and the lame were reclining, reading. Others, worn by the strain of the day's game, were getting ready to draw their curtains. The trainer and his assistant were passing quietly from berth to berth, working upon aching arms and bruised muscles, striving to keep their valuable live stock in condition to continue the struggle.

The quartette sang on and on, regardless of the lack of an audience, for no one in the car appeared to be listening. They sang tawdry "popular" songs for the most part, breaking into a ribald ragtime ditty, followed by a sickly sentimental ballad.

Kennedy's voice, without warning, rose strong and clear almost before the final chord of the song over which the quartette had been in travail had died away. Kennedy had a habit, when he wearied of the songs they sang, of singing alone some song the others did not know; some quaint old ballad, or oftener a song of higher class. For a moment the others strove vainly to follow. Then silence fell over them as Kennedy's voice rose, clearer and stronger, as he sang the old words of Eileen Aroon.

"Dear were her charms to me."

His voice was pregnant with feeling.

"Dearer her laughter—free."

Kennedy was singing as if to himself, but as he sang a voice, strong and fresh, like a clear bell striking into the music of chimes, joined his and sang with him the words:

"Dearer her constancy."

The card players suddenly lost interest in their game, dropped their hands and turned to see who was singing. Players who had been reading and those who had been vainly striving to sleep poked their heads between curtains of the berths, the better to listen.

On and on through the haunting, half-pathetic minors of the old song the clear, sweet tenor and the strong, well-modulated voice of Kennedy carried the listeners. McCarthy, leaning toward the window and gazing out upon the moonlight as if under its spell, sang on in ignorance of the interest his voice had aroused in the car.

The song ended. For a moment the silence in the car was so complete that the clicking of the wheels upon the fish plates sounded sharply. Then Swanson, with a yell, broke the spell. Hurdling the back of the berth he descended upon the startled McCarthy, who seemed dazed and bewildered by the outburst and the pattering applause that it started.

"Yeh, Bo," yelled Swanson, giving his diamond war cry. "Yeh, Bo, you're a bear. Hey, you folks, throw Maddy out of the window and make room for this red-headed Caruso. Why didn't you tell me you could sing? The quartette is filled at last!"

Flushed and laughing in his embarrassment, McCarthy was borne up the aisle and deposited in the place of honor in the quartette.

Suddenly the scuffling and boisterous laughter ceased, and the players drew aside, apologetically, to make room for an eager, bright-eyed girl, whose face was flushed with pleasure, but who advanced toward McCarthy without a trace of embarrassment. McCarthy, glancing at her, recognized the girl who had directed him to Manager Clancy on the evening of his first appearance in the Bear camp.

"I was coming to say good-night to father," she said quickly, "and I heard you sing. I want to thank you."

She extended her hand and smiled. McCarthy stared at her in a bewilderment. Some memory of long ago stirred within him. He recalled in a flash where he had seen the face before; the face that had come into his boyhood at one of its unhappiest hours. He had dreamed of the face, and the memory of the kind brown eyes, filled with sympathetic tenderness, never had left him. She was the same girl. He realized suddenly that he was staring rudely and strove to stammer some reply to her impulsive thanks.

"Oh, I say," he protested. "It was nothing—I wasn't thinking"—

"You sang it beautifully," she interrupted.

"The song is one of my favorites. I did not know Mr. Kennedy knew it."

"Used to sing it at home," said Kennedy, as if indifferent.

"Thank you," McCarthy stammered, partly recovering his poise. "It is good of you to like it. I seldom sing at all. The song made me forget where I was."

"You must sing for us," she said simply. "The boys will make you. I am certain that after you feel more at home among us you will give us that pleasure. Good-night—and thank you again."

The girl smiled and McCarthy, stuttering in his effort to reply, managed to mutter good-night as she passed into the next car.

"It's a pink Kohinoor now," said the relentless Swanson, as he observed the flushed face of the recruit. "All fussed up, isn't he?"

"Oh, cut it out," retorted McCarthy, striving to cover his embarrassment by ball field conversational methods. "A fellow might be expected to be a little bit embarrassed with a lot of big stiffs like you standing around and never offering to introduce a fellow."

"I forgot it, Kohinoor," said Kennedy quickly. "I forgot you never had met her. She is Betty Tabor, Sec's daughter, and one of the best little women in the world. Even Silent is a gentleman when she is with the team."

"I'm always a gent, Bo," declared Swanson indignantly. "I took a night school course in etiquette once. Any one that ain't a gent when she is around I'll teach to be a gent—and this is the perfessor."

He exhibited a huge, red fist and smote the cushions of the berth with a convincing thud.

"I'll introduce you properly to-morrow," volunteered Kennedy. "Come on and get into the quartette. We'll try you out."

McCarthy surrendered more to conceal his agitation than because he felt like singing.

The quartette sang until the bridge players grew weary of the game and the tired athletes who preferred sleep to the melody howled imprecations upon the vocalists.

For a long time after McCarthy climbed into his berth he remained staring into the darkness, striving to recall the outlines of a face set with a pair of friendly brown eyes that lighted with a look of eager appreciation. He remembered the little dimples at the corners of the mouth, and the wealth of soft, brown hair that framed the oval of her face. He blushed hotly in the darkness at the thought of his own rather threadbare raiment, and he decided that he would evade an introduction until he could secure money from Manager Clancy and recover the clothes he had left in an express office.

He found himself striving to compare her face with that of another.

"She is not as pretty as Helen is," he told himself. "But it's different somehow. Helen never seemed to feel anything or to understand a fellow, and I'm sure Betty—Betty? I wonder if that is her real name—I'll sing for her as often as she will listen."

And, after a long reviewing of the past that was proving such a mystery and which the baseball reporters were striving in vain to explore, McCarthy muttered: "I've made a fool of myself," and turned over and slept.

CHAPTER IV

"Kohinoor" Meets Betty

The train was speeding along through the upper reaches of a beautiful valley when McCarthy awoke. As he splashed and scraped his face in the washroom he found himself torn between desire to hasten the introduction which Kennedy had promised and to avoid meeting the girl. He glanced down at his worn garments, wondering whether or not the girl had observed them. He went forward to the dining car with sudden determination to avoid the introduction. The dining car was crowded, and the table at which Swanson was eating was filled. McCarthy stopped, looked around for a vacant seat. There seemed to be only one—and at that table Miss Betty Tabor was breakfasting with Manager Clancy and his wife.

"Good morning," said the girl, smiling brightly. "There is a seat here. My father had to hurry away. Mr. Clancy will introduce us."

Clancy suspended his operations with his ham and eggs long enough to say:

"Miss Taber, Mr. McCarthy. Kohinoor, this is the old lady."

"I heard Mr. McCarthy sing last night," said the girl, acknowledging the informal presentation. "He sings well."

"So I should guess," remarked Clancy dryly. "Swanson has been bellowing his praise of it until everyone on the train thinks we have grabbed a grand opera star who can hit 400."

McCarthy found himself talking with Miss Taber and Mrs. Clancy and laughing at the quaint half brogue of the manager's buxom wife as if they had known each other all their lives. Clancy himself had little to say. The conversation had drifted to discussion of the country through which the train was running and McCarthy suddenly ceased talking.

"I always have loved this part of the valley," said Miss Taber. "When I was a little girl father brought me on a trip and I remember then picking out a spot on the hills across the river where, some day, I wanted to live. I never pass it without feeling the old desire. Have you been through this country before?"

The question was entirely natural, but McCarthy reddened as he admitted it was his first trip.

"And what part of the world do you come from?" asked Mrs. Clancy.

"I'm from the West," he responded. "Probably that is why I admire this green country so much."

"What is your home town?" persisted Mrs. Clancy.

Miss Taber, scenting an embarrassing situation, strove to change the subject, but Mrs. Clancy refused to be put off.

"Why is it you are ashamed of your home and play under another name, boy?" she demanded.

"Why do you think my name isn't McCarthy?" he parried.

"The McCarthys aren't a red-headed race," she said, her brogue broadening. "Ye have Irish in ye, but ye're not Irish. Is baseball such a disgraceful business ye are ashamed to use your name?"

"Of course not, Mrs. Clancy," he responded indignantly. "It is a good enough business—but—but—Oh, I can't explain."

"This mystery business is a big drawing card," remarked Manager Clancy, endeavoring to ease the situation. "They flock to see him because each one can make up his own story. Let him alone, mother. Don't spoil the gate receipts."

"Let him alone, is it?" she asked, turning upon her husband. "'Tis for his own sake I'm speaking. They'll be saying you've done something bad and wicked and are afraid to use your own name."

"What isn't true cannot hurt anyone," he replied quickly. "I have not committed any crimes."

"Mother is a good deal right about it," remarked Clancy quietly. "A baseball player is a public person. The fans are likely to say anything about a player, and the less they know the more they will invent."

"I believe Mother Clancy is right," said Miss Taber, seeing that her effort to turn the conversation had failed.

"But there really isn't anything to tell—anything any one would be interested in. It's a private matter," protested McCarthy.

"Listen, boy," said the manager's wife. "I've been with the boys these many years. They are all my boys, even the bad ones, and I don't want any of them talked about."

"There is nothing to talk about," he contended, irritated by the persistency of the manager's wife.

"They're already saying things," she responded, leaning forward. "They're a saying that you've done something crooked—that you've thrown ball games——"

"Oh," ejaculated Miss Taber. "They wouldn't dare!"

"I'd like to have someone say that to me," McCarthy said, flushing with anger.

"Hold on, mother," interrupted Clancy. "I'm managing this team——Let up on him. Where do you hear that kind of talk?"

"I heard it in the stands," she argued earnestly. "They were saying you knew all about it. If you deny it they'll tell another story and if you keep quiet they'll think its a confession. Tell them what you are and where you came from, boy."

Her voice was pleading and her interest in his welfare was too real not to affect him.

"I'm sorry, Mother Clancy," he said gratefully, unconsciously adopting the term he had heard Betty Tabor use. "There is nothing I can tell them—or anyone—now."

"It's sorry I am, Jimmy," she responded sadly. "If it's anything ye can tell me come to me."

"I see I have another adopted son," remarked Clancy teasingly as he winked at Miss Tabor. "Ellen mothers them all, as soon as she learns their first names—even the Swede."

"'Tis proud I'd be to have a son like Sven," she said, defensively.

The breakfast ended rather quietly and McCarthy returned to his seat in the players' car dispirited. In his heart he knew that Mrs. Clancy had spoken the truth. He knew, too, that Betty Tabor held the same opinion and, somehow, her opinion of him counted more than that of all the others.

"If I only could explain," he kept thinking. "They have no right to ask," he argued with himself. "Why do they suspect a man just because he refuses to tell them all his private affairs?"

McCarthy was settling himself to resume reading when Adonis Williams came down the aisle and sat down in the other half of the seat. Williams looked at him patronizingly for an instant, and in a rather sneering tone said:

"Just a friendly little tip, young fellow. Keep off my preserves and you'll get along better with this club."

"I don't quite understand you," replied McCarthy, his eyes narrowing with the anger aroused by the air of superiority assumed by the pitcher.

"I was watching you during breakfast," said Williams. "Don't get it into your head that because you happened to play a couple of good games of ball you can run this club and do as you please."

"Hold on a minute," retorted McCarthy, flushing with anger. "If you have any grievance against me say so. Don't beat around the bush. I don't know what you are talking about."

"I wanted to tip you off to keep away from the young woman you ate breakfast with."

McCarthy's eyes flashed angrily, and he started to rise, but controlled himself with an effort.

"Only muckers discuss such things," he said, coldly.

"Well, we're going to discuss it," retorted Williams, who rapidly was working himself into a rage. "That young lady is going to be my wife, and I don't care to have her associating with every hobo ball player that joins the team."

McCarthy clenched his fists and started to his feet, but gritted his teeth and kept control of his temper. "You're to be congratulated—if it is true," he said slowly, his tone an insult. "Men cannot fight over a woman and not have her name dragged into it. Drop that part of it and tonight I'll insult you and give you a chance to fight."

"Any time you please," replied Williams, rather taken aback. "I think you're yellow and won't dare fight."

He swaggered down the aisle, leaving McCarthy angry, helpless and raging. He was boiling with inward anger when Swanson slid down into the seat with him as the train entered the suburbs of the Pilgrim City.

"Smatter, Bo?" asked Swanson, quickly observing that something was wrong. "I saw Williams talking with you. Has he been trying to bluff you? Don't mind him. He has been as sore as a Charley horse ever since you joined the team, and he won't overlook a chance to start trouble."

"He has started it all right," replied McCarthy, savagely. "We're going to fight to-night and I'll"—

"Steady, Bo, steady," warned Swanson, dropping his voice. "That's his game, is it? He won't fight any one. He heard Clancy warn you not to fight and he is trying to get you in bad. I know his way."

"I told him I'd fight," responded McCarthy, worriedly. "Now I'll have to. I don't know anything I'd enjoy better."

"I'd like to second you and make you do it," responded the giant. "But it would be playing into his hands if you punched him. Leave him to me. I'll fix his clock."

Swanson's methods were all his own. The repairing of Williams's timepiece took place in the big auto 'bus that carried the players from the train to their hotel. Swanson, wise with long experience in such matters, secured a seat across the 'bus from Williams, and when the vehicle rolled onto smoother streets he addressed the pitcher.

"Hey, Adonis," he said in tones Manager Clancy could not fail to hear, "trying to take out your grouch on Kohinoor, eh? You lay off him or count me in on anything that comes off."

"That sneak been tattling and crying for help, eh?" sneered Williams. "I wasn't going to hurt him."

"You're right, you're not," retorted Swanson. "He didn't tell me. I saw you trying to start something with him, and I've seen you do it to too many other kids not to know what you were up to."

"Who's talking fight?" demanded Clancy sharply, turning to scan the players until his eyes rested upon Williams's flushed and angry face.

"Nobody is going to fight," said Swanson easily. "Adonis has been trying to bully Kohinoor and stir him up. I guess he thought he could put over his bluff because you told Kohinoor not to fight."

"Adonis, you cut that stuff out or I'll take a hand in it myself," said Clancy, whose ability and willingness to fight had earned him a reputation during his playing days. "You've had a grouch for a week or more. As for you, Kohinoor, don't think you can fight your way through this league. The first thing you have to do is to learn to stand punishment and keep your temper."

"No fresh prison pup can swell up and try to cut into my affairs," muttered Williams, sullen under the rebuke.

McCarthy sprang up to avenge the fresh insult, but before he could act or speak he was forestalled.

"Oh," said Clancy sharply. "So you're the fellow who has been making that kind of talk? I've been trying to find out where it came from. One more bit of that kind of conversation will cost you a bunch of salary."

"I've heard it everywhere," muttered Williams, taken aback by the sudden defense of the recruit by the manager.

"Well, don't hear any more of it," snapped Clancy, and McCarthy, feeling he had emerged with the honors, discretely maintained silence.

"What started Adonis after you this morning?" asked Swanson, as he hurled garments around the room and wrought disaster to the order of his trunk as he hunted pajamas.

"Guess he was just trying to start something," responded McCarthy, still reading.

"Girl?" inquired Swanson.

"What makes you think that?"

"He was mad when he saw you at breakfast with Betty. He's jealous of everyone who talks to her."

"She's a dandy girl," said McCarthy, generously. "I don't much blame a fellow for being jealous when he is engaged to a girl like that."

"Engaged to Betty Tabor? That stiff?" ejaculated Swanson. "Say, did he spring a line of talk like that on you? Why, he has been crazy about her for three years, but she knows what he is, and she won't talk to him any more than to be polite."

"I thought it was odd," commented McCarthy, his heart becoming strangely lighter.

"Don't make any mistake, though," added Swanson earnestly, as he turned out the lights. "You've stirred up a bad enemy. He won't fight you openly; but keep an eye on him."

Swanson's warning fell upon deaf ears. McCarthy's attack of blues was cured, and he fell asleep to the music of street car wheels that seemed to say: "She isn't engaged, she isn't engaged," as they rolled past the hotel.

CHAPTER V

The Tempter

The Bears were coming into their hotel after the first game of the series with the Pilgrims. The throng in the lobby pressed forward, forming a lane through which they were compelled to run the gauntlet of curious and admiring eyes. Easy Ed Edwards was smiling sardonically as he noted the little display of hero-worship, and he watched the procession of battle-stained athletes until Adonis Williams entered. The handsome, arrogant pitcher was laughing as he strutted for the benefit of the onlookers, but, as his eyes met the cold, steady gaze of the gambler, his laugh gave way to a look of alarm. Edwards nodded coldly and motioned with his head for the player to come to him. Williams crossed the lobby to the cigar stand and held out his hand. Edwards did not seem to observe the extended hand, but turned coldly to the case and said:

"Have a cigar?"

"Thanks," said Williams, nervously. "What brings you out here, Ed?"

"Business," replied the gambler chillingly. "Business concerning you—and others. Come to my room to-night."

"Can't—I was going out. Had an engagement," Williams faltered, as he dropped his eyes to avoid meeting those of Edwards.

"I want you in my room to-night," said Edwards coldly, ignoring the refusal.

"You seem to think you have a mortgage on my life," said Williams, angered by the tone and manner of the gambler.

"Well—on your baseball life, I have," responded the gambler without changing a muscle of his face.

The pitcher started to flare into anger, then paled and his eyes dropped under the gambler's steady gaze.

"Well," he said, uncertainly, "I've got to dress, I'll see you later."

"Better drop in early. You'll probably pitch to-morrow and you must keep in condition." Edwards' tone was ironic as he added for the benefit of the clerk who was handing him his change: "The race is getting warm and you can't be too careful of your condition."

What happened in the gambler's room that evening was never known to any save the two who were present, but shortly after 11 o'clock Williams came downstairs white and shaking with passion, and went in to the bar. He emerged nearly an hour later, flushed and unsteady, just in time to encounter Manager Clancy, his wife, Miss Taber and McCarthy, chatting and laughing as the men bade the women good-night at the elevators. Clancy, catching sight of him, remarked:

"Hello, Adonis. Better hit the hay. You work to-morrow."

Williams turned away and said: "All right." But when the manager and McCarthy entered the elevator Williams returned to the barroom, and when, at 1 o'clock, the bar closed, he went unsteadily to his room, after informing the bartender that he was the best pitcher in the world.

The Bears faced the Pilgrims for the third game of the series before a huge Saturday crowd, attracted by the announcement that Puckett, the star pitcher of the Pilgrims would pitch against Adonis Williams. The teams battled brilliantly for three innings, although Williams was wild and unsteady. Twice sharp work by the infielders prevented the Pilgrims from scoring, and when the fourth inning commenced the crowd was cheering the Pilgrims wildly and encouraging them to drag down the Bears from their proud position at the head of the-league. Manager Clancy, crouching forward near the players' bench, was watching Williams closely, and every few moments his worried frown and quick gesture showed that he was not pleased with the manner in which his best left-hander was working. Between innings the manager talked in low tones with Kennedy, who was catching, seeking to discover why Williams seemed wild and what was the matter with his curve ball.

"Get out there and warm up a bit, Will," said Clancy to Wilcox, his reliable veteran. "They're likely to get after Adonis any minute."

To those in the stands it seemed as if Williams was pitching just as well as was his rival, but both teams knew that he was not in his best form, and that it was luck and fast fielding, rather than good pitching, that was saving him from being batted hard. The Pilgrims attacked him in each inning with confidence born of the certainty that sooner or later their hard drives would begin to fall in safe ground, while the Bears played the harder to prevent the start of a rally.

The break came in the sixth inning. A base on balls to the first batter gave the Pilgrims the opening for which they had been waiting and they rushed to the assault like soldiers upon a breached wall. Douglass, the next batter, hit a line single to right so hard that the runner going from first was compelled to stop at second. Instead of delaying and steadying himself while planning a system of defense, Williams commenced pitching as rapidly as he could get the ball away from his hand. Almost before the batter was in position he pitched a fast ball straight over the plate and the batter bunted down toward shortstop. McCarthy was racing upon the ball, ready to scoop it in perfect position for a throw. Williams attempted to field the ball which either McCarthy or Swanson could have handled. Williams touched the ball with his groping fingers just before McCarthy, stooping and going at full speed, scooped it and tried to snap it to second base. The ball left his hand just as he crashed with terrific force into Williams. Both men reeled and went down, stunned and dazed. The ball flew wild and rolled on into right field. One Pilgrim progressed to the plate. Douglass, who had been on first, dived safely to third, while only Swanson's fast recovery drove the batter back to first.

Williams arose, hurt and furious, and while McCarthy was striving to struggle to his feet the pitcher aimed a vicious blow at his head. Swanson's arm was interposed just in time to stop the blow, and before Williams could strike again players of both teams and the umpires rushed in and prevented further hostilities. The shaken and bruised players recovered and resumed play in a short time, and another safe hit and an out sent two more of the Pilgrims scurrying across the plate. Against the three run lead caused by the mix-up between the pitcher and third baseman the Bears fought desperately. Puckett was pitching one of his cleverest, most studious games and, although the Bears strove again and again to start a counter rally, he held them helpless and the Pilgrims won the game 3 to 1.

A sore and disappointed team crowded into the big auto 'bus after the game. They were depressed and silent, for the Panthers had won and the teams again practically were tied for the lead of the championship race. This knowledge that they had thrown away a game to a second division team which they expected to beat four times was bad enough, but that the Pilgrims should have won from Williams for the first time in two seasons made the dose more bitter. No word of blame for any one was uttered. But McCarthy, bruised and nursing a cut on his forehead, grieved and refused to be comforted.

"That was a great play you tried to make, Kohinoor," remarked Manager Clancy just before

the 'bus reached the hotel. "I like to see a player try to get the runners nearest home. If you had forced that fellow at second, as you tried to do when Adonis cut into the play, the next hit never would have got through the infield, and the chances are we'd have had a double play and won the game."

These were the first words of praise Manager Clancy ever had said to him, and he felt better.

The players had been invited to attend a performance at a theater that evening. After dinner they were grouped around the lobby of the hotel, when Edwards strolled through, going toward the desk. Manager Clancy glanced at him in surprise and a worried look came over his face.

"I wonder what that crook is doing out here?" he remarked to a group of players. "You fellows keep away from him. It's worth a player's reputation for honesty to be seen with him."

As Edwards turned from the desk he glanced quickly at Williams, caught his eye and beckoned slightly with his head. Williams suddenly pleaded that he was too weary to attend the performance and remained in the hotel, declaring his intention of retiring early. As soon as Manager Clancy, escorting the women of the party, left the hotel, Williams ascended to Edwards' room.

"See here, Ed," he said, "you're putting me in a dickens of a hole. Clancy is sore on you. He said he would fine any player who talked to you. I was afraid he'd see you tip me to come up. If he gets on I'll lose a bunch of salary. I had to sneak to come up here."

"I wanted to talk to you," replied the gambler. "I told you last night that the Panthers must win this pennant. I stand to lose close to \$80,000 if they don't. Of course they may beat you, but I want to make it a sure thing and clean up on it."

"You ought to be feeling better about it to-day," said the pitcher, in an aggrieved tone. "We lost to a dub club with me pitching. What more do you want?"

"It wasn't your fault that you lost," retorted the gambler coldly. "You tried hard to win it and you might have won if you had kept away from that bunted ball."

"I'd have thrown him out at first easily if that four-flush third baseman hadn't bumped me," snapped Williams, his pride hurt.

"Sure you would," sneered the gambler. "You'd have thrown me out of about \$160,000 just to have a better average. You had a chance to lose that game without any trouble and you're sore because you did lose it."

"Why shouldn't I be?" demanded Williams. "If we win my part of the world's series money will be close to \$4,000—enough to settle what I owe you and pay my bills."

"Now look here, Williams," said the gambler, laying aside his cigar and leaning forward across the table. "You stand to win just enough to pay your debts and you'll be broke all winter, without a sou to show for a year's work. If the Bears lose I'll cancel all you owe me and make you a present of as much as the winning players get out of the world's series. You get me?"

"Why, you d—d crook." Williams leaped from his seat threateningly. "You want me to throw the championship?"

"Sit down, you fool," snarled the gambler, viciously. "Do you want me to let Clancy know who tipped it off that Carson's leg was broken? Do you want me to tell him you got \$500 for tipping it to that Panther bunch of gamblers?"

"Now listen to sense," continued Edwards, more quickly, "you saw to-day how easily you can lose a game and blame the other fellow. You can use your head and get rich instead of being in debt. If you don't like McCarthy, all you have to do is to make him lose games for you. The papers will yell, 'Hard luck,' you'll get money and I'll clean up a fortune."

"You can't make a crook of me," whined Williams. "Wanting me to throw down a bunch of good fellows"—

"Oh, shut up. You make me sick," sneered the gambler. "All you have to do is to make a sure thing out of a doubtful one. You'll be protecting yourself and getting even with a fellow you hate."

"I won't do it." Williams was at bay and defiant.

"All right," said Edwards sharply, "then to-morrow Clancy will get some news that will start something."

"Aw, say, Ed, you wouldn't cross a fellow like that?" whined Williams.

"Wouldn't I? Perhaps you think I'll let go of all that money and not fight? I'm starting home to-morrow. I won't see you any more. I am depending on you to deliver—or I'll protect myself."

"I won't do it." Williams was desperately defiant.

"Yes you will—when you think it over," Edwards replied easily. "Let's have a drink." He rang the bell and smoked in silence while Williams sat sullenly defiant.

"I tell you I wouldn't do it for all the money in the game," declared the pitcher.

"Here comes the boy," said the gambler. "I'll watch the score of the next game you pitch to see what you do."

CHAPTER VI

Adonis Makes a Deal

The after theater crowd was trooping into the lobby of the hotel in laughing, chattering groups and drifting steadily toward the café, in which already gay parties were gathered at the tables. Manager Clancy and his wife, with Secretary Taber and his daughter, came together and they stood undecided, the men urging that they go to the restaurant for a lunch before retiring, and Miss Taber, laughing, declaring that too much pleasure in one day was bad for them. At that moment Williams, a little flushed, swaggered across the lobby, and, lifting his hat, advanced toward the group. The girl smiled pleasantly in response to his greeting, but as he spoke again she stiffened indignantly and retired a step involuntarily, as she saw he had been drinking.

"So you prefer that red-headed prison bird to me?" he asked in sneering tones.

Betty Tabor flushed, then turned pale and facing the handsome, half drunken fellow, she gazed at him steadily until, in spite of his swaggering attitude, he grew uneasy and dropped his eyes. Then she spoke. She spoke just one word, vibrant with all the scorn and anger in her being.

"Yes."

Without a glance at him she turned and stepped into the waiting car, leaving Williams staring blankly in the elevator well. The cold scorn of the girl's single word had stung him more deeply than a volume of rebuke would have done. Half maddened by jealousy and drink he turned to cross the lobby, forgetting to replace his hat, and Clancy, whose attention had been attracted by the pitcher's pursuit of the girl, grasped him by the shoulder and said sternly:

"Williams, if you take another drink to-night it will cost you a month's pay."

The manager turned to rejoin his wife, and Williams, seething with what he considered a double dose of injustice, walked unsteadily across the lobby. He sat down and meditated over his wrongs. He thought of Edwards and his offer and rising quickly he walked to the telegraph office and wrote a message, for which he paid as he handed it to the night operator. Clancy, who had been talking with friends, was waiting for an elevator and saw his pitcher writing the message. His forehead knitted into a worried frown as he turned and slowly walked toward the elevator again, whistling, as was his habit when he was seriously disturbed. Clancy determined to watch his left-hander. He did not speak of the matter to anyone, having decided to await developments. He watched Williams closely during the remaining games against the Pilgrims, which the Bears won easily, and during the trip to the city of the Maroons, where Williams was to pitch the opening game of the series.

The Bears and Panthers were fighting upon an unchanged basis, only a fraction of a game separating them in the league standing. With but eighteen more games remaining on the schedule for the Bears, and nineteen for the Panthers, the race was becoming more desperate each day and the nervous strain was commencing to tell upon some of the men. Clancy was nursing his players, knowing that one disheartening defeat might mean a break that would lead to a succession of downfalls. The more he watched Williams the stronger his conviction that something was amiss. Williams was not acting naturally and his demeanor when with the other players was a puzzle to Clancy.

He selected Williams as the pitcher in the first game against the Maroons with the purpose, being determined to find whether or not the pitcher was in condition, and he sent Wilcox, his best right-handed pitcher, out to warm up so as to be ready to rescue Williams at the first sign of distress.

"What's the matter with Adonis?" inquired Manager Clancy, as his catcher and principal adviser returned to the bench after the second inning.

"His curve is breaking slow and low and on the inside corner of the plate to the right-handers," replied Kennedy. "I can't make him keep it high and out."

"Make him use his fast one or he'll get Kohinoor killed with one of those line smashes," ordered Clancy quietly. "Watch him closely, and if he is loafing, signal me."

The third inning and the fourth reeled away without a score, and in the first half of the fifth a base on balls, a steal by Norton and a crashing drive by Partridge gave the Bears a score and the lead. Caton, one of the heaviest hitters of the Maroons, started their half of the inning, and as he stepped into position Kennedy crouched and signaled. Williams shook his head quickly and pitched a curve that broke on the inside corner of the plate. Caton drove the ball with terrific force straight at McCarthy, who managed to knock it down and hold the batter to one base. The next batter sacrificed, and Ellis, a right-handed slugger, came to bat. Again Kennedy signaled for a fast sidearm ball, pitched high, and again Williams shook his head and curved one over the plate. Ellis struck the ball with one hand and sent a carroming down to Swanson, who failed in a desperate effort to throw out the runner. With men on first and third the Bears' first and third baseman came close to the plate to cut off the runner, while the shortstop and second baseman remained in position to make a double play or to catch the runner stealing. Burley, the giant first baseman of the Maroons, was at bat, a man noted for his ability to hit any ball pitched close to him. Williams sent a strike whizzing over the plate. Again the catcher ordered a fast ball, and he pitched a curve that Burley fouled off for the second strike. Kennedy, perplexed and anxious, ran down to consult with the pitcher. Williams sullenly assented to the order to pitch high and out and waste two balls. Instead, he threw a curve, low, close to the batter's knees and barely twisting. Before Kennedy's cry of anger rose the bat crashed against the ball, which flashed down the third-base line, struck McCarthy on the arm, then on the jaw, and he went down like a poled ox, the ball carroming away toward the stand. Before it was recovered one Maroon had scored and the others were perched on second and third.

Time was called and players rushed to assist the injured third baseman. Kennedy threw off his mask and ran to the bench.

"I signaled him and told him to pitch fast and waste two," he said to Manager Clancy. "He nodded that he would and then crossed me and lobbed up an easy curve inside the plate."

"Don't say a word," cautioned Clancy, as McCarthy, still dazed, but recovering, was helped to his feet. "Keep ordering him to pitch fast and outside. Signal me if he disobeys again."

McCarthy got onto his feet unsteadily, while the trainer worked with his numb and aching arm. He winced with pain as he tried to throw to see how badly his arm was damaged. While he was walking slowly back to the bag, testing his arm anxiously, McCarthy had the second shock. The cheering in the stands drew his attention, and as he glanced toward the crowd he saw a girl. She was sitting in one of the field boxes between two men and she was staring straight at him. McCarthy lifted his cap, as if acknowledging the tribute to the crowd, but really in salutation to the girl, who flushed angrily. A wave of resentment stirred McCarthy. He strove to think that she had failed to recognize him, yet feeling that the cut was deliberate.

Play had been resumed, but McCarthy's mind was not upon it. A sharp yell from Swanson aroused him from his reverie just in time to see a slow, easy bounding ball coming toward him. He leaped forward, fumbled the ball an instant, recovered and threw wild. Two runners dashed home, the batter reached second. McCarthy was thoroughly unnerved. A few moments later he permitted an easy fly ball to fall safe in left field without touching it. His errors gave the Maroons two more scores, and, although the Bears rallied desperately late in the game, it was too late, and they were beaten 5 to 3.

A sullen crowd of players climbed into their 'bus under punishment of the jeers of the crowd that gathered to see them start back to their hotel. McCarthy, with his shoulder and head aching, but with his heart aching worse, sat with his chin drawn down into the upturned collar of his sweater, refusing to be comforted. The Bears were in second place, half a game behind the Panthers, and he, McCarthy, had lost the game. Williams was smiling as if pleased and McCarthy blazed with anger.

CHAPTER VII

McCarthy Meets Helen

"Come to the hotel parlor at eight this evening. I wish to see you."

The note, hastily scribbled on hotel letter paper, was awaiting him when Kohinoor McCarthy entered the hotel after the disastrous game. He recognized the angular scrawled writing at a glance. Since the moment his eyes had met those of Helen Baldwin during the game he had been thinking hard. Her behavior had hurt him and the thought that she deliberately had refused to recognize him stung his pride. The note proved she had recognized him on the field. Either she was ashamed of his profession or did not want the men with her to know that she knew him.

McCarthy ate a hurried dinner and paced the lobby of the hotel. He was anxious to meet the girl, yet he felt a dread of it, an uncertainty as to the grounds on which their acquaintanceship

should be resumed. For nearly half an hour he waited, growing more impatient with every minute and wondering whether there had been a mistake. His mind was busy framing a form of greeting. When last they met it had been as affianced lovers. Now— A rustle of soft garments brought him to his feet and he stepped forward with outstretched hand to meet the tall, slender girl who came leisurely from the hallway. Her mass of light, fair hair framed a face of perfect smoothness.

"Helen," he exclaimed quickly, "this is a pleasant surprise."

"I wish to talk with you, Larry," she replied without warmth, as she extended a limp hand, sparkling with jewels.

"It is good to see you, Helen," he exclaimed, a bit crestfallen because of her manner. "What brings you East? I was nearly bowled over when I saw you to-day. I thought you did not know me, but I see you did."

"Surely you did not expect me to bow to you there," she responded. "Did you desire all those people to know that I had acquaintances in that—that class?"

"Then you chose to cut me deliberately?" he asked.

"Don't be foolish, Larry," she replied. "A girl must think of herself and I did not choose to have my companions learn that I was acquainted with persons in that—profession, do you call it?"

"Well, if you are ashamed of my profession"—he said hotly.

"Nonsense," she interrupted him. "I simply did not desire to have people see me speak to a person who earns his living sliding around in the dirt on his face. That is what I wanted to see you about. What new prank is this? Are you seeking notoriety?"

"I am earning my living," he said. "Baseball is the only thing I could do well enough to make money."

"Earn your living?" The girl's surprise was sincere. "You haven't broken with your Uncle Jim, have you?"

The girl's eyes grew wider with surprise, and her tone indicated consternation.

"I have—or, rather, he has—cut me off," the boy explained rather sullenly. "I tried to find a job—thought it would be easy here in the East, but no one wanted my particular brand of ability, and I tried something I knew I could do."

"Then you—then your uncle"—the girl's consternation was real, and she hesitated. "Then our engagement"—

"I thought that was broken before I left," he replied. "You said you wouldn't marry me at all if I told Uncle Jim."

"I thought you would be sensible," she argued. "Everyone at home thinks you are sulking somewhere in Europe because of a quarrel with me. Why didn't you write to me?"

"After our last interview it did not seem necessary," he said.

"Oh, Larry," the girl said, pouting, "you've spoiled it for both of us. If you had done as I wanted you to do everything would have been happy, and now you humiliate me and all your friends by earning your living playing with a lot of roughs."

"They're a pretty decent lot of fellows," he responded indignantly.

"Why did you do it?" she demanded, on the verge of tears from disappointment and annoyance.

"I quarreled with Uncle Jim," he admitted. "I told him I wanted to marry you, and he told me that if I continued to see you he'd cut me off."

"And you lost your temper and left?" she concluded.

"Just about that," he confessed. "He told me I was dependent upon him, and said I'd starve if I had to make my own living. Of course, I could not stand that"—

"Of course," she interjected stormily. "I told you that he hated all our family, but that if we were married he would forgive you."

"I couldn't cheat him that way," he replied with some heat. "Besides you had broken with me. I knew he hated your uncle—but I thought if he knew you"—

"He would have," she said, "if you had given him a chance."

"I told him I could make my living—a living for both if you would have me," he confessed.

"Playing ball?" Her tone was bitter. "And you had an idea you would come East and make your fortune and come back and claim me?"

"I did have some such idea when I left," he confessed. "It wasn't until I was broke and unable to find work that I realized how hopeless it was to think of you."

"I couldn't bear being poor, Larry," the girl spoke with some feeling.

"We were poor once. Be sensible. Go back home and make up with Mr. Lawrence—and when I return"—

"I am making a good salary," he said steadily. "I can support two. If you care enough"—

"I couldn't marry a mere ball player," she said, shrugging with disdain.

"You used to like it when I played at the ranch and at college," he retorted angrily.

"That was different," she argued. "There you were a hero—but here you are a mere professional."

"But you attend games," he protested.

"I had to to-day. I am on my way to visit Uncle Barney for the summer, and his friend insisted upon taking us to the game."

"Oh, see here, Helen," he protested. "He's your uncle, but everyone knows he is crooked in politics and in business. Why do you accept his money?"

"He is very good to me—and I cannot bear to be poor again."

"Then you will not"—

"Be reasonable, Larry," she interrupted. "You know I cannot marry a poor man."

"Then it was only the money you cared for," he said bitterly. "Uncle Jim said it was, and I quarreled with him for saying it—and it was true."

"You put it coarsely," she said coldly. "You cannot expect me to give up the luxuries Uncle Barney provides for me and marry a ball player. Unless you make it up with your uncle I shall consider myself free."

A stifled exclamation, like a gasp of surprise, startled them, and a rustle of retreating garments in the adjoining parlor caused McCarthy to step quickly to the doorway. He was just in time to recognize the gown. He realized that Betty Tabor had overheard part of the conversation, and he wondered how much.

"Some eavesdropper, I suppose," Miss Baldwin remarked carelessly.

"She came by accident, probably to read, and departed as soon as she realized it was a private conversation," he said warmly.

"Then you know her?" she asked quickly.

"Yes," he replied, realizing he had betrayed undue interest in the defense.

"Who is she?" the girl demanded.

"One of the women with the team, daughter of the secretary," he explained, striving to appear unconcerned.

"Is she pretty?"

"Why—yes—I don't know. She is very pleasant and nice looking."

"Rather odd, isn't it, a woman traveling with a lot of tough ball players?"

"You are unjust," he exclaimed indignantly. "She is with her father and Mrs. Clancy. Besides, the ball players are not tough—at least none of them is while she is with the club."

"You seem ready to rush to her defense," she remarked with jealous accents.

"Of course, I cannot let you think she is not a nice girl."

"Of course not"—her tone was sarcastic. "Traveling around the country with a crowd of men and eavesdropping in hotel parlors."

"She would not do such a thing. You must not speak of her in that way," he stormed indignantly.

"I congratulate her upon having captured so gallant a champion," she mocked.

They were verging upon a sharper clash of words when a big man, heavy of jaw and red of face, strolled into the parlor, not taking the trouble to remove his hat.

"Oh, here you are, Helen," he said. "I've been looking everywhere. Time to start or we'll be late to bridge."

"Uncle Barney," said the girl, rising, "this is Mr.—oh, I forget. What is it you call yourself now?—McCarthy. I knew him when he was at college. He plays on some baseball team—one of those we saw to-day. Mr. McCarthy, this is my uncle, Mr. Baldwin."

"I have heard of you often, Mr. Baldwin," said McCarthy coolly, although fearful that Baldwin might remember him.

"You're McCarthy, the new third baseman, eh?" asked Baldwin, without offering his hand and merely glancing at the boy. "Saw you play to-day. Too bad you threw that game away."

"I"—McCarthy started to offer defense.

"We must be going, Helen," said Baldwin.

The girl extended her hand carelessly.

"We hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again," she said.

Baldwin, with a curt nod to the player, turned to leave the parlor and McCarthy, seizing the opportunity, said:

"As a favor, Helen, do not reveal my identity. Your uncle did not recognize me as the boy he saw play on the Shasta View team."

"You need not fear," she responded rapidly. "And, Larry, please be sensible. Go home and make it up with Mr. Lawrence—and you may hope. And," she added in a low tone, "beware of that girl."

She hurried after her uncle, who had stopped and turned impatiently, leaving McCarthy staring after her and frowning. After all, he thought bitterly, his uncle was right. All she cared for was the money and not for him. He had quarreled with his uncle, his best friend, who had taken care of him since his childhood and who had made him his heir—on account of her. He was free. Yes, he was free.

He found himself wondering that he was happy instead of bitter over the loss of Helen Baldwin. He knew now he never had loved her. With a thrill of gladness came the thought of Betty Tabor. His jaw set, the fighting look came into his blue eyes and he saw his way clearly. He was not free. His duty was to the Bears.

CHAPTER VIII

In the Deeper Waters

Two defeats at the hands of the Maroons sent the Bears into the final game of the series desperately determined to win. Their pitching staff was exhausted from the effort to stop the team which they had expected to beat easily.

The game was a brilliant exhibition of defensive playing on the part of the Bears, who were driven back by the hard hitting of the Maroons. In spite of the fierce batting of the Maroons the magnificent defensive work of the Bears held their rivals to two runs, while by their brilliant and resourceful attack and skilful inside work they had scored three runs on five scattered hits, and at the start of the eighth inning were holding grimly to their lead of one run.

McCarthy, spurred by determination to redeem himself for the errors of the preceding games, was giving a wonderful exhibition of third-base play. The knowledge that Helen Baldwin, her uncle and a group of friends were sitting in one of the field boxes directly behind him urged him to greater efforts. It was his long hit in the sixth inning, followed by a clever steal of third, that had enabled the Bears to gain the lead which they were holding by their fast work on the infield.

The Bears failed to score in their half of the eighth, and the Maroons opened with a fierce assault upon Klinker that threatened to break down the Bears' inner wall of defense. Swanson's brilliant stop and throw of a vicious drive checked the bombardment, but a safe drive and a two-

base hit went whizzing through beyond the finger tips of the diving infielders, and there were runners on second and third bases, one out and a hit needed to turn the tide in favor of the Maroons again.

The infield was drawn close in the hope of cutting off the runner from the home plate. It was desperate baseball, and, as the infielders advanced to the edge of the grass, each man knew that a line smash, a hard-driven bouncer between them, or even a fumble, probably meant the destruction of their pennant hopes.

The ball was hit with terrific force straight at McCarthy, who threw up his hands and blocked desperately. The ball tore through his hands, struck his knee with numbing force and rolled a few feet away. He pounced upon it and like a flash hurled it to Kennedy at the plate, so far ahead of the runner who was trying to score that he turned back toward third, with Kennedy in pursuit. Swanson had come up to cover third, and the runner from second base stood at the third bag watching the play, ready to dash back if the runner, trapped between third and the plate, managed to elude the pursuers and regain third base. Kennedy passed the ball to Swanson, and as the runner turned back, Swanson threw to McCarthy, who had fallen in behind Kennedy, leaving the pitcher to cover the plate if the runner broke through in that direction. The runner started to dodge, but McCarthy, without an instant's hesitation, leaped after him and drove him hard back toward third base, so hard that the runner went on over the bag and ten feet beyond before he could stop. Like a flash McCarthy leaped sideways, touched the other runner who was starting back to second base, and, with a fierce dive, he threw his body between the base and the runner who had overslid it and tagged him.

Before he could scramble to his feet to claim the double play he heard Clancy, excited in spite of his long experience, shouting: "Good boy—nice work." As the umpire waved both runners out the crowd, bewildered for an instant by the rapidity with which McCarthy had executed the coup, commenced to understand and broke into a thundering round of applause as he limped toward the bench.

With that attack staved off, the Bears held the Maroons safe in the ninth and closed the final Western trip of the team with a hard-earned victory. They started homeward that evening with confidence renewed and the men hopeful.

The Bears were scheduled to stop en route to the home grounds to play a series of three games against the Travelers, a team low in the standing of the clubs, but one of the most dangerous of all. It was a slow but heavy-hitting aggregation, and at times more dreaded than were the stronger clubs. The series was a critical one for the Bears as, after that, they would return to the home grounds to play all the other games, with the exception of two against the Blues.

McCarthy was happier and more interested than he had been since he joined the Bears. Restlessly he awaited an opportunity to talk with Betty Tabor. Since his interview with Helen Baldwin he had been strangely jubilant for a young man who had just been discarded by the girl to whom he was engaged. He wondered how much of the conversation Betty Tabor had overheard, and worried about it. He wanted to explain to her who Miss Baldwin was and how he had happened to be talking with her, yet he knew it would seem presumptuous for him to broach the subject. Why should Betty Tabor think enough of him to be jealous? Yet, in spite of this, he decided that, at the first opportunity, he would mention meeting Helen Baldwin.

He went to bed annoyed and with an odd sense of being wronged. He determined to see the girl at breakfast and almost decided to confide in her the secret of his past life. But he did not see her at breakfast. After a restless night he was among the first in the dining car and he loitered, but the girl, usually one of the earliest risers, slept late, and when the train reached the city of the Travelers she went with Manager Clancy and his wife in a taxicab, while McCarthy was bundled with the other players into the big auto 'bus. He failed to catch a glimpse of her during luncheon and was in a bad humor when the team made an early start for the ball park.

The game was a runaway for the Bears. They piled up such a large score during the early innings that Manager Clancy was able to take out Morgan in the sixth and send Shelby, a second-string pitcher, to finish the game, saving up more strength and skill to use at the finish.

It was a jubilant crowd of players that returned to the hotel after the game. They sang and laughed and were happy again. They had won, and during the afternoon the Panthers, overconfident, had suffered two defeats by the Maroons, leaving the teams again practically tied for the lead.

McCarthy spent the evening loitering around the hotel lobbies, still hoping for an opportunity to see Miss Tabor, and she failed to appear at dinner and was not with Mr. and Mrs. Clancy when they started out for a car ride. He wandered aimlessly around until, abandoning his quest, he went to his room disconsolately. It was not yet eleven o'clock, but Swanson was preparing for sleep. As McCarthy came into the room he stopped to laugh. The giant shortstop was in his pajamas, on his back in the bed. With one bare foot he was holding a sheet of paper against the head board, and with a pencil grasped between the toes of the other foot he was laboriously striving to write.

"What was you trying to do, Silent?" asked McCarthy, laughing harder.

"Figuring my share of the World's Series receipts," responded Swanson, laboring harder. "Clancy said he'd fine any one of us caught with a pencil in his hand dopping out these statistics," said Swanson, "and I just had to know."

They were ready to settle down for the night when the telephone rang in the connecting room. The door between the rooms was ajar, and Swanson sprang from bed to respond to the call.

"Hello!" he said. "Hello! Yes, this is Williams's room, but he isn't in just now. What? Oh, yes, I understand. I'll tell him. Hello—hold a minute, here he is now."

"Hey, Adonis," Swanson called to the pitcher, who was just entering the room from the hallway. "Someone wants you."

He handed the receiver to Williams carelessly and walked back into the room, where McCarthy was stretched upon the bed reading. His face was working rapidly as if trying to tell McCarthy something by lip signals.

"I'm tired," said Swanson in a loud tone; "let's sleep late in the morning." Then approaching McCarthy's bed he said in a whisper: "Listen. Try to catch what he says."

"Hello! Yes, this is Williams," said the pitcher brusquely. Then his voice changed suddenly. "Yes, Ed, I know you. To-night? Aw, say, Ed, I've got to have sleep! Can't it wait? I'll be there in a quarter of an hour."

He hurried out of the room, and before the door slammed behind him Swanson had leaped from bed and was dressing with great haste.

"Kohinoor, that was Easy Ed Edwards calling him."

"What are you going to do?" inquired McCarthy.

"Get a move on yourself," ordered the giant. "Something is up and I want to know what it is. Wait a minute," he added as if by sudden inspiration, and ran to the telephone.

"Hello," he said to the operator. "Can you tell me where that call for Mr. Williams came from just now? He has forgotten which hotel he is to meet his friend at. Thank you," he said after a moment's wait.

"Hurry. He's going to the Metropolis Hotel," he ordered. "We must catch up with him."

They dressed with the speed of men accustomed to changing clothing four or five times a day, and before Williams had been five minutes on his way they were racing for the elevator. Swanson, hastily leaping into a waiting taxicab, ordered the driver to make all possible speed to the corner nearest the Metropolis Hotel.

"What is up?" asked McCarthy, as they settled back in the cushions of the taxi as it lurched over the pavement.

"There is something funny going on in this ball club," said Swanson. "And I am going to find out what it is. Whatever it is, Williams is mixed up in it. I want to find out why he is meeting Edwards to-night and what is up."

"What do you think?" asked McCarthy.

"I haven't got it figured out," said Swanson, scratching his head. "There has been something wrong for two weeks. Ever since you joined the club Williams hasn't been natural. He acts mysterious off the field and worse than that on it. He has only won one of his last three games, and ought to have lost them all the way he pitched."

The taxi jerked to a stop at the corner opposite the hotel, and Swanson, after reconnoitering carefully, led the way across the street and into the café.

"I used to know this place like a book when I was hitting the booze," he said. "They'll be in here—or I don't know Williams. Let's take the corner booth so we can see who comes in and goes out."

Five minutes later two men came through the swinging doors from the hotel lobby. Swanson could see them, but McCarthy was out of the range of vision. Swanson drew back deeper into the booth.

"Who is it?" inquired McCarthy in a whisper.

"Sh—h! It's Williams and Edwards. They're going into the booth next to us. Put your ear close to the partition. I'd give a farm to hear them."

The players sipped their soft drinks, while in turn they strove to hear what was passing in the next booth. Occasionally they could distinguish a voice, but the words were unintelligible. Ten minutes of vain listening ensued. Then a heavy man in evening clothes hurried into the café, and after a hasty glance into the booths entered the one in which Edwards and Williams were waiting.

"I wonder who that fat man is?" whispered Swanson.

"It's a lucky thing he didn't recognize me," replied McCarthy in low tones. "That's Barney Baldwin, the broker and politician, one of the big men of this part of the country—and a crook."

"Whew," whistled Swanson. "Let's sneak. We can't hear anything—and the water is getting deep."

CHAPTER IX

Baldwin Gets into the Plot

The events that led up to the midnight conference between Barney Baldwin, Ed Edwards and Adonis Williams in the booth at the Metropolis Hotel that night would have been of vast interest to several millions of baseball enthusiasts had they known of them.

They started with the arrival of Easy Ed Edwards in the city of the Travelers. He had run down to watch the game between the Bears and the Travelers in rather a pleasant frame of mind. His plans for a huge gambling coup seemed to be working out well, and, with the Panthers holding a lead of a game and a half, with but eleven more games to be played, he was adding to his line of wagers. The double defeat of the Panthers and the easy victory of the Bears had placed a new aspect on the league race, with the Bears again favorites. Edwards had left the baseball park in the middle of the game in a frenzy of anger. It was too late now for him to attempt to lay off his bets, and he stood to lose more than \$100,000 if his plans to have the Panthers win the pennant from the Bears went astray. It was in this mood that he returned to the hotel and commenced to make drastic plans. In the lobby of the hotel he encountered Barney Baldwin.

"Hello, Barney," he said, shaking hands with the broker. "What brings you down?"

"Hello, Ed," replied the big man cordially. "Let's have a drink. I've been away a month out West visiting the family. Brought my niece on East with me. Just got home and heard that things are going wrong, so I ran over here last night to see what sort of cattle have been breaking up my political fences while I've been gone. What brings you over here?"

"Baseball—ran down to see the game to-day. Rotten game."

"Didn't know you were interested in baseball," said the politician. "I'm pretty well satisfied with the situation—both my clubs up there fighting for the lead, and I'm getting it coming and going."

"Both your clubs?" ejaculated the gambler. "I knew you had some stock in some club. How much of the Bears and Panthers do you own?"

"Well, I can control both in a pinch. I don't pay much attention to them. I let the fellows I hire as presidents of the clubs do the worrying."

"If you own both these clubs you and I can do a little business," said the gambler, lowering his voice. "Come on up to my rooms and we'll have our drinks sent up there where we can talk."

"I haven't much time, Ed," protested Baldwin. "I want to meet some of the boys down here and learn how the political situation is stacking up."

They ascended to Edwards's rooms and when they were seated the gambler rang for wine, and, leaning forward, said:

"You want your man, Hoskins, to go to the Senate when the Legislature meets this winter?"

"Why—not exactly—my political plans are rather indefinite. Hoskins is an acceptable man"—

"Oh, chop it," said the gambler sharply. "There's no use for us to try to fool each other. You want to put Hoskins over and you know you're going to have a deuce of a time crowding him through."

"Admitting that to be the case, what then?"

"I think I can push it over for you," the gambler said easily. "Up home I've got four members of the Legislature where they will do what I say—and perhaps can handle two others. With those four your man would go over—if you've lined up as many members as the papers say you have."

"Rather early to count noses," Baldwin started to protest. "We may line up several others"—

"Nothing doing!" exclaimed Edwards sharply. "You've got all you can—the others are lined up either with the high brows or against you under Mullins. I can deliver four, possibly six, of Mullin's votes that he counts as sure."

"What do you want out of it?" The politician was interested at last.

"Does it make any difference to you whether the Bears or the Panthers win?" Edwards put the question as if casually.

"It don't make any difference to me," Baldwin retorted curtly. "I'm not a bit interested in baseball—except to make money out of the teams. I bought the stock as part of a political deal—to help someone out—and it turned out a good investment. What has that to do with it?"

"Baldwin," said the gambler, leaning forward again and speaking in low tones, "you see to it that the Panthers beat the Bears out in that pennant race, and I'll deliver you at least five votes for your man."

"That's easy," remarked Baldwin. "I can turn that quickly enough, but I don't see where you get off."

"You make it a sure thing and I'll tend to my own part of it," said the gambler. "I'll get mine, but I'm not so certain you can do it as easily as you think."

"Why not—don't both clubs belong to me?"

"Sure they do," said the gambler, "but baseball is a hard thing to monkey with. You've got to handle it carefully, for if the fact came out we'd be in such hot water we'd both scald."

"Nonsense," said Baldwin testily. "I'll call the presidents in, explain what I want and let them do it."

"Keep off that stuff," warned the gambler. "You don't seem to know much about this game. If you tried to tell Clancy to lose this pennant he'd run straight to some reporter, and the whole country would be up in arms. I shouldn't wonder if they'd lynch you."

"Then how do you propose having it done?" asked the political boss, for once willing to listen to advice. He had no qualms of conscience. To him baseball meant a game, and the fact that hundreds of thousands of persons in all parts of the country were vitally interested either in the Bears or the Panthers did not count with him. He only sought the easiest and safest way to accomplish his ends without arousing suspicion.

"I have one of the Bears fixed," said Edwards. "But I'm afraid of him. He is crooked and willing to deliver, but he is yellow—lacks courage—and he is likely to fail to deliver just when I need him most. The first thing I want you to do is to help stiffen this fellow's backbone. After that we'll try to get at someone else. If you say it's all right and promise to protect them we will find it easier."

"This must be a big thing for you, Edwards," suggested Baldwin as another drink was served and the waiter departed.

"I don't mind telling you that if the Bears win I'll almost be smashed," replied the gambler angrily. "I was fool enough to play the game myself. I picked the Panthers to win and made a lot of scattering bets all summer. Then Carson, the Bears' third baseman, broke a leg. They tried to keep it quiet as long as possible. I had a friend in the club who tipped off to me an hour after it happened that Carson's leg was smashed in two places. I jumped right in and plunged, thinking that without Carson the Bears hadn't a chance. Then along comes this blanked red-head and turns it all upside down."

"What red-head?"

"McCarthy—that kid third baseman. He's been winning games right along that they ought to have lost, and it looks as if the Bears will win out anyhow—unless you can stop them."

"McCarthy, eh?" Baldwin smiled patronizingly for the first time. "My boy, don't worry. You may know baseball better than I do—but you've hit something I know about. I think I can handle this McCarthy. I believe you can get ready to deliver those votes. I must be going now."

"I'm going to send for that pitcher I've got fixed, to-night," said Edwards.

"Have him down about ten, or a little later," suggested Baldwin genially as he arose to leave.

It was the arrival of Baldwin in the barroom to attend the meeting with Adonis Williams and

Easy Ed Edwards that Silent Swanson and Kohinoor McCarthy saw—and it was well for McCarthy's peace of mind that he did not hear what transpired at that meeting.

CHAPTER X

Williams Caught in the Net

Baldwin, by nature, was pompous and patronizing. In his capacity as political boss, representing certain more or less questionable financial interests, he distributed political patronage with an air of one bestowing great favors personally.

Baldwin's rise to riches and to a certain degree of power had been a strange one. He had been a bartender, and had by a certain selfish economy and "touching the till" acquired sufficient money to purchase the saloon in which he was employed from the honest German who had trusted him almost to the verge of bankruptcy. Certain wealthy men and some others interested in public utilities had seen in Baldwin a proper catspaw, and, in a small way, had used him in politics. From that he had developed quickly into an official collector of graft money from disorderly houses, saloons, and gamblers.

Baldwin had become more and more independent financially and more powerful politically as he learned the game. He was shrewd and quick to learn. His share of the collections became larger and larger until in time he was admitted to the higher circle of graft, and, having served his apprenticeship, he had others to collect for him and take the greater risk of going to prison. Eventually, by cunning catering to big interests, he became the political boss of his city, stockholder in several public utilities, and head of a brokerage firm, which he maintained more to account for his possession of wealth than to do business, although favored in many instances in bond deals. His purchase of stock in baseball clubs had been incidental. He knew little of the game and cared less. He was satisfied with the large returns on the stock and avoided publicity in advertising himself as owner of either team through fear of causing an increase in the demand, "Where did you get it?"

Easy Ed Edwards, while waiting in the booth of the Metropolis Café, had told Adonis Williams the name of the man for whom they were waiting.

"Now get wise, Adonis," he advised, in friendly tones. "I'll tip you to something no one outside a few is on to. Baldwin owns this club you're pitching for, and he owns the Panthers. I had it from him to-night that he wants the Panthers to win the pennant this season. You toss off a game or two to help him and you'll be strong with him for life. You know he holds this State in his vest pocket."

"Ain't I trying my best?" said Williams. "Clancy won't let me work often now. He was working me to death until a couple of weeks ago and now he's always saving me for some other team. I asked him to get in to-morrow. Maybe I'll work. If I do I'll make good and lose it."

"Here he comes now," said Edwards in a low tone as Baldwin came pompously into the barroom in search of them. "I'll talk and let you hear what he wants."

"Ah, here we are," said Baldwin pompously, as he discovered them. "Order a bottle of wine, Ed, and introduce me to your friend."

He already was well warmed with drink and looser and less cautious in his conversation than customary.

"Glad to meet you, Williams," he said as Edwards went through the formalities of introduction. "I've seen you pitch. Had a good season?"

"Fair," said Williams, striving to appear modest. "I've won twenty-six and lost eleven—some of them tough ones, especially lately."

"Sorry to spoil your record, my boy," said Baldwin patronizingly, "but you must lose a few more for the interests of all concerned."

"Not so loud, Baldwin," warned Edwards.

"All right, all right," assented Baldwin unvexed. "Let's have another bottle."

"Now, young fellow," he continued in a low tone when the drink was served, "you know who I am. I don't forget my friends. That's my motto. Anyone who does anything that helps me, or helps a friend of mine"—

He paused to wave his hand indicating that Edwards was the friend.

The man was half drunk and too loose with his talk to please the more cautious gambler.

"Adonis here is all right," said the gambler suavely. "I don't blame him for being a little bit cautious. You see, Barney, Adonis wasn't sure the big men behind the game wanted it to go that way and I don't blame him. I wanted him to understand how the owners feel."

"I'm wise, I guess," said Williams, warming with the wine. "All I need is the chance, and I'll make the Panthers win it."

"You understand," Baldwin said pompously, "it won't do at all for owners to have anything to do with the games; that's the reason I don't care to have my name mentioned in connection with the Bears or the Panthers, but in this case it is to all our interests to have the Panthers win. My boy, I'll take care of you well, if you deliver the goods."

"You may count on me. We have ten more games to play, and I ought to work three, maybe four. I can lose two or three and make it a cinch."

"That's the talk," said Baldwin genially. "You know which side your bread is buttered on."

"Yes," remarked Edwards, "he does—but he wants it on both sides. He's had chances already to end this race, and won instead of losing."

"I couldn't help it," retorted Williams. "You know, Ed, I tried to lose, but that red-headed four-flush was lucky enough to keep me from it. You know I don't dare to make it too raw. Clancy might get suspicious."

"This McCarthy seems to be the trouble maker all 'round," suggested Baldwin. "With him eliminated it ought to be easy, hadn't it?"

"Him a good ball player!" ejaculated Williams angrily. "Say, he's a bum. He's just lucky."

"I don't want any more such luck," sneered Edwards. "The next time you're in there you lose the game right—you hear? Let them get a big bunch of runs right quick so no one can save the game."

"Maybe Clancy won't let me pitch," objected the star whiningly. "I can't make him let me pitch."

"I'll see to that," said Baldwin casually. "I'll see the president in the morning and have him tell this Clancy to let you pitch. Then he'll put you in."

"Don't be too certain of that," said Edwards. "Clancy usually runs the team to suit himself—and he plays to win."

"You leave that to me," replied Baldwin complacently. "I usually get what I want. Meantime, I think I can fix this young fellow Mac. I'll have a little talk with him in the morning."

"Don't let him find out that you know either of us," warned Edwards. "He's a pretty cagey young fellow from what I hear."

"Trust me for that," said the big man. "I've handled wise fish before now, and landed them without using a net."

"You know anything about him?" inquired Williams.

"Yes—and no. Anyhow I am pretty close to someone—a woman—who knows him and knows all about him."

"I wish I did," snarled Williams, now growling mean from the effects of drink. "Who's the woman?"

"She's someone whose name won't appear in this matter," replied the politician reprovingly. "She's a relative of mine. I think he is in love with her and she turned him down cold. Let's have another bottle and break up the party."

"He was in love with her?" asked Williams eagerly, as a plan for revenge flashed through his mind.

"I believe so," said Baldwin carelessly. "Family affair. Never heard the details. Of course she couldn't marry a fellow of that class."

The three men emerged from the booth, Williams and Baldwin flushed and unsteady from the drink, Edwards cold and revealing not a trace of the wine.

"Williams, you'd better go out the front door," he said quietly. "It wouldn't do for you to be seen around the lobby with us at this hour."

Fifteen minutes later Swanson and McCarthy, in their beds, heard Williams enter the adjoining room unsteadily and hastily prepare for bed.

CHAPTER XI

McCarthy in Disgrace

Events crowded upon each other rapidly the following day. The first was a telephone call soon after breakfast that summoned Manager Clancy to the Metropolis Café.

"Hello, Mac," said Clancy gladly. "How you hittin' em? Haven't seen you in an age. How's tricks?"

"Pretty good, Bill. You're looking fine," replied McMahan, manager of the café, who in his youth had played ball on the team with the now famous Clancy. "I was worried about something I heard this morning and thought I'd send for you. I couldn't come up."

"What is it? Let's have a drink—make mine grape juice."

"When I came down this morning Johnny, the night man, told me one of your players was in here until after midnight last night," said the old ball player.

"Which one?" demanded the manager angrily.

"He didn't know him, except that he was a ball player. He was a sandy-haired fellow, rather slender and wiry looking."

"McCarthy—maybe," said the manager thoughtfully and worried. "I didn't think that bird would do it. Something funny."

He had leaped at the identification.

"That isn't the worst of it, Bill," continued McMahan, "that fellow was with Easy Ed Edwards and a big fat guy in a dress suit."

"What?" demanded Clancy, starting indignantly. "Sure of that?"

"Johnny knows Ed Edwards. They sat in the booth over there and had four quarts of wine, and the player was pretty well lighted up when they got out."

"Thanks, Mac," said Clancy worriedly. "This is tough news at this stage of the game. I'll have to take a look into it."

Clancy, his weather-beaten face furrowed with a heavy frown, walked slowly back to the hotel.

President Bannard, of the Bears, was waiting for him in the lobby.

"Good morning, Bill," he said. "You're out early. I wanted to see you."

"Had some business downtown and went out an hour or so ago," replied the manager. "What's the woe?"

"Who's going to pitch to-day?" asked the president.

"I don't know. I never decide in advance," responded the manager carelessly. "Guess it will be either Wilcox or Williams—whichever one looks best warming up."

"If it's all the same to you," said the president diplomatically, "I wish you'd let Williams work."

"Why?" demanded Clancy, on the defensive in an instant.

"It's this way, Bill," explained the president. "You know I don't own this club. I've got most of my money in it, but another fellow has control of the stock. He is going to the game and he asked me to let Williams pitch, as he never has seen him work."

"Williams hasn't been very steady in his last three games," remarked the manager thoughtfully. "I don't want to risk this pennant to please anyone, no matter if he owns the whole league."

"Well, you said yourself that your choice was between Williams and Wilcox, so I can't see it makes any difference."

"You know I don't like to announce pitchers ahead of time," said the manager.

"It seems to me the owner ought to have a right"—

"Now look here, Bannard," said Clancy sharply, "when I signed this contract it was with the agreement that I was to run the business on the ball field and let your end of it alone. I'm perfectly willing to oblige a stockholder, but I'm going to win this pennant, and I'll do what I please with the playing end of the game. If Adonis looks good warming up he'll go in, if he don't I'll send someone else to the slab—and that goes."

"Well—have it your own way"; the president had surrendered entirely to the aggressive manager. "Put him in if you can, and if you can't I'll explain that he wasn't right—twisted himself or something."

Clancy went to his room puzzled and annoyed and, as usual, he sought advice and enlightenment by consulting Mrs. Clancy, whose abundant good nature and portliness formed a striking contrast with his seriousness and slenderness.

"Willie," she said, laying down her sewing after Clancy had stood at the window, whistling and gazing out for ten minutes without saying a word. "Well, Willie—who has broken a leg or sprung a Charlie horse now?"

"Nothing much, mother," said the big manager quietly. "Nothing much—just worrying a little over the way things are going."

"Bill Clancy," she ejaculated indignantly. "Do you think you can fool anyone with that talk? Do you think I could live with you eighteen years, come next Martinmas, and not know when you're in trouble? Tell your old lady what it is."

"Sure, mother," he said fondly, coming to put his arm around her waist. "Haven't you enough troubles of your own?"

"Me have troubles?" She was indignant. "Nothing troubles me but worrying over those pesky boys of yours. What's wrong now, Willie?"

"One of the boys out skylarking last night—and drinking."

"Saints forgive him," she said piously, but with a note of relief. "Sure you'll not be fining the poor boy? Perhaps he needed a drink or two to keep up his courage."

"Nothing like that, mother," he replied seriously. "This was one of the young fellows out with some gamblers drinking wine till past midnight. It looks serious."

"Now, Bill Clancy, you just send for that boy to come right up here and talk it over. Tell him he must behave and explain what it means to all the boys. Then you'll shame him and he'll be a good boy. They're all good boys," she protested earnestly, "only they do try a poor woman."

"I guess that's the best plan, mother," he said. "You trot over into the other room and I'll have him up."

"Which one is it this time, Willie?"

"McCarthy!"

"McCarthy—why, Willie, he wouldn't—there's some mistake. That poor boy wouldn't do such a thing. And him grieving his heart out because Betty Tabor won't treat him well any more. That's what's the trouble, Willie."

"We'll see what it is," said the manager, checking her flow of defense curtly. "I'll have him up. You run into the other room with the sewing and—don't listen."

His telephone call found McCarthy in his room, and the young third baseman promptly ascended to the manager's apartment and entered innocently.

"Good morning, Boss," he said, following the burlesque style of greeting used by the Bears to their manager.

"Good morning," said Clancy curtly, as he scrutinized the face of the player for signs of a debauch and found the blue eyes clear and fresh.

"You wanted to see me?" inquired McCarthy, thrown a little off his easy bearing.

"Yes—where were you last night?"

"I—in my room"—he suddenly remembered the excursion with Swanson. "I was out for a while," he concluded lamely.

"Were you in the café of the Metropolis Hotel late?"

"Yes," confessed McCarthy, bristling at the tone employed by the manager. "I was in there."

"Drinking?"

"Yes—lemonade."

"Nothing stronger?"

"No."

"No wine?"

"No—I'm not in the wine class."

"Who were you with?"

"You're the manager," said McCarthy quietly, although he was rebellious inwardly. "You may ask me anything you want to about myself or my actions—but you surely don't expect me to tell on anyone else?"

"I don't want you to tell on any ball player—but who were you with?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell."

"You needn't tell me—I know," said the manager angrily. "You got up out of bed to go there to meet Easy Ed Edwards—and you were with him while three of you drank four quarts of wine."

For an instant McCarthy clenched his hands until the nails bit into the palms, and a flood of angry color flashed into his face. With an effort he controlled himself.

"You've got everything backwards," he said at last, gazing straight at the angry manager. "I can't explain just now—but you'll find out some day—and apologize."

He turned without another word and left the room. Clancy, who had expected angry denials, threats, perhaps a personal encounter, sat gazing at the closed door, and then to himself he said:

"It looks bad, but hanged if I don't believe him. No fellow could lie and look like that."

CHAPTER XII

McCarthy Defies Barney Baldwin

"Pardridge, playing third base in place of McCarthy, Holleran in left. Morton and Kennedy, battery for the Bears."

This announcement, bawled by a battery of megaphone men in front of the crowded stands that afternoon was the first intimation that McCarthy had of the contemplated action of Manager Clancy in taking him out of the game. He sprang from the end of the bench, where he was tying his shoes, toward the manager, an angry exclamation on his lips, and his blue eyes flashing as they narrowed to the battle slit. Swanson, who was sitting next him, fondling a bat, seized McCarthy with his tremendous grip and jerked him back to his seat.

"Steady, boy, steady," the big Swede cautioned. "Take your medicine. Show your gameness."

"I'm laid off," said McCarthy as if astonished. "It isn't right. He's laying me off for something he thinks I did"—

"Don't quit—be game," cautioned Swanson. "Tell me about it to-night."

McCarthy was miserable, and his face revealed it. Swanson, hardened by years of facing such little tragedies, of seeing the hearts of young players broken under such punishment, sympathized, but preserved a cheerful demeanor as he selected his bats and prepared for the battle.

"Buck up, Jimmy boy," said Swanson, sitting down beside him and pretending to be retying his shoe laces. "We'll win this one anyhow, and to-night we'll have a talk with Clancy after he cools down. I can square things with him."

The comforting words of the kindly, big shortstop helped McCarthy. Clancy did not look toward the youngster, who sat huddled in his heavy sweaters on the opposite end of the bench watching the game and going over and over in his mind the circumstances that had led to his punishment and banishment from the team.

The game proceeded rapidly. The Bears scored a run in the second inning on Swanson's long

drive against the left field fence for three bases, and a fly to the outfield, on which Swanson came by sliding under the catcher. In the fourth the Travelers evened up the score on an error by Pardridge, who, off his balance by his sudden change of position, threw wild and allowed a runner to score from second base. The score remained tied until the fifth, neither team being able to hit the opposing pitcher's delivery hard enough to send home a run. Then Pardridge misplayed an easy bounder and, recovering, hurled wildly toward second base, striving to force out a runner coming down from first. His throw went on high and far into right field, one runner scored, the batter was perched on second and the crowd was in a tumult, thinking that the inevitable break had come. A crashing base-hit sent home another runner, and with the score 3 to 1 against them the Bears faced one of the supreme tests of nerve of the season.

Gamely they rallied in the fifth and again in the sixth inning, but failed to reach even terms again as Carver, the best pitcher of the Travelers, was holding them by clever work. Each time they forced men to within reaching distance of the plate he settled, and using more speed, checked the attacks and made the game one sequence of disappointments for the Bears.

The seventh inning proved uneventful, although the crowd arose and stood to urge the Travelers to make certain the victory and "rooted" with the unholy glee that all crowds show over the downfall of a champion.

The eighth commenced. A base on balls paved the way and gave the Bears a chance to exhibit their resourceful style of attack which had overthrown so many opposing teams. The Travelers played deep, believing that with two runs needed to tie the score the Bears would not attempt to sacrifice, and Noisy Norton hooked his bat around quickly, dropped a bunt down the third-base line, and beat the ball to first base before Pickett, the third baseman of the Travelers, who had been caught asleep, could reach the ball.

McCarthy glanced toward the seat where Edwards, the gambler, sat. Easy Ed's face was hard and set. He gripped the front of the box. The gambler's iron nerve was shaken. Swanson rushed to the plate, swinging two bats, and crouching, he pushed his bat back and forth as if determined to lay down a sacrifice bunt. The Traveler infield crept closer to stop the bunt. One ball was pitched wide. Again Swanson crouched, and as the second pitched ball came whizzing up he made a sharp, quick lunge; the ball went like a flash across first base, as Davis dived vainly toward it, rolled onto foul ground, and before the right fielder could retrieve the ball as it glanced along the front of the stands, two runs were across the plate and the score was tied.

McCarthy looked again. Edwards's usually stony face was writhing with fury and disappointment as he leaned forward. The panic had seized the Travelers. The infield was pulled close to intercept the runner at the plate, and the shortstop, over anxious to make the play, fumbled the easy grounder. Before the inning closed five runs were across the plate; the Bears had snatched victory from defeat, and they clung to their lead and won 6 to 3.

As the last batter for the Travelers went out on a long fly to the Bears' center fielder, McCarthy saw Edwards rise and hurl his cigar viciously against the floor of the box, then turn to gaze long and earnestly toward the Bear bench. Suddenly he gave a nod of his head and McCarthy, following the line of the gambler's gaze, saw Williams flush and then pale, as he turned to help the bat-boy pack the clubs.

McCarthy had intended to follow Swanson's suggestion and to plan with Swanson what course to adopt in explaining to Manager Clancy how matters stood, but he did not have the opportunity. Waiting in the lobby of the hotel when he returned, he found Barney Baldwin, who accosted him.

"You're McCarthy, the fellow my niece, Miss Baldwin, introduced me to, aren't you?" he asked pompously, pretending to be uncertain of the identity.

"Yes."

"Well, young fellow, I want to have a quiet little talk with you. Come up to my room at the Metropolis as soon as you get dressed. It's important."

They talked for a few minutes and McCarthy promised to come to the Metropolis after dinner. He hastened to his room, and to his disappointment found that Swanson had dressed hastily and already was gone. Nor did the big Swede come to dinner, and McCarthy was compelled to leave the hotel without seeing him in order to keep his engagement with Baldwin.

He was ushered into a pretentious apartment in the Metropolis, where Baldwin was awaiting him, with a bottle of wine in the cooler at the side of the table and a box of choice cigars at hand.

"Sit down, my boy, sit down," urged Baldwin cordially. "Have a drink and a cigar."

"Thanks—I'll smoke. I'm not drinking," said McCarthy quietly. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes. You see I called Helen up over the long distance to-day and had quite a talk with her about you. She dropped a few hints before she left and I wanted to hear more of you."

"Then she told you who I am?"

"She told me you were a young man of good family and that you were playing under an assumed name—but, of course, having promised, she wouldn't tell more."

"Now, I know how it is. You're in some trouble at home and just bull-headed enough to refuse to give in. I admire you for it, my boy—but it is youthful folly. Helen tells me she was engaged to you, but broke off the engagement because you wouldn't go back home and quit baseball. Now I want to see the thing in the right light. You come and run down to my summer place with me tomorrow, spend a week or two there with Helen, get things straightened out, and meanwhile I'll act as peacemaker and fix things up so you can go home and eat the fatted calf."

"You've tackled a tough job," said McCarthy, grinning in spite of himself at the mental picture of his uncle receiving overtures in his behalf from Barney Baldwin, his bitterest enemy.

"I'm certain it is a mere trifle when looked at in the right light," urged Baldwin. "I can explain things. I'll wire your people that you are visiting with us, and we'll forget all about this baseball foolishness. Better come along."

"I thank you for your good intentions, Mr. Baldwin," replied McCarthy quietly, "but it is impossible. In the first place, the plan you suggest would be about the worst possible—and more important than that, I can't quit the team until it wins the pennant."

"Now we're getting down to cases, my boy," said Baldwin, smoking easily. "I want you to go, for your own sake, but I also want you to go because I don't want the Bears to win that pennant. They haven't treated you right, and they can't blame you if you quit."

"You want me to throw the pennant race?" demanded McCarthy angrily. "That's why you want me to leave the team, is it? I'll see you in h— first—I'm in bad with the manager—but I won't quit the team."

"Now, now, my boy," interrupted Baldwin soothingly. "Take a sensible view of it. It's for the best interests of all concerned. It don't mean anything to you if you run back home, square yourself with the family—and quit interfering with our plans."

"You're a crook, Baldwin," said the third baseman threateningly. "My uncle, James Lawrence, always said you were a crook and a thief, and now I know it. I wouldn't quit now for all his money and all yours together. I'll stick to the team and we'll win this pennant in spite of you and your rotten gang."

The effect of his words caused him to stop in surprise and alarm. The big man, who had been sipping his wine, suddenly grew apoplectic and sat staring at him. Baldwin stared at the slender youth as if at a ghost. Suddenly he lurched forward as if to arise, and emitted a torrent of oaths.



Baldwin stared at the slender youth

"You Jim Lawrence's nephew?" he half screamed. "You his boy? Well, by —, I'll break you. I'll fix you—I'll"—

He pitched forward as if in a fit, and McCarthy, after ringing for assistance, waited until the house physician had revived the big man, then hurried back to his hotel, puzzled and excited and vaguely alarmed over the developments of the evening.

Swanson was not yet in the room.

CHAPTER XIII

McCarthy Balks the Plotters

It was past two o'clock when McCarthy was awakened from his troubled sleep by the entrance of Swanson.

"Hello, Silent," said McCarthy sleepily. "What time is it?"

"Past two," said the shortstop, for once seeming unwilling to talk. "Better get to sleep—you'll be in again to-day."

"Where have you been?" asked McCarthy, wide awake in an instant and interested.

"Trailing," replied Swanson. "I've found out a few things. Meanwhile I had a talk with Clancy. You little squarehead, why didn't you tell him I was with you? Do you want to get yourself in bad by some fool notion of protecting me? I couldn't tell him what we were doing—but I told him you were with me, that you weren't drinking, and that you weren't with Edwards."

"What have you been doing all night?" asked McCarthy, restored to happiness by the tidings.

"Finding out things. I trailed Williams downtown right after the game. He had dinner with Edwards in a private room. I couldn't find out what happened, but Williams came out looking as if he had been jerked through a knot hole. Then Edwards met that fat party that had you in his room."

"Is he in it, too?" asked McCarthy.

"Yes—who and what is he?"

"His name is Baldwin. He's a big politician and broker here in the East and I knew him out West, where he owns a ranch."

"What did he want with you?"

"He wanted me to quit the team and run back home. I told him where he got off. The idea of asking me to quit the boys now, when they may need me!"

"I can imagine what you said," laughed Swanson. "Did you kick him on the shins and try to make him fight?"

"I wanted to," replied McCarthy savagely. "I can't see where he gets into this affair at all. There's something queer all round."

"Listen, Kohinoor," said Swanson. "Someone wants to beat the Bears out of this pennant, and whoever it is is turning every trick possible to beat us. I suspect they've got to Williams and that he is trying to throw games, and I've been working all night trying to get the goods on him. We can't run to Clancy with a yarn like that unless we're ready to prove it. Now go to sleep and get ready to win to-morrow's game—to-day's, rather."

McCarthy lay staring, sleepless, into the darkness, his brain whirling as he strove to penetrate the maze of intrigue and plotting of which he seemed the center. Half an hour passed, then, as he turned in bed, a sleepy voice from the next bed asked:

"Asleep, Kohinoor?"

"No."

"Then quit worrying. I had a talk with Betty Tabor to-night, and you needn't worry. She don't believe all she hears."

"What did she say, Silent?" asked McCarthy, sitting up in bed suddenly.

"Aw, go to sleep," responded Swanson, as he rolled over, chuckling at the manner in which McCarthy had betrayed his interest.

It was nearly noon when Swanson and McCarthy descended to the hotel lobby in better frames of mind.

Manager Clancy, serious and worried, was talking with a gray-haired man and a younger man. McCarthy observed them and grew uncomfortable under their close scrutiny as the three turned toward him and focussed their eyes upon him. He felt relieved when the smaller man shook his head positively and was not surprised a moment later when Clancy came forward toward him and said frankly:

"Forget it, Kohinoor. Case of mistaken identity." He grasped McCarthy's hand and gave it a crunching grip as he added: "When you get ready to tell me what you know I want to hear it."

The manager did not attempt any further apology, but McCarthy felt as if a load had been lifted from his mind.

"I can't make any charges until I have proof," he replied steadily. "If ever I can back up what I suspect, I'll tell you—first."

"Swanson explained partly," said the manager. "I understand. Get in there to-day and hustle."

It was the final game of the trip and the Bears, with confidence renewed, went into it determined to rush the attack and win quickly. When the batting practice started McCarthy was surprised to find Lefty Williams pitching to batters. He faced Williams and hit the first ball hard and straight over second base. Williams was lobbing the ball easily, as if warming up. Twice Clancy called to him to quit pitching to batters, and he shouted back that his shoulder felt a little stiff and he wanted to limber it up easily. McCarthy stepped to the plate again. Up to that time Williams had not pitched a fast ball, but he wound up quickly and flashed a fast-breaking ball straight at McCarthy's head. The third baseman dropped flat and the ball, just grazing the top of his head, carried away his cap. He knew Williams had tried to hit him. He remembered his part in the deeper game he and Swanson were playing, and he decided not to reveal the fact that he was aware of Williams's intent. He leaped back into batters' position and yelled:

"Keep that bean ball for the game. You'll need it."

He saw that Williams was white and shaken, and the next ball came floating over the plate without speed. McCarthy swung at it, without attempting to hit it. Another slow one floated over the plate and again McCarthy made a burlesque swing, missing the ball a foot. Williams flushed scarlet and stepping quickly back into position he drove a straight fast ball at the batter. McCarthy was on his guard. Drawing back slightly he allowed the ball to touch his shirt, and when Williams, angrier than ever, hurled another fast one at him he stepped back and drove it to left field for a clean hit.

As he hit the ball he heard Clancy call angrily to Williams to come off the slab, and the pitcher, white with anger at the contempt the recruit had shown for his pitching, sullenly obeyed.

"That fellow tried three times to bean you," said Swanson in low tones as they walked to their positions after retiring runless in the first inning.

"I know it," said McCarthy. "I coaxed him along. I think we can make him pitch to-day by telling him that we don't think he can."

The plan was adopted. For two innings the shortstop and third baseman harassed the pitcher.

Under the running fire of taunts, criticisms and sarcasm Williams pitched harder and harder, furious at his teammates, and venting his anger upon opposing batsmen.

"Say, you guys," remarked Kennedy on the bench after the fourth inning. "Have some pity on me. You've got Adonis so mad he's smashing my mitt with his speed. Better ease off on him or you'll have him in the air."

The Bears had accumulated two runs and seemed winning easily in the fifth, when, before a runner was out, McCarthy, cutting across in front of Swanson to scoop an easy-bounding ball, played it too carelessly, fumbled and allowed the first batter to reach first base. The error was common enough, but allowing the first batter to reach a base on an easy chance was serious at that stage of the game. Williams turned upon McCarthy and gave him a violent rebuke. McCarthy was not in a position to respond. He saw that, in spite of his angry words, Williams seemed pleased by the error. An instant later a drive whizzed past him and then another screamed by him en route to left field. A run was across the plate, runners on first and third and no one out.

"Trying to toss off this one?" demanded Swanson angrily. "You big stiff, pitch ball."

The next batter sacrificed, and again Williams broke the ball low and inside the plate to a right-handed hitter. The ball came like a shot at McCarthy, who dived at it. It rolled away toward Swanson, who recovered just in time to throw out the runner at first, but another run had counted and the score was tied. Another hit screeched past McCarthy, another run counted and the Travelers were one run ahead before the attack could be stopped.

The Travelers held their advantage to the eighth, when, rallying desperately, the Bears drove home two runs by sheer force of hitting and the ninth found them hanging to a one-run lead. They failed to increase their advantage in the first half of the inning and took the field determined to hold their lead. McCarthy was puzzled. He thought Clancy knew what was happening on the field and had expected each inning that the manager would rebuke Williams when they returned to the bench. Instead Clancy had remained strangely silent.

Tuttle, the first batter for the Travelers in the ninth inning, hit a fierce boulder down the third-base line. McCarthy, knowing Tuttle to be a right field hitter, was swung a little wide from

the base. He threw himself out toward the line, his hands extended to the full limit, and the ball stuck in one outstretched hand. Scrambling to his feet he threw hard and fast to first, retiring the speedy runner by a step. The next batter hit fiercely between third and short and Swanson, by a great play, retrieved the ball back on the edge of the grass, but could not throw the runner out. The next batter, a right-hander, hit a vicious single past McCarthy and there were runners on second and first.

McCarthy felt the next drive would be toward him. He believed Williams was striving to lose the game, and that he was pitching so as to compel the batters to hit in the direction of third base so that the baseman and not he would be held responsible for the defeat. He gritted his teeth and crouched, waiting, as Watson, the heaviest-hitting right-handed batter in the league, faced Williams. Crouching, he saw Kennedy signal for a fast ball high and outside the plate, and then saw a straight easy ball sail toward the batter, low and inside. Watson swung. McCarthy saw a flash of light and threw up his hands just in time to keep the ball from hitting him. The ball broke through his hands and rolled a few feet away. His hands were numb to the wrists from the terrific shock. He stood still one trice. Then he saw the runners were stopped, bewildered. They had lost sight of the ball, so rapidly had it traveled and had stopped, thinking he had caught it. He leaped after the ball, framing the play as he touched the spinning sphere. He could have run back to third base and forced out one, but instead, as his numbed fingers gripped the sphere, he saw the possibility of a double play and threw fast and straight to Swanson, on second base, forcing out the runner coming from first. Swanson, catching the idea of the play in an instant, hurled the ball back to McCarthy, who grabbed it and touched out the runner coming from second, completing a double play that brought the crowd to its feet in applause and saved the game.

McCarthy heard the cheers, but he was cold with suppressed anger as he walked to where Williams was standing, and said:

"Williams, you're a d——d crook."

CHAPTER XIV

"Technicalities" on the Job

The Bears were going home holding grimly to their claim upon first place in the league race. With but seven games remaining to be played all were against clubs already beaten, and five of the seven were against clubs considerably weaker in every department. Two games were to be played off the home grounds.

The statisticians were busy calculating that the Bears had a decided advantage in the race, yet they were not happy in the homecoming. The ride home was only a few hours long, and they had caught the train immediately after the sensational finish of the final game with the Travelers in order to reach home and get settled by midnight.

Swanson and McCarthy sat together as the train pulled out, talking in low tones.

"I think Clancy is onto him," said Swanson. "Just sit tight. It isn't our move yet. The Boss acted queerly on the bench to-day and has been watching Williams all the time, while pretending not to. I'm going to mingle and see if any of the other fellows are wise to him."

Hardly had Swanson left the seat than McCarthy was surprised by "Technicalities" Feehan, who sat down in the seat vacated by the shortstop.

Feehan was one of the odd characters developed by the national game, a reporter who had traveled with the Bear teams for so many years the players regarded him as a sort of venerable pest who hadn't seen a ball player since Williamson's day, and never such a catcher as Mike Kelly, a first baseman like Comisky or a fielder like Tip O'Neil. He sometimes was called "Four Eyes," from the fact that he wore large, steel-rimmed glasses of great thickness, and his other name was "Technicalities."

He was not at all interested in baseball, excepting as a business. His chief interest was in the Children's Crusades, and he had spent eight years of his spare time in libraries all over America digging out data for his history of those remarkable pilgrimages which he had written and rewritten half a dozen times. Not being a baseball fan he was eminently fair and unprejudiced, and the players thought more of the quiet, studious fellow than they did of the excitable and the partisan reporters who joined their sports and their woes.

"Mr. McCarthy," he said seriously, "did you observe anything strange in to-day's game?"

"Several strange things," assented McCarthy. "Among them that error I made early in the game."

"I mean things of an unusual nature," persisted Technicalities. "I was struck by an odd phenomenon and thought perhaps you noticed it. I find it more perplexing as I study my score books."

"What was it?" inquired McCarthy, cautious not to betray any interest.

"Did you, for instance, observe anything strange about the hits in your direction?"

"I noticed that those that didn't have cayenne pepper on them were white hot and came like greased lightning," laughed McCarthy. "I expected to find my right leg playing left field any minute."

"I was speaking numerically, although, of course, the speed of the hits enters into the phenomenon."

"They did seem to be coming my way rapidly," agreed the third baseman.

"In to-day's game I find," continued the statistician, "that there were eighteen batted balls hit in the direction of third base. You had five assists and one error and caught two line drives. I do not include foul balls, of which six line drives went near third base. Of these eighteen batted balls, fourteen were hit by right-handed batters and four by left-handers. The fourteen right-handed batters hit balls pitched inside the plate, the four left-handers hit balls outside the plate, that is, outside to them, so that practically every ball batted toward you was pitched to the inside of the plate, that is, the catcher's left. I have checked these statistics and find them correct."

"Well, what of it?" asked McCarthy.

"In the preceding games—in which you played third and in which Williams has pitched—I find that an average of twelve and a fraction batted balls per game have been hit toward third base, exclusive of fouls. In the games in which you have played and in which Williams has not pitched the average is six and a trifling fraction. You have averaged seven and one-fourth chances per game—legitimate chances—with Williams pitching, and a trifle under three chances per game when he was not pitching. Does it not seem remarkable?"

"Perhaps so," assented McCarthy. "I never studied such statistics."

"The phenomenon is the more remarkable," added the strange little man, "because the average chances per game of the third basemen of five leagues, two majors and three Class AA for the last five years has been 2 and 877-998. It is impossible to construe the figures to mean but one of two things."

"What are they?" asked McCarthy, curiously interested.

"Either it is mere coincidence or Williams is deliberately trying to lose this pennant and to make you shoulder the blame."

"That's a pretty stiff charge," remarked McCarthy, amazed at the deductions of the reporter, which fitted so well the suspicion, gradually becoming a certainty to his mind.

"Either he is pitching purposely to make the opposing batters hit balls at you," insisted Feehan, "or it just happened—and things do not just happen in baseball with that regularity."

"Possibly he is wild and can't get the ball over the plate."

"On the contrary," persisted Feehan, "he has perfect control. If he did not possess control he could not pitch so many balls to the same place."

"I'm immensely grateful," said McCarthy, touched by the kindness of the odd reporter. "It's good of you and I shan't forget it."

"I deserve no thanks," insisted Feehan. "It's merely in the line of square dealing and justice—and, speaking of justice, McCarthy, did you ever take interest in the Children's Crusades? Let me show you some of the data I dug up recently"—

He delved into his little bag, which was his constant companion, and, drawing forth a mass of scattered, disordered notes, he went into raptures of enthusiasm while describing to the player some new features of the disappearance of the French children and of the sojourn of hundreds of them as slaves in African harems.

A great throng of admirers was waiting in the station to welcome the Bears back from their successful trip. Swanson and McCarthy finally escaped from the crowd, and, jumping into a taxicab, were whirled to the hotel, where Swanson had secured rooms for both.

The hour was growing late, but after they had deposited their baggage in their rooms, Swanson proposed a walk and a late supper. It was McCarthy's first visit to the city which he represented upon the ball field and its magnificence and greatness made him forget the worries and troubles of which he seemed the center. He even forgot to detail to his chum his strange interview with the reporter until they were seated in a quiet nook of one of the great restaurants.

Then, in response to some jesting allusion to the Children's Crusades by Swanson, he told the big shortstop of the array of statistics Feehan had presented.

"He's a square little guy," said Swanson. "And he's got more brains in that funny-looking little head of his than this whole bunch has. He dopes things out pretty nearly right, and when he is convinced that he is right he goes the limit. Between us there is a certain left-handed pitcher who is in hot water right now and don't know it. Speaking of the devil," he added quickly, "there's his wings flapping, and look who he is with—across the far corner there, at the little table."

McCarthy's eyes followed the route indicated and suddenly he lost interest in his food. At a small table were Williams, Secretary Tabor—and Betty Tabor.

McCarthy was silent and moody during the walk back to the hotel and seemed to have lost interest in the great glaring city, which was just commencing to dim its illumination for the night. They were in bed with the lights out when Swanson said:

"Cut out the worrying, kid. I wouldn't have a girl no one else wanted. Besides, either her father has been told by Clancy to watch that crook or else Betty Tabor is stringing him along to learn something. She despises Williams, and she wouldn't laugh at him or eat with him unless she had a purpose in it."

McCarthy could have blessed him for the words, but he assumed a dignity he did not feel and said:

"I don't see why I should be especially interested."

"Cut out the con stuff, Bo," laughed Swanson, relapsing into his old careless baseball phraseology. "You dope around like a chicken with the pip and look at her like a seasick guy seeing the Statue of Liberty and then think no one is onto you."

Reply seemed inadvisable, so McCarthy grunted and rolled over. There was a silence and then Swanson added:

"And say, Bo, this Williams is in trouble. There's me and you on his track. Clancy is wise and watching him. Old Technicalities has him doped crooked in the figures, and now Betty Tabor is smiling at him to get the facts—he hasn't a chance. It's darn hard to fix a baseball game."

CHAPTER XV

Baldwin Baits a Trap

"Willie says that one petticoat will ruin the best ball club that ever lived, but lands knows that if some of us women don't get busy right away there's one ball club that's goin' to be ruined without any rustlin' skirts to be blamed."

Mrs. William Clancy, her ample form loosely enveloped in a huge, flowered kimono, dropped her fancy work into her lap and fanned herself with a folded newspaper.

"Why, Mother Clancy," ejaculated Betty Tabor, sitting on a stool by the window of the Clancy apartment, "one would think to hear you talk that we had lost the pennant already."

"Now, there's Willie," continued Mrs. Clancy, ignoring the protest, "goin' round with a grouch on all the time like he could bite nails in two. There's that nice McCarthy boy frettin' his heart out because you haven't treated him nicely, and Swanson worryin' about something. And there's Williams sneakin' round like he'd been caught robbin' a hen roost."

"Mother Clancy," protested the girl, reddening, "you have no right to say I haven't been treating Mr. McCarthy well. A girl cannot throw herself at a man—especially an engaged man."

"How do you know he's engaged?" demanded Mrs. Clancy. "Lands sakes, I haven't heard him announcing his engagement, and he looks at you across the dining room as sad as a calf chewing a dish rag."

"I overheard—I saw the girl," admitted Betty Tabor, blushing as she bowed her pretty head over her work. "She was telling him she wouldn't marry him if he continued to play ball—besides, Mr. Williams met her uncle, and he said they were engaged."

"Is she pretty?" demanded Mrs. Clancy.

"Beautiful," admitted Miss Tabor. "She's tall and fair and graceful, and she had on such a wonderful gown all trimmed"—

"It looks to me," interrupted Mrs. Clancy, cutting off the description of the dressmaking details heartlessly, "as if someone was just jealous."

"Why, Mother Clancy," said the girl, shocked and red, "you must think me perfectly frightful to believe I'd act that way."

"Oh, girls your age are all fools," said Mrs. Clancy complacently. "I reckon I was myself at your age. Why, if Willie even spoke to another girl I'd go out and hunt up two beaux just to show him I didn't care. You went out with Williams when we came in last night, didn't you?"

"Yes; he asked papa and me to late supper," the girl admitted. "But it really wasn't what you think. I wanted to find out something from him—something that's been worrying me."

"Did you find out?" asked the older woman skeptically.

"I don't know, Mother Clancy." The girl's face grew troubled. "I'm worried. I know Mr. Williams hasn't any money. Papa says he is so reckless he always is in debt, and lately, whenever he talks to me, he talks about the big sums he's going to have. I asked papa what it was, and he only grunted."

"He'd better pitch a lot better than he has been if he's counting on any of that world's series money," remarked Mrs. Clancy savagely. "McCarthy saved yesterday's game twice."

"You think Mr. Williams didn't want to win the game?" The girl's voice was tense with anxiety.

"I hate to say it—but it looked that way."

"Oh, Mother Clancy, I haven't dared to say a word to anyone about it," said the girl hesitatingly, "but I've been afraid for days. He said something to me that almost frightened me. He hinted that Mr. McCarthy was losing games on purpose. I didn't believe it—and somehow I got the idea Mr. Williams was betting on the Panthers."

"Now, you just keep your mouth shut about this," replied Mrs. Clancy, pressing her lips together determinedly. "I've had that same idea, and I think that's what's worryin' Willie. You just lead that fellow on to talk and I'll put a bug in Willie's ear. Only," she added, "Willie is likely to snap my head off for buttin' into his business. He's got to know, though."

Clancy came into the apartment soon afterward and Betty Tabor, making a hasty excuse, gathered up her fancy work.

"It's going to rain," remarked Clancy resignedly. "I think the game will be called off. If the game's off, I've got tickets to a theatre, and you and mother and I can go. Which one of the boys shall I ask to go with us?"

"If you don't mind," replied Betty Tabor steadily, "ask Mr. Williams."

The rain came down steadily and before one o'clock the contest was called off. The postponement was believed to lessen slightly the chances of the Bears to win the pennant, and they lounged dismally around the hotel, watching the bulletin board record the fact that the Panthers were winning easily, giving them the lead in the race by a small fraction in percentage.

Manager Clancy, his wife and Betty Tabor, with Williams rode away in a taxicab to the theatre. McCarthy declined Swanson's proposal to play billiards, and, going to their rooms, he commenced to read. Presently five of the players trooped in, led by Swanson, to play poker, and, shoving McCarthy's bed aside, ignoring his protests, they dragged out chairs and tables and started the game. Scarcely had they started when the telephone bell rang and Swanson answered:

"No, he's not up here," he said. "No. Who wants him? All right, put them on. Hello! Who is this? Oh, all right. No, Williams isn't here. Yes, I'm sure. He went out with the manager an hour ago—to a theatre, I think. All right. I'll tell him."

"Fellows," he said, as he hung up the receiver, "some friends want Williams to meet them as soon as he can. He'll know where. Fellow says it's important."

He glanced meaningfully at McCarthy, who nodded to show that he understood, and as he sat down he remarked:

"Kohinoor, I guess it's up to us to go to a show or something to-night."

"All right," replied McCarthy, striving vainly to continue his reading, while puzzling over the fresh development.

At that same instant there was an acrimonious conversation in progress in the room from which the telephone summons for Williams had just come. Easy Ed Edwards hung up after his brief talk with the player at the other end of the line, an ugly gleam in his cold eyes.

"He isn't there," he reported to Barney Baldwin, who was sitting by the table, jangling the ice in a high-ball glass. "Either he's trying to cross us or he's playing wise and keeping his stand-in with the manager."

"Sure he isn't trying to cross us?" asked Baldwin. "He won yesterday's game instead of losing as he agreed to do."

"He tried hard enough to lose it," sneered the gambler. "He tossed up the ball and those dubs couldn't beat him. I tell you you've got to handle that red-headed kid at third base as you promised you would. He saved that game twice. We've got to get rid of him."

"He's stubborn," snarled Baldwin. "I tried to get him to quit the team and go back home. He's as bull-headed as his uncle, and that's the limit."

"You know who he is?" queried the gambler in surprise. "Why don't you tell the newspaper boys and show him up. That would finish him. He's under cover with his identity, and if we can prove he hasn't any right to play with the Bears they'll have to throw out the games he's won."

"That's just the trouble," replied Baldwin bitterly. "He's straight as a string. He never played ball except at college. We can't tell who he is because that would prove he's all right and make him stronger than ever."

"Who is he?" inquired the gambler.

"He's the nephew of old Jim Lawrence, of Oregon, one of the richest men out there. Lawrence is his guardian. They had some sort of a run-in and the boy left."

"How do you know these things?" demanded the gambler.

"The boy and my niece were sweethearts at home. I coaxed her to tell me when I discovered she knew him. They were engaged once, I understand, but it was broken off."

"Then," said Edwards determinedly, "get your niece on the job. If anyone can handle that fellow a woman can."

"Oh, I say," protested Baldwin, with a show of indignation, "I can't ask her to get into anything like this."

"She probably was willing enough to get into it until she thought the boy didn't have any money," replied Edwards coldly. "I don't want the girl to do anything wrong. Just get her to make up with this McCarthy, or whatever his name is, and get him away from this ball team for a week. Baldwin, this is getting to be a serious matter with me, and with you, too, if you want to hold your political power."

"All right, all right," said Baldwin hastily. "Maybe I can persuade the girl to help us out. I'll try."

"You'd better succeed—if you want to send your man to the Senate," said Edwards threateningly.

"I'll go right away," assented the politician.

Baldwin arose leisurely, went down to his limousine that was waiting and ordered the man to drive home, although it was his custom to remain downtown until late. At home he sent at once for his niece, and, after a brief talk, during which he was careful to hint that McCarthy had made overtures toward reconciliation with his uncle, the girl went to the telephone.

McCarthy, summoned to the telephone, talked for a few moments and, as the poker game broke up, he called Swanson aside and said:

"You'll have to go alone to-night. I've got to make a call."

"Who is she?" asked Swanson insinuatingly.

"Barney Baldwin's niece—and at his house."

"Run on, Kohinoor," said the big shortstop. "I'll take Kennedy with me and if I'm not mistaken you'll find out more than I will."

CHAPTER XVI

McCarthy Makes a Call

It was a little past seven o'clock, when McCarthy, arrayed in what Swanson referred to as his "joy rags," which had been rescued from impound in an express office after his first renewal of prosperity, came out of the hotel. He was undecided, wavering as to whether or not it was wise for him to keep the appointment to call on Helen Baldwin.

They had met during his college career, and, after a courtship that was a whirlwind of impetuosity on his side, she had agreed to marry him. He recalled now, with rather bitter recollections of his own blindness, her seemingly careless curiosity regarding the extent of the Lawrence wealth and his own expectations. He had told her how, when his father had died, Jim Lawrence had taken him to rear as his own child and heir.

The boy had grown older and broadened with his short experience in the world outside the protecting circle that had been round him in preparatory school and in college, and he determined to write that night to his guardian the letter he had so long delayed and to apologize and admit that he had been headstrong and foolish.

During the long ride uptown to the city residence of the Baldwins he had time to think clearly. He knew that Barney Baldwin was wealthy, but he was unprepared for the magnificence of the garish house, set down amid wide lawns in the most exclusive part of the River Drive section.

Helen Baldwin entered the room in a few moments, and McCarthy gazed at her in admiring surprise.

She came forward with both hands outstretched, smiling, a strangely transformed girl from the cold, half-scornful one with whom he had parted only a short time before.

"I wanted to see you so much, Larry," she said. "I have been so blue and depressed since I—since we—since we last met. Why didn't you call?"

"I only reached the city last night," he replied as he took a seat beside her on a divan. "And—well, Helen, I hardly thought you would wish to see me."

"You foolish boy," she chided. "Don't you know yet that you must never take a girl at her word? Of course, I was annoyed to find you playing baseball with a professional team, but I didn't mean we never were to meet again."

"I thought your ultimatum settled all that," he answered, ill at ease. "It was rather a shock to find that you cared more for what I was than for what I am."

"You know, Larry, that you placed me in a painful position. It isn't as if I were a rich girl, able to share with the man I love. My father and mother are not rich, and Uncle Barney has supplied me with everything. He has spoiled me—and I would make a wretched wife for a poor man."

"I would not have proposed marriage," said McCarthy quietly, "unless I had thought I would be able to provide for you as well as your uncle could. When circumstances were changed I could not ask you to sacrifice yourself unless you were willing—unless you cared enough for me to adapt yourself to the circumstances."

"But, Larry, aren't you going to quit all this foolishness and go back? Haven't you been reconciled with Mr. Lawrence?" she asked in surprise.

"I expect to go back after the season is over and tell him how sorry I am that I caused him trouble."

"Please go, Larry. You'll go to please me, won't you?" she said appealingly.

"I cannot see why it would please you to have me quit now, when I'm most needed," he replied stiffly. "Surely you cannot know what you are asking."

"It is such a little thing I ask," she pouted, "I'm sure you would if you loved me."

The girl's eyes were filling. She had found him easy to handle by that appeal only a few short months before, but now, as he saw her, he was seized with a desire to laugh, as he realized that she was acting. The words of Swanson: "You'll find out more than we will," flashed into his mind, and he determined to meet acting with acting.

"Perhaps, Helen," he said softly, "if you could explain just why you want me to quit playing I could see my way to do it."

"That is being a sensible boy," she said, bathing her eyes with a bit of lace. "I don't like to see you making an exhibition of yourself before a crowd—for money." She shrugged her beautiful shoulders disdainfully.

"Is that all?" he asked quietly.

"All? Isn't it enough? And then there's Mr. Lawrence. I know he is worrying about you."

"Any other reasons?" he inquired.

"Then there's Uncle Barney"—

"What has Barney Baldwin to do with it?" His voice was sharp, and the girl hesitated under his steady scrutiny.

"You mustn't speak that way of my uncle," she said reprovingly. "I'm sure he's only interested in you because of me. He says it is imperative that you do not play any more with the Bears."

"Then Barney Baldwin ordered you to telephone for me to come here?" he asked harshly.

"He merely wanted me to persuade you to quit that ridiculous game and go back to Mr. Lawrence right away. He was only trying to save you."

For an instant he sat staring at the girl steadily. Then he said slowly:

"What a fool I've been."

"Oh, Larry, Larry!" she exclaimed, frightened by his manner. "What's the matter—is anything wrong?"

"Nothing wrong," he said, laughing mirthlessly. "Nothing wrong. You may tell your uncle, with my compliments, that I will continue to play with the Bears to the end of the season, and that, in spite of him and his dirty work we will win that pennant."

He arose and passed into the hall without a backward glance, ignoring the sobs of the girl, who buried her face in her handkerchief and wept gracefully, telling him between sobs that he was cruel. He took his hat from the servant and strode rapidly down the steps, his mind a turmoil of emotions.

How far did the plot to beat the Bears out of the pennant extend? How many were in it? Gradually he commenced to draw connected thoughts from the chaos of his brain. He realized that he was the storm center of a plot and that he was dealing with dangerous enemies.

The girl he had left so abruptly continued her stifled, stagey sobs until she heard the front door close. Then she sat up quickly, glanced at her features in a wall mirror, brushed back a lock of ruffled hair and rubbed her eyes lightly with her kerchief.

"How he has changed," she said to herself. "He is getting masterful, and three months ago one pout was enough. I could almost love him—even without old Jim Lawrence's money."

"At any rate," she said, looking at the handsome solitaire on her finger, "I can keep the ring. He never mentioned it. I must go tell Uncle Barney."

She ran lightly up the stairs to the den where Baldwin, smoking impatiently, was waiting for her.

"Well?" he inquired. "Did you land him?"

"Don't speak so vulgarly, Uncle Barney," the girl replied. "No, I did not. He has grown stubborn. He told me to tell you he intended to keep on playing to the end of the season, and that they would win—I've forgotten what he said they would win. Does it make much difference, just these few more games?"

"Does it make any difference?" he stormed. "Any difference—why, you fool, my whole political future may be ruined by that red-headed idiot. Get out of here. I'm going to telephone."

The girl, weeping in earnest now, hurried from the room as Barney Baldwin seized the telephone. A moment later he was saying:

"Hello, Ed. She fell down. He's stubborn and says he'll keep on playing. You'd better see your man and break that story in the newspaper. What? They got him? Where? Well, then, they've got the wrong man. McCarthy left my house not five minutes ago."

CHAPTER XVII.

The Fight in the Café

Swanson left the hotel intending to pursue his volunteer detective work only a few moments after McCarthy started uptown to respond to the invitation of Miss Baldwin. He had remained lounging around the lobby talking with Kennedy, the big catcher, until he saw Williams leave the

hotel by a side entrance and enter a street car. Then he signaled Kennedy and they strolled out together and caught the next car.

"It's Williams we're going to trail," was the only hint Swanson would give at the start.

"Williams?" snorted Kennedy. "You told me there was a chance for a scrap. That guy won't fight."

"Maybe those he's going to see will," replied Swanson encouragingly.

Swanson did not know then that, only a short time before he made his arrangement with Kennedy, Williams had pleaded over the telephone to Edwards that he was afraid to meet him that evening, as requested, because he thought Clancy might discover the fact and that Clancy was already suspicious. Williams pretended alarm and convinced Edwards that there was danger of someone following the pitcher, and on his way to keep the appointment to meet the athlete he had drawn into the toils of the conspiracy, he stopped at his gambling room and ordered Jack, a big ex-prizefighter, to follow him to the meeting place and to keep watch during the conference.

It was growing dark when Edwards strolled slowly across town toward the rendezvous. Williams's fear of being upbraided when he met the gambler on that evening was unfounded. The gambler was convinced that the pitcher had made every effort to lose the game and that he had been balked only by luck and the fielding of McCarthy. He wanted to learn from Williams whether or not there was any other player on the team who could be bribed into assisting in the plot.

Swanson and Kennedy trailing cautiously saw Williams jump off the car and walk along the sidewalk, and, after riding past him, they descended and walked along the opposite side of the street, keeping close in the shadows of the tall buildings. A block further downtown they saw Williams stop, look around suspiciously as if to see whether or not anyone was following him, then turn up the side street and enter a café. Swanson quickly led the way. They passed the saloon on the opposite side of the street, and after walking half a block they retraced their steps and stopped in a doorway opposite the entrance.

"Let's wait here and see who goes in," suggested Swanson.

"Whom do you expect him to meet?" inquired Kennedy.

"Edwards," vouchsafed Swanson grudgingly. "He has been meeting that crook for ten days now, and I want to find out what they're up to."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" demanded Kennedy. "I'd kick his head off"—

"We hadn't the goods on him," explained Swanson. "That's what I want you for. If we can prove he's up to some crooked work"—

The big Swede menacingly folded his ponderous paw into a fist and flexed his biceps.

"Do you think he's trying to throw games? He's been pitching funny ball lately," asked Kennedy. "I've had to fight him in every game to get him to pitch fast."

"What I think and what I can prove are different things," growled the shortstop. "I've got my suspicions. Now we're after proof. Come on. If he was to meet anyone there the one he was to meet is in ahead of him."

The players walked to the corner, crossed the street and went into the saloon without an effort at concealment. The place appeared empty, save for a bartender who was washing glasses behind the bar, and a heavy, coarse-featured man lounging near the end of the bar with a half-consumed high ball before him.

"Gimme a beer," ordered Swanson, throwing a coin onto the bar; "what you have, Ben?"

"Make it two," replied Kennedy.

There was no sign of Williams, and only a narrow doorway, leading somewhere toward the rear, gave a clue as to his probable egress from the barroom.

The bartender, having rung up the amount of the sale on the cash register, exchanged a few words in a low tone with the man at the end. Then he strolled back and stood near where Swanson and Kennedy were wasting time over their drinks.

"We were expecting to meet a friend here to-night," remarked Swanson, deciding to take a new tack with the bartender. "Rather tall, slender young fellow. Has anyone been in?"

"Young fellow came in a while ago something like that," replied the bartender. "Seemed to be expecting someone, but turned around and went out. Maybe that was him."

They knew he was lying, and Swanson, without changing expression, said:

"Must have thought he was in the wrong place, or too early. Maybe he'll come back. We'll stick around awhile."

Had they known what was transpiring in the private room just beyond the doorway their interest would have been greater. The big man who had stood at the end of the bar had gone at the first opportunity and was reporting to Easy Ed Edwards, who grew venomous with hate, while Williams sat shaking with fright.

"I knew they'd get on. If they report to Clancy I'm done for," he said.

"Shut up," ordered the gambler angrily. "They haven't seen you and they don't know I'm here. Who are they, Jack?"

"I don't know dem," said the ex-fighter. "Dey's a big, husky lookin' guy, a Dutchman, I guess, wid a blue suit"—

"It's Swanson," said Williams. "He's been looking at me as if he knew something for two or three days. He has followed me here."

"De oder one is a smaller, wiry sort o' guy. Got on a light suit"—

"It must be McCarthy," whined Williams. "He's always with Swanson. They're looking for me. I wish I had kept out of this."

"Listen," ordered Edwards coldly. "This fellow McCarthy is the one we want. If we can get him out of the way it'll be easy and I can get even with that big, fat lobster, Baldwin, for trying to double cross me. Jack, you go out there and get in a mix-up with them and take a poke at the little fellow that'll keep him from playing ball for a week. Is the bartender a friend of yours?"

"One of me best pals," replied the ex-fighter. "Leaf it to me. I'll land de punch dat'll fix dat fresh, young guy."

The fighter strolled back to the barroom and resumed his stand at the end of the bar, eyeing the two ball players. As he tapped the bar the bartender walked to him.

"I'm goin' to start somethin'," said Jack in a low tone. "Ed wants me to punch de head offen dat youngest one."

"That big guy looks hard to handle," commented the bartender. "Make it quick. I don't like no rough house here. The license ain't any too safe now."

"I'm going back to see what's there," whispered Kennedy to Swanson. "You stick here. I'll bluff it through."

He walked toward the door leading back from the bar and started to pass through it.

"Here, young feller," said the bartender, "where you goin'?"

"Washroom," replied Kennedy, keeping on through the door.

"Naw you don't. Come back outen there," ordered the fighter angrily.

"Who appointed you boss?" asked Kennedy belligerently.

"Well, I'm boss anywhere I goes," declared the big fellow. "Youse stay outen there. D'ye hear?"

He grabbed the ball player by the arm—and at that instant Kennedy swung. His fist caught the bruiser squarely on the mouth and he reeled back, then, with a bellow of rage, he sprang at Kennedy.

With a roar of anger Swanson hurled himself into the fray. Kennedy's fist had caught the ex-fighter and cut his cheek open and blood spurted upon both as they fought, the frail partition swaying under their weight. Swanson leaped with his arm drawn for a knock-out blow, just as Jack's right caught Kennedy upon the jaw and dropped him to the floor helpless. The blow the Swede had aimed at the fighter hit him upon the shoulder and slid over his head, and Jack, whirling, faced his new adversary. Swanson sprang to close quarters with the giant and his fist thudded home. Jack, groggy and already half spent from his exertions, clinched and hung on. The Swede, now a man gone mad with the lust of battle, shook him off, hurled the giant backward against the partition, and, crouching, he prepared to swing his right, waiting for the opening to the jaw, while Jack, groggy and half dazed, covered his head with his arms and swayed. The blow never landed. Suddenly it seemed to Swanson as if the worlds were crashing around his head. Bright stars danced before his eyes, his knees gave way beneath him, and with a foolish laugh he sank to the floor and rolled, helpless, beside his fallen comrade. His last recollection was of hearing a telephone bell jangling somewhere.

The ringing of the telephone bell that Swanson heard as he lapsed into unconsciousness was the call of Barney Baldwin for Ed Edwards. The gambler, who, with his frightened companion,

had heard the sounds of the terrific struggle in the barroom sink into silence, spoke rapidly for an instant, then, as Baldwin said: "They've got the wrong man," he hung up the receiver with an oath and leaped toward the doorway. He emerged upon a tableau showing his slugger, half dazed and hanging to the partition for support, two figures inert upon the floor and the bartender coolly walking back toward the bar, carrying a heavy bung-starter in his hand, that explained the sudden ending of the fight.

CHAPTER XVIII

Two Missing Men

The disappearance of Silent Swanson and Ben Kennedy brought consternation to the ranks of the Bears, consternation that increased as the hour for starting the first game of the series against the Jackrabbits drew near. McCarthy, returning to the rooms after his surprising interview with Helen Baldwin, was determined to tell his chum all that had taken place and to explain as well as was possible the position in which he found himself. He planned to urge Swanson to go with him to Clancy, and for that reason he postponed taking the manager into his confidence.

He hastened downstairs to breakfast, half expecting to find his chum waiting for him in the dining room with an account of the night's events. He finished breakfast in a troubled state of mind, and, after wandering around the lobby for nearly an hour in the vain hope that Swanson would appear, he encountered Noisy Norton, who appeared disturbed and distressed.

"Say," said Norton, "seen Kennedy?"

"No—seen Swanson?"

"They went out together," said Norton, with an unusual burst of conversation.

"Didn't Kennedy come home either?" asked McCarthy in fresh alarm.

"No."

They sat silent for some time, then Noisy said:

"Something wrong."

"What'll we do?" asked McCarthy anxiously.

"Tell Clancy," said Norton, with an effort.

They ascended the elevator together and rapped at Clancy's door.

"Mr. Clancy," said McCarthy, when the manager had bade them enter, "I ought to have come to you before. Swanson and Kennedy are missing. They didn't come in last night—and we're worried."

"Where were they?" demanded the manager quickly.

"I was going with Swanson on an errand last night," said McCarthy. "We were working on that matter that caused trouble the other day. Then I had a telephone call and went to see a—friend of mine. Swanson said he'd take Kennedy with him. They left the hotel together, Norton tells me, and they haven't come home."

"Either of them drinking?" asked Clancy sharply.

"Beer—sometimes—not often," said Norton.

"Swanson hasn't been drinking at all," declared McCarthy. "Neither of them would go off on a tear at this stage of the game."

"You're right, Kohinoor," said Clancy worriedly. "It's something else. They'll show up, all right. Thank you for telling me, boys, and don't say anything about it."

In spite of their silence, however, the rumor that the star catcher and the shortstop were missing spread through the team. By noon the players were openly discussing the whereabouts of the two players. Clancy showed his anxiety.

"Can't you tell me where they were going, Kohinoor?" he asked. "I don't want to press you to reveal anything you don't want to, but I'm afraid those boys are in trouble."

"I haven't any idea where they were going," replied McCarthy. "I know that they were watching a certain fellow, and that a gambler named Edwards was mixed up in it."

"You've told me plenty," said the manager in low tones. "I have suspected it all along. I'm afraid they're run afoul of Edwards and that he has managed to get them into trouble."

"If he has he has his nerve," said McCarthy. "Look over there. He just came in with a party of friends. I know the big man."

"Who is he?" inquired the manager, watching the party just entering one of the field boxes.

"That's Barney Baldwin, the political boss," explained McCarthy.

"Is he in this thing, too?" inquired Clancy, starting with surprise.

"Yes, at least I think so. You see, I know his niece. It was at his house I went to call last night. I discovered that he ordered his niece to call me and had her try to persuade me to quit the team right away."

"Look here, Kohinoor," said the manager, drawing him aside so the other players could not hear, "I'm sorry you didn't tell me this before. It looks worse and worse all the time. He wanted you to quit—and now two of my men disappear. You'll have to play short to-day, and we'll send Pardridge to third. Get in there and hustle."

Smith, the big spitball pitcher of the Bears, who had been held in reserve, was chosen to pitch, and for three innings the teams fought for the opening without a real chance to score. The cunning of Clancy was shown in his choice of the big pitcher, whose speed and spitball kept the Jackrabbit batters hitting toward right field or sending slow, easy bounders down toward the pitcher. He had chosen Smith in order to protect the weakened third base side of the infield, and his plan worked well until the fourth inning, when Egbert, one of the speediest of the Jackrabbit sprinters, hit a spitball on top and sent a slow, weak roller toward third base. Pardridge made a desperate effort to field the ball, but fell short, and the Jackrabbits discovered the weak place in the defense. Two bunts rolled down the third-base line in succession, and, although Pardridge, playing close in a desperate effort to stop that style of attack, managed to throw out the second bunter, runners were on second and third with but one out when "Buckthorne" Black smashed a long hit over center for three bases and scored an instant later on a sharp, slashing hit through Noisy Norton. The three runs seemed to spell the doom of the Bears, and they came in from the field angry, hot and desperate. The roar of the crowd grew stronger when the score board showed the Panthers were winning their game—5 to 1—from the Blues.

McCarthy was first at bat in that inning. As he selected his bat he glanced toward the stand and grew hot with rage at seeing Baldwin laughing until red in the face and slapping Ed Edwards on the back. The gambler's usually stony face wore a smile of relief. McCarthy walked to the plate, pushed the first ball pitched down the third-base line and outsprinted the ball to first. Norton strove to bring him home, but his long-line drive went straight to the left fielder, and when Holleran struck out it seemed as if the chance to score was lost for that inning. McCarthy stood still, a few feet off first base, and, as Randall wound up to pitch, he started at top speed for second base. Jackson, catching for the Jackrabbits, saw him, grabbed the ball and leaped into position to throw. Like a flash McCarthy stopped and danced a step or two back toward first base, as if daring the catcher to throw the ball. Jackson pretended to throw to first, and, as McCarthy edged a step closer the base the catcher saw there was no chance to catch him, and slowly relaxing from throwing position, he took a step forward and started to toss the ball back to his pitcher. In that instant McCarthy acted. He leaped forward, and, before Jackson could recover and spring back into throwing position, the fleet Bear was nearing second base, making a beautifully executed delayed steal. Jackson threw, although it was too late. The ball, hurled over hastily, broke through the second baseman's hands and rolled twenty feet toward center field. McCarthy turned second at full speed and raced for third, while Reilly tore after the ball, and, picking it up, made a fast, low throw toward third. Again the ball escaped the baseman, and McCarthy, without the loss of a stride, turned third base and raced home, sliding under Jackson as he reached for the high-thrown ball.

The game had settled down to a desperate series of attacks by the Bears, and a stubborn defense on the part of the Jackrabbits. In the sixth and again in the seventh the Bears forced the attack, but each time they fell short of scoring, and the eighth inning came with the score 3 to 1 against them. Lucas, who was catching in Kennedy's place, opened that inning, and the Bears' hope arose when he, the weakest hitter on the team, was hit by a pitched ball. Smith drove a hard bouncer toward first, but O'Meara knocked down the ball and reached the base in time to retire the big, lumbering pitcher, letting Lucas reach second. Jacobsen struck out, and McCarthy, gritting his teeth, came to bat. One strike and one ball had been called when, looking toward the bench for a signal from Clancy, he saw a sight that made his heart jump. In that fleeting glance he had seen Swanson, in uniform, coming onto the bench through the little doorway under the stands.

Swanson's eye was black and a strip of plaster extended from under his cap onto his forehead. His face was swollen and discolored and a bandage covered his head, showing under his cap.

If he only could get on first base, McCarthy told himself, there was hope, and, as the ball sped toward him he poked out his bat, dropped another bunt toward third base, and, by a terrific burst of speed he beat it to first base, sending Lucas to third.

"Swanson batting for Holleran. Swanson will play shortstop, McCarthy third base, Partridge in left field."

McCarthy had determined to steal second base, but the chance never presented. The first ball that came whizzing toward the plate Swanson hit. It went like a rocket far out to left center field. Two speedy outfielders glanced at the flying ball, then turned and sprinted for the outer barriers. The ball soared on and on, and with a crash struck against the sign over the left field seats and fell back into the throng in the bleachers, and while the crowd cheered and groaned three Bears trotted around the bases to the plate.

Swanson, running slowly and painfully, crossed the plate, with the score that put the Bears in the lead. He did not stop. Straight toward the box where Edwards and Baldwin sat, he went. His face was terrible. They saw him coming, and Baldwin, apologetic with fear, half arose, as if to cry for help. The gambler, white but still keeping his nerve, shrank back a trifle, but held his seat. Swanson walked straight to them. For an instant he towered over them threateningly, then he said:

"Good afternoon, gentlemen, I hope you're glad to see me."

CHAPTER XIX

Swanson to the Rescue

When Silent Swanson aroused himself from the effects of the blow on the head from the beer mallet in the hands of the treacherous bartender, he sat up feebly and found himself in semi-darkness.

"Someone crowned me with a crowbar," he muttered to himself as his brain gradually began to work normally. "They must have kicked me after I went down."

A faint groan from the heavy shadows near him startled him into a realization of what had happened. He felt around for a moment and his fingers touched the body of a man huddled against a wall.

"It must be Ken—and he's hurt," he muttered, and crept toward his companion. Swanson worked over him, shaking and speaking to him and presently Kennedy stirred and sat up against the wall.

"Where are we? What happened?" he inquired in a bewildered manner.

"Search me," replied Swanson mournfully. "I was just getting ready to swing the haymaker on that big fellow when the house fell. I think someone beamed me from behind with a brick and then kicked us around. Ouch—my ribs feel stoved in."

"I'm sore all over," moaned Kennedy. "That fellow didn't do it all by himself, did he?"

"I have a dim recollection of hearing someone tell him to fix us right," replied Swanson. "I may have dreamed it."

"Let's get out of here," urged Swanson suddenly. "If some watchman finds us here we'll be pinched, and it will make a nice story for the reporters."

"Where do you think we are?" asked Kennedy, striving to get to his feet and groaning with every move.

"In the alley back of the joint we were in," replied Swanson. "They must have dragged us to the back door and dumped us."

He had managed to get upon his feet, assisted Kennedy to arise, and slowly and with many groans they went toward the mouth of the alley.

"Let's go around to the front door and clean out that place," urged Swanson, growing angry.

Both men were commencing to recover from the effects of the cruel treatment they had endured, and, as their injured muscles loosened their anger arose. They made their way painfully around the block and to the entrance of the saloon. It was locked and the place was in total darkness. Swanson shook the barred doors without result, then stood gazing blankly against the

glass.

"Say, Ken, we must have been knocked out for quite a while," he remarked thoughtfully. "No one is here. They probably closed up as soon as they threw us out—and we haven't a bit of proof against anyone."

"Wonder what time it is?" groaned Kennedy. "We've got to get to bed if we want to play."

"Holy Mackerel," exclaimed Swanson, using his favorite form of swearing. "I forgot! That's it! Ken, after we were knocked out they beat us to keep us from playing. Come on. We've got to forget about fighting and get ready to play. I'll get even with someone for this."

Swanson was thinking rapidly as they limped slowly along the darkened streets in search of a night prowling cabman or taxi-cab, keeping a sharp lookout for policemen, fearing they might be arrested because of their battered condition.

"We've got to get to somewhere we can be patched up and get some sleep," he repeated, urging Kennedy, whose sufferings made their progress slow. "We've got to keep those crooks from finding out where we are. Let them think they've finished us and then show up in time to play."

"I don't think I can play, Silent," moaned Kennedy. "I can't drag myself much farther."

He was making a brave effort to keep on, and for another block Swanson half supported him. Then he gave up and sat down upon the curbing.

"Sit here," said Swanson quickly. "There is an all-night drug store a couple of blocks down; I'll find a cab there."

He limped away as rapidly as possible, and, almost before Kennedy realized it, he returned in a taxicab.

"Caught him just starting home," explained Swanson, as he half lifted Kennedy into the tonneau. "He says there is a hospital less than a mile from here where we can get treatment."

The bruised and battered players groaned and swore under their breath, while the cab made a rapid trip to the hospital, and half an hour later they were resting easily in a private room, their wounds were being washed and dressed and a young doctor was working hard to relieve their sufferings.

"We've got to play ball this afternoon, Doc," said Swanson, watching the surgeon cut and wash the hair from the wound on his scalp. "Fix us up right."

"You'll not play ball this week," said the surgeon cheerfully. "Your friend over there will be all right in a couple of days. He's badly bruised and his hand is sprained, but not seriously. He's sorer than you are, but by morning you'll be a cripple."

"But, Doc, we've got to play," pleaded Swanson. "You've got to fix us up."

"I'll do all I can," remarked the surgeon. "But your right arm is badly wrenched and bruised. The cuts won't hurt, but one of your eyes will be out of commission for three or four days. Whose mule kicked you?"

Swanson, pledging the doctor to secrecy, revealed part of the truth.

"You won't be able to play," he advised his patients, "and Kennedy must take two days off at least."

"I've got to play, Doc," responded Swanson, "if it's on one leg; I've got to."

It was a few minutes past noon when Swanson awoke with a start. The nurse was in the room, moving about quietly, and Kennedy still slept, moving and muttering in his sleep, as if dreaming of the battle. He remained quiet for a few moments, and then said:

"Nurse, please bring me my clothes."

"You must wait until after breakfast," she said, coming to the bedside. "Dr. Anderson was here a short time ago, and said I was to give you your breakfast when you awoke, then call him."

"But I'm in a hurry," protested the player. "I can't wait. They'll be anxious about us."

"The doctor said he would give you treatment and massage, so that you could get out more quickly," she responded. "I'll bring breakfast and then call him."

Kennedy, feeling much refreshed, but too sore and stiff to move without suffering, was awakened for breakfast, and he and Swanson discussed the situation in low tones as they ate.

It was past one o'clock before Swanson commenced to worry about the failure of the doctor to come. After fuming and fretting for more than half an hour he rang for the nurse and sent her

in quest of Dr. Anderson. She returned soon and reported that he had been summoned suddenly to assist in performing an important operation, but that he probably would return soon. Not until two o'clock had passed did Swanson commence to become seriously disturbed at the failure of the doctor to appear. A short nap had refreshed him somewhat, and when Kennedy announced that it was past two o'clock he waited a few moments, then commenced ringing the call bell by his bedside to summon the nurse. There was no response, and growing angry and impatient, he rang again and again.

"If I only had a pair of pants," wailed the helpless giant, "I'd break out."

He climbed out of bed and searched the room. In his impatience he bumped his wounded head, and blood flowed afresh from under the bandages, and with a movement of his arm he smeared it over his face. The giant Swede was working himself into a fury. Every few moments he rang the bell, and a few moments before three o'clock the nurse, calm and appearing as if nothing unusual was happening, came in.

"Did you ring?" she inquired.

Swanson started to explode, but stood looking at her in helpless fury.

"Get me my clothes," he ordered in tones that frightened the girl, trained as she was to the outbursts of patients.

"Get me my clothes," he repeated.

"It is against orders," she said hesitatingly. "You cannot go until the doctor"——

"Get me my clothes," he half screamed. "If my clothes aren't here in five minutes I'm going this way."

The nurse, thoroughly alarmed by the fury of the big man, ran from the room, and, within five minutes she returned with another nurse to support her.

"Where are my clothes?" he demanded in an awful voice.

"It's against orders," said the older nurse firmly. "You cannot leave without permission from the doctor in charge."

For an instant it seemed as if Swanson would forget himself and become violent. With an effort he controlled his anger and sank back upon the pillows.

"All right," he said resignedly, "let me telephone to the boss and explain."

"You are not going to quit, Silent?" demanded Kennedy, starting up in bed. "I'll go myself"——

The quick wink that Swanson gave him stopped the catcher's angry expostulation.

"That's a good boy!" said the nurse pleasantly. "There isn't any use to fret. I'll bring you the telephone."

The telephone was brought, and, when the nurse left the room Swanson called up the hotel at which they lived.

"That you, Joe?" he said rapidly. "This is Silent—yes, in hospital. Send a taxi to the corner as fast as you can get it here. I'll be watching."

He cut off the carriage clerk's curious questions by hanging up the receiver.

"What are you going to do?" whispered Kennedy from his bed.

"I'm going out of here," said Swanson. He crept out of bed, and with his face pressed against the window, watched the corner four floors below until a taxicab stopped there and waited. Then, drawing a sheet over his night gown, he opened the door cautiously.

The receiving clerk had a glimpse of a ferocious looking ghost, garbed in a white sheet, and with face smeared with blood, racing down the hallway, and before her screams could bring help, Swanson had run limpingly across the street, leaped into the taxi and was shouting orders to the driver to get him to the ball park.

CHAPTER XX

Hidden Foes

The disappearance and dramatic reappearance of Swanson and Kennedy, who was released from the hospital after the game, was the sensation of the country for twelve hours; then it was paled into insignificance by a new sensation that caused a wave of indignation and an insistent demand for proof from all parts of the country and left the Bears dazed by the series of events that crowded upon them.

The second sensation was the printing of an article in one of the foremost papers of their city in which the charge was made that one member of the Bear team had been bribed; indeed, had been put on the team with the sole end that he might throw games and force the championship upon the Panthers.

The article created a furore which caused the public to forget the mysterious circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Swanson and Kennedy.

Although no name was mentioned, the facts set forth fitted only McCarthy, the new third baseman, and rallied all the admirers of the lithe red-headed boy to his side and set loose a storm of anger and suspicion directed upon him by those who criticised his playing or opposed him through prejudice.

Manager Clancy, after an anxious evening and night trying to get at the facts of the case of Swanson and Kennedy, and getting Kennedy out of the hospital, was the first of the Bears to see the new attack. He read the entire article from end to end, and going to his apartment he telephoned for McCarthy, Swanson, Kennedy and Secretary Tabor to come to his rooms at once.

Manager Clancy was waiting, striding up and down the room restlessly and as the three players entered, he unceremoniously shooed his wife into the next room before she had a chance to defend her boys.

"Fellows," said the manager quietly, "I sent for you because you seem to know more what's going on than the others do. I suppose none of you has read this article in this morning's paper. I'll read it to you."

As he read, the players began to look one at the other and ejaculations of surprise and anger came from them. When Clancy reached the portion of the article telling of the player joining the Bears, McCarthy sprang from his chair.

"Why," he exclaimed, flushing angrily, "why, he means me."

"It's a d—n shame," roared Swanson. "I'll wring his neck."

"Let me finish," said Clancy, and completed the reading. At the end the players broke into excited questions and threats and Clancy said:

"Now, see here, boys; we're against a tough proposition. This article is just part of it. I wanted to talk things over with you fellows. I've sent for Technicalities, and want to find out a few things from him. Now you fellows tell me all you know. By the way, you needn't shy at using Williams's name. I'm not saying he's guilty, but I know he's the one you have been watching."

Detail by detail they described to the manager the events of the preceding days.

"Keep quiet about all that. The case is one we can't beat except on the ball field. Every one of us is certain that Edwards has bribed Williams and that he has lined up this big politician, Barney Baldwin, and now they've dished up this story about McCarthy to try to drive him out of the game. Are you game to stand what the crowd will do to you to-day, Kohinoor?"

"I'll play," replied McCarthy grimly.

"Better stuff your ears with cotton if we're losing," advised the manager. "This crowd will turn on you in a second and accuse you of more than the paper did, if you make an error or two. It will be worse if you stay out of the game. Then they'll think the story is true and that I've laid you off for throwing games. I have a plan. I'm going to act as if I believe McCarthy is trying to throw games."

"Thanks," said McCarthy, gripping the manager's hand gratefully, just as a knock sounded on the door and Technicalities Feehan entered.

"I regret exceedingly my absence when you wanted me, Mr. Clancy," he said. "I have just returned and have been reading this absurd article reflecting upon the integrity of Mr. McCarthy."

"What do you think of it?" asked Swanson.

"Absurd. The figures prove directly the contrary. Let me read to you some of my recent calculations"—

"Never mind—never mind," protested Clancy. "Save them for the paper. What I wanted to find out is who is this fellow Barney Baldwin?"

"Baldwin," said Feehan calmly, "is a politician, accused of much crooked work. I do not know that he ever has been convicted"—

"Meantime," remarked Feehan calmly, "I shall attempt to discover the relations existing between Mr. Edwards, the gamester, and this person who wrote this attack. I shall have some statistics to show the editor"—

"Never mind the statistics," said Clancy, cutting off Feehan before he could bestride his hobby, "I want you to find out who was back of the fellow who wrote that article; whether anyone bribed him to do it. I'm beginning to think we are dealing with bigger men than Ed Edwards.

"Now see here, fellows," he added frowning worriedly, "we're up against the toughest proposition we ever tackled, but we can beat it. The best way to beat them is to pretend we don't suspect a thing and let them work out their own schemes"—"Hello, come in," he called in response to a rap on the door. "Oh, it's you, Bannard! How are you? I'm just having a little talk with the boys. How are things to-day?"

He feigned an indifferent manner.

"Pretty good, Bill. Team all right?" asked the president. "I heard two of the boys got mixed up in a barroom scrap."

"I was just warning them about that," said Clancy. "These are the two (he pointed to Kennedy and Swanson). I was warning them that a lot of tough mugs in this burg are likely to get excited over baseball these days and ball players ought to stick close to the hotel."

"Glad they're not much hurt," said Bannard easily, looking at the battered athletes. "How is the pitching staff? By the way, who is working to-day?"

"It's Williams's turn," said Clancy steadily. "Why?"

"Why, that's what I came to see about," replied the president frankly. "That friend of mine—the one I spoke to you about the other day—wants to see him pitch. I'm starting West at noon and I told him I'd ask you as a favor. He was pretty sore because you didn't put him in the other time I asked you."

"All right. Always glad to oblige when possible," said Clancy grimly.

"Why didn't you ask who his friend is?" inquired Swanson when Bannard departed.

"Bonehead, fool, slow thinker," said Clancy. "I ought to bench myself for not thinking of it. I'll find out the first time I see him."

The players laughed nervously and departed from the room. Scarcely had McCarthy and Swanson reached their quarters when the telephone girl called to tell McCarthy an important call had been coming in for half an hour.

"Very well, connect me," said McCarthy.

He recognized Helen Baldwin's voice, and it shook with emotion, as she made certain she was talking to him.

"Oh, Larry," she said, "I must see you! I must—to-night, if possible! Please come!"

"What is the matter, Helen?" he asked anxiously. "It's impossible to come to-night—and after the last"—

"I know, I know, Larry," she said rapidly. "Please, please forget all that. I didn't understand! I didn't know! I've found out something that showed me how bad and wicked I have been. I didn't mean to bring harm to you"—

"Uncle came home," she said. "He'd been drinking. He made terrible threats against you."

"I'll be up to-night," said McCarthy.

"Better look out—it's a trap," warned Swanson, who had heard McCarthy promise to call that night.

"There's something wrong up there," replied McCarthy. "I'm going to Baldwin's house to-night."

They went downstairs talking in low tones. On the parlor floor Betty Tabor was sitting reading. She had scarcely spoken to McCarthy since the day she had heard him in conversation with Helen Baldwin. Impulsively she dropped her book and came toward him with her hand outstretched.

"Mr. McCarthy," she said rapidly, "I wanted to tell you—I do not believe a word of these horrible things the paper says about you. It is hateful! I told them they were false. I didn't think

they'd dare tell others"—

"Them?" inquired McCarthy. "Then you've heard this story before?"

"Yes," she admitted. "I refused to listen—I knew there was not a word of truth in the stories. I knew you were honest"—

"I thank you very much, Miss Tabor," he said quietly. "I shall not need to ask who told you."

"I only wanted you to know I believed in you," she said simply, and as he looked into her eyes, she lowered them with a quick blush and hastened to recover her book.

CHAPTER XXI

Fair Play

Thirty thousand persons were packed into the big stands on the Bears' Park, and ten thousand others camped in the outer field seats when the teams ran out to play that day.

A few loyalists applauded McCarthy as he trotted along with the other players, but the ripple of applause died suddenly as if the friends he had in the crowd feared to start a counterstorm of criticism and abuse.

The great crowd was strangely quiet, although a hum of comment spread through the stands when the Bears took the fielding practice and Jacobson, the pitcher, practiced at third base, while McCarthy remained near the stands idly warming up a recruit pitcher. The buzz arose to a hum of excitement. Reporters, deserting the press box, swarmed down under the stands and crowded to the entrance at the rear of the Bears' bench, calling for Clancy, who went to speak with them.

"Why isn't McCarthy in the game?" demanded the spokesman, who already had written that McCarthy was suspended and out of the game.

"He is in the game," replied Clancy innocently. "Why shouldn't he be?"

For an instant the reporters stood undecided, then sprinted back to their posts, to change what they had written and alter the line-up.

Bill Tascott, the umpire, swaggered out to the plate, dusted the rubber, while the megaphones announced the batteries, and, at that instant McCarthy, jerking his glove from his belt, hurled his catcher's mitt to the bench and trotted out to third base, as Jacobson walked toward the bench.

The little scattering applause that greeted him grew and grew until the crowd applauded heartily and gave round after round of applause for the third baseman. It was the American spirit of fair play and justice revealing itself, and the crowd, accepting Manager Clancy's confidence in his third baseman, rendered its verdict of not guilty in cheers.

The Jackrabbits had figured cunningly that McCarthy would be unnerved by the strain of the situation, and "Hooks" O'Leary, the manager, had ordered that the attack be directed upon him. The first batter pushed a slow, twisting boulder down the third-base line and McCarthy, racing forward, scooped the ball with one hand and still running, snapped it underhand to first base ten feet ahead of the runner. He knew that his feat was mere bravado and that he had taken a reckless and useless chance, but the crowd needed no further convincing, but broke into a crashing testimonial of applause, and he knew he was safe so far as their confidence in him was involved.

The game developed into a panic, then the rout of the Rabbits and the triumphant Bears rushed to victory by a score of 11 to 2. And, while they were winning, the Panthers won one game by a wide margin and lost the second after a fierce pitcher's duel, 2 to 1, leaving the Bears a full game in the lead of the pennant race, with but five games to play, while the Panthers played four.

"The place to contradict baseball stories," remarked Clancy, grimly, in the club house, as the players were dressing after the victory, "is on the ball field. If we had lost to-day we would have been a bunch of crooks, but as we won, we're all honest."

He glanced quickly toward where Williams was dressing, but the pitcher kept his eyes averted and seemed not to hear the remark.

"And Kohinoor," the manager added, "I give it to you for nerve in pulling off that circus stuff in the first inning. But if you do it again it'll cost you a bunch of your salary."

McCarthy found a note in his key box when he returned to the hotel. He had torn it open to read when Miss Betty Tabor, who had returned from the grounds with Mrs. Clancy, came laughing and almost dancing across the lobby toward the group of players, leaving her portly, but no less elated companion, to pant along behind her.

"Oh, it was glorious, boys!" she said. "I never was so excited in my life as when you made those four runs in the third inning. And Mother Clancy was so wrought up she dropped three stitches in her fancy work and had to work all the rest of the game picking them out."

"She has a frightful case of nerves," said Swanson sarcastically. "I believe she'd break a needle if we won the world's championship the last inning of the deciding game."

They laughed joyously as the girl turned to McCarthy and said frankly:

"I am so glad for your sake, Mr. McCarthy. I was so angry I could have turned and told some of the people behind me what I thought of them before the game started, but when you fielded that first ball they cheered you—and that made up for it."

"They should have heard what Mr. Clancy had to say about it," he laughed, and then growing serious said, "It is kind of you, Miss Tabor. I am glad to know someone had faith in me."

They were standing a little apart from the group, which was slowly moving toward the elevators, chattering excitedly as school boys and girls. The feeling of relief from the anxiety and suspicion that had fallen upon them gave rise to exuberance.

"Mr. Clancy is taking us for an auto ride all around the city to-night," said Miss Tabor. "Shall I ask him to invite you to come with us? There's an extra seat."

"It's awfully good of you," he said in genuine regret. "I wish I could—but I have an engagement."

"Oh," she said, her tones chilling quickly. "I'm sorry."

"Miss Tabor," he pleaded eagerly, "please do not think I do not want to go"—

"Did I hint such a thing?" she inquired, with an air of innocent indifference.

He could not fence with her upon that basis and after a moment of idle exchange of formalities she turned to join Mrs. Clancy and McCarthy went to his room. Swanson was stretched upon the bed, reading newspapers, and flinging each sheet at random as he finished scanning its contents.

"Darn the luck," said McCarthy, hurling his glove and shoes toward his trunk.

"Did his 'ittle tootsie wootsy treat him mean?" asked Swanson in his most exasperating tones.

"Aw shut up, you big dub," snapped McCarthy angrily, resorting to ball players' repartee to cover his feelings.

"Maybe his lovey dovey is just jealous and will forgive her 'ittle pet," taunted the giant. "Petty mustn't mind what lovey says in her notes."

"Oh," said Swanson, with vast relief when he found Swanson was barking up the wrong tree, "I forgot all about the note."

He dragged the missive from his pocket and scanned it hastily, then tossed it across to Swanson.

"Date is off," he announced joyously. "Needn't watch me to-night."

Swanson read:

"Dear Larry:

"Don't come to-night. Uncle will be here—with friends—and I'm afraid. I must see you soon as possible. Will try to arrange to meet you somewhere to-morrow. I will telephone. H."

And while Swanson read the note McCarthy was at the telephone.

"Miss Tabor," he was saying eagerly, "this is Mr. McCarthy. I find my engagement for this evening is canceled. Please ask Mr. Clancy if I may go. Please. Yes, I said please. Shall I say it again?"

"And, Miss Tabor, if that spare seat is in the tonneau— No, Mrs. Clancy should sit with her husband."

CHAPTER XXII

A Victory and a Defeat

Another crowd of enormous size greeted the Bears as they raced onto the ball field early the next afternoon to play the doubleheader that was to complete the season's series against the Jackrabbits.

The paper that had printed the attack upon the team had given space to a partial retraction, and, although the players did not know it, the reporter who had written the article had been suspended during an investigation that was inspired because Technicalities Feehan had, after overwhelming two editors with his statistics, convinced them that no basis of truth existed for such charges.

The Bears were happy and confident. With a full game the advantage and only five more games to play, and those comparatively easy; with the pitching staff in good condition, they considered the pennant as won.

McCarthy and Swanson almost had forgotten to keep watch upon Williams. They despised him, and in the club house and on the field they ignored him completely. Several of the other players, although they knew nothing of the plot, had come to ignore the pitcher, and he shunned them all. He seemed nervous and laboring under a heavy strain. Two or three times he started toward Clancy as if to speak to him, but each time the manager, who was watching him, turned away to address another player. Finally, Williams seemed to gather his courage, and with a pretense of indifference he sauntered toward Clancy, who was talking with several of the players.

"Which game do I work, Bill?" he asked, tossing his glove down and picking up a bat.

"I think I'll save you for the first game of the World's Series, Adonis," replied Clancy. "It's a shame to waste you beating these dub clubs."

The hidden sarcasm in the words stung. The pitcher started, then rallied and said:

"What have you got it in for me about? Haven't I worked my head off to win for your team?"

"I haven't made any kick," responded Clancy shortly. "When I have a kick coming I'll make it good and strong."

"I'm not joking, Bill," the pitcher persisted. "My arm is good, and a lot of my friends are wondering why I don't work when it's my turn."

"Tell them," said Clancy very quietly, "that I have only one third baseman, and that I don't want him killed."

Williams's eyes were opened. He felt beneath the bitter calmness of the manager's voice the fact that Clancy knew—at least part of the truth. His jaw dropped and his face went white. Clancy, with a short laugh, started to run away.

"Then I don't work to-day?" Alarm, pleading and a note of despair in his tones as if he realized what the manager's decision meant to him.

"No, not to-day," replied Clancy, watching him sharply.

He turned away with exaggerated carelessness, and the rat-faced, cold-eyed man in the stands, who had been watching them closely, gritted out an oath and turned to Barney Baldwin, who was sitting beside him:

"He isn't going to let Williams pitch," He said. "We're done for, Baldwin."

The politician turned purple with rage.

"Well, by —, Edwards," he snarled, "we'll see about this. I'll put this over or know why."

The first game of the afternoon was a romp for the Bears. They scored early, and by clean hitting and dashing play on the bases, piled up tallies until the opponents were hopelessly defeated before the fifth inning. The game was a stern chase from that to the finish, and the Bears, scoring steadily, won, 9 to 2.

Instead of being elated by the victory Clancy seemed worried. On the bench he was fretful and uneasy.

"Don't you fellows take any wide chances in the next game," he decreed while the pitchers were warming up for the final battle against the Jackrabbits. "We want this game. I'm sending Wilcox in to win it. Who's that young bird the Rabbits are warming up? Hoskins, eh? Busher? Well, watch him. These young fellows with nothing but a strong arm are dangerous as the deuce

at this time of the year."

Unlike their manager, the players were confident. Their easy victory in the first game, the fact that Wilcox, their best right-handed pitcher, was to start the game against an unknown and untried "busher" fresh from some small team and nervous through desire to win his first game, made it seem as if victory should be easy.

They blanked the Jackrabbits easily in the first inning, and, obedient to orders, attacked the pitching of the youngster, Hoskins, with every art known to them. They coached noisily, they waited at the plate, they crowded close to the plate and they ran at the ball.

"What's that bird got?" demanded Clancy as each batter returned to the bench. "Nothin', eh? Nothing, and you swingin' your bat like you was stirrin' apple butter? Nothin'? Say, you fellows get busy and make a run or two."

In spite of the orders, the abuse and criticism heaped upon them by the anxious manager, the Bears were not able to hit the balls offered by the tall, cool youngster picked up by the Jackrabbits from some obscure club. He had steadied from his early symptoms of stage fright and was pitching beautifully. His curve ball angled across the plate, his speed jumped high across the shoulders of the batters. The fifth inning came with the score nothing to nothing.

The players no longer were confident. The batters no longer came back to the bench with reports that the pitcher "had nothing," but they grew serious and anxious and silent. They tried bunting, but the Jackrabbits were prepared and checked the assault. They changed, and instead of waiting they hit the first ball pitched. They realized now that they were engaged in a contest with a pitcher of merit, for they knew the difference between hitting unluckily and hitting good pitching.

Wilcox, a quiet, studious pitcher, was among the first to realize that the youngster was pitching well.

"Get a run for me, fellows," he begged. "This kid has a world of stuff on the ball. Just meet that fast one—poke it, and it may go over safe. Get a run for me and we'll trim them."

The veteran was pitching slowly, cautiously. Two or three times the Jackrabbits threatened to score, but each time Wilcox put another twist on the ball and stopped them. Inning after inning he pleaded with his fellows to make a run, and Clancy stormed and grew sarcastic with each failure.

"Get him this time, fellows; finish it up," begged Clancy when the Jackrabbits had been blanked. Norton was the first batter. He chopped his bat with a short stroke and sent a safe hit flying to right. A sacrifice pushed him along to second base and the crowd commenced to cheer as Pardridge came to bat. The big fellow drove his bat crashing against the first ball. It went on a line almost straight toward second base. Norton was tearing for the plate when O'Neill, the Jackrabbit second baseman, running across, leaped and stretched out one hand. The ball stuck in his extended glove, he came down squarely on second base and the triumphant scream of the crowd ended in a gasp of disappointment at the realization that a double play had balked the Bears' attack and ended the inning.

The Jackrabbits, aroused by their narrow escape, attacked with new vigor. A fumble gave them the opening. Despite the most determined efforts of Wilcox they forced a run across the plate and the Bears were thrown back under a handicap.

McCarthy was the first batter. He crowded close to the plate, determined to force the young pitcher to earn his victory. He refused to hit until two strikes and three balls had been called, and then, shortening his grip upon his bat, he hit the straight, fast ball sharply to center for a base. Instead of sacrificing, Swanson received orders to hit and run and, although he was thrown out at first base, McCarthy reached second, and Babbitt, the first baseman, came to bat. Hoskins appeared nervous. The strain was telling upon the youngster, and Babbitt hit the first ball. From the sound of the bat hitting the ball, McCarthy knew the hit was not on the ground, and as he started homeward a glance showed him that Merode, the speedy little center fielder, was running back into the deep field with his eye on the ball. It was a fly-out unless Merode muffed, and McCarthy, knowing that such a muff happens only four or five times a season, returned and perched upon second base, ready to sprint for third the instant the ball struck the fielder's hands. The thought flashed through his brain that the Blues had released Merode because of a weak arm and a habit of lobbing the ball back to the infielders instead of throwing it back with all his power. The ball fell into the upstretched hands of the outfielder. McCarthy leaped and raced for third base. He knew that Merode would not throw there because of his weak arm and the length of the throw, so he swung a little outside the base path, slowed up as he turned third, and glanced toward the field. The ball was coming in. Merode had thrown it slowly and carelessly toward the shortstop. McCarthy leaped forward toward the plate. The shortstop, running out to meet the slow throw, heard the cry of alarm from the fielders and the roar of excitement from the crowd. He knew what was happening. He grabbed the ball, whirled and threw like a shot to the plate. McCarthy was two-thirds of the way home; but the ball, striking the ground, bounded into the hands of the catcher six feet ahead of him. Like a flash McCarthy hurled his body inside the line, with one foot outstretched to touch the goal. He had out-guessed the catcher. His foot,

stretched out, felt the sharp jar of some object, then struck the plate, and, rolling over and over, he arose covered with dust.

The crowd was roaring. Nine out of ten thought McCarthy had counted with the tying run, but Bill Tascott, crouching over the plate, jerked his thumb over his shoulder, signaling that the runner was out and the Bears beaten.

Like flood waters breaking a dam, the crowd surged from the stands, shouting, screaming, threatening. A thousand men, mad with disappointment, swarmed around the umpire, pushing, shoving, shaking fists and screaming. McCarthy pushed his way hurriedly into the mob, which was growing more and more threatening.

"Let him alone. He was right," he cried loudly. "The ball touched my foot as I slid in."

Those who heard him stopped, and in an instant the danger was over. The crowd, subsiding suddenly, began to melt away. Tascott grinned as he turned to McCarthy.

"That was tough luck, Kohinoor," he said. "I was pulling for you to beat the ball, and you had it beat, but your leg kicked up and hit the ball as you slid. I'd have given a month's salary to call you safe."

CHAPTER XXIII

Kidnapped

"Train leaves at 11.30, Kohinoor," said Swanson as McCarthy came up to their rooms after dinner that evening. "Let's play billiards until it goes."

"Can't," replied McCarthy shortly. "I've got to make that call to-night. There's something wrong up there at Baldwin's, Silent. The girl writes to-day that Baldwin will not be home this evening and that she must see me to give me important news."

"Sure you can trust her?" asked the big shortstop. "Don't take any chances."

"There's no danger in going to one of the finest homes on the drive to call on a young woman," laughed McCarthy.

"I'll get away as soon as possible and tackle you for fifty points, three cushions, before we start for the train," promised McCarthy. "You hang around."

McCarthy had puzzled for two days over the odd conduct of Helen Baldwin, and her brief note, appointing that evening for the call, had failed to bring any solution of the riddle. He knew now that the girl with whom he had imagined himself in love was selfish and shallow, but he could not believe her criminal, nor did he for an instant think that she was a part of the conspiracy to rob the Bears of their championship. That he was in any danger he did not consider possible. He went uptown determined to hasten the interview as much as possible and arrived at the Baldwin mansion shortly after eight o'clock.

Presently Helen Baldwin came. She was wearing a dark street gown and her face was pale, dark rings under her eyes showing that she had been suffering.

"Larry," she said quietly, "you'll think me hateful and wicked. I have had a terrible time these last two days, and I have been thinking.

"I wanted to tell you I was a foolish, vain girl. I didn't love you; I was in love with the thought of being mistress to James Lawrence's fortune. I was conceited and silly and never thought of any one but myself; but I did like you, Larry—I do. You will believe that, will you not?"

"Yes," he said simply.

"I thought baseball was just a silly game," she went on, as if each word cost her a pang. "I couldn't understand why you gave up so much; why you insisted upon staying with the team. I didn't know that here in the East it is a great business and that hundreds of thousands of people take it so seriously. Uncle Barney asked me to get you to quit, and I told him you would. My vanity was hurt when you refused."

"You found out what it means for me to quit?" he asked.

"Yes. Uncle Barney came home in a terrible rage. He had been drinking and when he saw me he swore about you. He swore he'd fix you."

Her voice sank to a frightened whisper.

"He was only bluffing—I beg pardon; only talking," he said, striving to soothe her.

"I didn't know until then that I really cared, Larry," she went on. "He frightened me. I asked him questions, and he told me what he and some others have been doing to keep your club from winning."

"What did he tell you?" he asked quickly.

"He said they had one of your pitchers, I think he said, fixed, and that he had paid some other players to hurt you and to hurt Mr. Wilcox, I think he said. He wanted me to get you to come to meet me somewhere, and they'd kidnap you and someone else—Mr. Swanson, I believe it was."

"He's a kindly fellow," commented McCarthy coldly, an angry light gleaming in his blue eyes. "Did he say where this was to take place?"

"No. He tried to get me to write you to meet me at some place he named. He said I needn't go there, just get you to come. I told him I would. When he went to sleep I telephoned you because I was so frightened. To-day we had a terrible quarrel. I refused to write to you to meet me at the place he named."

Her terror was so evident that her words were not necessary to add conviction.

McCarthy laughed a short, rasping laugh.

"It's a good joke on him," he explained. "If he and his thugs are hunting for me all over the city and I here in his own home, safe; the last place he would look for me."

"You mustn't wait," she urged anxiously. "You mustn't wait here, Larry. He is drinking and I do not know what he might do if he came home and found you here. You must go now."

"I'll run back to the hotel and pick up my bodyguard, Swanson," he said steadily, and with an attempt at indifference of manner, "I think I'll be safe."

"You'll kiss me goodbye, Larry," she pleaded. "She wouldn't care—if she knew."

"She?" he asked. "What do you mean?"

He was astonished and curious to learn how the girl knew anything of his growing regard for Betty Tabor.

"I knew, I knew," she repeated. "I knew it the first time we met—I knew there was another girl"—

"I'm certain I did not hint at such a thing," he replied with an attempt at dignified bearing. "I have not even told her."

"Good-bye," she said. "I hope you're happy, Larry, and please don't think I meant to do wrong."

She clung to him weeping until he put away her hands and went out. The girl threw herself face downward upon the lounge and sobbed, this time from a sense of loneliness and perhaps of loss.

McCarthy descended the stairs and walked rapidly through the darkened lawn to the street. In spite of his pretense of believing there was no danger he found himself nervous. He walked two blocks toward the street car line, when a taxicab swerved toward the sidewalk.

"Taxi, sir, taxi?" asked the driver. "Take you downtown, sir?"

McCarthy hesitated an instant. If he hurried back to the hotel and found Swanson he would rid himself of the nervous dread of something intangible which he could not explain.

"How much downtown?" he asked, stopping near the taxicab, which had come to a full stop.

"Take you down for half rates, sir; I'm going that way."

"Very well," said McCarthy.

He walked to the side of the car, and turned the handle to step within. The instant he entered the car he felt himself seized and jerked downward while a pair of hands gripped at his throat. A vicious blow struck him on the back of the neck. Twisting, fighting, squirming, he struggled to free himself from the hands that were throttling him. His knees found a grip upon the floor of the car, and bracing himself, he jerked loose from one of the men, and struck wildly at the shape he saw silhouetted against the opposite window. His fist met flesh with a crunching sound.

"I'll kill you for that," gritted someone, striking him. In the half light of the interior McCarthy saw an object descending. He threw up an arm to protect his head, and with a crunching blow a

heavy blackjack fell upon his arm. He seized the weapon and jerked it from the hand that had held it, but it fell to the floor of the cab.

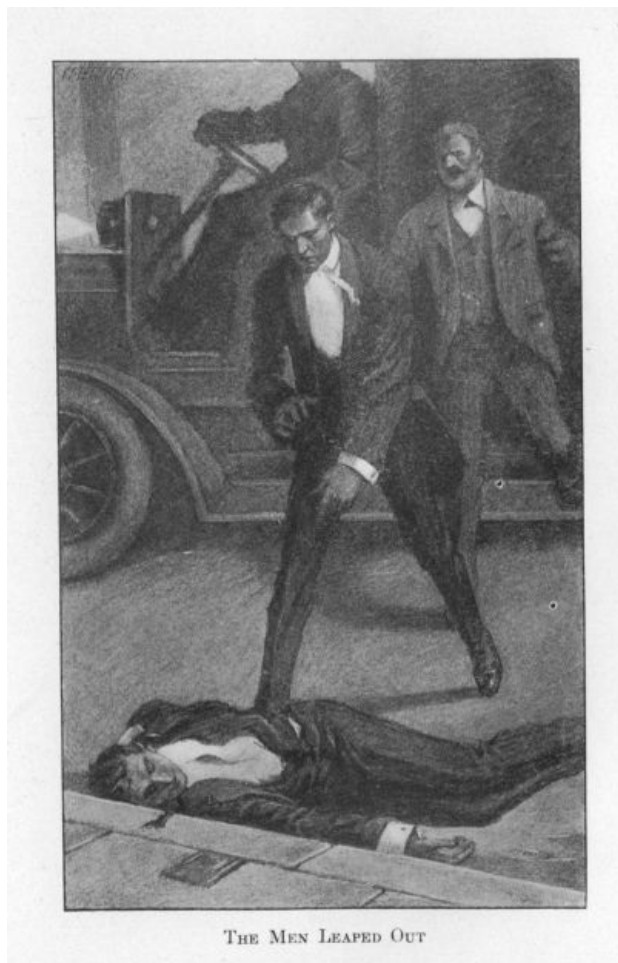
McCarthy had struggled to his feet, bowing as his head struck the roof. One man, seated, kicked at him and hurt him cruelly. He was standing, with the car door swinging wide, while the car lurched and raced along a rough street.

Curses, groans, cries of pain and anger came from the interior as the player, battling against two unknown opponents, fought on. All three of the participants in the battle at forty miles an hour, were hampered by the smallness of the interior.

McCarthy strove to tear himself from the arms and legs that struck and kicked him, to get his head out of the window to raise the alarm.

Again and again he cried. Then suddenly the car lurched around a corner at a mad pace, tipping onto two wheels and skidding sickeningly. At that instant one of his assailants drove his feet against his body, and, as the car lurched wildly, McCarthy broke loose, grasped frantically for something to save himself, plunged from the machine, struck upon the asphalt of the side street into which the car had whirled, slid along it to the gutter and lay a huddled heap.

The car stopped quickly and whirled back to where he lay. The men leaped out, one cursing and frothing, the other urging silence and haste. Between them they lifted the half-conscious player and shoved him into the bottom of the car.



THE MEN LEAPED OUT

"Hurry up, Fred," urged the quiet man to the driver. "These fellows down at the corner are coming. Jump in, Jack."

They leaped back into the taxi, and the man called Jack said viciously:

"There—you, that'll teach you"—He kicked the prostrate player.

"Cut that out," ordered the quiet man, quickly. "You needn't murder him; he's fixed."

Baiting a Trap

Events that preceded and led up to the desperate encounter between McCarthy and the two strangers in the dark interior of a racing taxicab seemed to have been dictated by fate. At the end of the doubleheader between the Jackrabbits and Bears, Easy Ed Edwards had hurriedly laid new plans to save himself. The gambler had watched both contests, believing all the time that the result of the games ended his final hope of winning the bets, and, facing ruin, he had welcomed his new lease upon hope with the determination of resorting to desperate measures to achieve his end. He realized that unless he acted at once all his plotting had failed. After the defeat of the Bears in the second game he left the grounds, hastened downtown in a taxi and at once telephoned to both Adonis Williams and Barney Baldwin to meet him at his rooms. Baldwin responded at once to the gambler's summons and entered the rooms blustering.

"You've a frightful nerve, Edwards," snarled the angry politician. "Understand, I do not take orders from cheap gamblers."

"You needn't try storming at me," said the gambler quietly. "I'm onto you. You may ring over such a bluff as that in politics, but not with me. You don't seem to understand."

"I don't think you can deliver any votes anyhow," said Baldwin sullenly. "I've nothing but your word for it."

"That's all the security I ever needed," said the gambler superciliously. "But never mind about the votes—you're going to help me."

"I've done all I can"—

"No, you haven't. I want you to go to-morrow morning and join the Bears and I want you to see to it that Williams pitches one of those games against the Blues. He'll lose it this time. I've thrown a scare into him and he'll do it, even if he gives himself away."

"I tell you I can't," snarled Baldwin. "President Bannard is the only one who knows I own the club"—

"Take your stock with you. That proves you own it."

"And Bannard is out of town. Clancy wouldn't pay any attention to me"—

"You own this club," said Edwards. "You can do what you please with it, and you're going to do it."

"You talk as if you owned me!" Baldwin was purple with anger.

"I do," said the gambler coldly. "It would look good in print to have the people know that Barney Baldwin, the crooked politician, owns both the Bears and the Panthers, wouldn't it?"

"You have no proof"—

"Haven't I? I saved both your notes. You're a fool, Baldwin. You write letters. I have two mentioning McCarthy and Williams. I wouldn't have any trouble getting them printed. Any sporting editor in the city would give a thousand dollars for such proof."

"Look here, Ed," expostulated Baldwin, "there isn't any use for us to quarrel. We're both in this thing"—

"Now you're talking sense," said the gambler. "We haven't any time to lose. The club leaves town at 11.30 to-night."

"What do you want me to do?" gasped Baldwin helplessly.

"You're pretty strong with Captain Rafferty, of the North Nineteenth Street police, aren't you?"

"Yes—I've done him some favors."

"Well, I want you to fix it with him that when I bring a prisoner in to-night some time he's to be locked downstairs and kept until you telephone to let him loose."

"What are you going to do?" asked Baldwin, alarmed.

"I'm going to do something myself," replied the gambler sharply. "I've tried a lot of you fellows and you've all fallen down. Now I'm going to get this McCarthy and put him out of the way."

"You're taking an awful risk"—

"It's a sure thing the other way, and I'm desperate," the gambler cut him short. "When you get that fixed you catch the first train and follow the team. You get Clancy in the morning and

force him to let Williams pitch one of the games down there. Wilcox is worked out now, and if we can make sure Williams will pitch one game, that will force Clancy to pitch Wilcox again, and he'll be beaten sure. With McCarthy out of the game, as he will be, the Bears haven't a chance. They're half a game ahead, but if they lose two out of three and the Panthers win one out of their remaining two games, the Panthers beat them out on percentage, and the Panthers ought to win both games."

"You haven't cornered McCarthy yet?" asked the politician.

"No," admitted Edwards. "He left the hotel nearly two hours ago and said he'd be back before ten o'clock. I have two men watching him, and they're to let me know where he is and what he is doing. I ought to have heard from them before now."

The telephone rang at that instant.

"This is it now," said Edwards in low tones. "Hello!" he said, taking up the receiver. "Yes—you, Jack? All right. You have? Where? All right. I'll join you as fast as I can get there. Don't let him reach the hotel if I'm late—you understand?"

"What do you think of that?" he asked, turning to Baldwin. "Of all the gall—where do you think that fellow McCarthy was?"

"I don't know."

"No wonder Jack had such a hard time locating him. He was at your house."

"I have a taxi waiting downstairs," said Edwards quickly. "Come on, I'll drop you at the police station. We'll bring in the prisoner before you've been there very long."

"How are you going to get him?" inquired Baldwin, as the taxi dodged in and out among traffic.

"I've got Big Jack, the fighter, trailing McCarthy," said the gambler, laughing mirthlessly. "He's sore on ball players since that scrap with Swanson and Kennedy the other night, and he'll welcome a chance to get his hands on one."

"He won't hurt him, will he?" asked Baldwin nervously.

"No, he won't hurt him," replied the gambler with scornful sarcasm. "Not a bit. He'll probably take him in his lap and sing him to sleep."

"This is dangerous business," objected Baldwin nervously. "We might all get into trouble."

"We're all in trouble now," snapped Edwards. "You leave the trouble end of it to me."

The taxi slackened its pace as it approached the police station and Baldwin climbed out under the lights that marked it as the home of the paid guardians of the people's rights and liberties.

"Don't fall down this time," warned the gambler. "If this don't go through, the newspapers will have some fine information to print in the next few days."

"I'll fix it, Ed, I'll frame it all right," replied Baldwin nervously.

The mention of his name and the imposing manner he had assumed won for him immediate entrance to the captain's private room, and after ten minutes of earnest conversation, Baldwin emerged, the gray-haired official with the gilt stars and chevrons escorting him and shaking hands with him at the street door.

"Don't forget, Raferty," said Baldwin importantly. "I want him kept close until I can get the proof we need. Don't let any lawyers or reporters get near him and keep your cops from gossiping. You won't lose anything by it, Raferty. Drop down and see me sometime. I'd like to talk the political situation over with you. You understand?"

Meantime the taxicab, with Edwards inside, had raced across the upper portion of the city to the place where Big Jack was pacing the shadowy part of the sidewalk half a block from Baldwin's home.

"He hasn't come out yet," Jack reported, stepping into the light as the taxi slowed down and crept along near the gutter.

"Jump in," said Edwards. "Run over across the street, and step in the shadow there," he ordered the chauffeur.

"There he comes now, out the gate. Follow him."

Five minutes later McCarthy stepped into the trap laid by the gambler and, ten minutes after he lurched out of the machine, he was carried half unconscious, into the basement door of the police station and deposited roughly upon the bench in the "cozy corner."

CHAPTER XXV

McCarthy Disappears

Silent Swanson was jabbing billiard balls around the table as if venting his irritability upon the innocent spheres of ivory.

"Why so cruel to the relics of departed generations of ball players?" inquired Kennedy, who was cuddled up in cushioned settee watching.

"Waiting for Kohinoor."

"Where has he gone?" inquired Kennedy carelessly.

"Skirting again," explained Swanson. "He ought to be back before long," added Swanson, jabbing the balls harder and stopping to look at his watch. "It's five past ten now, and he said he'd cut the call short."

"Think any sane guy would quit a pretty girl to spend an evening with you?" inquired Kennedy insultingly, having decided to wile away the time by ragging his big teammate.

"I've a hunch something is wrong with Kohinoor," said Swanson. "He told me he'd break away early and shoot me some billiards before train time. He didn't say just when, but I expected him back by ten."

"Why don't you sue him for divorce if he neglects you?" suggested Kennedy, again seeking to start an argument.

Swanson consulted his watch with gloomy foreboding and declined to engage in repartee.

"Better come drag along down to the train," suggested Kennedy. "I'll buy the gas wagon to haul us. Your little playmate is safe enough."

"I'll hang around here," replied Swanson without spirit.

"All right," Kennedy remarked, rising and stretching himself. "I'm going to dig along and get into the hay before that old rattler starts. I want some sleep. Most of the fellows already have gone."

Swanson resumed his gloomy pastime of making fancy shots on the billiard table. When he looked at his watch again it marked ten-thirty.

He strolled upstairs to the lobby, scanned the writing room and smoking rooms for a sign of McCarthy and then, with a sudden anxiety, he hurried to the telephone and called the Baldwin residence number.

"Is this Miss Baldwin speaking?" he inquired, using his off-the-field manner.

"Is my friend, Mr. McCarthy, there?" he inquired when she responded in the affirmative. "I was to meet him, and he has not appeared."

"Hasn't he arrived at the hotel?" he girl inquired in quick alarm. "He left here more than three-quarters of an hour ago. Has something happened to him?"

"I don't know, miss," said Swanson. "I got anxious waiting for him— You're sure he left your house that long ago?"

"About that—I'm not certain," she said. "He was only here a short time."

"I expect he had to wait for a car, or else went straight to the station without stopping here," said Swanson, striving to quiet the evident alarm of the girl, although his own misgivings were growing. "He left the house alone, did he?"

"Who are you? Are you a friend of his?" asked the girl anxiously.

"Yes, I'm Swanson, his chum," replied the shortstop. "You needn't worry, miss, he'll be all right. I'm sorry I worried you about it."

He hung up the receiver and made a hasty tour of the hotel, descended to the billiard room, peeped into the bar and hurried through the writing and lounging rooms.

"Five after eleven," he muttered to himself, as he turned from the desk. "Kohinoor has found

he was late and stayed on the car to the station. I'll grab a taxi and hurry down."

"If he comes in tell him I've gone," he called to the clerk as he hurried out.

A quarter of an hour later Swanson hurried into the great train shed where the train was waiting to bear the Bears on their final trip of the season. Most of the athletes already had sought their berths to attempt to get to sleep before the train started, as the ride was a short one and the hours of sleep too few.

"Kohinoor down yet?" asked Swanson in a low tone, as he came near the trainer.

"Haven't seen him," replied the trainer. "I put his baggage in his berth. There's a card game in the smoking room, maybe he's in there."

"I'll watch for him at the gate," said Swanson, "he may turn up yet."

Worried and alarmed, Swanson swung back along the train and took his stand where he could watch the entrances to the station and the great clock at the same time. Three minutes remained before time for the train to start. There was a flurry in the crowd at the gates, and a man broke through to race for the train. Swanson's heart leaped. He started to meet the newcomer, then, with a sickening feeling, he saw that it was not McCarthy, but Williams.

"Seen Kohinoor?" inquired Swanson, as Williams hurried past.

"Not since dinner. Isn't he here?" inquired Williams, stopping and dropping his grip.

"Haven't seen him," replied Swanson, watching Williams closely for symptoms of guilt, and finding none.

"I expected it," said Williams nastily. "Maybe that story about him trying to throw games is straight after all."

"That's what a lot of them will say if he don't show up to-morrow," reflected Swanson.

The warning cry of all aboard sounded. The big shortstop hesitated an instant, and gave a despairing glance toward the gates, just being closed.

"It won't do for both of us to miss this game," he muttered as he turned and ran along the platform. The porter was just closing the vestibule doors and the train was gathering speed as the big shortstop swung aboard, went into the now deserted smoking room and sank down, staring blankly out of the window at the rushing lights.

Before the train reached the city of the Blues the news that McCarthy was missing had spread through the car of the Bears. The consternation that followed the rumor grew as the berths were made up and it became a certainty that the third baseman was not with the team. Swanson had informed Manager Clancy early in the morning of the events of the preceding evening so far as he knew them. They had not told anyone, but every member of the team knew, and they gathered in little groups. Williams was circulating around the car, talking with different players.

"Look at him," said Swanson to Clancy. "He hates McCarthy and he was the one who told them first that Kohinoor was not with us. He guessed it when I asked him last night if he had seen him."

"It's queer," the voice of Pardridge came from the berth behind them. "It's a funny thing that all this sort of trouble in the team started when that red-headed tramp joined us."

"They'll all be talking that way," said Swanson gloomily. "They wait for a chance to knock."

"Something may have happened to delay him," said the manager in tones that showed he did not believe his own hopeful words. "Maybe he went to the wrong station, or had an accident. Have you looked at the papers?"

"Yes. Nothing in them about any accident. I'm still hoping he'll be in at noon, catching that early morning train."

"I hope for a telegram from him anyway, when we get to the hotel," replied the manager.

But McCarthy did not show up, nor was there any telegram from him awaiting when the team reached their hotel.

Baldwin Shows His Hand

"There's a swarm of reporters down in the lobby all excited over McCarthy," announced Swanson as, in obedience to orders, he, with Kennedy, Norton and Technicalities Feehan, gathered in Clancy's room soon after breakfast.

"Let them wait," replied Clancy. "They've been calling up here every five minutes."

Briefly each of the players recounted the little they had seen or heard during the preceding evening, Swanson giving his account of his engagement with McCarthy, his telephone conversation with Miss Baldwin, of her evident sincerity when she informed him as to McCarthy's departure from the house and of his vain wait.

"But what could have happened?" asked Kennedy. "You're sure he got out of the house? It's only two blocks to the street car line and three to the elevated on lighted streets, you say. If he was hit by an automobile or held up by robbers it would have been in the newspapers."

"Manager Clancy," said Feehan softly from his perch upon a trunk, which gave him the aspect of a huge owl, "I have been giving consideration to a plan. Unless Mr. McCarthy should arrive on the 11.45 train I shall catch the noonday express for home, arriving there shortly after five, to put my plan into effect."

"But you cannot neglect your work, Feehan," protested the manager. "It's fine of you to offer it, but you've got yourself to think of."

"I have a premonition," responded the reporter solemnly, "or what Mr. Swanson so graphically expresses as a 'hunch,' that the story at the other end is bigger than the story of the contest. Besides, Mr. Hardner has kindly consented to report the game of to-day for my paper as well as his own."

"What's your theory, Technicalities?" asked Clancy gratefully.

"Only one of two things are probable," explained Feehan. "Either McCarthy left of his own accord or because of threats made to him or else he has been kidnapped by certain—ah—interests, let us say, desirous of preventing the Bears from winning the championship emblem."

"Ah, Kohinoor wouldn't quit, and they couldn't scare him," growled Swanson.

"Precisely, Mr. Swanson. The statistics prove beyond doubt that he is not concerned in the losing of games, putting aside the fact that the young man undoubtedly is honest and sincere. That leaves us only one premise, the other having been found untenable. Mr. McCarthy has been kidnapped."

"I can't figure how they could take him in a public street or from a street car," interposed Clancy.

"I have calculated that," said the reporter. "Either he is in the Baldwin home and Miss Baldwin ah—er—falsified or he was attacked between her uncle's home and the street car line two and one-half blocks distant."

"How do you propose finding him?" asked Clancy.

"I shall arrive at 5.11," replied the peculiar little man of news quietly. "Before six o'clock I shall have one of the best detective agencies in the world scouring the city."

The train came steaming into the station on time and the shortstop and the reporter crowded closer to the gates, watching the stream of hurrying passengers rushing through the narrow gates and spreading, fan-like, across the great floor. Suddenly Swanson's elbow jarred against the reporter's body, causing the frail statistician to wince.

"Look there!" said Swanson in excited whispers.

"Where—who?" inquired Feehan, striving to focus his heavy glasses upon the position indicated by his companion.

"It's Baldwin—the big fellow with the cane and the small satchel. See him?"

"I see a big man. I never saw Baldwin," responded the reporter. "Now, what can he be doing over here?"

"I'm going to find out," replied Swanson, his jaw setting pugnaciously. "McCarthy isn't on that train or he'd have been out among the first, and they're almost all out now. Good luck to you, Feehan, and wire me the minute you locate Kohinoor."

"I will," promised the reporter. "What you've got to do is to win that game to-day without him. I'll have him here to-morrow if he hasn't broken a leg."

Swanson leaped into the taxi immediately behind that into which he had seen Baldwin climb,

and ordered the driver to follow the other vehicle. His surprise hardly could have been greater than when the short pursuit of Baldwin ended at the hotel from which he had come, unless it was that which came over him when, upon following the big man to the desk, he heard Baldwin order the clerk to send his card to Manager Clancy.

Swanson's surprise, however, was little more than that experienced by Manager Clancy when the bell boy delivered Baldwin's card.

"Send him right up," he said, and as the boy turned he said to himself: "Now, what the dickens does that fellow want with me?"

Baldwin entered the room pompously, and walked toward the Bears' manager with his pudgy hand extended.

"Ah, Clancy," he said patronizingly. "I'm Mr. Baldwin. I've seen you often on the field, but never had the occasion to meet you before."

"Yes," replied Clancy, ignoring the hand, "I've heard of you often, Baldwin, in various connections. You wanted to see me?"

"Yes; matter of business," said the big man. "Fact is, Clancy, I ran over from home purposely to have a little confidential talk with you."

"Depends upon what it is whether it's confidential or not," said Clancy; "I can't pledge myself not to tell the newspaper boys, especially if you've come to give me a third baseman."

"Hasn't McCarthy shown up?" inquired the politician quickly.

"No," responded Clancy coldly. "Didn't happen to see him over in town, did you?"

"No, no. Fact is, Clancy, I never have paid much attention to my ball players."

"Your ball players?" It was Clancy's turn to be astonished.

"Yes, yes; Clancy, I supposed you knew. I've owned the controlling interest in the Bears for a number of years. That's what I came to see you about."

"You own the Bears?" Clancy's tone was between surprise and disbelief.

"Certainly, certainly. Now, I haven't taken any active interest in them for several reasons until lately. Truth is things aren't going to suit me, and I have decided to take a hand myself."

"You have?" asked Clancy. "Well, you may own this club, but I'm d—d if you can run it while I'm manager."

"I'm not trying to run it, Clancy," replied the big man, unruffled. "Don't fly off that way. I just decided to use the owner's prerogative of consulting the manager."

"All right, Mr. Baldwin," replied Clancy, puzzled and mollified. "I did not know—you see it's a new idea—I didn't even know you owned stock."

Clancy was sparring for time in which to collect his thoughts, which were sadly scattered by the unexpected developments.

"Thought you might not be convinced," said Baldwin easily, "so I brought the documents along. Look over them and be convinced I own the club. They cost me a pretty neat pile, but I'm satisfied. You've made 'em pay me."

He tossed over the book of stock certificates, and Clancy, who owned a few shares of stock himself, realized their genuineness as he looked through them while planning his next move.

"I congratulate you," he said, handing back the forms. "I own a couple myself, so I know what they pay. Well, what have you to suggest, Mr. Baldwin? We're having a hard time winning this race, and if I seemed curt, blame it on worries. I have plenty."

"Naturally we all want to win," said Baldwin pompously. "Now, as to behavior, I'm told Swanson and Kennedy aren't behaving themselves."

"They're all right," argued Clancy, feeling from Baldwin's tone that he had not yet reached the point.

"I heard they had a fight in a barroom." Baldwin spoke with an effort of sternness. "That won't do, Clancy. And now McCarthy is missing. Then there's another thing."

Baldwin hesitated as if thinking how best to state his case, and Clancy eyed him closely, feeling that the real object of the interview was coming, "I'm not at all pleased with the way you are working your pitchers."

"A fellow makes blunders sometimes," replied Clancy, with a meekness astounding in him.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," went on Baldwin blandly. "Who do you propose pitching to-day and to-morrow?"

In a flash Clancy understood. It was Baldwin who had been urging Bannard to have Williams pitch. He saw through Baldwin's motives and planned quickly how to meet them.

"Well," he said, frowning as if worried, "it's a tough game. You see, the fans never forgive a fellow if he guesses wrong at this time in a race. I planned to use Williams in one game and Morgan the other. You see the Blues hit right-handers harder than they do left-handers."

"So I understand," a gleam of cunning and triumph came into the eyes of the politician. "Morgan and Williams ought to beat them, I think."

"Yes, they ought—I'm a little afraid of Morgan." Clancy was drawing the owner out. "He hasn't shown speed in his last two games."

"Then Williams is in fine form?" The triumph and satisfaction in the big man's voice were unmistakable.

"He's good," replied Clancy. "He ought to best them sure."

"Will you pitch him to-day or to-morrow?" asked Baldwin, completely thrown off his guard. "I'm anxious to make certain he will pitch."

"Of course he'll pitch, Mr. Baldwin," replied the manager. "I've got to pitch him and he's my best man."

"All right, Clancy, all right," said the owner genially. "I'm glad I had this conference with you. I was afraid you were angry with Williams or something and would not let him work. Glad to see you have good judgment."

He went out and as the door closed he removed his hat, and, wiping his brow, smiled a smile of great relief over the fact that his purpose had been accomplished without trouble. Had he been able to see through the door he would have seen Clancy, the veins of his neck standing out purple, his face convulsed with rage, standing, shaking his fist toward the door and muttering:

"Yes, I'll pitch Williams. I'll pitch Williams, and by — he'll win."

CHAPTER XXVII

Searching

Betty Tabor had remained at the hotel in the home town with Mrs. Clancy when the Bears went to play their two-game series with the Blues.

Mrs. Clancy had refused positively to engage in any baseball conversation or to debate with Miss Tabor the chances of the Bears winning the championship.

"Heavens knows it's hard enough to be married to a baseball man," she said as she bit a thread, "him makin' base hits in his sleep and worrying the little hair he has left off his head, without havin' a girl that ought to be thinkin' of dresses and hats wantin' to din baseball into my ears all day. My dear, never marry a ball player."

"You appear to be pretty well satisfied with yours, Mother Clancy," teased the girl. "Maybe I'll find one as fine some day"—

"I'm thinkin' you've found yours now," replied Mrs. Clancy, without glancing up from her work. "A nice bye, too, although they do say the red-headed ones are hot tempered."

"Why, Mother Clancy! How dare you!" the girl expostulated, reddening.

"If you're thinkin' to deceive Ellen Clancy, you're sore mistaken," replied the manager's wife. "My Willie says I can tell when young people are in love before they know it themselves, an' ye and the red-headed McCarthy boy has all the symptoms. 'Tis a nice boy he is, too, and you'll be doin' well."

"But after ye've been married as long as we have ye'll not be wantin' to see many ball games. Many's the time I've begged Willie to quit it and get a little house out in the country, with a bit of green grass and maybe a flower bed and a little garden and a porch, and maybe a chicken yard, and let me end my days in peace, out of the sound of crowds and yellin' maniacs. Eighteen year I've ridden with him on cars smellin' of arnica, and with the train dust an' cinders in me eyes an'

hair, and I long for peace. Only one season I've missed—'twas when little Mar-tin was born"—

She snuffled a little and dropped her work to wipe her eyes hastily. It was fifteen years since their only baby had come and gone in a short year, to leave them closer to each other, but each with a heart pain that never ceased.

A bell boy interrupted her lecture to bring in a card, and Mrs. Clancy, glancing at it, passed it over to Miss Tabor.

"'Tis for you, Betty girl," she said. "And, Mother of Mary, she'll see us this way"—

Betty Tabor sat staring at the card, at first puzzled, then in a panic of mingled emotions.

"Tell her to come up," she said. "I'll see her here. Mother Clancy, don't you dare hide."

The girl hastily arranged her hair and straightened the room, and a few minutes later, when the boy ushered the visitor into the apartments, she was self-possessed and cool. She arose as the door opened, and started forward to meet her guest, but stopped staring as the color faded from her face and then slowly heightened.

"You are Miss Tabor?" inquired the visitor, her voice trembling from excitement and nervousness.

"Yes. You are Miss Helen Baldwin; you desired to see me?"

The sight of the girl she had seen talking with Kohinoor McCarthy in the hotel parlor, shortly after he joined the club, had shaken her composure.

"Oh, Miss Tabor," Helen Baldwin cried, sinking into a chair and giving way to her emotions. "I had to come—I had nowhere else to go—and they told me over the telephone only you and Mrs. Clancy were here and all the men of the team away."

"If it is baseball business," replied Miss Tabor, "perhaps you'd better see Mrs. Clancy. I'll call her"—

"No! no! no!" expostulated the girl, drying her eyes. "It is you I must see. Have you heard anything from Mr. McCarthy?"

"I have no especial reason to hear from Mr. McCarthy," said Miss Tabor, freezing slowly. "I suppose he is with the team."

"He isn't! He isn't!" pleaded the girl. "He has disappeared— Haven't you seen the papers?"

"Mr. McCarthy disappeared! Where? When?" Betty Tabor had forgotten her jealousy in her startled alarm. "He isn't with the team?"

"I read it in the papers," sobbed Helen Baldwin. "He was at my house last evening. He left there—and he has disappeared. I hoped you might know."

"At your house?" Betty Tabor's alarm struggled with her jealousy. "And he's gone? Let me see the paper."

"I haven't seen him, Miss Baldwin," she said, after glancing at the paper. "We thought he had gone with the team. Tell me what you know. Perhaps we may help you. You were engaged to him, were you not?"

"We were—once," sobbed Helen Baldwin. "But that's all over. I did him a wrong. I never loved him—that way—and it's all my fault he's in trouble now."

Betty Tabor's heart leaped with a joy that overwhelmed all other emotions. Her cold attitude toward Helen Baldwin changed, and, sinking upon the seat beside the sobbing girl, she put her arm around her.

"There, there," she said comfortingly, as a mother might, forgetting that Helen Baldwin was older than she. "You must not blame yourself. Try to tell me what happened last evening. Perhaps we may know what to do."

Slowly, with interruptions by hysterical moments, Helen Baldwin told the story of her unconscious part in the conspiracy; of her alarm for the safety of McCarthy; how she had sent for him and warned him, and of Swanson's telephone call.

"You'd better go home, dear, and rest," Betty said finally. "There is nothing we can do. The men will have started the search early this morning and notified the police. He will return."

Helen Baldwin, calmed and reassured by the brave pretense of the younger woman, prepared to go home. Betty Tabor assisted her to rearrange her disordered fair hair, murmuring her admiration for it as she worked. For the first time a smile came to the troubled face of Helen Baldwin, and when she was ready to go she kissed Betty and held her at arm's length.

"You're very good and unselfish," she said in low tones. "I hope you and he are very happy."

"Why, Miss Baldwin," exclaimed Betty, blushing, "there is nothing between us. He is scarcely a friend"—

"I know, dear," replied the taller girl, kissing her again. "He is a very good and lovable boy, and very impetuous. He really loves you."

She smiled a trifle wanly and turning, left the room.

Betty Tabor turned with a sigh, just in time to see Mrs. Clancy making violent gestures through a small crack in the door.

"You didn't ask her," exclaimed the exasperated Mrs. Clancy. "You didn't ask her!"

"Ask her what?" inquired Betty in surprise. "You heard what we talked about?"

"Every word. I listened shamelessly," replied the manager's wife. "'Tis my curiosity will kill me. You didn't ask her one word about who McCarthy is. And she knows all about him!"

"I didn't think—I forgot," said Betty, hurrying to gather her work and belongings in preparation for leaving.

"Where are you going, child?" asked Mrs. Clancy.

"I'm going to dress and get an automobile to make the rounds of all the hospitals. He may be hurt and in one."

"Glory be! I never thought of it! Dress fast, darlin', an' I'll go with you."

They returned, weary and discouraged. They had not found a trace of the missing boy. Scarcely had they reached their rooms than another call for Miss Tabor came, and a few minutes later Technicalities Feehan entered.

"Mr. Feehan, what are you doing here?" both women exclaimed in chorus.

"I'm searching for Mr. McCarthy," responded Feehan. "I reached the city shortly after five o'clock, and, having concluded my arrangements for finding Mr. McCarthy, it occurred to me that, having an evening of idleness, I might devote it to no better purpose than in escorting you ladies to some place of amusement."

"To a theatre, with a tragedy like this happening to one of our boys!" exclaimed Miss Tabor indignantly.

"Rest assured, Miss Tabor," he replied, "we can do nothing, and eventually Mr. McCarthy will be found."

"How? Who is looking for him while we waste time?" she asked hotly.

"My arrangements," he stated quietly, "did not include useless running around. I called upon our managing editor, laid the figures and conclusive data before him, and convinced him that, besides securing an excellent news story, he can serve the team and the ends of right and justice by seeking Mr. McCarthy."

"Well, what did he do?" demanded Mrs. Clancy, sadly out of patience with his deliberate manner and rather flamboyant style of expression.

"As a result of his interest in the matter," replied Technicalities, "eight of the most highly trained men of his staff—men who know the city better than anyone who lives in it does—are seeking Mr. McCarthy with orders to find him to-night."

"How did to-day's game come out?" inquired Miss Tabor, relieved. "I almost forgot the game."

"Our team was defeated, 8 to 6," replied Feehan quietly. "McCarthy's absence already has cost us one game, and I greatly fear that unless he plays to-morrow the Bears are defeated in the championship contest."

"Glory be! I've dropped two more stitches!" said Mrs. Clancy.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Williams Stands Exposed

"Now here's a bally nice mess of figures," said Kennedy, holding half a dozen much-marked-upon sheets of writing paper in his inky fingers, and looking across the table at Swanson, Norton and Holleran.

"What are you figuring, Ken?" asked Holleran.

"I've been trying to figure out this pennant race," said Kennedy irritably. "Here we seem to be half a game ahead of the Panthers, and yet, just because it rained on them yesterday, and they didn't have to play but one game of their doubleheader, we've got to win two games to beat them out if they win their one game to-day."

He handed across a sheet of paper upon which was written:

	W.	L.	P.C.
Bears.....	89	59	.600
Panthers.....	91	61	.599

"Well, ain't we ahead of them?" asked Swanson, studying the figures.

"Yes, but look here. Supposing they win to-day and we win, we'll still be ahead. But supposing they win to-day and we win, and then we lose to-morrow. Look at this."

He handed over another slip of paper, upon which was written:

	W.	L.	P.C.
Panthers.....	92	61	.601
Bears.....	90	60	.600

"If we don't win both these games, or if it don't rain here to-day, or up home to-morrow, and keep us from playing, they beat us out by ten thousandths, or thirteen hundred thousandths. Didn't I always say thirteen was an unlucky number?"

"I wonder who Clancy will send in to pitch to-day?" asked Kennedy, idly. "Wilcox hasn't had enough rest. I suppose he'll be saved for to-morrow. Jacobson isn't right, and Morgan worked yesterday and got his trimmings. I suppose it'll be Williams."

An ugly laugh greeted his sarcastic remark, and Norton opened his lips as if to speak, but, thinking better of it, closed them again.

At that moment a bell boy came into the writing room, paging Williams. A quick exchange of glances between the players resulted and Swanson asked, "Who wants Mr. Williams?"

"Mr. Clancy, sir," said the boy. "He wants Mr. Williams in his room at once."

"Didn't I tell you?" said Kennedy, in mock triumph.

"Say, fellows," added Swanson. "I'd give a month's pay to hear what comes off up in that room. Clancy was on his ear this morning when I came down. He'd been awake half the night, trying to get some word from Kohinoor, and he was pretty well worked up. You know when he gets started to telling a fellow what he thinks of him he does it so the fellow believes it himself."

"He sure can explain a fellow's shortcomings," said Kennedy. "Look, the boy has found Williams and he is going up. He looks scared to death."

"Mamma, but I'd like to be among those present," said Swanson. "There will be several developments. Hadn't we better put mattresses under Clancy's window for Williams to light on?"

Meantime, in Manager Clancy's room a scene was being staged that fulfilled all the expectations of the players. Williams entered the room with a swaggering pretense of ignorance of the nature of the summons.

"Morning, Manager," he said with an effort at innocent playfulness. "How's things?"

"Sit down, you crook!"

Clancy had arisen as Williams entered. He shot the order at the pitcher viciously and without warning, and, as he spoke, he stepped past the player, and locked the door.

Williams had gone pale. His mouth dropped open. He started to say something, choked and sat down.

"What—what do you mean?" he managed to stammer as Clancy came close and stood over him threateningly.

After his first outburst of rage Clancy was strangely quiet, speaking in low tones, vibrating

with repressed feeling. From the moment Barney Baldwin had revealed to him his ownership of the Bears, and had issued his positive orders that Williams should pitch the game, Clancy had been fighting within himself, studying to find some plan of vengeance that would strike all the plotters. Never for an instant had he considered the thought of permitting the championship to be surrendered by the orders of the owner.

"Williams," he said, "you're a never-to-be-sufficiently-spit-upon cur. You're the lowest, yellowest dog in the world. I've known for two weeks that you have been trying to lose the pennant for us."

"Shut up!" he snapped, lifting his voice sharply as the pitcher attempted to speak. "I know what you've done and what you plan to do. I know who is back of you"—

The pitcher cowered under the scathing denunciation and started as if to rise.

"Who—who's been telling you this stuff?" he quavered, terror-stricken.

"You—you rat." Clancy's scorn stung like a lash and Williams quivered. "I know everything. I've waited and watched when you thought you were putting something over. I've waited for a chance to get you"—

He paused a moment, while Williams, palsied with terror, sat unable to answer.

"And I've got you, Williams!"

He shot the sentence at the pitcher, who half started from his seat, lifting his hands as if to protect himself from attack.

"I'm not going to choke you to death, I wouldn't soil my hands on you," said the manager with a scornful laugh.

"What are you going to do, Bill?" William's voice quivered.

"I'm going to make you pitch to-day's game," said the manager quietly.

A gasp of amazement and relief came from Williams.

"You're going to pitch to-day's game, Williams," the manager repeated. "And you're going to win it. You're going to win it, or if you don't win I'll tell the crowd you were bribed, and I'll let the crowd handle you. They'll tear you to pieces, Williams, and kick the pieces around the diamond—and I'll help them do it."

"You won't do anything to me if I win?" pleaded the pitcher.

"No; I won't do a thing to you," said Clancy, and he spat as if to relieve himself of a bad taste, as he turned and went out, locking the door.

"Good God, look at Clancy," whispered Swanson in awed tones as the manager stepped out of the elevator a minute or two later. "He's in his blackest form. I honestly pity Williams."

"Swanson," said Clancy sharply.

"What is it, Boss?" asked Swanson anxiously.

"Nothing," snapped Clancy, "I want you to do something."

"All right."

"Williams is locked in my room. You watch the door. If he breaks out kill him."

He turned and stalked away like a man in a trance, leaving the big shortstop staring after him.

CHAPTER XXIX

Found

Technicalities Feehan was directing the hunt for Kohinoor McCarthy, the missing third baseman of the Bears, even though it appeared to the two women that he was wasting time. His easy confidence and certainty that McCarthy would be found inspired something of the same spirit in Mrs. Clancy and in Betty Tabor, and they found themselves enjoying the light summer opera to which he had taken them, and later had laughed at his quaint, droll tales of baseball and

stories of his own experiences during his long years of travel with the team.

Feehan had found an appreciative audience at last, and it was half after eleven before he broke off suddenly and announced that at midnight he was to get reports of the results of the search and offer his own services in the effort to find the missing player.

"I will telephone you when I reach the office whether anything has been ascertained," he promised, as he left them at their apartments. "After that I will not disturb you until seven o'clock, unless McCarthy is found. We must find him and get him to the station to catch the train at 6.35 or our effort is wasted in so far as baseball is concerned, although, of course, that will not cause us to cease our efforts."

"You'll telephone me the moment you have news?" asked Miss Tabor. "Any time—I shall not sleep much, any news—good—or bad."

Feehan found the office force in the throes of getting out an edition, and he sidled through the hurrying, jostling office force to the city editor.

"Any news?" he asked quietly.

"Hello, Technicalities. Nothing yet. You take the case."

Feehan hurried to his desk, instructed the telephone girls to connect all reporters working on the McCarthy case with his desk, then extracted a mass of papers from various pockets and commenced to study and compile his unending statistics.

The reporters engaged in the search were under instructions to report at once any trace of the missing player and to report once an hour their whereabouts and progress. Every five or ten minutes one reported, and Feehan, laying aside his work, answered the call and suggested new lines of investigations.

Two o'clock came. The office was growing quieter. Weary news gatherers slipped into their coats and departed quietly. Copy readers and editors completed their tasks and went away.

Three o'clock came, and Feehan was busy tabulating the statistics of some player in a far-off league, when the telephone rang. By some inspiration he knew a trail had been found and he reached for the instrument with more haste than he had shown, his seventh sense spurring him on.

"Hello! Yes—that you, Jimmy?"

"I've hit a trail."

The voice was that of little Jimmy Eames, the most tireless and persistent member of the force of news hounds employed by the paper.

"Where?" Feehan was as calm as if only recording a fly out.

"North Ninetieth Street Police Station," said Eames rapidly. "I picked up a clue over on the other side of the city—inside police dope. Man taken there last night in taxi. I'm off for there."

Feehan pocketed his statistics and prepared for action. His voice had ceased to drag. He uttered commands in sharp, quick words. Briefly he detailed to each man as he called on the telephone the nature of Eames's discovery. "Get to North Ninetieth Street Station."

Thirty-five minutes after Eames flashed the first word to the office, Cramer, the star police reporter, announced over the telephone.

"McCarthy is in the black hole at North Ninetieth street. Orders from captain. No one permitted to see him. Not booked. Sergeant in charge don't know what he is accused of."

"Get him out. Report in ten minutes."

"Two hours and a half to get him out and put him on that train," Feehan muttered.

It was twelve minutes before Cramer called again.

"Sergeant says he dares not turn the fellow loose. Don't know he is McCarthy. Says orders are strict to keep him and to keep everyone away from him."

"Is he hurt?"

"Turnkey says he has cut in head and bruised, but all right."

"Pound him—pound the sergeant; make him act. Scare him! Who is the captain?"

"Raferty."

"I'll reach him by 'phone." Feehan hung up the receiver. "Joe," he said to the night man,

"raise Minette, the office lawyer. Lives somewhere up that way. His home is only a short distance from Judge Manasse's house. Ask him for a writ of habeas corpus or something."

Feehan was rapidly calling numbers. In fifteen minutes he had aroused Captain Raferty.

"Raferty," said the little man, "sorry to disturb you, but you've got a man in the black hole in your station that we want."

"Can't be done. Orders to hold him."

"Orders from whom?"

"Higher up."

"How high?"

"None of your business."

"Raferty, I'm going to the top," said Feehan quickly. "If that man isn't out by six o'clock, you'll be broken."

"What's all this fuss about some skate?" Raferty was alarmed. "It ain't any of my business. I'm told to hold him and not book him and I do it. What have you got it in for me for?"

"You'd better get to the station and get that man out or you'll have this sheet all over you," threatened Feehan, transformed. "I'm going higher now."

He cut off the spluttering police captain in the midst of a snarling complaint, half whine, half defiance.

Half an hour of hard work brought the indignant superintendent of police to the telephone. He curtly declined to interfere, denied all knowledge of any such prisoner, and hung up the receiver while Feehan was expostulating with him.

The mild mannered, gentle little reporter was rising to the emergency. He wiped his forehead free from the beads of sweat and looked at his watch. It was two minutes to five when the night man reported again.

"Minette's on his way to the station," he said. "He'll try to get Judge Manasse to order the release, and he is carrying ten thousand dollars in securities as a bond."

"Good," said Feehan rapidly. "Give me Gracemont 1328," he called quickly.

"Going after the mayor?" inquired the night man casually. "He'll be sore as a boil. Orders are not to disturb him after midnight."

"I've got to get him," said Feehan. "We can't fall down now after we've located McCarthy."

There was no reply to the call for the mayor's telephone number, and while waiting, Feehan slipped to another telephone and called the hotel at which the ball players lived, asking for the Clancy apartments. Betty Tabor answered the summons.

"We've found him," said Feehan. "He's alive and well."

"Where is he?" asked the girl breathlessly.

"He's in a cell at the North Ninetieth Street Police Station—about half a mile from your hotel. I want you to do something."

"What is it?" she asked. "Hurry—I haven't undressed. Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes," he said. "He's locked up and we're tearing the town to pieces trying to get him out of the station. It may be an hour—and he must catch that train. Can you arrange at your hotel to have a fast taxi to take him to the railroad station when he gets out, if there is a chance to catch the train?"

"Wait—yes, yes," she said eagerly. "The manager here has a fast machine that he has been letting me use. I'll get it. The garage is only a few doors."

"You'll take him yourself?" he said in surprise.

"Yes," she said. "I must hurry."

Again and again Feehan urged the telephone girl to try to get a reply to the call for the mayor. Beads of sweat stood upon his face, as he begged her to try again and summoned the manager to his assistance. He glanced at his watch. It was eight minutes to six o'clock.

"I must get him," he told the telephone girl for the dozenth time.

"Sorry—no one will answer," she said wearily. "I've tried—wait a minute, there's someone now."

"Hello," said a hearty voice.

"Your Honor"—Feehan's voice was pregnant with pleading—"this is Feehan, the baseball writer."

"Hello, Feehan," came the quick response. "Why aren't you with the team, or did you just get in to honor me with this early call?"

"Your Honor," pleaded Feehan, recalling suddenly that the mayor was an ardent baseball "fan." "I've been searching for McCarthy. He's in the North Ninetieth Street Station, held without being booked. I've been trying for hours to get him out so he can join the team."

"What charge?" demanded the mayor sharply.

"No charge. He is being held to keep him from playing. If he doesn't catch this morning's train the pennant is lost."

"Here's where I make a pinch hit, then," said the mayor sharply.

Feehan heard the receiver bang down. With a sigh of relief he hung up his receiver and grinned at Joe.

"He's a baseball fan," was all the explanation he offered.

An anxious wait ensued, then Cramer telephones:

"McCarthy just got out, mayor's orders. Pretty well bunged up, but says he can play. He's gone with some girl in an auto. She was waiting for him."

Feehan glanced at his watch. It was 6.23.

"Twelve minutes for two and a half miles," he muttered. "They'll just make it."

And with a sigh he picked up his scattered sheets and muttered:

"Let's see, what did this fellow Houseman hit last season?"

CHAPTER XXX

A Race to Save the Day

Kohinoor McCarthy, emerging from his cell into the fetid atmosphere of the receiving room of the police station, was met by Cramer, who broke from the group of reporters, lawyers and police officials stirred to activity at that early hour by the frantic efforts of Technicalities Feehan. His head was rudely bandaged and his discolored face was swollen and cut.

There was no time for questionings.

"Hurry, McCarthy," said Cramer. "There is an automobile outside waiting to take you to the station. You have about a quarter of an hour to catch the train."

McCarthy, with a word of thanks, hastened through the station, leaped down the steps with an agility that proved his injuries did not affect his speed, and sprang to the car.

The morning sun was just commencing to reach down into the cavern of the street into which the car leaped, and it shone directly in their eyes. The car lurched around a corner and swung into the avenue for the race to the station. At that instant the girl's veil flapped back, revealing her face.

"Betty!" exclaimed McCarthy. "You"—

"You didn't know me?" she asked as she steadied the car and increased its pace over the smooth asphalt.

"Why are you here? What are you doing?" he asked in astonishment.

"I had to come," she replied swiftly. "There was no one else. We must catch the train. Don't talk, please."

He leaned back wearily and watched the street as it seemed to flow past them.

"How much time have we?" he asked above the roaring of the wind.

"The train leaves at 6.35," she called back, without lifting her eyes. "Watch for clocks."

She had increased the speed gradually and the light car jumped as it struck a cross-town street-car track. Suddenly the car jolted, slid to a quick stop and with an exclamation of despair the girl strove to reverse and killed the engine.

"The street is closed below," she said. "Crank up, the engine is dead."

McCarthy leaped from the car and cranked rapidly. A precious minute was lost before the engine throbbed and the girl, turning the car quickly, ran back a block, swung across to a side street and raced for the station.

"The captain of the bell boys is waiting with the tickets. I sent him before I left the hotel," she said without lifting her eyes. "Jump from the car the moment I stop. He'll meet you at the gate."

"Two minutes—can we make it?" he asked.

"We'll try." Her face was set and white. She whirled the corner of the avenue onto the side street at full speed. A block and a half away was the station. The car was at racing speed now. The girl kept the siren screaming, hoping for a clear way. They tore toward the intersection of the streets—and directly ahead a lumbering team of horses, drawing a heavy wagon, trundled across their path. With a sudden swerve, a grinding of the emergency and a sickening lurch, the car checked its mad flight, scraped past the rear of the wagon, and gathering speed renewed the race against time.

"Goodbye," he said, leaning suddenly inward as the car commenced to lose momentum. "When I come back"—

"Hurry, hurry," she pleaded. "Run"—

He leaped before the car stopped and, with one glance back toward her, sprinted down the long passageway.

The gate was closing. He cried aloud, and ran faster. The gate clanged. A boy in uniform ran to him and shoved tickets into his hands as they ran side by side.

"Open it! Let me through!" he screamed at the gateman, just starting to lock the gate.

McCarthy was sprinting desperately in pursuit of the train already half way down the long train shed. He ran until his heart pounded audibly against his ribs, straining every muscle, and crying for the train to stop. Faster and faster it went, and, near the end of the station, McCarthy realized he had lost the race and, stopping, he stood dejectedly looking after the rapidly disappearing observation car.

The gateman let him out with a sympathetic word, but he did not raise his head. He knew that, 235 miles away, twenty men were hoping for his arrival. He would hire a special train. He whirled at the thought—and then remembered he was without money.

He felt a hand touch his arm and, turning quickly, he saw Betty Tabor.

"I missed it," he said, hopelessly.

"I know, I know," she responded quickly. "The boy who had the tickets told me. There is no time to lose. I have a plan."

"A special train?" he asked. "I have no money."

"The auto," she replied quickly. "I will drive it. I've driven it hundreds of miles"—

"Betty," he expostulated, using her name unconsciously. "You cannot—maybe we can find a driver."

"I can and I will," she said decisively; "it is only 235 miles. We have eight hours. We can make it. The car is fast and easy to handle."

Still arguing, she led him back to the car, and they rode quickly back to the hotel over part of the route they had traversed during their wild flight. They breakfasted while the car was being prepared for the run, studying road maps while they ate.

"Betty, how can I ever thank you," he said, leaning forward over the table.

"By calling me Miss Tabor and winning the game to-day," she said, coolly, without looking up from the maps.

"The car is ready," the head waiter announced. "A good trip to you, Miss Tabor."

"You have a good driver, McCarthy," said the manager, who alone knew the object of the trip. "She handles that car better than I do. I have given her permission to tear it to pieces to get you through."

The start was undramatic. The car rolled easily along to the drive and presently was lifting and dropping over the hills of the splendid speedway. A gentle breeze from the river fanned them as they rushed through it.

In five minutes they were clear of the congested traffic on the bridge and the car, gathering speed, rushed into the hills on the opposite side of the river. Five minutes later the car was quivering with its increasing speed and McCarthy, looking at the gauge, saw that it registered forty-seven miles, and was still sliding forward. Fourteen miles across the rolling plateau the car raced with sustained speed, the engine humming in perfect tune and only the heavier vibration of the tires attesting the speed. At slower pace the car climbed among the ridge of hills that had been rising ahead, and after five miles of rougher going it turned into the old stage road.

"It's five minutes past nine," said the girl, "and we've done more than forty miles already. The next forty is good and we'll try to gain time."

"We ought to make it easily," he responded brightly. "You're a heroine."

"I do not know what the roads are beyond Hedgeport," she interrupted anxiously. "It is hill country. It rained two days ago."

She had steadily increased the speed again until the indicator kept constantly around the forty-five mile mark. The speed was terrific and made conversation almost impossible.

"Hadn't you better rest? You must be tired," he screamed above the noise of the car.

"Arms are cramped," she replied, without lifting her eyes from the road ahead. "We'll take gas at Hedgeport and walk around. We will lunch somewhere near Hilton. We'll be over the worst of the road then."

"I wish I could help you," called McCarthy, after a long silence.

She shook her head, and, after the car had throbbed up the next incline and was sailing, hawklike, down the opposite side, she said:

"You'll need your strength for the game. There's Hedgeport now."

Before them, set on the hillside, lay the little city. It seemed as if the houses grew by magic as they rushed upon it. They flashed past a few market wagons, passed another auto chugging along busily, and slackened the pace as the car rolled upon the brick pavements and toward the heart of the city.

"A hundred and thirty-one miles in a little over three hours," said McCarthy, elated. "That leaves us one hundred and four miles and more than four hours to make it in. We've won."

"The road has been perfect," Betty Tabor said. "For the next fifty miles it is marked bad."

She turned quietly to ask questions of the mechanic, who was overhauling and examining every part of the machine, and examining the feed pipes. Another man was filling the tanks and using oil plentifully.

"My hands and wrists are cramped and numb," she remarked, turning to McCarthy.

"Let the man drive the rest of the way. He knows the road," he urged.

"And leave me—to miss the game?" she asked. "Not much. Rub my hands, please."

She extended her strong, firm hand and McCarthy, bending over it, massaged and slapped it vigorously.

"Don't break it, please," she said, laughing. "Take the other one."

"Both," he whispered, his voice full of meaning.

"All ready," announced the garage keeper. "I think she'll stand it now."

"It's 11.10," said McCarthy. "If we get there by three."

"If we get there at all," she said, "even if you are late, you can get into the game."

For five miles they sped along over perfect roads, then suddenly a long stretch of new macadam loomed ahead. For three miles they lurched and struggled, and were free again, but the road was heavy and slow. Up hill and down they fought the road, at times slipping, lurching and skidding while the girl coaxed the car onward. The road grew worse and worse. The hills were steeper. The rain-guttered mud at times almost stalled the car.

"Twenty miles in an hour and ten minutes," groaned McCarthy. "This won't do."

The next hour was even worse. The girl was showing signs of weariness and the strain of holding the machine in the rough going. Three miles of good road across a hill-top plateau raised their courage, then they encountered sand.

It was twenty minutes to two o'clock, when, mud splattered, they raced into Hilton, with the car missing fire in one cylinder, the engine smoking and gasoline almost exhausted.

McCarthy almost lifted Betty Tabor from the car as they stopped at the garage and she gave rapid directions to the manager, explaining the need of haste.

"I'm afraid the car won't get you through," he said, "but we'll try."

"Have it ready at two o'clock," she ordered quickly. "We must get through somehow."

"It's thirty-four miles," he said. "But the roads are fair. If the car was in shape it would be easy."

"We'll eat lunch while you overhaul it," she replied.

McCarthy secured the lunch from the car and they spread it upon the grass in the yard and ate. The girl was too weary for conversation, but as she ate she seemed to gain strength and courage.

"We'll get there before the game is over, anyhow," she said quietly. "I want to see Williams's face when you come onto the field."

"I thought you and he"—

"I never have liked him," she interrupted quickly.

Three minutes before the town clock chimed the hour of two in Hilton, the machine, again running smoothly, shot out from the garage. Its occupants, refreshed and more cheerful, faced the final stretch of the long race.

"Fourteen miles in twenty-one minutes," cried McCarthy, as the mile posts flashed by. "We'll be there."



**"FOURTEEN MILES IN TWENTY-ONE
MINUTES"**

Ten minutes later the smoke haze that hangs eternally over the great city of the Blues was

visible. The country homes along the road over which they sped were closer and closer together.

"Only ten more miles," McCarthy shouted triumphantly.

"We can cut across to the west here," she said as she swung the car into an avenue. "This goes near the ball park and we'll save three miles."

"Hurray," he shouted. "Then it's only seven miles."

The girl did not reply. She was weary and her fair face showed haggard lines. Their progress became slower, although two or three times policemen turned to watch them, as if to interfere.

The grandstand was close now. The steady roar of the huge crowd inside pulsed and beat upon them. A bell rang.

"That's either game time or last fielding practice," screamed McCarthy. "Hurry, please, hurry."

The car suddenly swung out of the line, sent a swarm of pedestrians scurrying, and jarred to a stop at the entrance marked "Players."

"Betty," said McCarthy, as he started to lift her from the car—

"Hurry," she said, faint from weariness and the reaction. "You must dress."

He ran stiffly toward the dressing room under the stand. Bill Tascott, the umpire, was just starting toward the field.

"McCarthy!" he exclaimed at sight of the specter covered with mud and with cut and bruised features.

"Bill, don't start the game yet," panted McCarthy beseechingly. "Wait till I dress. Please tell Clancy I'm here."

"I'll tell him. I'll delay the game. Can you play?" said the umpire rapidly.

"Yes—give me time to dress."

Jack, the trainer, quiet after his first outburst of surprise, was preparing the hot shower and working like mad over the weary player and when Clancy, summoned by a quiet word from the umpire, rushed into the player's room, McCarthy was sighing luxuriously as the trainer soaked his weary, cramped limbs with witch hazel.

"Hurry, Jack," ordered Clancy as he squeezed McCarthy's hands. "I knew you'd come, Kohinoor."

"Am I in time?" asked the player. "Get my uniform out, please."

"Just in time. Good old Bill Tascott is delaying the game. You ought to see him raising Cain over his mask being lost. He hid it in our bench and is accusing the Blues of stealing it. He won't start the game until you are ready."

In five minutes they rushed him toward the little gate by which the players enter the field from under the stands, just in time to hear Bill Tascott announce:

"Batteries for to-day's game—Wiley and Kirkpatrick for the Blues; Williams and Kennedy for the Bears." He glanced toward the group emerging from under the stands and his voice rang with gladness as he yelled, in louder tones:

"McCarthy will play third base."

CHAPTER XXXI

The Plotters Foiled

The gasp of astonishment with which the crowd greeted the announcement that Williams would pitch gave way quickly to a cry of surprise that rose to a roar of applause when Bill Tascott announced that McCarthy would play third base.

He walked slowly out toward third base, the huge arm of Swanson, who with a bellow of gladness had raced to meet and embrace him, around his shoulders, while the great crowd stood and howled with excitement and hummed with curiosity as to the explanation of his

reappearance. Had Clancy tricked the Blues and produced his third baseman at the dramatic instant, hoping to unnerve them? Had McCarthy been hurt? A thousand conjectures and questions flashed around the field.

The announcement by Bill Tascott was a double shock to two persons sitting in one of the front boxes near the Bears' bench. Barney Baldwin brought his fat hand down with a thump upon the shoulders of the rat-faced, cold-eyed man who sat next to him, and shouted, "I told you so!"

Easy Ed Edwards, paler than usual, turned angrily toward the politician, restrained himself, and resumed his steady scrutiny of the field. When the umpire announced McCarthy playing third, Baldwin, in his astonishment, half arose and Edwards started quickly.

"Sit down, you fool," he said sharply. "We're in enough trouble without you giving us away. Clancy was watching us from the bench. They're wise to you."

"To me!" ejaculated Baldwin. "I like your nerve"——

"You're the only one they can connect with McCarthy's—accident," he said coldly. "There'll be h—— to pay at home."

McCarthy's head was bandaged afresh, strips of court-plaster decorated his face, and even from the stands the black bruises around his eyes were visible.

Nearly forty thousand persons were watching, unaware of the full meaning of the complex drama they were witnessing. McCarthy was so astonished at hearing that Williams was pitching that he turned to Swanson.

"What does it mean, Silent?" he asked anxiously.

"Clancy made him pitch," whispered Swanson rapidly as they went toward the bench. "He has had him locked in his room all day and Williams is scared stiff. Look at him."

The pitcher was white to the mouth, and he licked his lips nervously as if in a fever, as he sat during the first inning while his own team endeavored to make a run. Clancy, his face hard, sat next to him, terrible in his rigidity.

Three of the Bears retired in rapid order and the team raced for the field. A roar of applause greeted them, and as McCarthy ran along in front of the stands, the applause followed him like a wave. It was clear some hint of the truth was spreading through the crowd. Williams hung back when the team started for the field.

"I can't, Bill. Oh, God, I can't," he wailed. "Please"——

"Get out there and pitch! Pitch whatever Kennedy signals for, and if you don't"——

"I'll try, Bill. But if"——

"There are no ifs," snarled the manager, half rising.

Williams walked to his position, a glare of terror in his eyes, as if he contemplated flight. He was wild and erratic at the start. Two balls sailed wide from the plate, and Swanson ran to him.

"Get that next one over or I'll signal Clancy," he said.

Williams put every ounce of power into his throwing arm, and the ball cut the heart of the plate, jumping.

"The old hop on it!" yelled McCarthy. "That's pitching, Adonis; that's pitching."

Williams stood staring toward him as if dumfounded. A grateful look came into his eyes.

"Now the old hook, Adonis," yelled McCarthy. "Something on every one to-day, remember!"

An outburst of cheering arose from the crowd. Those who had heard or read the stories and rumors of the enmity between the two thought they recognized the magnanimity of the third baseman and admired him. Another strike whizzed over the plate, and a fast ball hopped while the batter swung. The strike out was greeted with a howl of applause. Williams glanced toward the stands. His eyes met those of Edwards fixed upon him, and his nerve broke. He pitched without looking to see what Kennedy signaled, and "Sacred" White, the center fielder of the Blues, drove the ball to left center for three bases. Kennedy gave a quick glance at Clancy, who sat staring straight ahead. Swanson rushed upon Williams, who, trembling with fear, waved him back. He pitched desperately, but Wertheim hit a long fly to center and "Sacred" White scampered home.

"I didn't do it, Bill. Honestly, I didn't," pleaded Williams, as he returned to the bench and resumed his seat next to the manager.

"Williams," said Clancy coldly, "you pitched without a signal. I've got men in the stands to

pass circulars telling exactly what you have done. If that happens again I'll signal them, and when the crowd gets you, may the Lord have mercy"—

"I'll pitch—I was trying," begged the pitcher. "Don't turn the crowd loose on me. They'll kill me."

"Then win," ordered Clancy.

The fifth came with the score 1 to 0 and Wiley pitching at his best. Williams had lost some of his nervousness. Either he had made up his mind to betray Edwards, and strive to win, or he was pitching, as he thought, for his life. His fast ball was cutting the plate, and even when the Blues hit it they popped the ball into the air for easy outs. The last half of the fifth started. Williams, glancing toward the stand as he walked out to the slab, saw Edwards. Edwards made a quick signal with his hand and turned his face away. Williams went to the slab entirely unnerved. He was wild, and a base on balls gave the Blues another opening. Instantly Swanson charged upon him and renewed his threats, and Williams, after pitching two more balls wild, got one over the plate, and Henderson sacrificed, putting Hickman on second. Kirkpatrick drove a hard bouncer at Norton, who fumbled, recovered, threw wild and Malone scored.

McCarthy was feeling deadly weary. The racking ride in the automobile, the injuries received at the hands of Edwards and his prize-fighter employe, the loss of sleep and the anxiety, added to the strain of the game, had sapped his youthful vitality. Williams, under the dire threats of Clancy, Kennedy and Swanson, was pitching steadily. He was inspired now by a new hope: That he might lose the game and not be blamed for defeat and at the same time escape the vengeance of Edwards by pretending he lost it purposely.

"We ought to get at him this time, boys," called Swanson, as the Bears opened their eighth inning. "We've got to. Look out there—at the score board—the Panthers are winning, 4 to 1, and it means the pennant."

Suddenly Noisy Norton, the silent man, sprang to his feet and rushed to the coaching lines.

"Wow! Little of the old pep, boys!" he yelled.

"Whoop! We've got it won now. Noisy is coaching. Come on, boys—get at them!" yelled Swanson.

Out by first base, Norton, who had never been on the coaching lines in the five years he had played with the Bears, was ranting and screaming like a wild man. The spirit of the thing came over the Bears. Kennedy, rushing to the bat, cracked the first ball that Wiley pitched to center for a single. A moment later little McBeth, who had been fretting his soul out on the bench for three months, leaped toward the bat like a hound unleashed. He never had played in a major league game before, and Wiley teased him into swinging at two slow twisters, then attempted to waste a curve high and outside the plate. The boy, his teeth set, waded into the ball, drove it over third for a base hit, and, with runners on first and third, Swanson came rushing up and drove a line single to left that scored Kennedy and sent the speedy little McBeth scurrying around to third.

McCarthy was coming to bat. He swung two bats, testing their weight, and walked toward the plate. The excitement of the rally had revived his waning strength and stirred his jaded nerves. Swanson signaled his intention to steal on the first ball pitched. McCarthy crouched, and as the ball came he swung viciously at it, not intending to hit it, but to give Swanson the advantage by hampering the catcher. The strike was wasted, as the catcher, knowing the speed of McBeth, bluffed at throwing, and held the ball, hoping to lure the substitute off third base and let Swanson reach second without trouble.

The next ball McCarthy fouled against the stands for a second strike. A great dread came over him as he heard the roar of the crowd. He turned to watch the Blue's catcher recover the ball, and at that instant he saw the face of Betty Tabor, strained, white, beseeching, as the girl, still mud-splattered and stained from the long race, leaned forward. Her face revealed all the hopes and fears that surged within her. As McCarthy's heart leaped with grim resolve he saw another face that caused him to step back out of the batter's box and, while pretending to rub dirt upon his hands, to glance again.

James Lawrence, his uncle and guardian, was sitting in the box next to that in which Betty Tabor was voicelessly beseeching him to win the game.

"Hit it, Larry—hit it!"

The sound of the name called by the familiar voice, the sight of the agony in the girl's face, spurred him to desperation. He delayed, wiped his hands carefully, stepped into position and waited. Wiley wound up. A fast curve flashed toward the plate. McCarthy took one step forward, snapped his bat against the ball. The Blues' third baseman leaped wildly, stuck up one hand, the ball went on, struck two feet inside the foul line, and before it ceased rolling around the stands two runs were across the plate. McCarthy was on third, and the Bears were in the lead.

The inning ended with McCarthy still on third, and the score 3 to 2 in favor of the Bears.

Wilcox, who had been kept warmed up during the entire game, ready to rush to the slab if Williams weakened, went in to pitch and held the Blues in the eighth, and in their ninth the Bears drew a blank.

McCarthy knew he was very weary. Only by his will power did he make his tired, aching limbs obey his brain. He ached in every muscle, and his brain seemed dulled. Gallagher hit a long fly to Pardridge. Swanson was still shouting, urging Wilcox to cinch the victory, encouraging, leading, fighting with every nerve for the victory. Henderson drove a two-base hit to center field, and Swanson redoubled his efforts to brace the team against a rally that might rob them of their victory. Kirkpatrick, a dangerous hitter at any time, drove a fast bouncer at Norton. The little second baseman set himself for the ball. It took a bad bounce, struck his wrist and rolled away only a few feet. He was after it in an instant, but he knew that Kirkpatrick's terrific speed would get him to first ahead of the ball. As Norton's fingers gripped the ball he thought of another play. Henderson would go to third on the fumble, turn the base, look to see where the ball was, and if it had broken through the infield far enough, he would try to score. For an instant, Norton knew, the runner would halt, undecided, six feet from third, and if the ball was there— Without looking, Norton hurled the ball toward third. McCarthy saw it coming. He realized the play that Norton had attempted to make to save the day. He grabbed the ball and dived desperately between the runner and the bag. Henderson, trapped, leaped back toward the base, feet first. McCarthy felt the shock of the collision, felt the spikes bite into his arm, and he held his ground, blocking the runner away. He heard Bill Tascott's cry of "Out!" and, dazed, hurt and dizzy, he arose slowly and tossed the ball back to Wilcox. Trentman, the great pinch hitter of the Blues, was sent in to attempt to snatch victory from defeat. Twice he drove fierce line fouls past third base, then he lifted a high foul and, as the ball settled into Kennedy's mitt, McCarthy swayed upon his feet.

"Help me, Silent; I'm all in."

Through the eddying, shouting, scrambling crowd that had swarmed cheering upon the field, Swanson half led, half carried his exhausted mate.

They had pressed close to the exit to the club dressing rooms, when suddenly a great shout smote the air. A tremor of fresh excitement ran through the crowd.

"What is it, Silent?" asked McCarthy anxiously.

"It's the Scoreboard!" yelled Swanson. "Look! The Jackrabbits scored five in the eighth inning and beat the Panthers out, 6 to 4. Boy, we're champions!"

McCarthy did an odd thing. He slid quietly to the ground in a faint, and they carried him to the dressing rooms.

CHAPTER XXXII

Rejoicing

McCarthy slept the deep, dreamless sleep of exhaustion. He slept all the way during the homeward journey, waking refreshed and only a trifle stiff when he was called early in the morning to disembark. He and Swanson rode to the hotel in a taxicab, anxious to escape from the crowds that gathered to witness the arrival of the champions after their sensational victory.

"Don't run," urged Swanson, "I'm a hog for punishment of this kind. I could stand around all year and let these people cheer me. It sounds good after what I've heard them say. See that big fellow, yelling his head off, there? He's the same one that yelled 'rotten' at me for two months in the middle of the season."

"Let's have breakfast up in the room," urged McCarthy. "Get them to send up all the morning papers. I want to read what they say about the game."

"They say enough, judging from the headlines," replied Swanson. "Let's eat down here and bask in the admiration of these fellows who have been calling us dubs. Pose for them, Kohinoor! You're a hero! Don't you know a hero has to stand on his pedestal all day and smile? Smile, darn you!"

In spite of the giant's good-natured badinage they hurried to their rooms and ordered breakfast and newspapers.

"They've got most of the story," said McCarthy. "They have written a lot of guff about— Oh, they make a heroine out of Miss Tabor. Look at her picture. Where did they get it? I never had one."

"Get the original," said Swanson gruffly, his mouth full of toast. "See this: Easy Ed Edwards has run. He skipped before the game was over, and the paper says he has carried off a hundred thousand dollars in money that was bet with him and is fleeing to Europe."

"Williams made his getaway, too," said McCarthy, eagerly scanning the papers.

"Where did he go? I saw him slide off the bench in the eighth while we were scoring and start toward the club house. Guess he was afraid of Edwards."

"Darn the luck," growled Swanson. "Here's all that stuff about Kennedy and me being licked in the saloon. The whole story is out."

"There's one thing I want to find out," said Swanson, clenching his fist. "And that is who the big guy was that Edwards hired as his slugger. The season won't be complete until I hook this old grounder grabber of mine on his jaw."

"I've got a bit of business," announced McCarthy, after an hour of excited conversation.

"Wait till she gets through breakfast," insinuated Swanson insultingly. "Going to desert your old pal for a skirt so soon?"

"Aw, shut up," said McCarthy. "I've got to thank her, haven't I?"

Swanson was silent for an instant. A serious expression came over his homely, good-natured face.

"I hope you win her, Kohinoor," he said, simply, putting his big arm across McCarthy's shoulders. "You deserve her—I wanted her myself, once."

Without another word he went over and sat down, picking up a paper, and McCarthy, walking to him, said:

"I'm sorry, Silent, maybe"——

"No maybe about it," said Swanson without looking up, "I lost, long ago."

McCarthy descended two flights of stairs and knocked timidly at the door of the Clancy apartments. He expected to find Betty Tabor with Mrs. Clancy, but the girl was alone, the Clancys not having finished their breakfast.

"Betty," he exclaimed, taking both her outstretched hands, "Betty—I had to come—I wanted to tell you—I love you."

"Oh," she said in surprise, "I"——

His arm slipped around her waist and he drew her close.

"I have loved you from the first," he said, pleadingly. "I wanted to tell you yesterday. I thought you cared then; you do care for me, don't you?"

"Yes, Larry," she said softly, hiding her face. "I think I have—from the first."

"From the first—the very first, dearest?" he asked tenderly. "From the day we met—years ago?"

"Years ago?" she asked in surprise. "Then you are? Yes, you are; you must be the little boy who was crying in the train? I knew when you came with the club we had met somewhere, and I could not remember where."

"Did you remember the little boy?" he asked.

"Yes, Larry," she said "I never have forgotten. I used to pray for him every night; that he might be happy in his new home. I kept the picture of him that was taken at Portland and I often have thought of him."

"It must have been meant that we should meet, dearest," he whispered.

"Yes, Larry," she replied softly.

He kissed her and held her close.

"Larry!" he exclaimed. "Where did you learn my name, sweetheart?"

"The old gentleman in the box next to us at the game called you Larry—and it seemed to fit you better than Jim does." She laughed.

"He is my uncle—my father, almost. You will meet him soon, and then I will explain how I became McCarthy."

At that instant Manager Clancy and his wife entered abruptly, followed by Technicalities Feehan. Betty Tabor blushed and struggled to extricate herself from McCarthy's arms, but he held her close and announced:

"Betty has just promised to become my wife."

A shower of congratulation followed, and Mrs. Clancy became so excited she dropped her fancy work and kissed both, then kissed Feehan, and that surprised reporter dropped his precious manuscript in his embarrassment.

A few moments after McCarthy left his room to make the call that resulted in his happiness being established, Swanson was aroused from his reverie by insistent rapping upon the door, and in response to his welcoming cry, a tall, slender old man with bristling moustache, stormed into the apartment.

"Where's that young scoundrel who calls himself McCarthy?" he demanded, brandishing his cane threateningly.

"Hello, grandpaw," said Swanson. "Who dealt you a hand?"

"You're another one of those rascally ballplayers!" charged the man violently. "I know you—you've been leading my nephew into all sorts of wild scrapes, disgracing the family"—

"You Kohinoor's uncle?" howled Swanson joyously as he sprang up and seized the old gentleman with a bear hug and waltzed him around. "Welcome to our fair city, uncle. I adopt you right now. Kohinoor is my chum. How does it seem to be the uncle of a hero?"

"Release me, you scoundrel," puffed the uncle. "Release me or I'll cane you! Where is he?"

"Truth is, uncle, he's gone skirting," said Swanson, releasing his victim.

"Gone where?" asked the uncle.

"Skirting—calling on a girl—and between you and me, uncle, he's got the best chance to win her, and she's worth winning."

"What, another?" demanded the uncle. "Then he hasn't eloped with that blond niece of that crook, Baldwin?"

"Not on your life," said Swanson, "he's won the best little girl in the world."

In five minutes they were laughing and chatting like old friends, and the uncle was boasting of his nephew's prowess at baseball.

"Hang it," he stormed, "I ought to cane him, the young rascal, for treating me this way. He never let me know he was playing, and I only got to see one game. But wasn't that a—what do you call it—a corker?"

"Let's go to them," proposed Swanson.

And into the tableau of congratulations that was being presented in the Clancy apartment Swanson burst, leading the old gentleman, who was struggling to smile and to be angry at the same time.

"Look who's here," he shouted. "Kohinoor's uncle, and from the looks of things he has arrived just at the right minute to give his blessing."

"Uncle Jim," exclaimed McCarthy, stepping forward quickly.

"Larry, you young rascal!—Larry"—

His voice broke and tears rolled down his cheeks as he put his arm around the boy's neck and wept. "Larry, you young scoundrel, what did you mean by running away from your old uncle?"

"Uncle Jim," said McCarthy seriously, as he put his arm around the old man's waist, "I was a fool. I found it out and I was coming home to tell you I was wrong and beg you to forgive me, but I could not leave the team when it needed me. I was only a foolish boy. If you can forgive"—

"It's all right now, Larry, boy," said the old man, wiping his eyes and laughing happily. "I was certain you'd come to your senses and find you didn't love that girl."

"I am certain you will not object to the young lady I am going to marry, Uncle Jim"—

"Marry!" cried Mr. Lawrence angrily. "Nonsense! You're not going to marry anyone! Here we just make up and you want to start the quarrel all over again. Marry? You young scoundrel! You're going to stay at home with me"—

"Don't say that until you meet her, Uncle Jim," and, putting his arm around Betty Tabor's waist, he said, "Uncle Jim, I want you to meet Miss Betty Tabor, who has just honored me by

promising to become my wife."

"Why, bless my heart! Bless my heart!" exclaimed the old man in surprise. "If it isn't the young woman who sat in the box next to me at the game! I fell in love with you, my dear, when you applauded Larry. Marry her? If you don't marry her, you young rascal, I'll cut you off in my will. Not a penny, you understand—not a penny."

He kissed Betty Tabor gallantly while the others laughed and he bowed low over Mrs. Clancy's hand as Kohinoor presented him to the manager and his wife.

"Are you the Mr. Lawrence they call the Lumber King in Oregon?" inquired Clancy, as he shook hands.

"They call me that out there," said the old man, testily. "Call themselves democratic—then King everyone who makes a few dollars—bah."

"Oh," exclaimed Miss Tabor, in sudden alarm. "Then Larry is rich?"

"Never mind that, sweetheart," he said, consolingly. "We can live on my baseball salary if Uncle Jim cuts us off."

"Cut you off, nonsense!" the old man exclaimed testily. "You'll have all my money if you behave yourself and obey me. Young scoundrel never would obey me."

"I've learned to obey in baseball, uncle," replied Kohinoor seriously. "Ask Mr. Clancy if I haven't."

"I'm so glad, Larry," said Miss Tabor brightly, "that you asked me before I knew you were going to be rich."

"Young rascal must have learned some sense," growled his uncle. "He picked out just the girl I wanted him to. When I saw you at the game, my dear, I said to myself: 'Now if Larry would only choose a girl like that, I'd make her my daughter.'"

"You're the worst flatterer of them all—Mr.—Lawrence," said the girl, blushing and laughing.

"You must call me Uncle Jim, my dear," he insisted in his most tyrannical tones. "And understand, Miss, I'm boss of this family."

"By the way, Kirkland," said Technicalities Feehan, who had been busily engaged studying some statistics he had taken from his pocket, "what did you hit the last year you were at Cascade College?"

"Kirkland?" exclaimed Miss Tabor. "Then your name isn't James Lawrence?"

"I forgot," he responded, laughing at her bewilderment. "Your name will be Mrs. James Lawrence Kirkland; I was named for Uncle Jim. How did you find it out?" he added, turning to Feehan.

"I knew it the second day you were with the Bears," replied Feehan. "I have all your records, excepting those of your final year at the university. Did you hit .332 or .318? The records do not agree."

Ten days later, on the night after the Bears triumphantly won the World's Championship, there was a jolly party in the banquet hall of one of the great hotels. Jimmy McCarthy was giving a farewell dinner to his friends and comrades of the Bear team. The dinner had been eaten, the toasts to the team and its manager drunk, and McCarthy arose.

"Boys," he said, "I'm not going to try to make a speech. I want to thank you all for your kindness to the tramp who came to you when he needed friends. And now my uncle has a little announcement to make which I know you all will be glad to hear."

A round of applause greeted the testy old gentleman as he arose, scolding his nephew for calling upon him. In the ten days that he had traveled with them he had become the idol of the Bears, and he proudly claimed credit for their victories, declared he was their mascot, and called each one by his first name.

"Nothing at all. Just a little matter," he said, testily. "Young rascal shouldn't have mentioned it. All it amounts to is that yesterday I bought Baldwin's stock in this ball club. He's a disgrace to the business. I made him sell out. I'm holding the stock for Clancy. He can have it at the price I paid any time he gets the money. Just bought it to get that crook, Baldwin, out."

He sat down amid a riot of cheering, while Clancy, who had not been informed of the deal, arose and stammered his bewildered thanks, as he strove to realize that a fortune had been thrust upon him. When the excitement had died down and a toast to Mr. Lawrence had been proposed and drunk standing, Betty Tabor, flushed, and appearing prettier than ever, arose.

"Boys," she said, in her low, steady tones, "I have an important announcement to make, one

which, I believe, will please you almost as well as the one we just heard did."

She hesitated and smiled down upon her future husband, who sat beside her.

"Boys," she continued, after a moment, "I have consented to permit Larry to play ball with you next season, if he will allow me to travel with the team at least one trip."

Noisy Norton sprang upon his chair, his glass held aloft and cried:

"To the bride, the groom and another pennant."

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JIMMY KIRKLAND AND THE PLOT FOR A PENNANT ***

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