

FULLERTON HUGH STUART

JIMMY KIRKLAND AND
THE PLOT FOR A PENNANT

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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, Slat?" 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 stiffes 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 pefessor."

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 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 it's 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 to-night 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 Pardridge 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.

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