

A Three-Day Moral Crusade

(Cleveland)

It's nobody's fault but my own that I didn't get a world's series ticket. I seen in the paper that they was takin' reservations, and I knew that was the time to get in line. But I dallied and now the papers say the reservations is all claimed, and if you ain't got one there ain't no more to get.

Schultz says not to worry because the Indians ain't even in the Series yet, and they probably won't be after the Sox come in and clean us out. But Schultz is a dope. Who's hotter than the Indians right now? We've got five straight bagged, that Sewell kid is playin' shortstop like he's been doin' it all year, and Mails... well, five straight wins, that's all. How do you suppose a team finds a couple kids down the stretch like Sewell and Mails to jump in and help out just when they're needed?

Schultz says havin' Mails and Sewell is fine, but Sewell ain't Chappie and the Sox ain't stiffs like the Senators and those other teams we been beatin' lately. And I should concede they can be tough.

"Tough?" Schultz says. "Did you see what they did to the Yanks?" Knocked 'em right out of the race, that's what."

It was true enough. The Yanks come in here and bump us off two out of three, leave in first place, but as soon as they get to Chicago the Sox take 'em three straight and kick 'em back to third.

"We couldn't beat 'em and the Sox couldn't lose to 'em," Schultz says. Now how we gonna beat the Sox?"

For one thing, I point out, we don't have to beat the Sox, at least not three straight. "We're still a game and a half up," I says, so if we only win one we're still in front. Ain't no team can come in here and win three in a row, not against Tris Speaker and Jim Bagby."

Then I dropped what I thought was the clincher on him. "Anyway, you never know when the Sox is playin' for real." Anybody who'd been readin' the papers knew what I meant. Schultz had been readin' the papers.

"That grand jury's startin' to talk like they're on our side," I says. "The Sox are a bunch of cheaters, and the jury's gonna say so. Then you watch and see what happens. Why," I says, "I wouldn't be surprised if they don't even suspend the lot of 'em right in the middle of the series."

Schultz didn't have no argument for that because of course there weren't one.

We all knew the Sox tossed the Series to Cincinnati, some of 'em anyway, and it

sure sounded like the jury was gonna say so. The papers this morning had a bunch of old ballplayers comin' forward to confess, and I'll bet they know plenty.

You don't have to be very smart to know there's a lot of money ridin' on games. All you got to do is go to a game and you'll probably see it. The other day I read about a couple of fellows picked up at League Park for bettin' with each other. They tossed 'em out of the park and fined both of 'em. To me, it ain't a far stretch from that to the players bettin'.

So I was pretty sure the Sox was crooked. I think most everybody in Cleveland was. And that made it even more important for us to win the series and also the pennant. If the Sox did win, why that might tell people that cheatin' pays. I knew our guys were square, just like I knew my dad said cheaters never win. But somehow I needed to make sure. It sounded like a good time to go over to St. Philomena's. So I did. It bein' a Wednesday afternoon, there wasn't much goin' on in the church and it was dark. But they never lock the doors, because you never know when somebody might need to come in and pray. So I just walked in and knelt down. I thought about lightin' a candle to the Virgin, but that would have cost a dime and I figured they'd understand that a dime was a pretty steep price for a kid to pay even if it made a prayer come true. So I just knelt down and started mumblin'. You don't have to pray loud...just mumble or even say it to yourself, because God hears everything, and that goes double if it's in church.

“God, I know you don’t care too much about the pennant race, but I know you do care about bein’ honest. So please, God, let a bunch of honest guys win. Cheaters shouldn’t ever win, God. You believe that, don’t you? You believe cheatin’s a sin, don’t you?”

I let God in on the schedule, Chicago comin’ here for games tomorrow, Friday and Saturday. “The Indians is a bunch of honest guys, and they deserve to win,” I said. “Now the Sox...well, I’m sure some of ‘em’s OK, too. The rest I guess you know about, and you can deal with ‘em like you think’s best. You probably heard about the Series.” I didn’t ask him to do anything special like make Smitty hit a homer or nothin. “Just kind of watch out for us,” I said. “If you do, maybe there’s a time comin’ along when we need a little bit of a push, and then you could be there and give it to us. And thanks. Amen.”

I saw Schultz again that afternoon and told him I couldn’t say how, but I knew the Indians was gonna win.

“Chi’s won six straight,” he warns me. Schultz ain’t no more of a Sox fan than I am, but he keeps track of ‘em and knows they been puttin’ the pressure on.

“Yeah, but we’ve won SEVEN straight,” I remind him.

“So, how do you know?” he asks. “You run into somebody who put the fix in?”

“Nah,” I says. Well maybe...in a way. But an OK way.”

“You tellin’ me you know some sure-thing boys?” Schultz asks, and there is a tone of admiration and even envy in his voice.

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I wasn’t worth shucks all afternoon Thursday at school, and I ran home so I could be sure to be there when the evening paper came around. I shouldn’t have hurried. The score was right up in the corner of the front page of The Press where you couldn’t miss it, and it wasn’t at all what I imagined.

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I couldn’t believe they hammered us that good. Even worse, when I read the story it was the guys they was all sayin’ was the crooks that got us. It had me wonderin’ whether the Press was right, but the story had Ross Tenney’s name on it and he usually don’t make mistakes. Three hits for Felsch? Three hits for Jackson...two of ‘em doubles? Risberg stole home? A hit for Weaver? None of that seemed possible. Neither did nine hits off Bagby; heck, he was goin’ for his 30th.

The Press said O'Neill blew the game by tryin' to peg Schalk out at second on a steal and lettin' Risberg slip home with the tyin' run. They blamed the fans for lettin' 'em get ahead in the sixth because Jackson hit a fly out to left that Jamieson would have caught easy, only it got into the folks on the field and they gave Jackson a double. Tenney said that was the hit that let 'em get three off Sarge. I guess the paper felt like a bunch of people should have stayed home.

That settled it in my mind. I was ditchin' school Friday, and I didn't care what anybody did about it. I mean, we was only a half game up and the way everybody doped it up whoever won the game Friday just about had the pennant copped.

The trick was how to do it, and the answer was to just cut out during lunch hour. From there I'd just catch the trolley and disappear. I couldn't tell my mom, because I knew she'd say no. I'd miss three classes, but one of 'em was P.E., and they wouldn't even notice in there. Social studies and algebra was another matter, and I guessed I'd probably be in the principal's office Monday morning. I knew I'd be in trouble with the principal, and probably with mom, too if the school told. But I wasn't too worried. If God didn't punish Weaver and Felsch and Jackson and Risberg no worse than that, I didn't figure he was gonna let 'em come down too hard on me.

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The Plain Dealer was full of stuff about the Sox and Indians, either about the first game or about the grand jury. It says they're bringin' in a bunch of players and former players to spill their guts. It's a tough spot because you got to choose between rattin' on your teammates and tellin' the truth. We was talkin' about it at school. The Dago says if it was him he wouldn't rat no matter what anybody said or did. I said if you took the money and threw the games, then you're already a rat so what difference does it make if you spill?

"At least I'd be an honest thief and not a rat thief," says the Dago.

If it was me I'd want a clean conscience, so I'd tell. But that's me and the Dago, and I don't suppose either one of us will ever be in the position of havin' to find out, because you'd have to be a rat to cheat about somethin' as important as the World Series or the pennant race, and I know the Dago ain't and I know I ain't.

I didn't tell nobody, not even the Dago or Schultz what I was doin', but just slipped away during lunch and beat it for the trolley. The toughest part is just getting' off the grounds, and for that I was countin' on not bein' seen, or if I was seen on them thinkin' I was goin' home sick. All I know is it worked. Since I couldn't go home without getting' found out, I had to carry my books with me, which must have looked pretty funny at the park.

There was another big crowd, although since it was a Friday and not a weekend the place wasn't quite packed. They said about 20,000. The bleachers are pretty far away from the plate, but at the prices they charge it's all a kid can do. I've already spent more on games this season than the whole rest of my life. So I laid down the 50 cents and crammed in next to a couple of guys doin' action with each other.

Natch we gave the Sox the razzberries when they came out. Twenty-thousand folks yellin' "cheat!" and "fix!" and "Cincinnati!"...man, it was better than social studies. "Hey, Joe," one guy yells out, "did you read what Herzog said this morning?" Jackson don't take no notice, or at least pretends not to. Then the guy yells, "Oh, I forgot...you can't read the papers," and Jackson still don't take no notice, or at least pretends not to. But we all had a good laugh.

The matchup is Faber for them and Duster Mails for us. Our bad luck, they only got two decent honest pitchers – them bein' Kerr and Faber – and we're seein' both of 'em. Well, our hitters ain't getting' no breaks. It's the first time I seen Mails, but I sure read about him. That's what happens when they call up a guy from the bushes and he goes 5-0 in September. The little kid at shortstop must be Joey Sewell. Don't look more than a couple years older than me.

Mails puts 'em down in order in the first, and the Sox take the field. In our part of the grounds, we let Jackson and Felsch have it some more because we know they can hear us. The guys beside me ain't takin' much part because they is bettin' quarters on whether the next guy makes an out or gets on. Cuckoo gives 'em the first go and the guy who bets 'hit' makes a quarter when he legs one out over Faber's head. Collins gets to it, but Cuckoo's pretty fast and he beats it out. Wamby lays one down, Speaker makes out but Elmer knocks one out to Strunk and with Cuckoo runnin' and two out he ain't got no play. So right away we lead 1-0.

Joey Sewell comes up to start the second. Faber tries to bust him inside with the fast one to knock him back. But the kid hangs in and slaps the next pitch off Collins' glove at first. Collins almost collects it, but that Sewell kid runs faster than anybody I've seen and makes first before the Sox can do anything about it.

"O'Neill's gonna bunt, so I'm takin' out," the guy two seats down says. But Speaker crosses 'em up and puts on the hit and run. Faber throws the curve and Steve whiffs at it. They should have had Sewell dead, but Schalk comes up too fast and throws high tryin' to get him, so Joey slides in safe. When O'Neill sends the next one square to left and Sewell beats it around for home, the guy next to me pops the guy two seats down in the ribs. "Bunt?" he says. "You don't know from bunt. Gimme' that quarter."

The Sox wasn't hittin' Duster a lick until the fourth. Then Eddie Collins busts one to center, and after Mails gets Jackson, Felsch comes up and drops one in front of Jamieson out in left. Two on, one out, and Shano Collins comin' up. "Hit," the guy next to me says. He thinks Duster's getting' a little limp leg. He throws one in the dirt that O'Neill blocks, follows with two shoots for strikes and then misses up and away. Two-two. The next one's a fastball and Collins leans on it straight up the middle. I counted a run in right off the bat, but the crowd don't even have a chance to groan when Sewell streaks across the middle and cuts it off on the fly. The way Collins and Felsch is runnin', it's a simple toss to Wamby for the double play. We get out of it like nothin' happened.

"I still say Mails is losin' it," the guy says. Normally I wouldn't mind, but he sounds more interested in makin' a quarter than in winnin' the game. Those kinds of fans we don't need.

The Swede is first up in the fifth. It ain't no difficult feat to boo Risberg, for not only is he on the Sox but the scuttlebutt pretty well pegs him as one of the crooked players. So he steps in to 20,000 folks tellin' him how they'd like to string him up, and they will if he dares get a hit. "He gets on," the guy two seats down says."

It's all I can take. "The hell he does," I butt in.

“You got a quarter that says that?” the guy says.

“Yeah,” I says. I knew I shouldn’t have popped off, first because I’d never before today seen Mails and second because I only had two quarters left and needed one of them for trolley fare. But I also knew a bet’s a bet, and a guy didn’t welsh. My lucky day: Risberg fans air. I now have 75 cents.

“You wanna go on the next one, kid?” the guy next to me says. The next batter is Schalk. I figure they see me as an easy mark to pluck. But as I see it the honor of the Indians is at stake. “Yeah,” I says. “Out.” Mails throws four up to Schalk and none of ‘em are even close. I am back to a half dollar.

Faber steps in. “He gets on,” the guy two seats down says. This I take as an insult to the team and the city, for around the league it is well-known that even for a pitcher Faber is miserable at the bat. Mails will make easy work of him. He throws four more that send O’Neill flyin’ in every direction to knock down. I am back to my last quarter. The Sox has the tying runs on base and the top of the order comin’ up.

“Speaker better get somebody throwin’, because this guy’s through,” the guy next to me says. “He ain’t neither,” I says. “They ain’t hit him and they can’t, all he’s got to do is throw it over the plate.”

“Ain’t been much of that goin’ on the last few minutes,” the guy says. “A quarter says Strunk gets on, too.”

By this time the crowd is crazy for Mails to just throw the ball somewhere’s they can hit it, never mind where it went. In that atmosphere, I didn’t have no choice but to take the bet. It was a matter of honor. If Strunk got on, I was broke and I’d have to walk the six or eight miles home to boot, but that was bettern’ bein’ called a chicken.

The first pitch is in the dirt. Ball one. “Make ‘em hit it!” is all you hear. Mails steps off. He looks like a guy who ain’t been in this kind of pressure on the West Coast, and who isn’t sure he wants to be in it now. The second is in the dirt. Ball two.

“Make him hit it!” I suppose the crowd yelled that time, too, but all I could hear was myself. Speaker calls time and comes runnin’ in from center. There is a lot of earnest gesticulation in the general direction of the plate, and although we are a couple hundred feet away and the place is abuzz, there’s no mistaking what’s bein’ said. At the same time, Uhle, Morton and Clark start to warm up. The third pitch is high. The fourth cuts the plate, but Strunk is taking, as the entire park knew he would. The fifth is a fastball that looks good. “Ball four,” says Owens, who everybody understands to be an idiot. Strunk takes first. I hand over my last quarter.

“You got yourself a real winner out on that mound, kid,” the guy says. If Speaker don’t get him out, he’s gonna blow himself and the pennant race as well.”

“And it’s only a matter of time because them was the easy guys,” the other guy says. Look who’s up now.”

I do. It is Weaver. A lot of the fans is callin’ for Speaker to bring in Morton or Uhle. I wish he would. When a pitcher goes wild, there’s often nothin’ to bring him back but a shower, and Mails has gone wild for sure. Twelve balls in 13 pitches.

“I’ll give you a chance to make it up, kid,” the guy next to me says. “Weaver’s hittin’ .330; another quarter says he gets on.”

I didn’t have another quarter, and I was beginning to understand why my pop hated gambling so much. But I couldn’t tell the guy that. The whole season was on the line. If I quit now, it’d be like walkin’ out. “He’ll get him,” I says. I didn’t believe it, and I didn’t believe I was stupid enough to say it. I looked around for a good place to get lost, just in case.

Mails sets in the stretch and delivers the first one. It backs Weaver off...ball one. The way the fans groaned, you’d have thought somebody died. I thought in a few seconds it might be me. Weaver took the second one down the middle. One and one. The third was a curve. Weaver turned hard on it and pulled it down the left

field line, foul all the way. I felt sorry for the sap in the stands who got in the way of it. Mails tried him outside, but Weaver was a smart guy and wouldn't fish. Two-two. The next pitch was a fastball. He took a huge cut, but I didn't hear no contact. Then O'Neill showed the ball in his glove. Strike three! If I quit now, I could ride the trolley home.

"He won't do it to Collins," the one guy says. "Not a chance," the other agrees. "He's a .370 hitter and you can't hardly get a pitch past him."

"He'll get him," I says. "He has to." It was the only reason I could think of.

"You wanna go a half dollar on it?" he shouted. Even though he was standin' right next to me, I could barely hear the guy over the din. I said yes. I reasoned that I'd been this stupid before and got away with it; it could happen again.

On the other hand, this was Collins. He was a better hitter than Weaver, made better contact, and the world knew he was honest. A base hit would tie the game and bring Jackson up to hit for the lead. The crowd fairly pleaded with Mails. He delivered the first pitch. Collins checked his swing, but the ball clipped his bat and caromed into the stand. You could tell just by the way he stood on the mound that this was a different Mails from the one who had walked bums like Schalk, Faber and Strunk. The second hit the bat again...strike two.

“One more, Duster, one more!” It could have been me, or most anybody else in the place.

“This is when Collins is toughest,” the one guy says. Mails tried a fastball and Collins sent it ripping into the crowd down the left field line. I exhaled when it landed foul. Then came a curve breaking low into the dirt. Two and two. “You can’t get a fastball past Collins,” the guy said. Mails tried and Collins sent another rifle toward the left field line. Cuckoo made a dive for it, but all he caught was some of the fans behind the ropes on the field. “Foul!” yelled Owens, and how he could tell with those people out there I ain’t for sure. If he says fair, two score, the game’s tied, and Jackson hits with runners at second and third. Mails come set again. It was a swift, tryin’ to tie him up inside. Collins took his best hack...and missed! Strike three.

There was still four innings to play, but they just about had to call it a forfeit for the Sox, and would have the way the fans was celebratin’ if they hadn’t had the good sense to get back behind the ropes and into the stands after a few seconds. Must have been a thousand straw hats takin’ to the air. Even the women was beside themselves with carryin’ on, if you can imagine it. I can see Elmer Smith cover his ears with his hands as he runs in because the noise is so loud that he cannot stand it otherwise.

“Here’s your quarters, kid,” the guy says, and it is only then that I remember I have just profited from the wages of sin. To me, the guy seems matter-of-fact about it, as if he didn’t much care whether the Sox or Indians won, just so long as Weaver, Collins and the rest of ‘em did what he said they would.

I got more quarters if you’re game for the bottom half,” the guy says to me.

“No, thanks,” I said. “I’m retired. Four innings later, so are the Sox. They never again tap Mails for more than a single, so the game ends with the Indians triumphant by the same 2-0. They are a game and a half ahead now, and even if Cicotte beats ‘em Saturday the Indians will still be in first place.

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Even from up on the fire escape, you could hear the crowd hootin’ and hollerin’ at the Sox. The names had been in the Plain Dealer that morning – that very morning – Cicotte and Jackson, Felsch and Weaver, Williams and Risberg. Crooked. That’s what the papers said. The Plain Dealer said they didn’t even get paid for the Series last fall because the Sox suspected they was rotten. Now there they were, right in front of us. (Well, a little bit more in front of the other folks than me.) There was Jackson and Felsch, playin’ catch, warmin’ up to play left and center. There was Weaver and Risberg doin’ the same. And there was Williams, warmin’ up to pitch. He was crooked, but they was gonna let him pitch

right in front of us, on our own field, with the pennant on the line, like there weren't nothin' happenin', just because he'd beaten us four out of five already. I knew them Sox would stop at nothin'.

It was an outrage, and everybody around League Park knew it. And there was 30,000, just countin' those inside the park, not to mention more on the sidewalks. Some of 'em had brought megaphones so they could be sure to be heard. Even from where I was, you could hear them. "Go back to Cincinnati!" they'd yell at Williams. "Slacker!" they saved for Jackson. Then there was the less personal stuff: "Cheater," "Lyin' bums," and the like. It looked like some of the fans was throwin' coins at 'em before the game.

I wished I could say this all rattled the Sox, but I guess when you been dealin' with big-time gamblers you do not rattle easy. If anybody was rattled, it was us, for we gave them both of their runs in the first. Covey got Strunk and Weaver quick enough, but then Eddie Collins pounded one out to right and Jackson followed with a double that sent Collins to third. The next up is Felsch, and he knocks an easy one down to Gardner, only Larry throws it in the dirt and Doc can't come up with it, which lets Collins score. Risberg is next and he hits a polite little bouncer to Sewell, whose throw is right on target for the third out...except Doc flat drops it. Now Jackson scores and it is 2-0.

We get one of 'em back in the third when Sewell leads off with a double into the crowd on the field, then comes around on a couple of fly balls. If Covey can hold 'em now, we can get back in it. But Covey cannot hold 'em. Felsch leads off the fourth with a clean knock, Shano Collins bunts him to second and Risberg sends one into center, so it is 3-1. Schalk bunts, which looks good to me because it brings up Williams with two out. But darned if Covey don't throw him a fat one that he takes into the crowd over Cuckoo's head in left. So that makes it 4-1.

It is while the Indians bat in the last of the fourth that I hear the footsteps on the iron ladder. I know it has got to be Levi; in fact I am countin' on it. He is the reason I am up here instead of even tryin' to buy a ticket to get inside.

"Hi," he says simply.

"Hi," I says. "We need to talk."

"Bout what?"

"Bout playin' a game. Remember you said we should play one?"

"Yeah?"

"OK, lets."

“You said your guys’d never do it.”

“Well, they will.”

It took a few minutes to settle out times and dates and places and such, but since a weekend made the most sense, we settled pretty easy on 2 p.m. a week from Sunday at the Lexington field. It was easy for us to get to on the trolley. “Shake on it,” I says.

“Deal,” said Levi, and that easy we shook on it. I didn’t know what my dad would have said if he’d seen me shakin’ Levi’s hand, and I sure didn’t know what the guys would say. But I knew we was gonna do it. I knew because it was right. And hangin’ around the Sox this much, I wanted to do some stuff that was right.

We was drawn back to the game by the crowd, which over the course of fallin’ behind 4-1 had gone from bein’ cranked and angry to just bein’ angry. It’s like when the crooks rob your house and you see ‘em, but you can’t stop ‘em and there ain’t no police around, so they just kind of laugh at you and go about their business. The way you get mad when that happens. They really let Jackson have it when he come up in the fifth. “Shipyard!,” “Slacker!” and “Cheater!” was the kind stuff, and there was a bunch more I get in trouble for sayin’, and all of it bounced around the block outside the ballpark, not to mention inside as well.

Jackson took a couple, then sent one out toward us that I thought for a minute I might be able to catch. It cleared the Lexington screen easy and crashed through a window of the school building just a couple floors below us. From the fire escape, I thought I felt the building rattle. Levi and I just looked at one another in a sort of awe. Neither one of us had ever seen anything like that, and we couldn't say nothin'.

But inside the park they had plenty to say. They was givin' it to Jackson even more as he rounded the bases, so when he got to third he gave some of it back, thumbin' his nose at the fans. Now the fans start throwin' stuff, and Jackson does it again when he touches home and they're throwin' more, and it's about all he can do to make it back to the dugout without gettin' hit by anything worse than oranges.

I'd like to report that we came back from that to give Williams his due, but the fact is we only got five hits off him all day and the Sox ended up winnin' 5-1. So we was back to bein' just a half game in front. I was glad I didn't pay to see it, not just because we lost but also because if I'd paid we wouldn't have had our game with Levi's team. Now it was up to me to make sure the game happened.

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I knew I was in trouble when I got to school Monday mornin', and the principal wanted to see me. The short of it was I got a day's detention, and when Mom found out she grounded me three days on top of that. Since we'd won the game, and since the Indians was on the road all week, I didn't have no complaints. Sure, I'd miss a couple of after-school games, but that was it. Mostly I sat home and read the reports from St. Louis and Chicago in the Plain Dealer and the Press.

They was good reports. We put Caldwell up against the Browns on Sunday. He didn't have it – they got five off him in the first – but then Uhle came out of the pen and shut 'em down. Sewell saved us by makin' five plays and getting' a double with the bags loaded in the third that put us ahead. The Sox won, too, but it didn't make no difference. Mails whipped the Browns on Monday, and again the Sox won to no difference. The Sarge copped number 30 on Tuesday, and Covey beat 'em 10-2 on Tuesday. Since the Sox didn't play neither day, we had 'em by a game and a half. But that weren't the half of it. The Wednesday papers was full of reports of Sox players spillin' their guts. Joe Jackson, the same Joe Jackson who thumbed his nose at us on Sunday, confessed! Cicotte confessed! The jury indicted the both of 'em along with Williams, Weaver, Felsch, Risberg and a couple of other guys. The papers said they was all gonna be suspended. Well, there wasn't no way the Sox could make up a game and a half on us when they didn't have but half their team.

We were a cinch!

I wasn't quite outta stir yet, so Schultz came over after school Wednesday to talk about it.

"We got to figure out a way to get tickets to the Series," he says.

"Do you know how much they cost?"

"Well, we just got to," he says, and we sat there a solid half hour thinkin' up ways to do stuff to earn the money without no success. "They're probably all gone by now, anyway," I says. I didn't really think it was possible, and if it was I didn't want to think I'd blown the chance of earnin' the money by getting grounded. But Schultz was insistent. "Remember how Jim Dunn's addin' those extra seats just for the Series so he can get more people in. Lemme go home and think it over," he says. "Nothin's more important than that Series."

Schultz and I walked home together Thursday afternoon after school.

"Any ideas yet?" I says.

"Nah. I can't think of nothin'."

“Well I got one. I know a place you can see the game, and it don’t even cost a penny.”

“You do?”

“Honest. And I’ll take you with me, but you got to make me one promise.”

For the chance to see the Series for free, Schultz would have promised me anything. That’s what he thought, at least. We were about to find out.

“You got to promise to help me get the guys to play the Lexington Avenue team Sunday afternoon.”

“Lexington...ain’t they the guys with the nigger playin’ shortstop?”

I dropped my books, squared up on Schultz and popped him one right in the jaw. Knocked him back on the grass. He got up and tried to rush me, but since I knew he’d be comin’ I dodged him. Since Schultz was more baffled than mad, he didn’t have much stomach to mix it up...especially if he thought he might be fightin’ a guy with the key to the Series.

“What’d you pop me for?”

“Sorry, but I just can’t let you call him that.”

“What?”

“That...word. It just ain’t right.”

“You mean the nig...”, but he stopped, so I didn’t pop him again.

“He’s a regular guy,” I says. “An Indians fan, just like you and me.”

“How do you know?”

“Cause I met him, that’s how. Shook his hand, too.”

“You shook the hand of a ...” I drew back, but he didn’t say no more, so I didn’t have to pop him again.

“I did, and there weren’t no problem with it. We made us a deal; we’re gonna play Sunday. Our team and theirs. Their place. 2 p.m.”

“Well we just can’t,” Schultz said. “Why, if word got out, we’d be finished. Nobody around here would play us. Our pops would ground us. Anyway, who’s gonna make us? You ain’t.”

“No, but you are.”

“Me?”

“You want to see the Series, don’t you? You’re the biggest and the oldest, ain’t you? And what you say always goes with the team, don’t it?”

Schultz couldn’t take issue with none of my logic.

“Anyway,” I says, “with you pitchin’, we’re sure to win, ain’t we?”

“Well yeah, sure...I suppose.”

“Then all you got to do is tell the guys to meet up at the trolley stop at 12:30, bring their gloves and bats and be ready,” I says.

“What if they say no?”

“Then just pop ‘em.”

I waited through Friday to hear back from Schultz, but there weren’t no word.

Mitch was hot-tempered Irish and might take some work, and Tommy of course

would go along with Mitch. But most of the guys would do what Schultz said. The Saturday morning papers said we split with Detroit and what was left of the Sox lost to St. Lou, so we was two ahead with just the last two to play. With Sarge pitchin' for us, it was as sure a thing as I could imagine that we'd have it wrapped by the time the Press hit the streets Saturday afternoon, and that's what happened. I went lookin' for Schultz again.

"You sure about that World Series business?" he said.

"Yep."

"Okay, see you at the trolley stop at 12:30."

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"I don't like it," Mitch says.

"What don't you like?" I says.

"Playin' against no..."

I started to haul back to pop him if he said it, but Schultz musta seen me comin' because he steps in like the law. "See here, Mitch, you're playin'," he says. Mitch

drops his bat and glove. Says you?" he says. "Says me, says Schultz. Schultz and Mitch bein' the two biggest, they don't hardly ever scrap each other. But they're goin' at it now, right there at the trolley stop. Mitch lands a couple haymakers and bloodies up Schultz's nose some, then Schultz gets Mitch down and the next we know his pants are torn up and he's got a scraped knee. This goes on a couple minutes, but finally we see a couple of adults from the neighborhood headin' toward the stop so Tommy pulls Mitch off and tells him he better cheeze it with the fists or mom's gonna hear about the brawl. They both get up and dust themselves off, and we all make nice with the adults.

"I'm gonna get in trouble with my dad sure," Mitch says to Schultz and me. "Don't tell him," I pipes, and then the Dago, who usually just clams up, says, "yeah, just don't tell him." And that is the last I hear of any beefin' until we get there and the game starts.

If you got 18 kids on a field, there's gonna be beefs, especially since there ain't no umpires, even anyas bad as Chill or Owens. Pretty much the only way to do it is for the guys on the bench to take turns callin' 'em, and that's what we did. Whoever made the last two outs umpires; one callin' the pitches and the other on the bases. You can stir up a lot of suspicion that way if you're on the defense and the umps is playin' for the other side, but guys who don't call 'em square gets found out pretty quick and run the chance of gettin' beat up. I seen Mitch call the Dago out once when he was slidin' into second and the two of them got to

scrappin' right in the middle of the game, never mind that they was teammates. Another time I seen the same thing with Billy and his little brother.

Levi made a couple a nice plays on us, and he took Schultz out to center in the third for their first hit. Schultz can throw hard, even though he don't always know where it's goin'. The best beef started when one of the Lexington boys led off the fifth with a hit and the next guy rolled one over to the Dago at first. He fires to me as the first guy slides into the bag. "Safe!," the Lexington kid who's callin' the bases said. At times like this etiquette calls for you to get in the guy's face, so that's what I did.

"He was out!"

"Safe!"

"Out!"

"Safe!"

"You're a cheater! Ask anybody, they'll tell ya I got him." I was hopin' for Levi to jump in and throw to our side, but team loyalties bein' what they are that turned out to be askin' too much.

So the ump pushed me and I dropped my glove and chased him around the field, then when I ran him down we squared off for a few minutes and a couple of the other guys squared off, too. It was fun. The guy bloodied my nose. I'd a got his, too, but he was wearin' glasses and I couldn't see breakin' 'em just because he cheated us on the call. Generally when you get cheated, you don't actually have to get the guy to change his call, unless he's a lot smaller than you, which this guy wasn't. It's enough to get a couple of shots in, then get up, dust yourself off and say, "well, he was too out and you better get it right next time or I'll whip you again." Then you hope to heck the guy had enough because if he hasn't some times he'll come right back at you again.

So we start up and the next guy hits it clean out to right and the runner scores so they take the lead. "Bunch a cheaters," I said, throwin' my glove when we get back to the bench. What we need is to get somebody on so we can use our umpires, and I figure I'm just the guy. So when I come up leadin' off the eighth I drop one down third and leg it out because they ain't seen me and don't know how good a bunter I am. Now I'm lookin' down at second, figurin' how I can swipe it, first because Billy's brother is comin' up and he can't hit, and second because the Dago's callin' the bases. I get my lead, take off and about four seconds later I make the best slide I can make into the bag, but the problem is Levi's waitin' there with the ball like he's been expecting me. 'Yer' out!" says the Dago, and all I can do is look up at him and say, "didya have to?" and he just shrugs. It turns out to be our last chance, for we are set down in order in the ninth and lose 3-2.

We pick up our gear and shake hands, and Levi takes me aside. “Thanks,” he says.

“For what...losin’?”

“Nope...for playin,” he says. “And for shakin’ hands...usually if we get a game, the other guys all pretend I ain’t around. “I’d say five or six of your guys came over.”

“If they hadn’t I’d a cold-cocked ‘em,” I said. The fact is it hadn’t even occurred to me to notice.

“You guys got a good team,” I says. “Your team’s got a good shortstop, too.”

We’re getting ready to catch the trolley back home, but Levi’s got more on his mind. “Let’s not let this be the last time we see each other, OK?” he says. “I mean, just because you don’t live in a house on Millionaire’s Row...”

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The Indians got back from Brooklyn Friday afternoon and things didn’t look all that good. Covey’s won the first one, OK, but the Dodgers got Sarge and

Caldwell in the next two so they was up two games to one. I was killin' time at McGregor's store that evening, mostly talkin' up the Series with whoever wandered in, when somebody came by I had gotten to know pretty well. It was O'Neill.

'Ain't you supposed to be home restin' up for tomorrow?' I says.

"Sure, but a guy's got to have some food in the house, don't he?" O'Neill says.

"You wouldn't want me showin' up tomorrow without any strength, would you?"

"Heck, no," I says. "What can I get you?" says old McGregor, and O'Neill allows as to how as much as they've been on the road he's fresh out of bacon and eggs and bread and coffee.

"You goin' to the games, kid?" he asks me.

"Nah, I couldn't get no tickets."

"What do you mean you can't get no tickets?" he says. "A guy as close as you was to Chappie and they won't give you tickets? How the heck are we supposed to win if you're not there?"

Say," he says, "you didn't go to any of those three games in Brooklyn, did you?"

“Brooklyn, nah,” I says.

“I figured as much,” says O’Neill. That explains why we lost two of ‘em.”

“I suppose they would have if I’d asked,” I said, “only...well, you know they cost a lot.”

“Not if you get ‘em from me, they don’t,” O’Neill says. Why heck, I got two for game five right here.” And he pulls’ em out of his pocket, and sure enough that’s exactly what they were...tickets for the actual World Series game on Sunday.

“Mr. O’Neill...do you mean it?” I says. I can hardly speak the words.

“You got a friend you can bring along?” he says. I wouldn’t want you bein’ lonely. It’s a big park and there’ll be a lot of people there. And he holds the tickets out for me to grab. Grandstand seats right behind home plate.

“Do !! Yeah,” and I took ‘em and gave him as big a hug as I could, which wasn’t much considering what a big guy he is, bein’ a catcher and all.” Then I ran out of the store in the general direction of home. Two tickets. To the Series. Sunday’s game. Grandstand seats. I knew I couldn’t tell anybody except for my best friend.

This was gonna take some sleepin' on, so I put the tickets under some clothes in my dresser and decided to sort it out Saturday mornin.'

I was at Schultz's door before noon, for I had to keep up my end of the bargain. "Yo, Denny!" Yo, Denneee!" I said, and it weren't too long that Schultz pops out ready to go. We made 66th and Lexington 45 minutes before the game was to start, but unlike most of the 25,000 who were hangin' around there we never made a move for the entrances.

"Back this way," I said, directin' him out toward right and then to the school and up the fire escape. "I seen the Babe hit one right to this spot," I said proudly at the base of the iron ladder. We climbed and watched it, just Schultz and me, the two of us. (I thought Levi might come by, but he must have had chores.) Covey had it all that day. They only got five hits off him and the two runs we got in the first would have been plenty. Then we got two more in the third and pretty much made it look easy. The sun was bright and the sky was warm and it was all in all pretty much as good a day as I could spend with Schultz. When it was over we climbed down and agreed that the Indians was too goin' to win the Series, and also that there weren't many better places to watch it from than right up there.

"See you tomorrow," Schultz says.

“Well, I’m not exactly sure I can make it,” I said. “You see, well...I can’t say why exactly.”

“Secret, huh?”

“Secret, yeah,” I says. “But this place is yours, too. I hear it’s supposed to be a great game tomorrow. We got Bagby goin’.”

“Sorry you won’t see it,” Schultz says. “Goin’ home now?”

“Can’t,” I said, excusin’ myself. “I got ... uh... an errand.” And I was off into the crowd because Schultz was too good a buddy to lie to, or for that matter to tell the truth to.

In the crowd it was a 10-minute walk down 66th to Euclid, another couple of minutes to Millionaire’s Row, and two more minutes up the manicured lawn. A Negro lady of stately bearing answered the door. “Is Levi home?” I asked. I didn’t have to wait but a few seconds for him.

“Levi,” I said. “You wanna go to the game with me tomorrow?”

