

An Afternoon Well-Spent Outside

League Park

(Cleveland)

Did I think the Indians still would win? No, the way I figured it they were through. There ain't no more important position on the field than shortstop – that's where the most balls are hit – and we'd just lost ours. Now we were playin' Harry Lunte. I don't want to say nothin' against Harry Lunte – he's doin' his best – but he can't hit. He was up last year, didn't break .200, and he ain't broke .200 this year, either. Hasn't hit a home run; heck, he ain't even hit a double.

Then there's the pitching. Speaker's getting' along on three guys: Sarge, Covey and Caldwell. That ain't enough. You can't count on any of the rest, Clarke, Morton or Uhle. I read where the other day they called up a guy named Mails from out west and put him out there against Washington, hopin' he might get by a time or two. Maybe he will, but he sure didn't Wednesday. The Senators got him for three in the first, and when he walked Lamotte to start the second Speaker gave him the hook for Morton. The only good thing was we hit Acosta even harder than they hit Mails, so we got out of it with the win. But it's hard to see how Mails is gonna be much help. Lunte either.

I shouldn't be givin' up on us, seein' as how since the Sox blew up in Boston we're back in first place by a half a game. How Chicago lost three to those guys is a puzzle along our block. Mitch's dad says the Sox is fixed with the gamblers, and he knows because a friend lost a bunch of money on 'em last fall. He says they'll cave this year. All I know is that Jackson can hit, and so can Felsch and Weaver and Collins. We've got three good pitchers, but they've got Cicotte, Williams, Faber and Kerr.

Nope, I don't see how we can stay with 'em unless we get us a good shortstop and a good pitcher.

Like I said, though, I ain't givin' up. None of the kids is. They got a group at the park called the "Stick to the Finish Club," and we decided that's what we're gonna do. We decided right after Chappie got killed we'd be at League Park for the first game back, we'd be cheerin' and we'd stick to the finish. The 50 cents it'd cost for a bleacher ticket weren't gonna be missed compared with showin' the players we was still behind 'em. We was gonna catch the trolley early, get some good seats where we could be heard, and have a contest to see who we could cheer loudest for. (Personally, I didn't think it would be Speaker, but I hadn't told any of the other guys about that.)

The park wasn't full like I thought it might be, but there was maybe 15,000. Jim Dunn done a nice thing. He called it Ray Chapman Day, had a special program

printed up and gave it to everybody for free. Some folks said some awful nice things about Chappie in that program. The part that got Schultz was when the bugler went out to shortstop and played “Taps” and they lowered the flag to half mast. The players was standin’ along the sidelines, and the sun was bright and everything else was quiet so all you could do was think and stare at the flag. I saw a few folks cryin’ then – men, too. Schultz wasn’t alone.

There was a loud hand for each player when he came up to hit. Speaker got a big one. The Stick to the Finish Club passed out what they called “Tris Speaker bats” (which really weren’t much more than pieces of wood), but you could slap ‘em together and really raise a racket, so that’s what we all did. The Dago and Mitch found it was even louder if one guy slapped his against the other guy’s, so that’s what they did. Some of the folks was havin’ so much fun with the noisemakers they didn’t hardly notice that Leonard got Speaker out easy.

Me, I was savin’ it up for Harry Lunte. I figured he needed it. We went out pretty easy again in the second, so Lunte didn’t come up until the third started, and I’ll say we gave him a sendoff. I believe it was an even louder reception than Speaker himself got. Then darned if old Harry don’t slap one right past Leonard and out into center field for a single. I’ll tell ya’ how much we all wanted to push Harry home. On the first pitch to O’Neill he takes off for second tryin’ to steal it, and Stanage pegs him out clean. It wasn’t much of a smart play on Harry’s part, but you couldn’t tell that from the fans. To them it’s all “nice try, Harry” and “get

'em next time." Nope, there wasn't much Harry could have done wrong s'far as the fans was concerned.

By then we'd settled into the issue of actually winning the game. By the fifth, the score was posted from Boston that the Yanks had won, but neither Covey nor Leonard was givin' ground. Stanage came up in the eighth and knocked one left of Gardner that looked like a sure hit. But here came old Harry Lunte to cut it off, and his throw to Johnston gets Stanage by a half step. The truth is we was lucky it was the catcher runnin', and Stanage to boot because there's girls at our school can run faster than him. But the truth didn't matter all that much; as far as we was concerned it was another great play by Harry Lunte, and to a fan one more bit of evidence that we were, too, goin' to pull through.

They finally got Covey's number in the ninth. Young hit one I didn't think Wamby could even get a glove on, and I wished he hadn't. If it had got through, Young would have been on first with a single. But Wamby knocked it down, then tried to make the throw when he didn't have a Chinaman's chance, and tossed it into the dugout instead. That let Young move to second. Covey walked Bush, but that only brought up Cobb and he pulled one between Doc and Wamby to get Young home.

It was only one run, and you wouldn't think that if Covey only gave up one run Dutch Leonard would make it stand up. But that's where we were when the ninth

started. Doc led off the bottom half with a clean hit, and O'Neill moved him over, giving Burns – who was battin' for Lunte -- a chance to drive him home. Well, it would have given him a chance only Leonard hits Burns right on the toes with the pitch so he goes to first. Now Spoke sends up Les Nunamaker to hit for Covey. 'C'mon, Les," we's all sayin'. Les wasn't much of a catcher, which was why he didn't play, but he could hit. Leonard throws strike one and we all yell some more. Leonard throws strike two and we all yell some more. Leonard throws it off the plate for a ball. Louder. Leonard tries to get Les to chase one in the dirt. Les does, misses for strike three, and the ball pops out of Stanage's mitt by a few feet. Schultz is the first to see it, and he goes into a panic. "Get back, Doc!" he screams. Then we all notice. Doc has gone about half way down from second to third when the ball hits the dirt. Maybe he tried to go and then decided he couldn't make it. Maybe he forgot you don't have to run on a dropped third strike when there's runners on first and second. I don't know. All I know is Stanage makes the throw down to Young at second and Doc is out and so are we, 1-0. So much for first place, now the Yankees has caught us and if the Sox beat the Browns they'll be even, too.

We spend the trolley ride home decidin' whether Doc don't know the rules or just made a bad guess on whether he could make third.

"Doc ain't stupid enough to not know the rules," I says.

“He’s stupid enough to get caught,” the Dago says. “How do you know he ain’t stupid enough to not know the rules.”

“Yeah, you inside his head?” says Mitch.

I wanted to scrap him, and before the funeral I probably would have for suggestin’ the Indians might be somethin’ other than what we seen on the field, which was a smart bunch of guys playin’ together. Now, inside me, I wasn’t quite as sure he was wrong. Anyway, as far as scrappin’ is concerned, they don’t like that kind of going on aboard the trolley. The other thing was I couldn’t afford to get tossed off. It’s a long walk from Dean’s Corners back to St. Philomena’s, and I might have had to fight Mitch the whole way.

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Labor Day’s always good because they play double-headers. But it’s bad because school starts the next day. Myself, I’ve about had it with school. There’s too many good things you could be doin’ instead that school gets in the way of. I don’t mean there ain’t no use for school. It’s fine for teachin’ kids stuff and all. But you get to a certain age, a fella ought to be out workin’ and helpin’ out, and not hangin’ around school all day.

That's what Mitch decided, and his parents let him. So now he's helpin' to clerk and clean up over at McGregor's. He makes a buck a week doin' it, too. Well, why shouldn't he...he's nearly 15. It's about time he helped out. That's what I'd like to be doin'. I heard they need help over at the railroad yard. There was a fella around the neighborhood a few days ago, I didn't recognize him, don't suppose he's from around here. But he said when he was gettin' off a train over at the yard he noticed they had signs and posters up lookin' for help. "Alert, hard-working young men," that's what he said the sign said. They use 'em to walk the yard lookin' for hobos tryin' to cop a free ride, makin' sure nobody filches coal and other such useful stuff. Everybody knows the railroad's a good career, and I figure I'd like to give it a try.

Only my folks won't let me. "I don't care if you are 14," my mom says when I bring it up. "You're getting' your education."

"But I already got an education," I plead. "And a good one, too. I been clear through the eighth grade." I point out to her and my dad that I have studied math, English, history, geography and I even had some science. I got good grades, pretty much all B's and C's. "There ain't nothin' more to be learned than that," I plead.

"There's high school, and you're goin' to it," my mom says, and dad says that's final. So high school opened Tuesday and I showed up and started class. I can't

imagine what they'll teach me that I don't already know, and I sure will miss the money I could be makin' spottin' hobos in the yard. But I told my folks I'd go, so I'll go.

The worst part, of course, is havin' to miss ballgames during the week. The Yanks came in Thursday for three, but since I had school I couldn't go Thursday or Friday. Worse than that was that the Babe hit a homer in both games, both of 'em clean on out to Lexington. I wanted to go to see the Babe, and also to boo the Yanks. At least they had the sense not to bring Mays into town with 'em. That would have got things pretty well stirred up if they had, but they made a big deal out of how they "wanted to spare the feelings of the people of Cleveland," so they were gonna send him straight on to Detroit. We won't miss him, I say.

School don't let out until it's past 3, so there ain't no chance of getting' over to the park for more than the last inning or two, if that. So I have to wait until 3:45 or 4 when the Press gets out to see what happened. Turned out we won the first game, but when I did see Friday's sheet on the stands, well, Shawkey whipped us. Time to go home. Only I didn't feel like goin' home yet. I felt like takin' a walk and thinkin'.

You walk very far along Euclid out toward our neighborhood and before long you walk past Lakeview Cemetery. The place always gave me the creeps, so I didn't know why I wanted to walk through there today. No, that's not true. I did know

why. I hadn't seen Chappie since the funeral, and with things bein' busy and all I didn't get much chance to visit. Before that was when Father introduced us at the church, but I didn't get much chance to visit there, either. Seems like there's never time for a visit. But it was only a little after 5:30, there was plenty of daylight and mom would just figure I was out playin' ball or somethin'. She wouldn't even start to worry about me for another hour at least. And like I said, Lakeview's just down Euclid a ways from our neighborhood, so goin' through it ain't much different from walkin' home.

Bein' green and quiet like it is, the cemetery's a good place for a visit, and Chappie's grave was still fresh, which made it easy to find. That late in the day, there wasn't nobody else around, so I could talk to him without nobody thinkin' I was dumb. "Shawkey beat us today," I started, but then it occurred to me that he might not want to hear bad news, so I quickly added, "...but the Polack won yesterday." I gave him the roundup: Us and the Sox is tied, Yanks a half behind. Sarge is goin' tomorrow, so we should win and that'll put us back in first place."

I figured he might want to know how Lunte was doin,' but that was more bad news. Harry Lunte had torn up his leg over the weekend, and couldn't play no more. They'd brought up a busher from New Orleans to take his place. Imagine, a busher from New Orleans tryin' to take Chappie's place in the pennant race. I couldn't tell him; I didn't see how I could bear to. So I just stood there a while

longer thinkin' about what else to say. I thought I heard Chappie say I should say a prayer for him, so I did.

I was still prayin' when I noticed a couple of guys wander up from the direction of the sexton's office. They stopped at a grave a couple rows over. I thought one of 'em looked a little familiar, like I'd seen him someplace, but I couldn't put a name to the face. He was tall, probably 30, good-looking and well-dressed. Of the two, he was the one who seemed most interested in bein' there, like he'd come lookin' for somebody. The other guy looked like he wasn't sure why he was there. That guy was older, he wasn't as well dressed and he had the look of somebody who's drank too much. I seen guys around like that, but they weren't the kinds of folks I wanted to know. This guy I knew I'd never seen before, though. Didn't figure I'd missed anything.

In the cemetery your eye wants to follow any movement, so even though I was starin' at Chappie part of me is watchin' those two as well. .After a while the first guy, the good-lookin' one, takes somethin' out of his pocket, bends down, scoops out some dirt with a spade he'd brought along and buries whatever it was he had right near the grave they was standin' at and drops the thing in the hole. Then he covers it up again and the two of 'em left about as quick as that. "Just a visitor for somebody," I told Chappie. "Seemed like a nice guy."

We went on for another five or 10 minutes – I went on, I guess I should say – and then it was time to go. “Mom’s gonna be wonderin where I’m at,” I explained. Then I added, “I’ll try to get back soon.” Only I wasn’t sure I meant that last part; I don’t believe in ghosts or none of that kid stuff, but cemeteries still ain’t my favorite places. One last thing I wanted to leave him with. “Tomorrow’s a Saturday, so I can go to the game,” I told him. “We’re gonna win sure.”

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Seven of us – Mitch, Denny, the Dago, McGuire, Bobby, Tommy and me -- decided to go to the Saturday game so’s we could see the Babe and cheer on the Indians together. We knew we’d have to start early because it bein’ a Saturday and with the pennant race and Ruth and all, you guessed there’d be a big crowd. So it weren’t much after 10:30 up and down the street you could hear a chorus of “Yo, McGuire,” “Yo, Tommy,” and the like.

The only problem was by the time we got off the trolley we could tell that pretty much the whole rest of the city had the same idea. From Euclid the people was a river of ants up 66th all the way across Quimby, and Lexington could have been one of the big boulevards in Paris or New York with all the folks gathered there just to get in line for tickets.

“We don’t got a chance,” the Dago says when he sees it. But as far as we’d come, there wasn’t nothin’ to do but get in the shortest line and hope for the best. It was nearly noon. Still a couple hours before they’d start playin’, but I was with the Dago and I think the rest of the guys was, too. We was in trouble.

At least we was in trouble at my favorite place. The area is lit up with flags everywhere, and all different colors. A four-piece band had set up on the corner and was playin’ rag. I ain’t heard much rag, but it sure set well with the tone, which was fast and loose. It bein’ a Saturday, all the vendors was hawkin’ wares. There was a stand sellin’ baseball stuff, and we could see a lot of it from the line. “They got Reachs,” Mitch gasps. “Man, I’d love to get em one of those.” Who wouldn’t, of course? That’s the official ball, the kind they use in the games. Any time we even find an old, beat-up Reach it’s better than all the ones we got. The gloves caught my eye. “They got some new Doaks,” I pointed. We’d been hearin’ about those Doak models, but this was the first time I ever actually seen one. I wanted to run over, grab it and just pound the pocket a while...not to steal it or nothin’, but just to feel it on my hand. The gloves we use, they don’t got no pockets. This guy Doak – he pitches for the Cardinals – he just invented it. Tied the thumb and first finger together with some leather and made it into a pocket. “They say you can’t miss a ball with a Doak,” says Tommy, and the rest of ‘em all chimes that if that’s true our team’s shortstop ought to get one first. I think they was tryin’ to be funny.

There was guys out there with signs for Cox, and then others for Harding, and they was both talkin' up the crowd but keepin' a respectable distance from each other. A guy came by sellin' cigarettes, and Mitch bought a pack of Lucky Strikes.

"I didn't know you was smokin'", I says.

"Sure, he says, pullin' a match from his pocket and lightin' one. "Ever since I dropped out and got my job. You guys want one?"

"I do," Schultz pipes, and Mitch offers him one.

"Not me," I says.

"It'll make you a man," says Mitch. "And I'll tell ya somethin' else; the girls love a guy with a smoke."

"Nope," I said. "My dad says they make you sick and anyway he says he's gonna whip me if he smells cigarettes on my breath."

"How's he gonna find out?" Mitch says.

"I don't know...all I know is he will."

I figure Mitch and Schultz are gonna call me a sap for wimpin' out, but to my surprise they don't. "Well, you're probably the smart one," Mitch says, givin' me the kind of push you give a guy when you're tryin' to show him he's still an all-right fellow.

When you got as much time to kill as we did, you try to make it up with small talk about the game. The one thing we was all sure of was that we'd win. "The Sarge ain't gonna lose to the Yanks," Schultz said. Why would he?, I agreed, seein' as to how he'd already bagged 27. Nobody was as good as the Sarge.

"Not Cicotte, that's for sure," said the Dago.

"And not Walter Johnson, even when he don't have a sore arm," says Mitch.

"And darned sure not that bum Mays," I tosses in.

"I wish they'd brought him to Cleveland," says McGuire. "I'd like to get a piece of him. And I'd have a lot of help getting' it, too."

"Yeah," we all agreed.

"Well, he ain't here, and that's just too bad," I said. "If he was, the Sarge would give him what for today." With Mays, Huggins said the Yanks would go with

Thormahlen today. That was a joke, we decided. Thormahlen? Why, the Tigers and Red Sox kicked him around. With Thormahlen against the Sarge, we was as good as back in first place. It was just a matter of time...and of gettin' into the park to see it.

A half hour. We were movin' up slowly. Forty-five minutes. We'd settled the pennant race and was movin' into the League of Nations question. An hour. There was three or four groups ahead of us, and hundreds in line behind us. Another five minutes and we were finally at the window.

"Seven bleacher tickets, please."

"Sorry kids, only got three left. Got a few grandstands, though."

Grandstands? Jeez, those things cost a buck. How rich did he think we looked?

"No bleachers?" Mitch asks again.

"Three, if you want 'em," the guy in the cage says. "If not, there's more people waitin' in line, so make up your minds."

We exchanged quick glances of desperation, but each of us knew there was only one thing to be done, and so Mitch did it. The Yanks was in town playin' the

Indians for first, and this was no time to suffer in the name of friendship. "We'll take the three," he says, and he and Schultz and McGuire ponied up the 50 cents each. We talked about climbin' in another line to try for four more tickets, but the way people was backed up all around the street we could tell right away there was no future in that. Now came the hard question: How to decide who gets the three tickets?

"I say we draw sticks," I said, and there bein' no fairer way, the matter was quickly agreed to. The Dago set about scourin' Lexington for twigs, and since Lexington has lots of trees he didn't have no trouble findin' enough. He broke four of 'em short and gave all seven to Schultz, who mixed 'em up behind his back and brought 'em out front. "The three long ones get in," Schultz said, and we agreed.

Mitch drew first. Long. "Yes!" he exclaimed briefly when he saw the full length of the twig. Then realizing four of the six guys in his audience were about to get shafted, he silenced up fast. The Dago drew next. It was short.

"Damn." McGuire followed. Short. Tommy drew short, too. Bobby went next and drew long...at least Mitch and his brother wouldn't have to split up. Bobby gave Tommy his 50 cents, and McGuire surrendered the pass he figured he hadn't had in his grasp nearly long enough.

It was my turn. Two sticks left, one winner and one loser. I fingered the money in my pocket. Since Schultz laid out for the ticket, if I drew the long stick I'd have to pay up for it. There wasn't no time in my life I wanted to give somebody 50 cents more than that. I knew Schultz didn't want to take it. You could see the muscles in his hand twitch, as if he were subtly tryin' to nudge one stick ahead of the other. I made my best read on which one he wanted me to take, but Schultz was good at this. It weren't easy to tell, and he could have been gamin' me. His face wasn't showin', either. So I picked the one on the right. Right's always been my lucky side.

Not today. It was the short twig. Schultz opened his palm to show the long one remaining.

"Tough luck, guys," Mitch says with as much sincerity as he could muster. C'mon, Tommy, Denny, we'd better get inside. And they were gone about that quick.

The Dago, Bobby, McGuire and me was left there out on Lexington tryin' to decide what to do now. But there was really only one answer...go back home. The problem was that I didn't want to be home. All the important stuff was happenin' here.

“I think I’m gonna stick a while,” I tells the guys, and the last I see of them for the day they are headin’ back down 66th for the trolley. Them and a bunch of other folks. The papers the next mornin’ said they turned away 15,000 from the park on account of they ran out of room. That and the Babe and the pennant race. I seen ‘em put 30,000 inside the park before, so that would mean close to 45,000 showed up wantin’ to get in, and a third of ‘em was turned away. Damn if it wasn’t just my luck to be one of the third.

I watched the faces of the late-comers who’d already bought tickets in the grandstand, so they could just walk right in. In a way I sort of hated them. They’d showed up late and they was gettin’ in just because they were rich enough to get tickets before. They didn’t have to stand in no line, either, and then find out they’d wasted their time. Probably stuck up, I decided.

Well, what do you do when there’s a game inside but you’re outside? I could tell by the sounds the game was about to start, and the funny thing was there still must have been a few thousand out on Lexington and down 66th just millin’ about. Like me.

If I couldn’t watch from inside, the next best place was somewhere over on Lexington. The outfield fence backed right up to the sidewalk, so you weren’t but a few feet from the right fielder, even though you couldn’t see him. All you could see, actually, was the screen above the fence and then the roof and the sky

above that. There was a crack about six or eight inches high below the exit gate, and if you scrunched down real low you could usually see a little of what was goin' on inside. But not today. The crowd was so big they were lettin' people onto the field again, so all you could see from the crack under the exit gate was people's shoes.

No, you couldn't see much, but you could hear plenty. Besides, if the Babe did hit one, he'd hit it out here. I knew from the papers he'd done that Thursday and again Friday. For a second, I tried to persuade myself that drawin' that short twig had actually been a break, that I'd saved myself 50 cents and still got a good place to take in the game. But only for a second. In my heart, I knew that weren't true.

Besides, there must have been a couple hundred people out on the sidewalk, so you couldn't even move much. Once the game started, a few guys tried yellin' up to the fans in the right field grandstand to find out what was happenin'. "The Babe's comin' to bat," one of 'em yells. A few seconds and we hear "crack" and then "bam," the bricks rattle in the wall right in front of us. Good thing they rattle on the foul side of the pole. "That was a close one," the fan in the grandstand yells down to us. It ain't but a couple seconds more when we hear "crack" again, and this time there's rustlin' and scramblin' comin' from the other side of the wall. We don't need no fan in the stands to tell us the Babe's pasted one into the folks

on the field. They'd give him an automatic double for that. "Pipp scored," the fan yells down, so we ain't even through the first and already we're behind 1-0.

Other than the street itself, there weren't many other places where it looked like a fellow could get a look at the game. But I was dyin', knowing the Indians was down 1-0 and I couldn't see it. I noticed a couple folks climbin' up to the top of the Andrews Storage Building, and thought about followin' 'em. But once I got a look at the climb, I decided I didn't want to see the game that badly. It was mostly straight up the fire escape, and then the last 20 feet or so by a ladder. And then you had to climb over the wall on the roof. You couldn't see nothin from the fire escape, so you either had to go all the way or there weren't no part in startin'.

That climb wasn't for me. There was another building next to it – it said Dunham School over the door -- with another fire escape, and this one looked like it might give me a look. I found a branch long enough to help me, jumped up to hook the bottom of the ladder and started climbin'.

It wasn't much of a perch, but it was better than I had. From the fire escape, I could see most of the infield and out to Cuckoo in left. It was easy to see why I couldn't get in; the place was jammed and the fans was 10 or 12 deep on the field all the way around. I could see the scoreboard, too. It wasn't good. On top of that run they got in the first, they'd added another in the fifth. If I'd said Thormahlen was a bum he was makin' me take it back, because we only had a couple hits.

The sixth was the worst. Ward come up and whaled into one that he sent out into the crowd in left. Hannah was next. Normally the only thing surer than Bagby gettin' out Ward was Bagby gettin' out Hannah, but I'll be golldarned if Hannah don't tie into one and send it right back into the crowd in left, too. Now it was 3-0. Speaker called time and in from center, takin' the ball from Sarge and wavin' Bob Clark in from the pen.

I never would have guessed it.

About the time Clark gets loose and O'Neill takes his squat, I hear sounds from down below. There ain't no sound to confuse it with – footsteps on metal. Somebody was climbin' up after me. If it was a cop, I supposed they was gonna get me for trespassin' or maybe tryin' to freeloader on the game, and either way call my parents and then I'd be in real trouble. So I tried to hide, but there wasn't much place to hide, so I just kind of scrunched back against the wall. The sounds got closer. I didn't want to look down for fear of what I might see, but finally when the sounds was on the landing below I didn't have no choice but to look.

That's when I seen him. The eyes first, bright with contrast, and then the hair, dark and curled around and cut low. They say they all look the same, but the funny thing was although we'd never met, I recognized him right away. It was the

kid I'd seen playin' shortstop over on the Lexington Avenue field. Close up, he looked about my age.

I didn't know what to say, so I said the first thing that came to my mind. "It ain't a very good place to watch from, I'm afraid."

"Maybe not," he says, "but it's better than down there."

Clark was gettin' waxed pretty good. He gave up three more before he got the side out, puttin' the Yanks up 6-0. The way Thormahlen was goin', we could play till Tuesday and not catch up.

"You come up here often?" the kid says to me.

"Nah...they ran out of tickets so I couldn't get in. You?"

"Can't afford tickets. This is the next best place."

I must have looked uneasy. It could have been the railings or the height or the chance of the cops comin' along, but I think he knew what it was.

"You scared a heights?" he asks.

"Not really," I says. "It's just...well, I don't know."

“What?” he commands, like he’s seen the look and asked the question a hundred times.

“Well,” I said, “you know, it’s just that I ain’t never been around a nigger before...”

I hardly got the word out when he hauls back and pops me right in the jaw. Good thing I fell back into the building; the other way wouldn’t have been pleasant.

“Sorry,” he says, helpin’ me up as I rubbed my jaw. “But I ain’t what you said. And my dad says if anybody says I am, just to pop him one. And I always do what my dad says. Anyway, sorry. But from now on, you call me somethin’, call me Negro.”

“Didn’t mean nothin’ by it,” I says. “I guess I didn’t think. No hard feelings?”

“No hard feelings.”

“You’re all right,” I says, and he agrees I’m all right, too. We struck up a conversation right there, mostly about playin’ shortstop and stuff. I told him I was gettin’ a Bill Doak mitt, even though that weren’t true, because he’d be sure to be jealous. He didn’t act like he’d even heard of a Bill Doak mitt. Must be too expensive for him, too.

“When do you suppose they’ll put that new kid out at short?” I says.

“Joey Sewell? I think they could have used him today,” he says. Evans was playin’ short, and although Joey was game he was a natural outfielder. I’d seen him kick two today, and even from this distance you could tell a real shortstop would have got ‘em both.

We finally pushed a couple over in the ninth, but that didn’t make no matter on the final decision, so the two of us climbed down. “Hey,” I says, “what’s your name, anyway?”

“Levi Brown,” he says. “What’s yours?”

I told him. “Well,” I said, “I guess I better get goin’...sorry if I said anything...you know.”

“If you’re headin’ toward Euclid, I’ll walk home with you,” Levi Brown says.

“You live on Euclid?” I ask. “I didn’t think that was...you know, allowed.”

“My mother’s the housekeeper for a family,” he says. “So the three of us – my dad, my mom and me – we have rooms there.”

“Wow,” I says. “You live in a mansion?”

“Not a mansion, exactly, but pretty close. I’d invite you over but...we ain’t allowed to have guests. It’s against the rules.”

You could see their field down Lexington headin’ out of the park. “You got a team?” Levi Brown asks.

“Sure, jeez, of course,” I says. “Don’t everybody?”

“Well bring ‘em over some time and let’s play,” he says.

“I don’t know what some of the guys would think about that,” I says.

“Because of me?”

“Well, you know. Most of ‘em never met a ...a Negro.” I found myself saying it with a shrug

“And they hate us...”

“Hate’s a mighty strong word,” I says. Funny, but that’s when I remembered how O’Neill and I had talked in the car on the way over to Speaker’s place. What I said about Negroes and Yankees, and what O’Neill said.

We was at the trolley stop. Levi Brown offered his hand, and instinctively I shook it before I’d even known what I was doin’. “Well,” Levi Brown says, “if they change their minds, come on over and find us. There was just time to hop the trolley. “I’ll see what I can do,” I yelled as we pulled away. It was only then that I had the chance, in the peace and quiet of the trolley car, to assess the day. We had to wait a long time in line, I drew the short stick, I didn’t get in, I had to watch from a fire escape down Lexington, and the Sarge got hammered. But I had finally met Levi Brown. Somehow, I reckoned it a pretty good afternoon.

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The standings the next morning were as much a mess as ever. We was still a percentage point ahead, but we was a half game back of New York on account of having played five fewer games. The Sox was three more points back and a half game as well. Losin’ two of three to the Yanks was a setback, but at least we knew the A’s was comin’ in after ‘em. That new Mails fellow went Sunday and beat ‘em, and we ended up winnin’ three of four. But with the Yanks sweepin’ Detroit, they moved a game and a half up on us headin’ to Chi. The Sox was

another game back. The good news was that since they was playin' each other, one or the other was gonna get beat. That left it up to us to beat the Senators.