

The Double Squeeze

By **Henry Beach Needham**

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PART I.

The Star's Disappearance.

Downstairs, in the visitors' room of the University hospital, which stank of iodiform, Tris Ford, manager of the Giant-killers, waited uneasily. Upstairs, reposed as befitted the true scientist, the resident bacteriologist squinted through his microscope. Before this revealing instrument, on a hanging drop slide, was a liquid globule of bouillon taken from a culture of typhoid bacilli.

Keenly the disease detective observed the care-free bacteria in their native sports. Some of the wrigglers indulged in a continuous round of somersaults. Others tore through space and looped the loop as though riding invisible monoplanes. Those more socially inclined tangoed in pairs. But not one bacillus was static. All were in turmoil. The culture was "good."

With almost cruel cunning the bacillus expert precipitated a tiny quantity of blood solution into a minute amount of the culture, and deftly transferred the combination drop to a fresh slide.

The base of the solution used was the blood of Bill Dart, pitching mainstay of the Giant-killers.

Curiously the resident bacteriologist awaited results. In five minutes there was to be noted a gradual quiescence in the movements of the wrigglers. They ceased their mad pranks and settled down as if overtaken with languor. One by one the bacilli became absolutely static, curling up in groups and going to sleep in a conglomerate mass, like so many young pups. In a quarter of an hour there was not a sign of life. The bacteriologist had brought his experiment to a successful conclusion.

An intome came to Tris Ford and reported. The manager of the Giant-killers got a dose of heavy language, in which emphasis was laid on "Widal reaction," and "positive." There was something assertively final about the surprisingly intelligible medical term "positive."

"You mean he's got it?" asked Ford. The interne majestically inclined his



"You Mean He's Got It?" asked Ford. head. "There is not a shadow of a doubt. A positive reaction—typhoid. A light or a mild case?—suppose you can't tell?"

"Not with certainty, of course. But the bacteriologist informed me that the behavior of the bacilli after the mixture of the blood solution and the culture would indicate a pronounced type of typhoid, probably a severe case."

"Poor Bill," said Tris, half to himself. Then in a tone of authority he addressed the interne: "Everything is to be done to make Mr. Dart comfortable and to get him well. Don't try to save a nickel. Our club will stand it. I'll call again soon. Good-day!"

Walking to the trolley, Tris Ford came to three important conclusions: First—To count Bill Dart out for the entire season (not a fortnight old) and recast his campaign without taking his most valued pitcher into account.

Second—To write to the surgeon general, United States army, and learn all about the inoculation of officers and enlisted men as a preventive of typhoid fever.

Third—To go in search of Barney Larkin, who was touted as the greatest left-hander outside the breast-works of organized baseball.

Like the manager in the war game, Tris Ford believed in preparedness. He was almost invariably forearmed. But he wasn't prepared for the trick played him by a criminally negligent city which harbored a water supply devoted to the propagation of typhoid bacilli. Otherwise he wouldn't have thought for one moment of hitching up with two yards and fifteen stone of human trouble, even though said trouble did boast a phenomenal fast ball and beautiful control—"control" not of the man, but of the ball.

Not one of the other fifteen major league managers would have undertaken the job of handling Barney Larkin. Two had tried. It was Parke of Pittsburgh who discovered Larkin. For fully twenty-four hours after Larkin pitched his first big-league game, shutting out Cincinnati, Parke boasted of his find. Then abruptly he ceased to boast; and after two weeks, replete with excitement for the Pirates, the eccentric performer was given his unconditional release. When the paring was over, Parke made this statement:

"I've seen some grand port sidlers and some 'bad actors' in my day, but Barney Larkin's got 'em all beat. Curving a ball and crooking his elbow seem to be born in him. Reminds me of a famous Irishman who boasted he could fight a duel and drink a bowl of punch between thrusts. And the more he drank the harder he fought. So with Barney. He can pitch shut-out ball between drinks. The more hard liquor he puts away the faster his ball and the better his control. I'm not joking—drinking actually improved his pitching. But it didn't have the same effect on other players with our club—there was the devil to pay. No more Barneys for me."

Undismayed by the judgment of Parke, the manager of the Cincinnati grabbed Larkin, bragging: "Observe me—I can handle any player who isn't actually bughouse."

Baldom observed. It wasn't altogether what Barney Larkin did, although that was "a-plenty." It was what he did to the Cincinnati team. When they next appeared in the East, one of the sporting writers said that nothing so disorganized had come out of Ohio since Coxe's army. Gladly the "load of wild oats," as Barney had come to be called, was given his unconditional release.

He was now officially designated a "free agent." But where had his freedom taken him?

There was a sure way to trace Barney Larkin. He loved the spotlight; no near statesman or Thespian of the chorus sought the bright white light more persistently. Barney was either in the newspapers or seeking to break into print. Most generally he found the scribes in a receptive frame of mind. Barney Larkin was to the sporting writers what Harry Thaw was to the sob artists—good for a column any dull day. And the story, nine times out of ten, got on to the wire and traveled over the country.

Tris Ford sent out an "S. O. S." to Barney Larkin, the sporting editor of the North Star acting as transmitter. The scribe wrote a story about Barney, rehearsing his exploits with horsehide and highball, and winding up with the query:

"Has anyone seen Barney? Is he far from the madding crowd of fans, bumping along on the water wagon, or is he mixing up drinks and pitching with his old-time abandon and never-failing skill? We repeat—has anyone seen Barney Larkin?"

Back flew the answer: "Barney is in our midst."

It came from Punxsutawney, state of Pennsylvania.

The rest was merely the correspondence of diplomacy, at which Tris-tram Carling-ford was a lineal descendant of Charles Maurice Talleyrand. The culmination was a telegram from Larkin, sent collect, reading:

"Come on and get me."

The manager of the Giant-killers took the first train for Punxsutawney, which is a borough most inconveniently located northeast of the Smoky city. He took with him a corpulent roll of yellow bills. Tris Ford knew that he must buy Larkin's release—not from the outlaw club, but from the tradesmen of Punxsutawney.

Up Center street and down the shady side, Ford and Barney tramped, making more calls than the letter carrier. There were the clothier, the shoe-store man, the haberdasher, the laundry, the barber, every bar in town, and both hotels to pay, and the express company. Barney owed the express company for transportation charges on a bulldog! The one thing that saved the enterprise from complete insolvency was the departure of the daily train for Pittsburgh at one o'clock in the afternoon.

Tris Ford did not leave Punxsutaw-

ney altogether in a cheerful attitude of mind, notwithstanding he had captured his quarry, for the directors of the outlaw club came to the train in a body and thanked the big-league manager because he was taking Barney out of town. Even to the man of iron nerve this was disquieting.

In the manner told was Barney Larkin brought to the Giant-killers' ball yard. His first appearance, notably unlike most pitching inaugurals, was an unalloyed triumph.

Facing Detroit, which club was then going strong, he let the Tigers down without a hit. But twenty-seven men went to bat, and of these Barney struck out fifteen—a record commented upon to this day. In the last inning, with two out and that demon batsman, "the Georgia persimmon," at bat, Barney walked toward the grand stand, stopped, and then motioned the crowd to go home. "All over!" he insisted.

The fans roared in delight—and roared louder still when he struck the champion batter out. From that moment Barney Larkin was the idol of the fans. There were times, many times, when he caused Bill Dart, who was fighting disease and death in the hospital, to be forgotten by the heartless rooter. The eccentric left-hander was keeping the Giant-killers in the hunt for the pennant.

Also, he was keeping Tris Ford awake nights. No such prize problem in manhandling had been put up to Ford in the twenty years of his management. Unerringly Tris had sized up Barney Larkin. The manager knew that whenever Barney was pitching airtight ball—mowing 'em down—it was necessary to keep an eye on him about eighteen hours out of the twenty-four; "going good," he was most inclined to give rein to his bad habits. But when he was in a slump he was not difficult to handle. This was infrequent, for he was continually leading the other pitchers in the number of games pitched and in games won.

Early in his association with Barney Larkin, the manager of the Giant-killers decided, first of all, that he must let the unruly pitcher believe he was fooling his boss. Every excuse must be accepted as the unglorified truth; otherwise Barney would have to be disciplined, and that would mean in a short time his release. Usually Tris Ford was "wise." But there was that episode in St. Louis which illuminates Barney's character, wherein Tris was fooled completely.

It was on the Giant-killers' second trip West. Barney was given an afternoon off. He went at once to a saloon near the ball park and started in by negotiating a loan of five dollars from the proprietor. After the money had gone into drink for himself and his hobo admirers, he struck the proprietor for five dollars more. The saloonkeeper hesitated. As se-

curity for the loan Barney offered to "hang up" the gold watch fob which admiring fans had presented to him in appreciation of his mighty pitching. Giving it to the proprietor, Barney made this proposition:

"You let me have the five, which will make ten I owe you, and I'll make Tris believe I've lost my fob. Then he'll advertise for it and offer a reward of ten dollars."

Barney got the second five and without delay it passed over the bar to



Barney Got the Second Five, and Without Delay It Passed Over the Bar to the Proprietor in Exchange for More Liquor.

the proprietor in exchange for more liquor. Then the wild performer wandered back to the grounds. Tris Ford heard that he was outside, and, as he thought he needed a rescue pitcher to save the game, he sent for Barney. Barney came without protest and entered the clubhouse to dress. But the tide of the battle turned in the Giant-killers' favor, and the left-hander was not called upon.

(To be continued.)

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