

The Dilemma

“O kay, Mathilda, see you tomorrow,” Ed Devoy said to his comely receptionist as she shimmied out the door into a bright October afternoon. In her hand she clasped two tickets that said: *1923 World Series, Game Six*.

Lucky duck.

Less fortunate and less aquatic, Ed would have to make do with listening to the play-by-play on the radio while Mathilda cheered on the boys. Located at 155th and Amsterdam, his office suite was close enough to the Polo Grounds that Ed would be able to hear the roaring cheers from the sell-out crowd and smell cotton candy on the breeze.

By
Karen
Fayeth

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Tonight's matchup featured his beloved New York Giants versus those Yankee cur dogs from the Bronx. They hailed from just across the Harlem River but were a world apart. Them with their fancy new stadium, feh!

Today was an important game. John McGraw had to bring home a win to keep his Giants alive to see game seven.

There was no way Ed could pay attention to patients while the boys were on the brink, so he had purposefully cleared his appointment book, planning instead to spend the afternoon sterilizing instruments and tidying up the place. Quietly piling all manner of sadistic-looking dental tools into

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the autoclave was good, mindless work.

Ed wanted the vacuum tube nice and warm for the first pitch, so he snapped on the radio to help pass the time. "Yes! We Have No Bananas" reverberated from his Radiola as Ed hummed along while he worked. He was so involved in what he was doing, he didn't hear the bell ring as his front door swung open.

"Hey, Mack! Hey!" a deep voice boomed from the front room, causing Ed to startle.

Peering through the doorway into the waiting room, Ed saw perhaps the largest man God had ever invented.

"I'm talking to you, buddy boy, you open?" the beast asked impatiently.

The men stared at each other a moment.

Ed blinked first.

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"Yes, can I help you?" he asked, trying to regain his professional demeanor.

"You Devoy?" the mountain asked gruffly.

"Dr. Devoy, yes, that's me," Ed replied.

"You gotta work on somebody," the stranger declared.

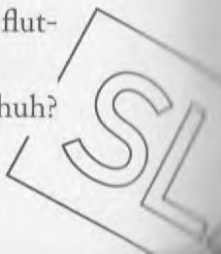
"Excuse me?" Ed said, confused.

"Look, Doc, I gotta friend, and he needs help. You're a tooth doctor," the man said shrugging, as though it was as plain as the nose on Ed's face.

"Now hold on; I'm not taking new patients, and besides, I'm all booked up today," Ed said, screwing up his minuscule courage.

The man reached deep into his coat, and Ed's heart fluttered at what he might draw out.

"Look, Doc, what's it gonna take to unbook you up, huh?"



It's a real emergency," the man said, pawing absentmindedly at a large roll of cash.

Ed's eyes went wide. Decency rose to mind, only to be squashed by good old-fashioned greed. He thought of an impossibly high number.

"Two hundred dollars," he said without flinching.

"Done!" the man said, peeling off notes and slapping them on the receptionist's desk.

Ed looked at the pile, wide-eyed. He couldn't have been more shocked if the man had laid a viper on the counter. Ed quickly swept the bills into a drawer while the stranger leaned out the front door, whistled sharply, and added a wave.

Soon Ed's door was darkened by yet another beast of a man. His presence filled the space as he strolled in and shook off a battered, brown leather jacket, handing it to the first man, who took it reverently.

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This new man was also well over six feet tall, broad shouldered, and clearly in pain. He held a mitt of a hand over a swollen right check, attempting to suppress agony between beefy fingers.

Ed slipped into his white lab coat, hoping the familiarity would put him at ease. It didn't.

He felt like he knew this guy but couldn't quite place him. Dark hair, broad nose, and round gut were obvious, but it was the electric presence of the man that left Ed wondering.

"Can you help me, Doc? I'm in awful pain," the man said contritely.

"Yes, okay," Ed mumbled and held out his hand. "I'm Dr. Ed Devoy," he said.

The man fully enveloped Ed's hand inside his own and

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gave a hard shake.

“Devoy. Irish, right?”

Ed nodded.

“Then you must be all right. You’ve already met Tiny,” he said, jerking his head toward the other man. “I’m George, but you can call me Babe,” the man said quietly.

Ed went pale with realization.

“B-b-b-but don’t you have a game today?” Ed stuttered.

“That’s why he needs fixin’, genius,” Tiny snapped.

Ed vacillated. Hippocratic oath told him it was his duty to help a man in pain. Team loyalty said he should tell this bum to take a hike. The Babe’s batting average against the Giants was no small matter.

Still unsure, Ed ushered the man into the exam room, and while The Babe got settled, Ed took a fresh set of tools from the autoclave and laid them out.

“Okay, let’s see what’s troubling you, hey?” Ed said, adopting a cheery tone he didn’t feel.

While looking deep into the maw of the great man, he immediately identified the problem: a very rotten tooth.

Ed leaned back in his seat and noticed that Tiny was closely watching his every move.

Placing a comforting hand on The Babe’s shoulder, Ed said, “You’ve got a bad tooth. It’s in pretty rough shape. We can pull it; that’s fast and easy. You’ll be in some pain, but it heals quickly. Or we can drill it down and put in a filling. That’s a bit more involved.”

“Pull it,” Tiny said without hesitation.

“Is that what you want, Mr. Ruth?” Ed asked.

The miserable slugger nodded.



"Okay," Ed said with a shrug and grabbed a few more tools.

Ed injected a healthy syringe of Novocaine into the man's gums to help numb the pain, but still the big man howled all through the extraction. At one point Ed thought he was actually crying.

When it was over, The Babe was stoic.

On their way out, Tiny laid another pile of bills on the counter.

Hush money, he called it. "Just between you and me," he said with a wink.

Two hours after George Herman Ruth left Ed Devoy's office, he hit a home run with two out in the first inning. The Yankees would go on to win that game and the Series too.

"Shoulda laid him out when I had the chance," Ed muttered to himself, glumly turning off his Radiola and closing up shop. ■