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Who today knows Ernest L. Thayer? Very few. But no American who has ever suggested immediate mayhem for an umpire can ever forget Thayer's epic of baseball's greatest goat, "Casey, mighty Casey." Remember, now? And how many of you were fortunate enough to hear De Wolf Hopper's immortal rendition of that dread day in Mudville when the voice of the umpire was the voice of doom as he solemnly intoned "Str-r-rike three" and Casey slunk from the plate into eternal opprobrium? "And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout; but there is no joy in Mudville — mighty Casey has struck out!" Hopper's interpretation of Thayer's poem resulted in a deathless piece of Americana. Now we have been lucky enough to discover that Ernest Thayer has a true spiritual descendant in Larry Siegel and, as proper fare for World Series time, we bring you (from the "American Legion Monthly") Mr. Siegel's own epic of how, through the good offices of one John J. McGraw, mighty Casey was allowed another turn up at the plate. And we hope that Mr. Siegel will be as lucky as Ernest Thayer was in finding a proper interpreter for this stirring chronicle of Casey's come-back!

Another Chance For Casey

by LARRY SIEGEL

CASEY walked slowly across the cloud and went up to the big golden gate. He took his bat off his shoulder, and for the 12,123rd time he rapped loudly with his fist. Nobody answered and he stepped back. He looked up at the hand-lettered sign over the gate and read for the 12,123rd time —

WITHIN THESE SACRED PORTALS DWELL THE SPIRITS OF
THE SHINING LIGHTS OF BASEBALL. NO TRESPASSING!
SIGNED, A. DOUBLEDAY, C.O.

Casey knocked on the gate again. Suddenly he heard someone approaching from inside. A few seconds later the door was thrown open, and a chunky

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figure poked his head out. "Well, well, if it ain't old Casey again," the figure said. "What do you want this time — as if I didn't know?"

"Mr. McGraw," said Casey, "I want in."

"Oh you do, do you?" said McGraw, cocking his head and grinning sarcastically. "Look, Casey, I been telling you for the past twenty years and the guy before me at the gate told you for another twenty years that we don't want failures in here. Do you see what that sign up there says? 'Shining light.' You ain't a shining light. What right has a flop to come in here and play ball with guys like Matty, the Babe, and the Big Train?"

"I ain't a flop," said Casey.

"Oh you ain't?" McGraw came back. "What do you call that day in Mudville when you whiffed — V-Day? *And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout, but there is no joy in . . .*"

"Can it, Mr. McGraw," said Casey sensitively. "That damn poem is driving me nuts. Look, I been upstairs for around forty years now. I like it pretty much. But if I can't get inside *this* gate, I might as well be stationed downstairs in the other place."

"Look, Casey," said McGraw, "when anybody mentions your name, what do they think of? A big bust, right? Now how would it look to anyone if I brought a big bust inside these gates?"

"Mr. McGraw," said Casey, "didn't any of the guys inside ever flop once?"

"I suppose so," said McGraw, "but nobody made a fuss about it."

"That's what I'm driving at," said Casey. "Nobody looks at my overall record. All they think about is that single lousy day in Mudville. In case you didn't know it, I was a shining light up till then, but I never got another chance after that strikeout. I think it's time I got another chance — right now."

"What do you mean, 'right now'?" asked McGraw.

"Well," said Casey, "today I spoke to some guy who just arrived up here from the U.S.A. He told me about some moving pictures he's been seeing — whatever *they* are — and in them there are stories about guys from up here who get a chance to go downstairs to earth to take care of unfinished business. Now, I got unfinished business in Mudville. If you could fix me up with a little pass, maybe I . . ."

"Don't be nuts, Casey," said McGraw. "It's too much trouble to get those passes. And even if I could get one, why should I give it to *you*?"

"Because you guys owe it to me," said Casey. "Every man who gets a rough deal should get another break."

"Supposing," said McGraw, "that I got you a pass and you flopped again, would you swear that you'd never bother me again?"

"I swear," said Casey.

"On this?" asked McGraw, holding out a faded copy of *The Sporting News*.

"On this," said Casey solemnly, as he dropped his bat, removed his cap, and placed his left hand on *The Sporting News* and his right hand in the air.

"Wait here," said McGraw, "I'll be right back."

Casey whistled softly as he paced the cloud. He tugged at the large square peak on his woolen cap. He fidgeted with his black stockings. He kicked star dust out of his spikes, and he swung his big bat back and forth.

An hour later McGraw opened the gate again. "Casey," he said, "you'll never know what I went through for you. They don't give these passes to just anybody, you know; and I had to speak to everybody all the way up before I got any place. Even then I didn't do too well. The best I could get was a one-hour pass with an extra six minutes for traveling."

"If there's a game on at Mudville, that's all the time I need," said Casey.

"Yeah, there's one going on now," said McGraw. "One of the spotters inside gave me the dope. Right now it's three minutes to three, Mudville time. You gotta be back here three minutes after four, their time, and I wouldn't be A.W.O.L. if I was you. The elevator operator will give you an hour and six minutes worth of mortal fluid. Don't try to connive for more 'cause the officers up here are strict about those things. Oh yeah, before I forget, don't be coming back with wild stories because somebody'll be watching every move you make."

With that, McGraw gave Casey the pass and closed the gate. Casey went to the elevator on East Astral Street, took his proper amount of fluid, and in a short while he was zooming through space with unbelievable speed.

A minute later the elevator stopped, and Casey got out. He found himself in a dark corridor. He looked around and up ahead he saw a light. He followed the light, came to a few steps, went up the steps, and discovered that he was standing in a dugout. About a dozen men were sitting around on a long bench peering intently at the field in front of them. They didn't see him. What strange outfits these guys wear, Casey thought. They had the

word "Mudville" written across their shirt fronts, just as he did, but everything else was different.

Casey turned and looked out on the field. An electric shock shot through him. Old familiar memories stirred within him. The sight of uniformed men battling on a diamond. The sound of horsehide hitting against wood. The chatter in the stands. The scent of earth and sweat. All these things made him feel as if he were back home after an eternity in prison.

Casey saw a squat, elderly man sitting nearby, and he sat down next to him. "What's the score?" asked Casey.

"One all, top of the 7th," the man said, without looking at Casey.

"Who you playing?" Casey asked.

"Fallsburgh," the man said.

"Old Casey could break the tie," Casey said nonchalantly, as he leaned back and propped his feet up against the wall.

The man stiffened like a cut of frozen meat. His mouth opened and closed five times, but he didn't speak. Then he turned and looked at Casey for the first time. "Holy mackerel!" he said. "Who are you? Where'd you get that circus suit? And what's the idea of cursing in this dugout?"

Casey locked his hands behind his head and pushed his cap over his eyes lazily. "All I said is that old Casey could break the tie."

The man jumped to his feet. "Look, Mac," he said, "I'm Pete Morgan. I been managing this outfit for ten years. This town ain't hard to get along with, but what you just said is like swearing in church around here. Do you know that we refused to play the New York Yankees an exhibition game here last year because their manager's first name is the name you just said? Do you know we don't allow people from Kansas City in here? Do you know what the initials of Kansas City are? Don't say it! Do you know . . . say, who the hell are you anyway?"

"Well," said Casey, unaffected by the speech, "I just got in from . . ."

"Evansville!" Morgan broke in. "That's it! You're the new guy Sanders was supposed to send me from Evansville. But you ain't a young kid, and we didn't expect you till Wednesday. Let's see, Sanders told me your name, but I forgot it."

Casey started to say something, but all of a sudden Morgan let out a moan. The Mudville pitcher just threw a home run ball. "Damn!" said Morgan. "Can't that guy go one game without a gopher ball? Look, Mac,

why don't you go inside and have Charley fix you up with a good uniform. I don't know where you got the thing you're wearing, but those outfits went out with the Stanley Steamer."

"I don't have any time to change," said Casey.

"Oh, I see," said Morgan, regarding Casey strangely.

Mudville finally got Fallsburgh out and came into the dugout for the last half of the 7th. When the players saw the oddly-dressed figure who was relaxing on the bench, they turned to Morgan for an explanation. "Fellahs," said Morgan, "this here is a prima donna that Sanders sent us from Evansville. He picked up that suit he's wearing from a junk dealer in town. Now don't go annoying him or telling him to change into another uniform. You see, he doesn't have too much time." With that, Morgan winked at the men.

Casey lifted his cap from his face and said, "Hi, men." Then he got up, stretched, and said to Morgan, "When do I bat?"

"Well," said Morgan, "it's still early in the game. You can lean back and take it easy for a while. When the bases are loaded in the 9th with two out, I'll call for you."

"Thanks," said Casey. "I'd rather go in at a crucial spot. It'll look better upstairs."

"Oh, it sure will look better upstairs," said Morgan, glancing at the men and making a rotating motion around his ear.

Mudville went down in the 7th, and nothing happened in both halves of the 8th. It was 2-1, in favor of Fallsburgh, as the top of the 9th began.

"What time is it?" asked Casey.

"Twenty to four," said Morgan.

"I still got time," said Casey, loosening his shoulder muscles.

The first two Fallsburgh men singled. Morgan sprang to his feet and, leaning out of the dugout, he waved to the bull-pen.

"What are you doing?" Casey asked, chewing on a piece of grass.

"My wife just came in the park, and I want her to know where I'm sitting," said Morgan. "What the hell do you *think* I'm doing? I'm telling the relief pitchers to warm up. Tulley's about ready for the showers."

"What are relief pitchers?" asked Casey.

Morgan looked at him wearily. "Relief pitchers," he said, "relieve other pitchers."

"Oh, you got more than one pitcher?" Casey asked.

"Heavens, yes," said Morgan sarcastically. "We got all kinds of pitchers. Great big ones. Little skinny ones. And then we got . . ."

"Seems like a waste of money," said Casey, interrupting him. "We never had more than two. Sometimes only one."

"Now ain't that nice," said Morgan. "Strong-armed pitchers, just like in the old days. And how were their spitters working?"

"Well," said Casey, "McGowan only used his in spots, but Thompson threw his a couple of times an inning."

"Oh, my Lord!" said Morgan. "How long is this insane talk gonna go on?"

Tulley managed to put out the fire, and it was still 2-1, Fallsburgh, as Mudville came in for the last of the 9th. "Let's go, damn it!" said Morgan to the men as they came into the dugout. "Let's get back into this ball game."

The first two men made out. Then the next man singled, and the following man walked. It was now Tulley's turn to bat.

Casey got up off the bench, picked up his bat, and said to Morgan, "I think there's a chance that the bases won't be loaded this inning. I think maybe I better get up there now. It's getting kind of late, you know."

With that, he stretched and started climbing out of the dugout. "Now where do you think *you're* going?" asked Morgan, seizing Casey by the leg.

"I told you it's getting kind of late," said Casey. "Besides, I think they want action upstairs."

He broke loose from Morgan and ambled toward the plate. "The fool's actually gonna do it!" a player shouted at Morgan. "Do something!"

"The guy's nuts," said Morgan. "He's absolutely and completely goofy."

"Should I go out and drag him back?" another player asked Morgan.

"No," said Morgan, "let him bat. The guy's got more guts than brains. He'd be just crazy enough to . . ."

Casey was almost up to the plate. A curious buzz swept through the stands. Fans were leaning forward to get a better look at this quaint, picturesque figure who moved with a confident stride. Was it a gag? Who was he?

Suddenly in the stands old Doc Walker, number one baseball fan in Mudville — and still active for his 80 years, leaped to his feet. "If I wasn't sure," he said, "if I wasn't absolutely and positively sure that . . . that . . ."

"What is it, Doc?" somebody asked.

"No," said Doc. "Forget it. I felt like I was goin' loco for a minute."

Casey was now rubbing dirt on his hands. The umpire, a gigantic figure, went over to him, and bending down to dust off the plate, he asked, "You pinch-hitting?"

"That's right," said Casey. "It's getting late, and I figure this is a good enough spot."

The umpire walked to the screen and picked up his megaphone. He came back and asked, "What's your name, bud?"

"Casey. Why?" Casey said, taking a firm stance.

"Now batting for Mudville," the umpire bellowed, "CASEY! . . . Casey?" he said, dropping his megaphone and double-taking. "Casey? Well, I'll be —"

For a fleeting moment there was silence in the Mudville ball park. . . .

Then from that stricken multitude went up a maddened yell, like the sound of tortured devils a-screaming down in hell! The teeming stands were raging; there was chaos everywhere. How dare the name of Casey contaminate this air!

Pete Morgan in the dugout and all the Mudville herd were petrified like statues; they didn't say a word. Their necks were strained like stallions that are ready at the post. Their eyes bulged from their sockets as if they'd seen a ghost.

And now the roaring hundreds came moving from the stands, like groups of stalking panthers, but with weapons in their hands. Their prey was at the plate: on his shoulder was a bat. His crime? His name was Casey. What bigger crime than that?

But then the masses halted on their trip out to the plate. The umpire stood and faced them — a massive wall of weight. Six feet six inches tall he stood, and weighed three hundred pounds. And he made it clear he wanted no strangers on his grounds.

With a loud and booming voice he addressed the seething throng. And every word he uttered rang clearly like a gong. "Whoever lays a hand upon this batter's head, will have to deal with me. Now let's play ball," he said.

Casey heaved a little sigh as he stepped into his place. A funny little smile started playing on his face. Four thousand angry eyes watched him blow into his hands. Two thousand hostile tongues hissed venom from the stands. And when responding to their jeers he lightly tipped his hat, no stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat!

And now the rival pitcher got his sign and slowly rocked. And Casey's figure tensed, and his bat was set and cocked. And then the ball came winging — a whizzing blur of white. A whirling blob of fire, a lightning flash in flight. Close by the form of Casey the blazing horsehide sped. "Too high for me," said Casey. "That's a strike," the umpire said.

"Kill him! Kill the batter!" screamed an overheated fan. "Let's put an end forever to this flubbing, whiffing clan!" Calmly, Casey called for time and rubbed his bat with dirt. And then he smiled again as he fiddled with his shirt. "It was much too high," said Casey. "Two feet above my head." "It was right across your shoulders," the mammoth umpire said.

The Mudville stands were boiling like a pot upon a stove. They cursed the name of Casey and the fiendish spell it wove. But Casey took a toehold and signaled to the mound. And then the pitch came flying with a chilling, whistling sound. "Kind of low," said Casey. "Right around my shoe." "Your eyes are telling stories," the umpire said. "Strike two!"

"Fake!" roared the irate hundreds, and the echo answered, "Fake! Let's throw him in the river or burn him at the stake!"

Then Casey dropped his smile, and his lips were firm and tight. He had to do it now or spend eternity in night. He hitched his weary shoulders and dug his feet in earth. The next pitch would determine just what his name was worth.

And then the pitcher had his sign, and then began his rock. And somewhere in the distance it was tolling four o'clock. And now the ball came shooting from its gun upon the mound. It was heading far outside, just a foot above the ground. The batter took a lunge as he quickly arched his back. And then there was a gust of wind and then there was a crack! Away up in the stratosphere a leather horsehide flew. It danced up in the sunlight and it disappeared from view.

SOMEWHERE IN THIS FAVORED LAND THE CLOUDS BEGIN TO FORM. SOMEWHERE WINDS ARE HOWLING AND SOMEWHERE THERE'S A STORM. BUT THERE'S A DIAMOND FAR ABOVE, JUST WITHIN A GOLDEN GATE — WHERE THE SHINING LIGHTS OF BASEBALL TAKE THEIR TURNS UP AT THE PLATE. AND STANDING UP THERE NOW, BRUSHING STAR DUST FROM HIS SUIT, IS A HAPPY, SMILING FIGURE — CASEY, THE NEW RECRUIT!