

1912

Left Out

John Gladstone Graney,
better known as Jack,
comes from Ontario, Canada,
where friends call him
Glad.

Jack is glad for many things:
to have family and friends
and to play major league
baseball for Cleveland.

But Jack is not glad about
everything. Something is
missing.

Jack bats left,
throws left,
plays left field . . .

and feels left
out —

 left behind
in the pennant race
 always nabbed by
 some other team,
 never by the Cleveland
 Naps.

And now, something else
makes Jack unglad —
makes him fear
he will be more left
out than ever.

The Buzz of Rumors

On the train bound
for spring training,
rumors buzz
like baseball-sized horseflies —
buzz that Cleveland will trade
Jack to the Detroit
Tigers.

Jack hears the rumors
and swallows hard.

He has covered
Cleveland's left field
two full seasons,
chasing down hard-hit liners
in hot sun and cold drizzle.
His friends play here.
His heart soars here.
Jack longs for this team
to win the pennant.

As the train chugs south,
Jack is left wondering
what it will take
for Cleveland to win
the pennant. He is left
wondering if he will be
part of it all.

Spring Training

After a long winter
Jack and his teammates stretch,

stretch to remember,

remember how to hit
 the fastball
 and curve,
how to slide,
and how to field
 one-hoppers,
 two-hoppers,
 good hoppers,
 bad hoppers.

Jack snares the line drives,
hoping no bad hoppers
bounce his way —
no trade to Detroit
or anywhere else.

But life throws everyone
a bad hopper
 or two
 or three,
Jack knows that . . .

knows that the unforeseen
and unexpected
could cross his path
any day.

Something New

The unexpected jumps at Jack,
then zooms away. Jack watches
the four-footed black-and-white
bullet race across the outfield,
scatter dust through the infield,
bump into the backstop,
and stand there

panting.

The exuberant dog
is a young bull terrier
that the team trainer
won on a bet
and brought to

camp.

Jack watches Larry
gnaw baseball leather,
hurl himself against sweaty
shoes and socks in ecstasy,
and snag his teeth on woolen

uniforms.

Jack knows dogs.
He knows that Larry
is learning how to be part
of the

pack.

The trainer gives the dog
to the whole team and the players
make Larry their official

mascot.

Reliable

Jack understands how to be
part of the pack —
do your own job
and help
everybody else
do theirs.

He bats leadoff, where
his job is to make
something
happen:

slap a single,
slam a double,
earn a walk,
get hit by a pitch
if that's what it takes
to reach first base.

Jack does his job and does
it well. He can be counted on
to play his hardest for the team.

He works harder than ever,
hoping he won't be traded.

When the photographer arrives
Jack lines up with his teammates
for the official team picture.

Three Wrongs

Team photos glow with promise,
each player anticipating
September sunshine.

The Naps pose for
their official photo —
thirty-eight people
and one proud dog.

The papers call Larry
a bulldog, but they are wrong.
Larry is a bull terrier.

The rumors are wrong, too.
Jack Graney is not
traded to Detroit.

A heavy load lifts
from Jack's heart.
He smiles and laughs
and babbles happily
to reporters.

"I have a hunch,"
he tells them,
"a hunch that the Naps
will win the pennant."

Now, he means.

This year.

Wrong, Jack.
Wrong.

Bad hoppers
ahead.

Knockdown Pitch

Still with the team he loves,
Jack Graney repels pitches
with a sturdy bat
and pulls fly balls out of the sky
with a well-worn glove.

Things are looking good.

And then, life lobs
Jack two warmup
warnings

 and one
knockdown pitch,
as if to say,
Good things don't
come easy.

 In Chicago an umpire
 steps on Jack's stomach
 as he slides into second.
 Jack is in pain.

 In Boston something
 Jack eats gives him
 food poisoning.
 Jack is in more pain.

 In Detroit a batter
 smashes a line drive
 to left field.
 The ball plummets
 earthward too soon,
 like a one-winged goose
 calling it quits.
 Jack dives for the ball
 headfirst and hits
 the ground hard.

Twice Jack struggles to stand,
but he can't.
His right arm is dangles,
broken at the shoulder.

Teammates and trainer rush out
to help Jack into the clubhouse.
He grits his teeth, bearing the pain
without a sound as the trainer
sets his broken bones . . .

sets them incorrectly, so that
back in Cleveland the team doctor
cracks the shoulder
apart
 and lines up the bones
 a second time.

Jack and the bench spend
the rest of the season
together.

On the Bench

Larry spends time
on the bench, too.
Sometimes under it.

Larry leaps onto
the long wooden
seat and licks
Jack's fingers
and face.

Jack's team is on the field,
but Jack isn't. He strokes
Larry, talking to him.

Jack sees that Larry
never gives up.

The dog is an
optimist — today
is good and tomorrow
will be great.

Jack makes himself and Larry
happy by teaching Larry tricks —
Roll Over,
Sit Up,
Jump.

Larry sniffs Jack and smells
Jack's determination,
smells how hard Jack works
for the good of the team.

At the other end
of the bench,
somebody observes.

The Manager

That somebody is
Napoleon Lajoie,
stellar second baseman
and team manager.

Team namesake, too —
when Lajoie first arrived
in Cleveland, the fans
nicknamed the whole
team after him, which
is how they became
the Naps.

When the incomparable Lajoie
first arrived in Cleveland,
he was expected to lead
a losing team
to the pennant.

But even star players pulsating
immense volumes of heat and energy
cannot always ignite
their teammates —
cannot always lead a team
to a first place finish.

After ten years of trying,
Lajoie has learned this
bitter lesson.

Something is missing.

Lajoie knows what it is.

He looks at Jack and believes
that Jack knows, too.

He looks at Larry and knows

that Larry knows.

Lajoie makes a seemingly small decision that ends up monumental.

Larry belongs to the whole team, true. But the whole team can't take Larry home.

Lajoie looks at Jack.

He points at Larry.

"Take him," he tells Jack.

"The dog is yours."

The Dog Is Jack's

Jack is thrilled
to have Larry,
but along with the rush
comes the responsibility.

What does it mean,
he wonders, that
the team manager
gave Larry to him?

Was it merely convenient
for Lajoie to hand the dog
over to Jack? Or did the great
man have a plan?

Jack ponders this
as he plays with Larry . . .
feeds Larry . . .
walks Larry . . .
talks to Larry.

Jack ponders this
as he watches Larry
play with his teammates,
making each one
smile.

The beginning of a plan
starts to grow in Jack's
mind. A plan for next
season.

Season's End

Standing on the open deck
of the boat, Jack admits to himself
that he was very wrong about the Naps.
They did not win the pennant.

In fact, they finished thirty games
out of first.

The ferry steams across Lake Erie
from Cleveland to Port Stanley,
Ontario, and from there
Jack and Larry ride
the streetcar home,
Larry's toenails clickity-clicking
on the brick road that leads
to Jack's house.

Family and friends welcome Jack
home, glad that he is safe.

On the outside Jack looks safe,
but Larry senses something gnawing
Jack on the inside.
He licks Jack's hands and face.

Jack shares his fear with Larry —
fear that his shoulder might not heal right,
fear that he might never again
play in the big leagues.

Larry listens, but does not
agree.