

Chapter 1

The unopened pack of Topps baseball cards sat in my palm. *Please let me get a Jackie Robinson.* If I didn't, I was a dead man.

I ripped open the Topps' wrapper and popped the stick of gum in my mouth. It tasted like sugar-coated cardboard like it always did. Good.

I held my breath as I turned over each card. Bobby Tiefenauer. Dud. Hal Jeffcoat. Bunky Stewart. Willard Schmidt. All duds. Shoot. Only one more to go. *Please.* I flipped over the last card. Jackie Robinson? I stared at the card. Was it really Jackie smiling back at me? Yes!

"Kenny," I yelled to my best friend. "I can't believe it. I got it!"

Now I could pay Domingo back. I owed him two dollars for betting on the Dodgers against the Yankees in the first game of the World Series. A Jackie Robinson card was worth two dollars.

Some of the other boys in the dormitory lifted their heads.

Kenny got off his cot and walked over to look. A cockroach scuttled out of his way.

"Wow, Eli, that's great," he said. Kenny was eleven years old, same as me, chubby with a round, friendly face. "You're lucky. Too bad you have to give it away."

My heart sank. Yeah, I wouldn't get beat up by Domingo, but I wouldn't get to keep the card of my favorite baseball player, the best player who ever lived. It wasn't fair.

"Yeah, Eli," a snide voice added. "That's great." It was Marty, the dormitory captain. He was a tall sixteen year-old. He had a sneer on his face as usual.

The Secret of Ebbets Field
By Richard Seidman

I should have kept my big mouth shut. I hadn't realized he was so close by. Now it was too late.

"Hand it over." Marty reached for the card.

"No way." I held it behind my back.

"Give it, Schwartz."

"Go to hell."

Marty lunged at me and grabbed my arm. I tried to pull away, but he was way bigger and stronger than me. He began prying my fingers off the card.

I jerked my hand back, and the card ripped in half. "You idiot!" My whole body shook.

Marty laughed, tossed his half of the card onto the floor and sauntered away. "You should've let go, Schwartz."

I balled up my half of the card and threw it as hard as I could at Marty's back. It just drifted harmlessly back to the floor. I kicked it and stubbed my toe on the smelly old wood floor. "Ow."

"What a jerk," Kenny said.

I stared at the wreck of the card at my feet. "Domingo's gonna kill me."

"Maybe he'll give you a few more days to get the money."

Maybe. Domingo was tough but he was fair.

I had made the bet so I could run away from the Bushwick Home for Boys. Thirty dollars would be enough, I figured, to get me settled somewhere. I wouldn't have to worry about Marty and Reiger and Domingo. I could have a real home instead of that

The Secret of Ebbets Field
By Richard Seidman

dump. Someplace without rats and cockroaches. Someplace where the paint wasn't falling off the ceiling and the roof didn't leak. Someplace I belonged.

"I wish I was rich," I told Kenny. "All my problems would be solved if I had money."

He looked at me with raised eyebrows. "I'm not so sure about that."

"Without cash, you're nothing," I said. "Bucks means freedom."

I had to figure out a way to make money. And fast.