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THE BLACK CAT CHANGE-UP



David A. Kelly

illustrated by Mark Meyers



THE BLACK CAT CHANGE-UP

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**THE
BLACK CAT
CHANGE-UP**



by **David A. Kelly**

illustrated by **Mark Meyers**

Curveball Books  **Boston**

This book is dedicated to my Black Cat mystery team: Mark Meyers, who found new ways to bring Kate and Mike to life with his wonderful illustrations for this book (and the preceding 22 Ballpark Mysteries books); Jen Arena, who helped me sharpen the story, action, and dialogue; Jon Ford for his copyediting expertise; and Oliver Nash, who went above and beyond when it came time to turn my manuscript into a polished and published product. I, and the readers, thank you!

—D.A.K.

To Mike and Kate (and David of course), what a blast it has been to venture across the country and work through so many mysteries together!

—M.M.

"The Mets have shown me more ways to lose than I even knew existed."

—Casey Stengel, NY Mets manager 1962–65

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Swing for the fences!

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A Bad Omen

“No, no!” Mike Walsh yelled. He sat up in his sleeping bag on the floor. The New York City hotel room was dark and quiet.

Mike’s cousin, Kate Hopkins, clicked on the light. She had been asleep in the sofa bed next to him. “What happened?” she asked. “Are you okay?”

Mike swiveled his head to look around the room. He rubbed his sleepy eyes.

“It was awful!” he said. “I had a night-

mare that Mr. Met was chasing me! He said my head looked funny. He wanted to turn it into a baseball!”

Mr. Met was the mascot for the New York Mets baseball team. He had a huge baseball head perched on the shoulders of a regular-size body. Mr. Met and his wife, Mrs. Met, were popular sights at the Mets’ stadium. Mike had bought a Mr. Met pillow earlier that day while he and Kate were sightseeing in New York City. Kate’s mom was taking them to a Mets game the next day.

“Well, there’s one good thing about having a baseball head,” Kate said. “If you carried around a baseball bat, you could get a hit anytime you wanted!”

“That’s not funny!” Mike threw his Mr. Met pillow at her.

Kate ducked. The pillow bounced off the wall and landed on the sofa bed.

“I’m done with him!” Mike said as he flopped back down on his sleeping bag.

Kate dropped an extra pillow onto Mike’s stomach.

“Ooof!” Mike said. “Hey! I’m trying to sleep here!”

* * * * *

“You need to wake up, sleepyheads, so we can get our day started,” Kate’s mother called out at nine the next morning. “First up, sightseeing. Then, this afternoon, we’re going to meet Cookie Clifford before the game. He’s the Mets’ second baseman and star hitter. He agreed to say hello to you since you’re both big baseball fans!”

“That’s great!” Kate said.

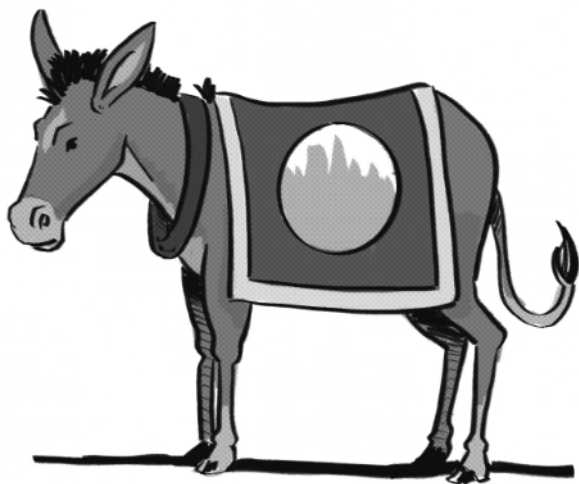
Mrs. Hopkins was a sports reporter. Kate and Mike often joined her when she traveled to different ballparks. Today she was covering that day's game between the Mets and the Chicago Cubs. It was an important game. Whichever team won would advance to the National League playoffs and possibly the World Series.

Mike groaned and rolled over. "I'm only getting up if you promise we won't run into Mr. Met!" he said into his pillow.

"Come on, 'fraidy cat!" Kate said. "We won't let him chase you. Besides, Mr. Met is sure better than Mettle the Mule."

Mike poked his head up. "*What* the Mule?" he asked.

Kate pulled him out of his sleeping bag by his arm. "Mettle the Mule," she said. "I read about it in the Mets history



book on the way here.” Kate loved to read and always had books with her. “Mettle was the Mets mascot for a few years in the 1970s. He lived in a pen in the right field of Shea Stadium, near the Mets’ bullpen.”

“What happened to him?” Mike asked.

“1979!” Kate said. “After the Mets lost ninety-nine games and came in last place, they ditched Mettle to see if it would help.”

“Did it?” Mike asked.

“Sure,” Kate said as she twirled strands of her brown hair through her fingers. “They only lost ninety-five games and came in second to last in 1980!”

Mike groaned and slid back down onto his sleeping bag. “I don’t want to see Mettle the Mule or Mr. Met!” he said.

After breakfast, Mike, Kate, and Mrs. Hopkins visited the Empire State Building and the New York Public Library. They ate a late lunch near Grand Central Terminal, then jumped on a number 7 subway train, which took them directly to the Mets–Willets Point station just outside the Mets’ stadium.

“There’s the Home Run Apple from Shea Stadium, the Mets’ old ballpark!” Kate said. A large red apple on what looked like an upside-down black hat

stood in front of the stadium entrance. “The apple used to rise up out of the hat every time the Mets hit a home run!”

Kate’s mom took a picture of Kate and Mike in front of the Home Run Apple. Then they crossed the concrete plaza to the main gates. People were starting to gather for the big game.

Mrs. Hopkins showed her press pass to the security guard at the gate and he waved them through. They stepped into the Jackie Robinson Rotunda, a large circular area with escalators to the upper levels. On the ground level was the entrance to the Mets Hall of Fame and a gift shop.

Mike spun around to take it all in. “Why so much Jackie Robinson stuff?” he asked. Large pictures of Jackie Robinson

flanked either side of the stairs to the upper level. “He played for the Dodgers, not the Mets!”

“The Mets wanted to honor both the Dodgers and Jackie Robinson,” Kate said. “The Dodgers with Jackie Robinson played in New York before they moved to California. And they’re a National League team, just like the Mets.”

Kate twirled to see all the words etched into the stone above the rotunda archways. *Courage, Excellence, Persistence, Justice, Teamwork, Commitment, Citizenship, Determination, and Integrity.* “Those are Jackie Robinson’s core values,” she said. “I read about them in the Mets history book.”

“Look at that giant number 42!” Mike said. Two huge blue numbers dominated

the space under the escalators. Each was as tall as a person.

“Forty-two was Jackie Robinson’s number,” Kate said.

“Even I know that!” Mike said.

Mike raced Kate toward the 4 and 2, but before they got there, a man in a Chicago Cubs hat stepped out from between the giant numbers.

“Louie Lopez!” Mike called out.

“¡*Hola!* Mike and Kate!” Louie said. “My two favorite detectives. I was hoping I’d see you here!”

Louie was the star center fielder for the Chicago Cubs. Mike and Kate had helped him solve a mystery during the World Series. Louie gave them each a high five. He tipped his hat at Mrs. Hopkins as she joined them.

“It’s great to see you again,” Kate said.



“Excited for today’s game? It should be a good one!”

Louie smiled and nodded. He flexed one of his arms and pointed to it. “I feel good about the game. We’re strong,” he said. “But I don’t think the Mets are feeling so good about it now, especially the superstitious players!”

Mike and Kate looked at each other.

“What do you mean?” Kate asked.

“Didn’t you hear about the ghost of the black cat?” Louie asked. “It’s haunting the Mets!”