

*The* **Secret**  
*at*  
**Haney Field**

Twelve-year-old April O'Day's summer has gotten off to a flying start. As the new bat retriever for the Harpoons, her hometown's minor-league team, she's fetching bats and doling out great advice to players and coaches alike. In a word, she's becoming indispensable. But mysterious things are happening at Haney Field, which April and her best friend—and fellow baseball enthusiast—Darren Plummer are determined to uncover. As they quickly learn, this is no ordinary season. In fact, it's a whole new ballgame!

### Praise for *The Secret at Haney Field*

“. . . a well-written Disney-like story. . . . The characters are well-drawn and likable, and Clark obviously knows baseball . . . . A home run. . . .”  
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Told in first person by April, her experiences are an inviting read. The discoveries and the reflections of this feisty protagonist, who loves the sport and whose curiosity leads her to investigate the Negro leagues, baseball history, and even issues of discrimination, are what make this story so enjoyable. . . .”  
—*Diane Donovan, Midwest Book Review*

“April is a likeable and engaging heroine and Darren is good comic relief. The writing is clear and fluid, the dialogue smooth and realistic, and the baseball know-how is very interesting!”  
—*Julia Hopkinson for Readers' Favorite*

“As deeply moving as *Field of Dreams*. . . . Inspiring, intriguing, and insightful. . . .”  
—*Bil Howard for Readers' Favorite*

“R. M. Clark's baseball mystery . . . will royally entertain baseball fans of all ages. . . . This book is great fun and highly recommended.”  
—*Jack Magnus for Readers' Favorite*

*The Secret*  
*at*  
*Haney Field*

A BASEBALL MYSTERY



**R. M. Clark**

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**Summary:** April O'Day, a spunky twelve-year-old, has a grand-slam summer acting as the bat retriever for her hometown's minor-league baseball team and, along with her best friend Darren Plummer, solving a mystery on the field, dating back to the days of the Negro Leagues.

**Photo & Illustration Credits**

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Page 15: "There's no crying in baseball": From *A League of Their Own*, the 1992 Penny Marshall film.

To Sandy,  
my best friend

# Glossary

A white baseball with red stitching is positioned behind the letter 'y' in the word 'Glossary'.

**Bullpen:** A warm-up area for pitchers and catchers. It is typically located behind the left or right base line or an outfield fence.

**Bunt:** Purposely batting the ball weakly to a specific spot on the infield by holding the bat still and letting the ball hit it. When used to advance base runners, where the only play by an infielder is to throw the batter out at first base, the maneuver is called a **sacrifice bunt**. If, however, the infielders are playing back and the batter is a speedy runner, then a bunt can be used to get a base hit.

**Clean-Up Hitter:** As the fourth player in the **lineup** (i.e., the list of players in the order in which they will bat), this batter is usually the team's best power hitter. If any of the first three batters gets on base, the No. 4 hitter ideally "cleans up" the bases with a hit, potentially driving in a run (or runs).

**Cut-Off:** A defensive tactic, whereby an infielder (usually, the first baseman, the second baseman, or the shortstop) catches the ball that is thrown in by an outfielder and then, quickly, throws it to the third baseman or the catcher at home plate to keep a runner (or runners) from advancing or scoring.

**Double:** The batter arrives safely at second base.

**Doubleheader:** Two games played by the same two teams on the same day.

**Fastball:** The most common pitch, it is a straight pitch that is thrown at a pitcher's top speed. A fastball that breaks slightly downward over the plate is called a **two-seamer** or a **sink**er.

Compare to a **breaking ball:** A pitch that deviates from a straight path by changing direction as it approaches the plate—either diving sharply over the plate (i.e., a **curveball**) or dropping down and across the plate (i.e., a **slider**).

**Glove/Mitt:** A leather covering for the hand used to catch a baseball. It has individual thumb and finger sections. Catchers and first basemen wear gloves called mitts (designed in the style of a mitten).

**Grand Slam:** A home run that is hit with the bases loaded (i.e., there is a runner on each base—first, second, and third). In a grand slam, four runs are scored.

**Infield:** The positions played by four players: the first baseman, the second baseman, the third baseman, and the shortstop (the shortstop covers the area between second base and third base). It's also the area of the field that's within and around home plate, first base, second base, and third base.

**Line Drive:** A line drive is a batted ball that is hit low to the ground in a nearly straight line.

**Major Leagues:** This name refers to the organization that operates the two North American professional baseball leagues—the **American League** (Baltimore Orioles, Boston Red Sox, Chicago White Sox, Cleveland Indians, Detroit Tigers, Houston Astros, Kansas City Royals, Los Angeles Angels, Minnesota Twins, New York Yankees, Oakland Athletics, Seattle Mariners, Tampa Bay Rays, Texas Rangers,

and Toronto Blue Jays) and the **National League** (Arizona Diamondbacks, Atlanta Braves, Chicago Cubs, Cincinnati Reds, Colorado Rockies, Los Angeles Dodgers, Miami Marlins, Milwaukee Brewers, New York Mets, Philadelphia Phillies, Pittsburgh Pirates, San Diego Padres, San Francisco Giants, St. Louis Cardinals, and Washington Nationals). Learn more at [baseballhall.org](http://baseballhall.org) (the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum).

**Minor Leagues:** Composed of 240 professional baseball teams in the Americas, the six leagues, from Rookie to Triple-A, compete below the level of Major League Baseball and provide opportunities for players to prepare themselves for the major leagues.

**Missed Signs:** Hand or body signals given by the coach or the key players that are not followed correctly by the player being signaled.

**Negro Leagues:** From 1920–1960, 73 teams operated within 8 U. S. professional baseball leagues (i.e., the Negro National League [1920–1931], the Southern Negro League [1920], the Eastern Colored League [1923–1928], the Negro Southern League [1926, 1932, 1945], the American Negro League [1929], the East-West League [1932], the Negro National League [1933–1948], and the Negro American League [1937–1960]) in Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas. Learn more about the Negro Leagues at [nlbm.com](http://nlbm.com) (the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum).



**On-Deck Circle:** Five feet in diameter, this circular area on the field (in foul territory, about halfway between the team's dugout and home plate) is where the next batter in the lineup takes warm-up swings before going to the batter's box. There are two on-deck circles—one for each team.

**Outfield:** That part of the field beyond the **infield**. Also, the positions played by three players: the right fielder, the center fielder, and the left fielder.

**Pop-Up:** A batted ball that is hit very high and stays in the infield.

**Relief Pitcher:** A replacement pitcher—a *reliever*—for another pitcher.

**Rookie:** An athlete in his or her first year of play for a professional team.

**Single:** The batter arrives safely at first base.

**Stand-Up Double/Triple:** The batter reaches second base (a double) or third base (a triple) without needing to slide.

**The Box:** Also called the batter's box, this is the clearly marked area—measuring four feet wide by six feet long—on either side of home plate within which the batter stands. A right-handed batter stands in the box to the right of home plate (from the perspective of the pitcher); and a left-handed batter stands in the box to the left of home plate (again, from the perspective of the pitcher).

**Triple:** The batter arrives safely at third base.



*Saturday, June 21<sup>st</sup>*

The familiar red sign twinkled in the summer sky above me: “Welcome to Haney Field ~ Home of the Harpoons.”

Looking up at that lighted sign, I smiled, because tonight I was coming to the stadium as more than just a fan. Tonight, and for the next six days, I was going to be the bat retriever for my favorite minor-league Class A baseball team in my own hometown of New Blackburn, Massachusetts.

The security guard at the entrance to the players’ parking lot waved my dad and me right in. *That* was a first. As we walked through the stadium doors, I heard someone calling my name. “April? April O’Day?”

Spinning around, I saw a tall, slim woman with stylishly short brown hair rushing towards us. When she got closer, I said, “Yes, hi, I’m April, and this is my father, Danny.”

“Hello, I’m Beth Harrelson, director of promotions for the Harpoons. I’m so happy to meet you both,” she said, smiling warmly, talking quickly, and shaking our hands. She was wearing a red-and-white Harpoons jersey with jeans and white sneakers. She reminded me of my mom: pretty and fashionably casual. “Congratulations again on winning our essay contest!”

“Thanks, Ms. Harrelson.”

“Oh, please. Call me Beth.”

I won this bat-retriever job with an essay about something that even my dad, a former minor-leaguer himself, doesn’t completely understand but which I find super easy and fun. It’s called sabermetrics, and it’s all about baseball records, math, and statistics.

Beth checked her watch. "Well, how about that? We're running ahead of schedule. Let's take a tour first, shall we?" She was already walking away briskly—and expecting us to follow.

"April, that sounds like fun," my dad said. "But do you need me for this?"

"No, I can handle it."

"All right, honey. Remember, I'll be sitting in the front row."

"Okay, I'll find you, Dad." I gave him a quick hug and ran to catch up with Beth.

First, she took me down to the field to watch the players take their practice swings. From there, we went to the bullpen, where the pitchers were warming up. Then, it was on to the dugout!

"And here's *your* spot," she said, guiding me to the second step leading up to the field. Fortunately, there was a sturdy fence between the hitters and me, so I would be protected.

"We have two rules, April. One, you will wear a batter's helmet at all times, okay?" Beth said.

"Sure!" I replied.

"And two, you'll only come onto the field to retrieve the bat once the ball is back in the pitcher's hand, understood?"

"Absolutely." I couldn't stop smiling. This was actually *happening!*

Spreading her arms wide, she added, "You probably don't realize it, but this place has quite a history. Full of ghosts, I like to say."

"Ghosts?" I said. "Really? Cool."

"Well, not *real* ghosts, of course."

"Oh."

"Sorry to disappoint you. No, I meant that this stadium has been home to baseball for *eighty* years. To celebrate, I'm updating our website and collecting photos to tell our story. Would you like to contribute a photo essay about your

experience here—you know, ‘South Coast Fan Finds Fun!’—or something like that?”

“That sounds great. I got a digital camera for my birthday this year, so I’m all set.”

We jogged over to Beth’s office to pick up my uniform. It was exactly like the ones the players and the coaches wore, except mine didn’t have a number.

I kept my cap low with the brim flat, drew my shoulder-length hair into a ponytail, and pulled the red leggings up high, the way baseball players are supposed to wear them. The long part of the “p” in “Harpoons” was actually shaped like one. Neat.

Checking myself in the mirror—I’d even brought eye black to make those stripes under my eyes—I decided that I looked like a genuine player, freckles and all!

I was *ready!*

\* \* \*

Our opponent that night was the Springfield Braves, the *worst* team in the league. I retrieved the bats without any problems. As promised, Beth stopped by every so often to see how I was doing. I was having a ball! The players spat and scratched themselves (lovely), but they also said nice things to me, like, “Good job!”

After six innings of outstanding bat retrieval, I figured it was time to make myself a little more useful to the team. I had been keeping track of each player’s bat size. Although most players had chosen the correct bat for themselves during batting practice, I could tell by the way some of them were swinging that they *really* needed my help.

A new left fielder named Juan Santiago was one of them. He had recently joined the team—a rookie, like so many of the others. I’d watched him hit plenty of times and had gotten a good look as he swung his huge 34-ounce bat. Sure,

he could hit some pitches out with that size, but his swing never seemed quite right from *my* vantage point.

In the bottom of the seventh inning, he was standing near me while fastening his batting gloves, waiting for his turn. I went to the rack and chose a lighter bat.

"That's not my bat," he said, with a gentle smile. He was a tall kid, but not exactly beefy. "I use the thirty-four."

"This pitcher's hitting ninety-five today," I said, meaning the miles per hour of his fastball. "This is the bat for you: Thirty-two inches and thirty-one ounces of pure hitting perfection. Tony Gwynn hit almost four hundred with this size."

He took it and held it out, checking the weight. "But I want to hit like Albert Pujols. I need some thunder." He made a weak attempt at flexing.

"Pujols mostly uses a thirty-one ounce bat." I crossed my arms and gave him my best serious look.

He squinted at me. "Really?"

"Really." I may know the Harpoons' stats, but I know the major-leaguers' even better.

"How old are you, Blondie?"

"Twelve. And my name is April."

He tried to stare me down but failed. Finally, he shook his head and re-gripped the bat. "Well, April, speaking of twelve, I'm oh-for-twelve using thunder bat since I got here, so why not?"

He walked up the stairs with the lighter bat, took some warm-up swings in the on-deck circle, and then headed to the plate. On the third pitch, he laced a clean double down the third-base line to put the team up by four runs. When the next hitter singled, Juan scored, knocking the pitcher out of the game.

During the pitching change, Juan came over to see me.

"How do you know so much about baseball?"

I kept my eyes on the new pitcher. "My dad's a former minor-leaguer and he's taught me a lot. Plus, I read tons of baseball books. I check the scouting reports. Stuff like that. I've been around."

"You've been around, huh? A whole twelve years." He laughed. "I got a pair of cleats older than you."

"Don't believe me? Ask me anything about baseball."

"Okay. What award is given to the best pitcher in each league?"

"Cy Young Award," I said. Too easy.

"How about this one: How many consecutive games did Cal Ripken play?"

"That would be 2,131. He broke Lou Gehrig's record from 1939. But those are *trivia* questions, Juan. Ask me about the game. You know, what happens on the field."

He removed his cap and ran his fingers through his short hair. "Okay, let's say next time I'm up, I see the third baseman playing back a few feet. Do I lay down a bunt?"

"Nope. Bad idea."

"Why? Bunting is one of my specialties."

I turned and looked him straight in the eye. "It's a trap, Juan. The third baseman will back up a step to get you to bunt. Earlier in the game, it would have been smart. But this reliever is the best fielding pitcher in the league, and he covers twice the ground of most pitchers. His range factor and total zone runs are out of this world. At the beginning of the season, you may have beaten it out, but that ankle injury you suffered last week has cost you a step."

"Wow, Blondie, that's amazing."

"It's April. And my advice is to use the thirty-one ounce and let 'er rip."

He smiled, balled his right hand, and put it out. It was my first fist bump of the season.



*Saturday, June 28<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday, July 2<sup>nd</sup>*

After a few more games, the players got used to having me around and offering advice. My one-week stint was over way too fast. When it was time for me to leave, I tried not to cry ('cause as everyone knows, there's no crying in baseball). I said goodbye to as many players as I could. There were more fist bumps than I could count.

Beth walked me down the tunnel after the last game. "So how did you like your experience with the Harpoons?" she asked.

"Oh, it was a *total* blast! I can't tell you how much I'm going to miss being in uniform and hanging with these guys."

"Well, you can keep the uniform, April. And you know what? Some of the players and coaches are going to miss you, too. In fact, several have asked me if you can stay on through the summer. I'll have to run it by the owner, but I can't imagine he'll have an issue with it. The team comes back from their road trip in a couple of days. What do you say?"

I tried to appear calm, but inside I was jumping up and down like a maniac.

"Okay, thanks! I'll have to ask my parents," I said, trying to act casual, "but I'm positive they'll say yes."

I was overjoyed—and would have done a cartwheel . . . if I knew how.

\* \* \*

Four days later, I was back at my regular spot, retrieving bats and giving advice. I fist-bumped Carl "Cannon" Caswell,

the first baseman, as he returned to the dugout. Cannon was an excellent fielder and a power hitter, but as slow as a turtle. Earlier in the game, I had pulled out my trusty stopwatch and timed him going from home to first base in 5.1 seconds! That was a full second slower than most of the other players.

"What's the word on this pitcher, April?" he asked, as he loaded his bat handle with pine tar from a towel. He knew I had been charting the pitches in my head for a while. It was another one of my talents.

"He'll pitch inside with the two-seamer early in the count to make you swing," I said. "Don't. If you're patient, he'll hang a breaking ball." I pointed a finger in his direction. "Money." That meant I was sure.

Cannon laughed as he twirled the bat above his head. "I hope you're right, April."

He waited for his pitch and hammered the curve ball into the right-field seats. As he loped around the bases, I retrieved his bat and met him about halfway between the dugout and home plate.

"Money!" he said, giving me another fist bump.

\* \* \*

Many of the players on the Harpoons were guys straight out of high school or college in their first or second year of professional ball—and quite a few of them had never been away from home before, so I considered it my job to help them as much as I could. Some, like Cannon, caught on early. Others were a bit slow.

Roscoe Barnwell, the Harpoons' speedy center fielder who had joined the team the previous game, waited on the steps next to me a few innings later. I'd been watching the lefty relief pitcher closely, tracking his move to first base to pick off any runner who dared to venture too far. I looked over at Roscoe. "Watch the pitcher's hands," I said.



"What?" He put his hands flat against his chest. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yep. Watch his move to first, Roscoe. His hands come up high when he throws to first base, but they're low when he throws to the catcher. It's not much, but it's there."

He gave me a good stare down. "You're the bat girl, right? I'm getting advice from the bat girl?"

"Bat retriever," I replied.

"You should listen to her," Cannon said from behind us. "April knows her stuff."

The batter struck out and Roscoe moved up to the on-deck circle, laughing loudly. "Base-stealing advice from the bat girl. Now I've heard it all."

After the next batter grounded out, Roscoe got up and hit a clean single to left. The pitcher threw over to first base a few times, lifting his hands just like I'd said, and then went to the plate. Roscoe took off on the next pitch and cleanly stole second base. He stood up, dusted himself off, and pointed to the dugout with both hands.

"Money," Cannon said.

The estimated crowd of 2,500 seemed to agree as they cheered loudly.

Money, indeed.



*Wednesday, July 2<sup>nd</sup> (After the game)*

After every game, it was my job to put away the bat weights and the pine tar rags and gather the broken bats from both dugouts and dispose of them. Usually, there were six or seven from each team, but tonight's game featured a couple of hard-throwing pitchers who chewed up batters with inside stuff. Twenty bats turned into firewood in the 2-1 win for the Harpoons.

There was a dumpster behind the stadium where the cleanup crew threw most of their trash. It smelled horrible. As I approached with a can full of busted bats, I noticed that the area was nearly overflowing with black trash bags, but I found an opening and let the bats fly.

After the second trip, I decided to return a different way—by going under the bleachers on the first-base side. The sign read EMPLOYEES ONLY, but I figured I was an employee. And anyway, I wanted to see all the ins and outs of the place.

It was fairly dark down there—even with the security lights on—and grungy. Old grounds crew equipment had been pushed into every nook and cranny. And based on the dust and the rust covering the tractors, drags, and rakes, it looked like everything had been there for a while.

Along the wall was something big and rectangular. It was covered in a green tarp, tucked under the grandstands as far as it could go. It seemed out of place, so I went in for a closer look.

When my eyes adjusted to the light, I realized that the mystery item was bigger than I'd originally thought—probably

fifty feet long and twenty feet high. Most of it was blocked by large equipment, but a section of it on the left was practically wide open.

Naturally, I was curious. But when I picked up the bottom of the tarp for a peek underneath, a sudden breeze blew it right up into my hand, ruffling it along the length of the enormous object. Then the tarp went flat. *How did a breeze get under here?* Thankfully, it disappeared as quickly as it came. When I started to lift the tarp again, voices interrupted me. A couple of grounds crew guys were heading my way, so I scurried back to the field and made a mental note to check it out again very soon.

\* \* \*

The field lights were still blazing at half past eight while I finished packing up in the dugout. When they began to click off, I knew it was time to go. Just as I lifted my backpack, I saw, out of the corner of my eye, what looked like a shadowy essence running from first to second base—and then another on the pitcher’s mound. I closed my eyes and shook my head. When I reopened them, I blinked twice to readjust my eyes to the darkness. The shadows had vanished. Weird. I immediately flashed back to Beth’s comment about ghosts. I knew she was merely using a figure of speech . . . but then, why was I shivering?



*Wednesday, July 2<sup>nd</sup> (Evening)*

Dad picked me up right on schedule. In the car, I grabbed a bottle of water from my pack and drank, and drank, and drank. I figured that dehydration must have set in. What else could account for what I had just seen? When my dad questioned me about my level of thirst, I told him I'd explain as soon as I'd checked my messages.

I turned on my phone and saw that I had two of them. I'd had to leave my cell phone off in the dugout because the Harpoons have a strict no-phone policy.

*stats?*

It was Darren Plummer, my best friend. He'd sent the same text twice, the second one in all caps. He wanted to go over the statistics of tonight's game.

Fortunately for him, it was Dad's part of the week (my parents are separated and have a joint-custody arrangement) and we were heading home with some carryout for a late dinner, so I told Darren to come over. To avoid having to talk about my "water" issue, I chatted about the game the whole ride home.

Darren was waiting for us at the front door. He's short, like me, but cute in his own way. He rode his bike over—he lives only two blocks away—and always wears a helmet. When he takes it off, the consequences of safe biking are evident: His floppy brown hair sticks out in, like, twenty-seven different directions. No amount of coaxing or patting or combing helps, so I think he's stopped trying.

"Tell me everything," he said, as we treated ourselves to

some popcorn and root beer after dinner. "Who did what?"

Dad had already headed into the den to watch his 52-inch high-def TV. We settled for the 42-inch set in the living room.

"It was a complete nightmare," I said. "Missed signs. Missed cutoffs. And don't get me started on the base-running blunders." I was flustered and took a quick sip of root beer to calm down.

Darren grabbed a handful of popcorn, shoved it in his mouth, and then polished off half his root beer. I knew what was coming next and his loud belch proved me right. He sat on the edge of the couch and excused himself with a small smile. At least he was polite.

"April, there are lots of rookies on this team," he said. "That's why they're in New Blackburn—to learn, remember?" He drained the rest of the soda can but without any further aftershocks. "Anyway, let's talk stats."

I went through the game inning by inning, recalling the major plays for him. I didn't need a scorebook; I just have a knack for remembering details like that. He sat back and absorbed it all, gazing contentedly at the real game that was playing on TV.

"I love this TV," he said during a commercial. "High-def rocks. Your dad's landscaping business must be doing well."

"Ha!" I didn't mean to say it, but it slipped out.

"What? You're *lucky*," he continued between fistfuls of popcorn. "He volunteers at school *all* the time. I don't think my dad has ever set foot in our school, except on Parents' Night."

I thought hard about what I was going to say next. Darren was my closest friend, and I figured I owed him the truth. "Okay, you can't repeat what I'm going to tell you to anyone. Ever. Promise?"

"Sure."

"The reason my dad is able to volunteer is because he doesn't actually have a landscaping business, or any other kind of business. He got into a very bad car crash when I was seven. Doctors told him he'd walk again, but his back was such a mess, they thought that he'd eventually end up in a wheelchair." I let that statement fill the air along with the smell of popcorn.

"Whoa, April. For real?"

"Yep. It qualifies him for full-time disability, so the government sends him a check every month. His legs and back got better, but he never returned to his real job. I know he still gets the checks, because I saw one on the kitchen counter the other day."

Darren cocked his head to the side. "But he has his own truck with a sign and all the equipment."

"He *tells* everyone he's a landscaper, but he mows only a lawn or two a week. He can come to school because he has nothing else to do except cash the stupid checks. I'm pretty sure that's the reason he and my mom separated. But he doesn't know that I know." That last statement stung my throat. "Every morning, before I open my eyes, I say their names—Debby and Danny O'Day. They even *sound* like they belong together, don't you think? I picture them in the kitchen, having coffee and laughing. But then, when I go down to breakfast, it's just me and Mom or just me and Dad. Still think I'm *lucky*?"

Darren lifted the can to his mouth but then realized it was empty. "Wow, April. That's some secret. I . . . I had no idea. Sometimes I wish I had a family secret to share, but my parents are so boring, it's almost painful."

"Oh, then you're not going to like what I have to tell you next."

"What is it?"

"I have *another* secret."

"You're kidding," Darren said.

"Nope."

"Well, don't leave me hanging here. Tell me!"

I moved forward onto the edge of my seat, and he leaned in towards me. "It's about the stadium."

"How can a *building* have a secret?"

"I went under it today and there's something very long and tall leaning against the wall. It's covered with a tarp and it's truly ominous-looking."

"Whoa. That is totally and completely not fair that you get to see it and I don't." He sat back and gave me a reassuring nod. "But that's really cool, April."

I considered telling him about the out-of-nowhere breeze and the bizarre shadows I'd seen from the dugout when the field lights went out, but he might have thought I was crazy. And I sort of doubted it all actually happened, anyway.

Sort of.