

# Contents

1	The Error .....	1
2	The Hit Man .....	7
3	The Pro .....	11
4	Grandpa Hayes .....	17
5	A Pitcher .....	22
6	Curveball .....	26
7	Fastball.....	33
8	Micah's Night .....	39
9	The Fly .....	47
10	A Team .....	52

## *Chapter 1*

### The Error

Micah knew the throw from center field was hopeless even before he scooped up the dropped fly. The runner on third was steps from home, getting high-fives from his teammates while the Bulldogs' cut-off waited for Micah's throw. When he got it, he whipped around with the ball, saw the Cobras cheering, and sank to his knees.

"You got a hole in your glove?" the massive left-fielder shouted. "Go back to the country, farm boy!"

"I can't help it, Tommy! I lost the ball in the sun," Micah yelled back. He gritted his teeth and clenched his fists but couldn't change what had just happened. To hide his shame, he turned to walk back to the dugout.

But there was Tommy's twin, Peter. A little shorter and a lot meaner than his brother, Peter gave Micah a disgusted look and spat on the grass, inches from Micah's foot. "Did you get dropped on the head when you were a baby, or is your whole family stupid?" Peter snarled.

Micah looked toward home plate from his position in center field. The Cobras were still cheering as they danced around the player who had just scored the winning run.

Micah's team, the Bulldogs, had taken the lead earlier that inning. The game would have been over, and the Bulldogs would have won, if Micah had only caught the long fly ball. But he had missed it by inches. Tommy and Peter, who also played in the outfield, were jogging off toward the dugout now, still complaining angrily about Micah's game-losing error. Micah took off his worn old baseball glove and started after

them, wondering how many more angry insults he would have to listen to. He ran his first few steps, then began walking, his head bowed. At least his mother had been working and missed seeing him drop the fly ball.

Micah tried to get to his locker without being noticed, but it was impossible. Some of his Junior League teammates were still angry. He saw them, sitting on the wooden benches, shooting mean glances his way or turning their faces from him as they went to take their showers.

Only Darrell, the equipment manager, was his usual cheerful self. Darrell was a short, wiry kid with black-rimmed glasses that made him look smart. Unlike the other teenagers, Darrell wasn't there to play. His goal was to own a major league baseball team.

Micah wasn't sure how Darrell could do that without winning the state lottery, but he liked Darrell a lot. Darrell was the

only kid who had gone out of his way to befriend Micah when his family had moved to town only a month before.

“The stats were against you, kid,” Darrell said, placing a consoling hand on his friend’s back. Micah was at least six inches taller than Darrell, but Darrell said “kid” like he was much older and wiser.

“The batter, Brock, was way overdue. He’s a power hitter, and he hadn’t really tagged one the last couple of games.”

“Brock sure tagged one this time,” Micah grumbled, sitting on the locker room bench. “I don’t need stats, Darrell. I just need to catch the ball when it counts.”

“You’re wasting your brain on him, Darrell.” It was Tommy, wearing just a towel, on his way to the showers.

“Yeah,” chimed in Peter. “He probably can’t count past ten without taking off his shoes.”

Peter pretended to count using his

toes, and Tommy laughed.

Micah leapt to his feet, his face red and his fists clenched. He took a step toward the twins.

Peter stopped in his tracks and faced Micah, ready for a fight. It wasn't going to be a fair one. The twins were heavily muscled, from using their private gym at home. Everything the twins owned was top of the line, from the wraparound sunglasses down to their expensive baseball cleats.

Micah was no weakling, but his strength came from years of working on a farm. He looked skinny next to Tommy and Peter.

Darrell stepped in and slapped Peter on the back, grinning. "Good one, Pete! Hey, did you ever hear the joke about ..."

But Tommy interrupted him, staring coldly at Micah. "I'll tell you what *isn't* a joke. You're going to get smoked if you keep messing up, country boy."

Peter pushed Darrell's hand away and turned toward his brother. "We don't want to get the stink of country on us, do we? Maybe we should pay someone to smoke him for us."

"Yeah!" Tommy laughed. "A hit man!"