



MEET THE



Tyler

Age: 9

Hidden Talent: can communicate with animals

Favorite Food: lobster

Secret Wish: to one day live on the moon

Best Quality: cares about people's feelings

CHARACTERS



Brandon

Age: 15

Biggest Secret: does yoga every day before school

Dream Vacation: dog sledding in Alaska

Career Goal: to be a professional gamer

Best Quality: creative

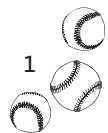
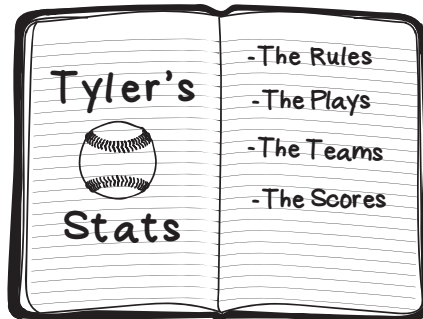
LOSING IT

“Mom! Have you seen my baseball? It’s not here!”

Tyler Hughes loved baseball. No, he was obsessed with it.

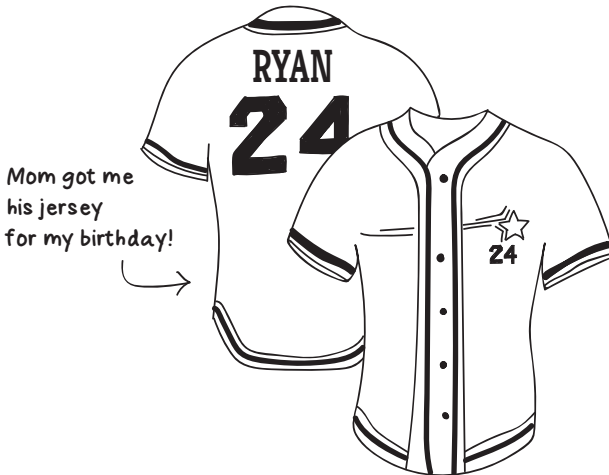
The nine-year-old played on a team every summer. He was a catcher. Someday he hoped to be a pro ballplayer.

Ask Tyler anything about Major League Baseball. He knew it.



It was baseball season now. But it would soon be over. Tyler had been watching the games on TV. He was rooting for his favorite team.

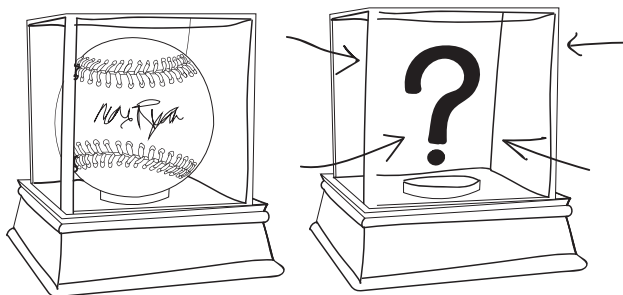
There was one player Tyler really liked. The player was a new pitcher. The rookie's name was Ryan. He had talent. It would be amazing to meet him.



Then it happened. Tyler and his mom went to a game. They met Ryan afterward.

He shook Tyler's hand and signed his baseball.

It wasn't just a ball. It was special. Tyler wanted to keep the ball safe. He kept it in a case. The case sat on his dresser. One minute the ball was there. The next it was gone.



Mom came into Tyler's room. She looked at the case. "Did you take the ball out? Maybe you put it down somewhere. You just forgot."

"I didn't touch it," Tyler said.

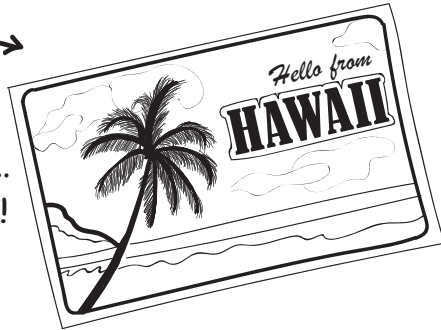
He was sure. Someone took the ball. Only one person was low enough. That person was his stepbrother. Should he tell?

Brandon would get in trouble. But Tyler figured he deserved it. Brandon wasn't nice. It was too bad. Tyler liked his stepdad. Steve was nice.

Tyler's real dad had been in the army. He was killed in a war. Tyler and his mom were sad for a long time. Mom cried a lot.

Then Mom met Steve. It was a few years after Dad died. Mom finally smiled. She was happy again.

Where Mom and
Steve got married.
It was AWESOME!



Steve had a son. Brandon was 15. Tyler was happy about it. He had a new big brother. But it wasn't like that.

Brandon stayed in his room. All he did was play video games. Or he was on his phone playing games. And he was always mad. He caused trouble.



It wasn't that bad at first. Brandon did little things. He slammed doors. Often he would stay out late. Then Brandon got mean. Once he pushed Tyler. Brandon said it was an accident.

Last week some money was missing. It had been in Mom's wallet. She said she

must have lost it. But Tyler saw Brandon right before that. He was near the wallet. And now the ball was gone.

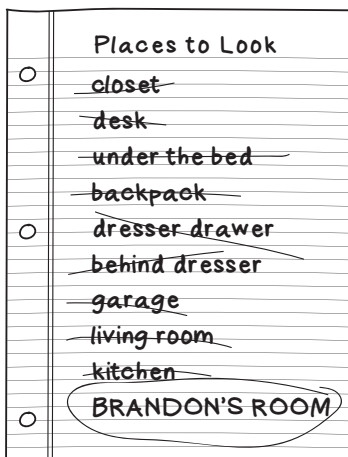
Tyler looked at his mom. He saw the look on her face. She was worried.

“Don’t say anything, Tyler. Search your room first. Did you look under the bed?”

“It’s not there, Mom.”

“Then where is it?”

Tyler didn’t answer. He wasn’t sure what to do.

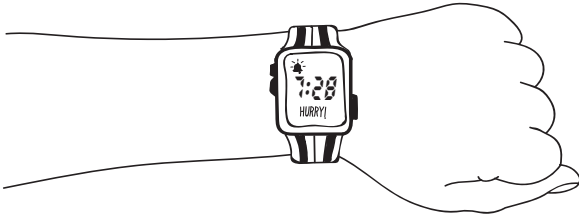


It was the next morning. Mom asked Tyler about the ball. “Did you find it?”

“I’m still looking,” he said. But that wasn’t true.

Mom drove Tyler to school. He hurried to class. The first bell would ring soon. And he wanted to tell Josh about the ball.

Can’t be late!



Josh Martin was Tyler’s best friend. Josh had seen the ball. He thought it was cool.

Tyler saw Josh ahead. “Wait up,” Tyler called out.

Josh turned around.

“The baseball is gone,” Tyler said.

“The one the pitcher signed? You lost it?”
Josh asked.

“No!” Tyler said. “It was in the case. Like
always. And then it was gone.”

The only other
explanation...

