



Windy City Publishers

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Excerpt #1

The echo of voices coming down the hall snapped me back to the fake leather chair in the corner of the pale-green hospital room. The noise drew closer and closer, a strange combination of laughter and moaning, of good-natured teasing and occasional shouts of anger.

Twenty years earlier, I had worked my way through college as a nurse's aide in the inpatient unit of a community mental health center, and the sound of inappropriate manic humor, short bursts of anguish from the depressives and wild ramblings of the schizophrenics triggered my old feelings of sympathy, frustration, and hopelessness. The sound was unmistakable; the mental patients were coming back from lunch.

I stepped out into the hallway to see if I could spot Harry. Immediately the din was reduced to a whisper as each patient, in turn, made eye contact with this stranger in the doorway. I tried to smile and nod a silent hello, tried to seem as nonthreatening as possible. Most of them smiled back, but no one spoke.

Then a toothless old man shouted, "Hey!" He was pointing at me. "Hey... hey," he stammered. His eyes were vacant and tired. His face was wrinkled and pale, but there was something familiar about it, like an old photograph of your dead great-grandfather. "Hey, I know you." His eyes opened wide then. "I know you."

"Oh my God," I murmured in disbelief, "it's Harry."

--From Chapter Three, *I Know You*



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Excerpt #2

"...My uncle had spent hundreds of hours in the batting cage with every kid sitting at that soda counter. The fact that we considered Dawson unhittable was more than he could stand.

"I'm not afraid of him," I said finally. It was sort of a lie, I guess. What I really meant was that I wasn't as afraid of Dawson as I was of my uncle Joe. Looking back on it across the years, I think that's the effect he was hoping to have on us.

Baseball, especially for Little Leaguers, is about overcoming your fear of the hard ball. It's not easy to concentrate on your swing with a seventy-mile-an-hour missile coming at you from forty-six feet away.

My cousin Tony left his head down an instant too long. "What's the worst that could happen?" His dad now turned on him. "You get hit with a pitch?"

"So what? So what?" his dad continued raving. "I've got news for you. If you want to play this game you ARE going to get hit." Now he noticed the bag of warm-up balls he had stored behind the counter.

"Here," he shouted grabbing a baseball in his hand and pounding it against Tony's chest. "Here," he screamed again, pounding it against my chest. "Does that hurt?"

"No," we both replied in unison. "Dawson's not going to hit you any harder than that," he shouted. "I guarantee you!" And with that he stormed off to the back of his pharmacy.

We all walked back outside the store and straddled our bikes again. I was rubbing my chest, and then pulled up my jersey to examine the spot where Dawson's simulated "pitch" had hit me. It was blue and red and I could easily make out the stitches of a baseball imprinted on my skin. "Damn it," I said, "your old man's nuts."

--From Chapter Six, *Does That Hurt?*



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Excerpt #3

Suddenly my dad shouted, "There he is!" as his headlights flashed upon a solitary figure on the side of the road. He wore an old, plaid shirt and a worn-out black jacket and carried a walking stick in his left hand. He had no right arm. He had no face.

My dad swung the car to the side of the road, pulled to a stop, and turned off the engine. I looked back at Harry in the back seat. His eyes and mouth were both wide open and I probably looked more terrified than he did. "Are you ready, boys?" my dad asked in a calm, measured voice.

"Are we getting out of the car?" I shrieked in disbelief. "If you're ready," my dad answered.

"I don't think my parents would want me to," Harry stammered, as he turned to look out the back window at the motionless figure in the dark.

"I asked your father," my dad confided. "He said if you want to talk to Ray, you're allowed."

Harry and I exchanged glances. Then he looked my dad straight in the eyes. "Let's go," he said. Three car doors flung open and a man and two soon-to-be men approached the faceless legend.

--From Chapter Eighteen, *Green Man*



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Excerpt #4

...I don't know, Tony," I sighed. "I think we've got it pretty good right now."

"Nope," he answered. "It just gets better from here. It gets better and better every day, and then you die and go to heaven. And that's just the *best* it can get."

"Maybe this is heaven," I offered. "Right now, right here."

"No, you're wrong," Harry stated matter-of-factly. "It gets better, Teddy. It just keeps getting better. We'll be adults someday. That's got to be like, *ten times* better!"

--From Chapter Thirty Four, *Joy on the Home Front*