

Susan and Bruce Wigden

Chapter Two: The Magic in Baseball

Tex Ware
Everett, WA

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Chapter One

"Where are you two off to so early this morning?"

"Today's the first day of tryouts, Mr. Flynn."

"Tryouts?" He asks as he turns the key in his mailbox.

I look at Dad as he says, "Yes, Mr. Flynn. Today is Jake's tryout at the Great Kills Little League on Greaves Avenue."

"Oh, yes. I did read something about that on a flyer at the supermarket. Well, good luck Jake! Before you go, let me take that quarter out of your ear."

Mr. Flynn reaches his right hand over to my left ear, and then he removes a shiny quarter. I notice the quarter always has the same shine on it, so I say, "Mr. Flynn, that's the same quarter you take out of my ear every time I see you."

"That's what you think," he says as he throws some junk mail into the recycle trash bin.

"Glad they keep this next to the mail boxes. All I ever get is junk mail mixed in with bills."

Dad wishes Mr. Flynn a good day, and tells me we had better take off. "Great day," says Dad as he pushes the door open.

I take my first step out from our apartment building and as soon as I am outside, the sun is right in my face. "Hey, it's not a great day. The sun is in my eyes. This can't be good for tryouts, Dad."

"It's fine. You'll be fine."

Dad always says that to me, "It's fine. You'll be fine."

We walk around the building where our car is parked. Dad clicks the door open, and just as I'm ready to get into the car, I notice bird poop on the passenger window.

"Hey Dad, didn't Mom just take the car for a wash?"

"Yeah. Yesterday. Why?"

"Duh, there's more bird poop on this window than there is up the bird's --"

"Alright Jake, I get the point. Don't make an issue, and don't finish that sentence!"

As I enter the car and put my seat belt on, Dad has already turned on his MP3 player.

"Oh, not that again," I say as his music from the 1980's begins.

"What are you talking about? This is the best music ever!"

"Yeah right, Dad. Whatever!"

Just as Dad turns the engine of the car on, I turn my head to the right. "Hey Dad, the poop looks different from the inside."

I can tell he's not paying much attention to me, but he asks, "How so?"

"Uh, I think it looks like a bat." Now that gets his attention.

"Bat. Where?"

He turns his head towards me. "Yeah, it kinda does look like a bat. That must be an omen of some sort."

"Omen. What's that mean?"

Dad lowers the music. That makes me happy.

"An omen is a prophetic sign."

"A what?"

He repeats, "A prophetic sign."

"Yeah," and for the second time, I say, "what's that mean?"

"It's a message of some sort."

"Yeah Dad, that makes a lotta sense, a message written in poop. Here, I'll read it." I make believe I am reading the window, "This window has bird poop."

"Hey wise guy," says Dad, "aren't you the one who just said the —"
I can tell Dad is searching for a word.

"Poop, Dad, poop."

"So ya think it looks like a bat, huh? Well, there's more than one way to read into things. Messages don't always have to be written in words, Jake."

I don't have a clue what he's talking about, and he knows it!

"Jake, this is a message to you. It means you'll be up at bat."

"Dad, you're really out there. The only thing that poop means is Mom wasted her money on that car wash yesterday." This time, both of us understand and we laugh.

"Dad."

"Yeah, Jake. What is it?"

"I stink."

I see Dad's nostrils squeezing together, and then he says, "I don't smell anything."

"Come on," I say, "you know what I mean."

Dad gets serious. "Listen up Jake; baseball is a sport to be enjoyed. All you have to do is give it your best shot. Be a team player. Keep your eye on the ball, and go for it!"

I repeat, "I stink!"

"I don't want to hear you say that again Jake. Do you understand?"

This time I know Dad is serious, because he turns his music off and he just stares at the road ahead. After a few minutes, he speaks. "What concerns you the most?"

"Well, the other guys trying out have been playing ball for a long time now, and they weigh a whole lot more than me. They don't want me to try out because they think it won't be good if I end up on their team."

"What makes you say that, Jake?"

I don't answer right away because I'm feeling like I'm about to cry. Dad says, "Talk to me Jake."

"Well, I heard Josh in my class talking to Alex last week. Josh said his sister, Elyssa, is better up at bat than me. They were laughing."

"Jake, did you say anything?"

"No. I made believe I didn't hear it."

"I understand. But, Jake, if you ever hear anyone say anything like that again, you need to speak up for yourself. Do you understand me?"

"Yeah."

We're almost at the field, when I notice some loose change in a paper coffee cup squeezed in between the passenger and driver's seat. I pick the cup up. It has some left over lipstick marks from Mom's lips on one side. I dump the change from the cup into my lap and start to count the money, "Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, forty-five, fifty, seventy-five –"

Dad interrupts. "Remember when you couldn't count money, Jake?"

I think about it, and then answer. "Not really."

"Good," says Dad.

"Why good?" I ask.

"Someday you won't remember when you weren't good at baseball either."

Dad thinks he's helping me, but he's making me feel worse. I decide to change the subject. "Dad, how does Mr. Flynn's quarter

always stay so shiny? Is there some special stuff he puts on it to keep it that way? Or, do you think it's a new quarter all the time? Maybe he buys the quarters at some magic store."

Dad doesn't answer me, because he's too busy pulling up to a parking space next to the field. "The sun's gone in Jake, if that makes you feel any better."

I don't answer Dad. Instead, I drop the loose change back into the paper coffee cup, and undo my seat belt. For a minute, I stare at the lipstick mark on the paper cup and think about how proud Mom will be if I make the team. I don't think Mom will care if I am good or not, but I know Dad will. Dad opens the locks of the car and it's time for both of us to get out. I'm wishing it would start to rain and the tryouts would be cancelled.

"I hate the way this cup feels, Dad," I say as I move my hand over my pants in an attempt to adjust it.

"You'll be fine, Jake."

I think to myself, *I don't feel fine. I don't look fine.* I stare down at my skinny legs and big feet. Dad interrupts my thoughts. "Good luck, Jake."

We start to walk towards the field. In the distance, I can see Josh and Alex.

"They look like baseball players," I say.

Dad ignores me, but I can tell he's worried by the way he rubs the back of my head, and then he says, "Looks like they've already started cutting the grass on the infield."

I nod, yes, like I care, but really my eyes are on Josh and Alex. I wonder how the heck the calves on their legs look so muscular. We're all the same age, ten, so how could that be? Dad and I are getting closer and closer to the ball field.

"Jake, that man with the clip board must be the manager. I'll introduce you to him."

"No. Don't Dad. I don't want to be introduced."

"It's fine. You'll be fine."

"But, Dad."

Dad isn't giving me a chance to talk. Now he's walking real fast like he's in a hurry or something. I don't have a choice, so I keep up with his fast pace. Before I know it, I'm standing with Dad on the side of the playing field. He's waiting for his turn to talk to the manager. I'm starting to feel like the eggs Mom made for me this morning are in my mouth. I remember once I felt that way at the dentist, and I ended up puking in the bathroom. Some of the puke landed on a purple vase that was on top of the toilet bowl tank. I had to wipe it off with the toilet paper, because the hygienist saw me go into the bathroom. By wiping it, that only forced some more puke out of me, but luckily for me, that time it was a small amount and it went straight into the bowl.

"Dad, is there a bathroom here?"

The man, with whom Dad is waiting to speak, hears me ask for a bathroom.

He looks at me and then speaks. "There's a bathroom, but unless you're wearing some protective gear, I wouldn't go in there unless I really had to."

Dad turns to me and says, "You'll be fine. Wait until we get home." Then Dad extends his hand and introduces us.

"I'm Lee Daniels. This is my son, Jake. He'll be trying out today."

The manager introduces himself. He says his name is Evan Greene.

I'm too busy thinking about the eggs in my mouth to notice who Mr. Greene looks like. The eggs in my mouth are mixed with spit, and that makes it impossible for me to answer when he asks me if I'm ready to try out. I'm about to spit on the ground, when I remember

that Mom stuck a tissue in my right pocket of my jacket. I put my hand inside my pocket and there it is. I take the tissue out and turn away from Dad and Mr. Greene. When I do spit into it, there really are some eggs, but they're also mixed with some other stuff that looks like the sausage pizza from last night's dinner. It feels good to get rid of it. When I lift my head up and turn around, I'm able to see who Mr. Greene looks like.

Oh no! He has to be Josh's dad. And, just as I am thinking that, I see Josh walk up to him and ask him how much longer the tryouts are going to last.

"About another hour," says Mr. Greene to Josh.

"Jake," says Mr. Greene, "this is my son, Josh."

My voice feels weird inside my throat. "We're in the same class, Mr. Greene."

"You can call me Evan," he says. "So you guys are in the same class?"

I look at Dad. His face looks a kind of red color, the kind that happens when he is upset. Dad starts to open his mouth. Now I am afraid he's going to say something to Josh about that comment he made about his sister being better at bat than me.

I wait for what seems like forever until Dad finally speaks. When he does, he says, "Nice to meet you, Josh."

Whew – that's a relief.

"Ready Jake?" asks Mr. Greene.

I nod, yes. Dad and I follow Mr. Greene. Dad mentions that the snack bar looks like it's ready for action, but he doesn't answer Dad.

I think Dad is somewhat nervous himself and is just looking for something to say. I stare at Dad for a minute, hoping he could read my mind. *Don't talk. Don't say another word to Mr. Greene. Just let me do whatever it is I have to, and let's get out of here.*

Dad sits down on the bleachers. At least, he's quieted down. Mr. Greene is chewing gum and his moustache is moving from side to side. Now I'm thinking that his moustache is going to distract me.

Mr. Greene asks, "What position are you trying out for?"

I swallow a little of the leftover puke that's in the back of my throat and answer, "Right field."

"OK," says Mr. Greene. "Run out to right field and be ready to catch some fly balls."

Mr. Greene is now hitting fly balls to the outfielders. Next thing he's telling me is to catch the ball and throw it to the second baseman. Mr. Greene hits a fly ball in my direction. I take two steps to the left and then I quickly run in toward the infield in an attempt to judge the ball. Woe, bad choice! The ball flies directly over my head. I reverse my steps and pick up the ball. I set myself and toss it in the direction of second base. In the background, I hear laughing. When I look up, I see Josh and Alex in the dugout. They are passing a can of soda back and forth to each other. I'm thinking that they look exactly alike, with their short dark hair and matching sweatshirts.

Mr. Greene yells out, "Knock it off guys. Give him a chance."

His comment reminds me of the question Dad asked me in the car, "Do you remember when you couldn't count money?" When I answered, "Not really," Dad figured he'd help by telling me that one day I wouldn't remember when I couldn't play ball. I'm thinking that grownups have a way of trying to make things better, but sometimes they make it worse. I keep hearing the words, "Give him a chance," and now I feel like I am getting sick to my stomach.

"Let's try it again Jakey boy," yells Mr. Greene.

Jakey boy? Oh great! That's just what I need to be called.

Meanwhile, Dad is sitting there in the bleachers. I could see him doing this thing he does. He makes a fist and sort of taps it into his right

thigh. Mom says it's a nervous thing, I think it's a not-going-to-work kind of thing.

Mr. Greene must know that I am nervous. He yells out, "Jakey, how about some gum?"

"No, thanks," I say.

"Take some," he says. "Helps calm ya down."

Great! Now the whole world has to hear that I need to be calmed down.

"OK," I say, and then I jog towards him and he hands over a piece of gum. I reach my hand out and the gum drops to the ground.

I hear Josh say, "He can't even catch the gum."

Mr. Greene walks over to the dugout. "Knock it off, Josh. I told you to give him a chance."

I watch Josh as he buries his face in his sweatshirt, and I know he's still laughing at me.

"Let's try it again, Son."

Now he's calling me Son. I'm not his son, but I know Mr. Greene's trying to be friendly, because he feels bad for me. "Go back to your position and we'll try it again."

"Yeah." I run out to right field again and position myself in a crouched stance, ready to catch a batted ball.

Mr. Greene says, "I'm going to hit you a line drive. Play it on a bounce and hit the cutoff man who will throw to third base."

I call out, "I'm ready," hoping that this time I will make a good play. I see the ball hit on a line. It bounces in front of me. I get myself in position. *Oh no*, the ball goes through my legs. I chase the ball down and pick it up off the grass. I turn my body toward the second baseman who is in perfect position to take the relay throw. I bring my arm back and throw the ball as hard as I can – right over his head.