

matters familiar



e. g. fabricant

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ISBN: 0615727042
ISBN-13: 9780615727042

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011917205

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Cover designed by E. G. Fabricant

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Printed in the United States of America

DEDICATION

For Frank and Betty, for the gifts of life and love—theirs,
mine, and ours—and
For M. A.; BeeEss; Tomiss; Jerome; J. L.; Fuffy; and The
Brat, for helping me fill in the blanks.

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5 Intentional Walk



*“Won't you be my luh-ver (yeah)/
I'll treat you ri-ight (uh)/
I know you hear your friends when they say you
might...”*

The nascent 16-year-olds rocked and bumped hips under the earnest, two-dimensional eyes of their favorite boy-band, crooning along into their hair-brushes.

“LeLe!” her mother cried from below. “Turn that racket down!”

They froze and eyed each other. “Uh-oh—Busted!” They embraced in mock terror and collapsed onto LeLe’s bed in peals of laughter.

“You two are supposed to be studying!”

LeLe rolled her eyes. “Yesssssss, Mu-THER.” On reflex, she reclaimed an abandoned book, browsed, and listened for disengagement. “So, Tif; you ready to crank it tomorrow?”

Her best friend in the 10th grade world and

starting pitcher for the Scottsdale Copperheads made a face. “Whatever—regionals and all. At least we’re at home; travel-ball so, like, totally *sucks*.”

This took the shortstop/leadoff hitter by surprise. “It’s all still fun, right?”

“Oh, yeah.” Tiffany waved the concern away like a minor odor. “*Playing* is so *cool*. When the hitter’s dug in, you’re all down behind me, and Tonya’s glove goes up, it’s like I’m in charge of this big, powerful *machine*. Everyone is tense, straining, and nothing happens until I make it. I kick to the plate—*BOOM!*” She slapped her hands together, startling LeLe a little. “Everything, something, or nothing. Then I do it again!”

“Yeah, grrrrr!” They clasped hands, holding it just long enough to allow the sensation to course through them both. Tiffany’s soaring eyes returned to earth. “It’s all the other stuff I can do without.”

“Like?”

“Drills. Camps. Videos. Special coaching. The rants. ‘Trophy, Tiffany.’ ‘Scholarship, Tiffany.’ ‘The Olympics, Tiffany.’ It’s not bad enough that we play half the year...” She drifted away, lost in her laced fingers.

LeLe bounced into her, trapping her thick, blond French braid against her neck inside the crook of her elbow. “Hey—we’re 15. What *else* are we gonna do?”

Evil Tiffany rolled her eyes up to meet LeLe’s. “Boys?”

They tumbled backward, smothering giggles and kicking their feet. Again, quiet descended. Tiffany stared at the ceiling. “What if I’m not that *good*? I mean, like they all want? What then?”

LeLe took her hand firmly. “My Dad has this favorite Zen saying: ‘Wherever you are, be there.’”

Tiffany smirked. “That’s deep, Le. What in Hell

does that mean?"

"It means, you're spending all of today worrying about tomorrow. You've got the ball *now*. Live in that as long as you can before you have to find something else. Softball ends—for all of us."

Tiffany was pensive. "Do Buddhists play ball?"

"No, but Christians do." LeLe jerked Tiffany toward the computer. "We'd better check Arnie's web site. You *know* there'll be a quiz in the dugout." They logged on, bringing up "Arnold Jeffries' First Calvary Chevrolet—Proud Sponsor of the Scottsdale Copperheads," and clicked on "Today's Inspiration." They read, aloud:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?

The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid?

When evildoers come at me to devour my flesh,

My foes and my enemies themselves stumble and fall.

--PSALMS 27:2

Tiffany screwed up her face. "I wonder if he has a clue what a goober we all think he is."

"Dunno." LeLe chewed a thumbnail. "Four sets of uniforms for us, and the 14Us and 12Us, plus equipment and fees. That's got to run into serious money."

"Yeah, but it's not like he *owns* us. And why do we get the same Old Testament 'vanquish mine enemies' rap all the time?" Tiffany was up again, hands on hips. "Jesus is about love and forgiveness, right? What do fear and hatred have to do with competition, anyway?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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