

Josey Bartlett

Art Leo

English 11

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No Tears

“Hey pretty baby, aren’t the stat girls suppose to stay in the dugout?” the catcher taunts as his roving eyes look me up and down. He continues, only confirming my preconceived stereotype of male high school baseball players, “The softball field is over there, babe. I’m going to squat behind you so I can watch you swing.”

“Wow, like totally, I would, like, love it if you would, like, look at my butt... it’s what I’ve always wanted!” I retort in a high-pitched mock valley girl tone that perfectly fits his stereotype of me. I drop the persona, then turn and shoot him an icy glare.

On this particular day, we’re playing on Catlin Gabel’s beautiful home field. The grass is thick and green and one of our few achingly blue cloudless days arches overhead. I love wearing our white home uniforms with the royal blue piping and can endure the too-tight batting helmet that threatens to squeeze my brain out through my nostrils and ears. But this game will be like any other game, regardless of the place, the weather, or the uniforms worn by the players.

Every time I step over the chalk line of the batter’s box, I know the outcome five steps before it occurs. Step one: the pitcher over-exaggeratedly winks at me so his buddies can see. Step two: he saunters up to the rubber and methodically tears at the lava red dirt with his cleat, like a charging bull. Step three: the catcher’s bony finger stretches between his armored legs, as he signals to the man on the mound. Step four: the methodical windup begins. Step five: I prepare to take one for the team.

The ball launches towards home. Blue-sky, white ball. I contort my body, hoping for the least possible contact, but then I hear the smack, a ringing in my ears, the yelling of my furious teammates, and then the gruff voice of the umpire: “Hit by pitch--take your base.”

The impact of the pitch has shoved me roughly to the ground like a rookie shopper at a Nordstrom sale. I can gauge how much the new pain will hurt by just registering the degree of hush that falls over the shocked crowd, but I’m not surprised. The crowd’s response prevents me from really feeling. I must put up the same emotional shield that is expected from any boy. No tears.

The grains of Oregon dirt crunch in my mouth, leaving a copper penny taste. Pulling down my bright blue stirrup, I watch my heart beat in the purple flesh that bulges from my shin. The imprint of baseball seams emerges like a Magic Eight Ball fortune. From the ground my eyes focus on the tangible results of chauvinism and I think: isn’t it ironic that when a boy steps up to bat, the ball zooms precisely across the plate, but when the opposing pitchers see me, the ball becomes this pain-inducing heat-seeking missile hurtling towards my body?

The pitcher’s ashamed face gives him away like a little boy who ate dessert before dinner. I imagine that before the game he listened to his friends discuss the differences between our genitalia and he believed their preconceived notions of what girls should and should not do. But his friends don’t feel the regret now. His friends didn’t let go of the ball. The pitchers end up the same way, suddenly realizing that pegging me will not secure their macho status.

Unfortunately for me, they arrive at this epiphany only after they’ve plunked me. And their late awareness won’t prevent the bruising that marks much of my body.

I jump up, slowly brush my hand over the swelling in my leg, tighten my ponytail, and jog to first base. I’m going to steal second.