

DON. All you gotta do is believe it. Come on, Mikey, are you the boss?

MICHAEL. Okay.

DON. That's the spirit! Listen to this goddamn thing. You can tell the guy's a prick just from the ring. I do this for you. (*DON smashes the bat down on the ringing phone. It stops ringing.*)

MICHAEL. You did it.

DON. Oh, yeah. Not the first time, either.

MICHAEL. Thanks, Don.

DON. Hey, no sweat. It had to be done.

MICHAEL. You know what? I feel good. I feel very good. I stood up to him. With your help, of course. (*To the smashed phone.*) Take that, Roger! I'm the boss today! You...prick!

DON. Feels good to take charge of your life, doesn't it?

MICHAEL. Yes, it does. I've got to start doing more of that. I feel really good. I think I'd feel even better if it wasn't my mother calling.

DON. You knew it was your mother? Why didn't you tell me?

MICHAEL. Because then you wouldn't have smashed my phone. Now we can concentrate on baseball. (*Yells.*) Ready position, Timor! Timor! (*MICHAEL demonstrates "ready position."*) Talk it up out there! I can't hear you! Philip, you've got to tie those shoelaces! That's why you tripped! (*To DON.*) Shoelaces have been a team problem all season.

DON. It's a problem every season.

MICHAEL. I don't know what they have against double knots! It's shameful!

DON. Easy, Mike. Stay in the game. (*They anxiously watch the game.*)

MICHAEL. Don?

DON. Yes, Mike?

MICHAEL. I think I'm going to make that clicking sound you hate.

DON. Oh, man. Do you have to?

MICHAEL. Yes, I do.

DON. I'm not happy about it. But click away. (*DON silently endures MICHAEL's clicking sound.*) Hey, you know who's looking good?

MICHAEL. Eric? He's playing the game of his life.

DON (*nods to bleachers*). Mrs. Timmy. Same blouse she wore to Parents' Night. Plus, she smiled at me. I should take a run at her now that I'm living in my van.

MICHAEL. Yeah, women can't resist that.

DON. What...you don't think she'd go out with me?

MICHAEL. Actually, Don, I kind of made a date with her.

DON. You? With Mrs. Timmy?

MICHAEL. Carolyn.

DON. Oh, Carolyn. Must be serious if you know her name. (*Beat.*) That's good, Mike. I've been very worried about you, the way you come across like such a nothing sometimes, but this is excellent. I'm very happy for you.

MICHAEL. Is it really okay, Don? Because the two of you did spend time in her Subaru.

DON. And you know what happened? Nothing. I just couldn't. MICHAEL. Huh.

DON (*jumps up*). Great play, Eric! Major league caliber! (*Yells to one of the parents watching.*) Hey, why don't you tell your son he made a great play, huh? (*Beat.*) Come on, you're louder than that whenever he screws

up! I don't think he heard you! I want to hear you say, "Great play, Eric!" (Beat.) This is my business, pal! And I'd be glad to discuss it with you in the parking lot, you dumb dirtbag son of a bitch! (DON starts for Eric's dad and MICHAEL pulls him back to the bench.)

MICHAEL. I need you here, Don. He's not worth it. (To team in field.) Timor! You'd have stopped it if you were in ready position! (To DON.) How many millions of times have we told him that? (To the team.) Two outs, play at any base! Bear down and get this out! (Watching the action.) Oh, no.

DON (watching the action). Boy oh boy. He clocked it. (Looking toward right field, calls.) You got it, Frankie, it's all yours!

MICHAEL. Dear God, please let him catch this ball. Just this once, let him know what it feels like to have the ball stay in his glove and not go bouncing past so he chases it in a mad terror with everyone screaming and when he finally finds it he has no idea what to do. We've done that. Many times. Let him catch this ball. Let him have this one memory for the rest of his life, that summer afternoon when the ball fell into his glove and stayed there. And let him jog back to the bench smiling in spite of himself, getting pats on the back from his teammates, still clutching the ball that didn't get away. He's never had that and he may never have the chance again. Check your stats, God, he's twelve years old, his first and last year of Little League, no team for my boy next year. So this is it. Now, God, if you're really there—and for the purposes of right now, I'm assuming you are—this is a pretty small request. Last year I asked you to let my wife live, and yes, that was a big one and I know you had

your reasons for what happened, which I try to respect although I will never understand. But this should be a no-brainer. The bases are loaded, the score is tied, it's the fifth inning, Frankie has already struck out three times plus a ball got past him in right field and went all the way to the fence—a bad hop, not his fault, just one more example of your peculiar sense of humor which has caused so much hilarity through the ages. I guess what I'm trying to tell you is this: I need to feel hope. I want to believe there's a purpose to all this. That somewhere there's some meaning to the dropped fly balls and the endless hours in the hospital waiting room and the daily dread of getting out of bed. I don't need much, but I need something—a hint, a sign, a quick "thumbs-up" from the Home Office. Just once, I need this boy to catch the ball. Please.

DON. Nice catch, Frankie!

MICHAEL (to God). Thank you.

DON. Frankie's doing a helluva job handling the high-fives for a first-timer. They can be rough.

MICHAEL. It's the chest-bumps I'm concerned with—(Yells.) It's okay, Frankie, pick yourself up, you're okay! (DON is coaching first base.)

DON (yells). Top of the sixth, boys, last chance! (To the runner.) This is a big run, Philip! If Timmy hits it, you just keep running! Coach Mike is at third base, he'll tell you what to do! (Beat.) Go, Philip! Go! It's going all the way to the fence! Look at Coach Mike! (MICHAEL is coaching third base.)

MICHAEL. You can do it, Philip! I know you can do it!

DON. Don't watch the ball! Just run run run! (MICHAEL waves Philip around to score.)

MICHAEL. Hurry, Philip!

DON. Go, Philip!

MICHAEL. I mean, go! Don't slow down when you're rounding third! You can make it, all the way home! Go, Philip, go!

DON. Go! Go! Go!

MICHAEL. For God sakes, go! (*MICHAEL and DON watch, full of hope. The game is over. MICHAEL goes over to address the team.*) I am so proud of you guys. You played the game of your lives. I hope you never forget this season. I know I won't. Now go shake hands with the other team. We've got some great snacks, Linda's famous homemade health bars! (*MICHAEL and DON sit on the bench.*) I guess I shouldn't have sent Philip home. DON. He would have made it easy if he didn't trip.

MICHAEL. All season long he was so resistant to double-knotting. I don't know why.

DON. Hey, did you see what happened after Philip was out? He went to the end of the bench and just sat there all alone. And then Timor went over and sat with him and then Eric went over and sat with him and then Frankie.

MICHAEL. I didn't even notice. What did they say? DON. They didn't say anything. They didn't have to say anything. They were just there.

MICHAEL. They were all there, rooting for each other, the whole game. And nobody cried.

DON. They were a team.

MICHAEL. I love our team.

DON. I love our team too. And what about Frankie's catch?

MICHAEL. Oh, he had it all the way.

DON. Still, it was an important catch. If he hadn't made that catch we'd have lost by more than five runs.

MICHAEL. So, are you around town next week, Don?

DON. Yeah, if I can find a good parking place. Otherwise I'll have to put the van out at the gravel pit. Why?

MICHAEL. I'll call you.

DON. Why?

MICHAEL. We could maybe get together or something.

DON. Why?

MICHAEL. You know, hang out. Get a pizza. Whatever it is people do when they get together.

DON. I'm going to say something here, Mike.

MICHAEL. Okay.

DON. There's really no reason to get together.

MICHAEL. No?

DON. See, I don't really consider you a friend. And I think if you're honest with yourself, you'll find that you don't really consider me a friend, either.

MICHAEL. Yes I do! Of course I do! Why do you think I don't?

DON. Mike, please. I'm asking something from you. I'm asking you to be honest. That's a hard thing.

MICHAEL. So I shouldn't call you?

DON. I just don't know why you would. We had some good times out here coaching but the season's over.

MICHAEL. I really thought we were starting to become friends.

DON. I thought Tony was my friend. See, Mike, there comes a time for every man who lives in his van when he wants to know the truth. And the truth is, you and I could never be friends. And yes, I'll say "Hello, Mike," if I see you at the Food Emporium, but that's really no different than if I stopped to pat my neighbor's dog.

MICHAEL. To tell you the truth, there were many times I dreaded coming to the field because it meant seeing you.