

MICHAEL CB SIDE

68

ROUNDING THIRD

Act II

up. I don't think he heard you! I want to hear you say "Great play, Eric!" *(Beat.)* This is my business partner! 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.)* Terror! 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 any base! Bear down and get this out! *(Watching the action.)* Oh, no.

DON *(watching the action)*. Boy oh boy. He blocked 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

START

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. (to Michael.)~~
 MICHAEL *(to God)*. Thank you.

END

~~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! Catch Mike's 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!~~