

# Enzo Januzzi Scores A Double Header

David R. Beatty

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While the places and events described in this novella are based upon real ones, the characters are entirely fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or deceased, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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**A note on the Melungeon dialect:** Unusual terms, phrases, and phonetical spellings used for the character Josepha Collins are derived from a glossary of terminology in *North From the Mountains: A Folk History of the Carmel Melungeon Settlement, Highland County, Ohio* by John S. Kessler and Donald B. Ball (Mercer University Press, 2001).

"Kiss the snake"  
my sister whispered  
in the middle of a writhing dream.

"Yes" I implied with closed eyes  
as ripples moved from vapor to viper  
and forked tongue flicked willing lips.

- Enzo Januzzi 1978

## Chapter 1: Mah Number

"But mah Pop, he'us twenty-two when he played hyer" argues Jo reverting to her home dialect.

"The best player always gets the Mick's lucky number" counters Coach Jim Quintana reaching over to pat her on the bottom.

---

We were passing out uniforms after the first spring practice. The women had been frisky as they hit the lime green expanse and tart smell of newly cut grass.

"If wood's good enough for the bigs, it's good enough for girls" Coach Q had announced when Catherine Kent arrived with one of the new aluminum bats.

These were the first words of the new Gibson-Henry College women's softball coach.

The previous season they had been a club team organized by juniors VeRonica Leskuski and Josepha Collins. After winning the all-Richmond club tournament, Ronki and Jo had lobbied the Dean for school backing. He had stalled by pointing out all the permissions and costs, only assenting to bring it to the Board of Governors when the new school President arrived with two teen-aged softball playing daughters.

Coach Q had let me pick the rest of the numbers, saving seven for Jo and seventy-seven for himself. I mostly deferred to the strong willed women, serving only thirteen to MG since she didn't know what to pick as an exchange student new to softball. She had played boules in southern France and that bocce-like game using metal balls didn't have uniforms, much less unlucky numbers.

Being scorekeeper for a college women's team had certain advantages and disadvantages for a, shall we say, "big" guy. The players ignored him in the equipment room of the Old Gym, a stately brick building built in 1887. They also forgot that guy on Saturday nights in the not so stately motel dorms and fraternity houses that made up the

Gibby-Hank social scene of the late 1970s.

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"Hey coach, how about a hit of that chaw?" asks Jo stalling for time and dodging his pat with her jet curls bouncing.

"We don't want any hair on that pretty little chest, now do we?" he laughs, running long fingers through his thin black comb-over.

"Not iff'n I git mah number" she bargains, eyebrows raised and chestnut eyes flashing as she leans on the door frame.

"Does it have to be one or the other?" he grins stepping behind his desk and spitting into an extra large McDonald's cup.

Jo storms out of the office stripping off the new white Izod Lacoste polo with a big number seven on the back and heading for the exit in her sports bra.

"Wait, try this on for size" I call tossing her the only remaining jersey.

"We're meetin in mah room after larnin so fetch a poke a that tobacco" she smiles, pulling on number seventy-seven as she bumps open the door.

The soft "who coo, who, coo, who" of a mourning dove floats in on the orange of a spring sunset, briefly illuminating Jo's ruddy skin before the oak door slams shut.



## Chapter 2: Suicide Squeeze

"Was that ear-arm-nose-brim?" whispers Ronki after calling time-out and meeting Coach Q halfway up the third base line.

"Nose after arm means bunt, Einstein" he hisses with hands cupping his mouth to muffle the code. "Now get that bat on the ball because Reid's heading home on the next pitch."

"Suicide squeeze?" questions Jo from the bench. "The feller don't even know thar's no stealin until she throws it in softball."

"Yeah and we need both those runs to beat the frickin' Woman's College" adds Toni Valenti from the on deck circle.

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The two Gibson-Henrys had been sibling schools when birthed by Methodists before the Civil War. The happy family was separated in the 1930s by a nasty divorce from the church in order to qualify for Carnegie Foundation funding. Admission of women to the men's college in the early seventies ended any semblance of civility between Magnolia and Lynchburg, especially for the competing female sports teams.

The night before the first game I had scarfed a bag of chewing tobacco from Q's office while finishing the team laundry in the Old Gym.

"Hey big guy" startled me as I snuck across the fountain plaza toward Alma Wood dormitory.

"MG, I nearly stained my shorts" I gasped. "What are you doing in there?"

"Mon nom de famille, c'est La Mer après tout!"

"Speaking of names, why MG if you're Marie-Josee?"

"Silly man, J sounds like G in French" she laughed stepping out of the fountain with water streaming down her long legs. "Hé, c'est une anguille ici!"

"The American eel is a catadromous fish born in the Sargasso Sea but living in rivers before returning to salt water to breed" I blurted, reverting to facts in the face of those pretty legs.

"PEENT...PEENT" from overhead made us both jump. I was about to toss the bag and run when we caught a glimpse of a night hawk darting through the dome of light from the fountain's lamp post.

"Are you going to Jo's?" I asked, recovering enough to salvage the encounter.

The side door to the old three-story brick building was propped open by a wad of paper in the latch. I was about to knock on her carved oak door when it was thrown open to reveal half the team lying around in various stages of nightclothes.

"Hey big feller, d'ya git the goods?" she shouted before reaching over to turn down the turntable volume.

"Virginia's finest" I replied handing over the pouch and sitting back against the heavy door.

Jo took one look at the bag and leapt up, slamming it down into the trash can as she kneed me aside and stormed out.

"What crawled up her and is eating it's way out?" laughed Toni crab-walking over to the can with her squat frame hidden in flannel pajama pants, her thick red hair spilling over the shoulders of an oversized KISS t-shirt.

"I'll find out" offered Ronki, her smooth face creased with a furrowed brow as she lithely stepped over our legs in her blue jean cut-offs and headed down the hall. "You guys go right on ahead."

"Here's to the new coach" toasted Toni, pulling open the foil top and holding up the pouch for MG.

"One does this in the mouth?" asked our French relief pitcher taking a big whiff and staring down into the moist leaves with amusement in her emerald green eyes.

"Jest a pinch between yer cheek and gum" drawled Shawna Drachman imitating a TV commercial as she tossed her long blond locks out of her lean face. "Then you suck and spit."

"So Januzzi, I've got an important question for you" Toni said before squirting a stream of brown juice into a ceramic Homer Laughlin mug someone had lifted from the cafeteria. "On a hot summer night would you offer your throat to the wolf with the red roses?"

"Will he offer me his mouth?" I dutifully replied with the second line of a song from the new Meatloaf album.

"Seriously Zo, what do you think of the Q Ball?"

"This rookie fireballer led Tidewater with 107 K's and is vying for a spot in the bullpen" I replied, repeating the back of his 1965 New York Mets baseball card. "Too bad he blew out his shoulder before ever getting into a game at Shea Stadium."

"I betcha the bastard didn't have to shave his legs before games?" lamented Shawna. "Those skirts you guys gave us suck the big one."

"You wax, no?" asked MG incredulously.

The girls laughed their way down to the basement bathroom for a French lesson, leaving me alone in Jo's room. I stood up to leave and was hit by a wave of nausea and dizziness as the nicotine reached my central nervous system.

"How the hell do they play on this stuff?" I mumbled as I stumbled back to my dorm room.

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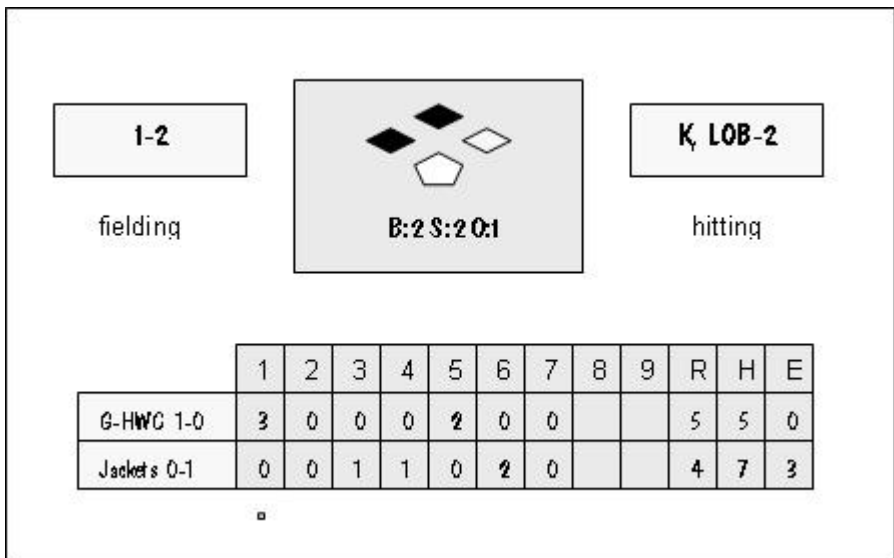
Ronki steps back into the batter's box with runners on second and third base and assumes the hitting position with her left hip toward the mound and the bat held up and back as if ready to swing. We're down one run with runners on second and third base and one out in the bottom half of the seventh and last inning. The Woman's College pitcher steps back into her windup and slings her body forward. Just as the ball leaves her fingertips Sue Reid takes off from third toward home.

Ronki jumps around to face the pitch. It's heading for her face so she ducks and reaches the bat up to tap the ball. She misses and it slaps into the catcher's mitt.

"Strike three" calls the home plate umpire.

Sue leaps into a hook slide on the inside of the leffield foul line. The catcher dives to reach her big mitt across the corner of the plate. Sue skids past on her left side, her right hand brushing across the glove before skimming the plate.

"You're out" yells the ump and our first game is our first loss.



## Chapter 3: Bean Ball

"All right ladies, the first three Bridgewater batters need to get hit" Coach Q whispers to the women lined up on the wooden bench of the makeshift dugout in a corner of Dusk Field. "That'll send a message to last year's Old Dominion Athletic Conference champs."

"Just nail em?" squeaks our pitcher Shawna Drachman, her blue eyes darting over to Jo before staring off to the motel dorms.

"What worked for my coach'll work for us" he counters while plugging a wad into his cheek.



After the tough loss on a failed suicide squeeze to Gibson-Henry Woman's College, Coach Q had lined up the girls along the brick wall of the Old Gym and fired overhand fastballs at their chests for bunt practice.

"C'mon Ronki, stay in there and let the ball hit the bat, you've got all the chest protection you need" he mocked when she leaned back and popped one up for what would have been a sure out. "Now go to the back of the line."

"Atta girl, Valenti" he grinned when our leftfielder dropped one down, "shower time for you."

"No go chickenshit" he chided when Jo laid down a perfect bunt. "Do it without bailing next time."

I saw her dark eyes flash and her arms tense to throw the bat but she managed to pull back before stomping over to the back of the line. Only one other player got her bunt down without backing away before it was MG's turn.

"Now we'll see if the French are really yellow" he laughed, heaving one right at her.

She turned to face the ball, sliding her right hand up the bat and laying it down across her chest. The ball hit the side of her hand with a crack and bounced down for a perfect bunt.

"That's the way ya do it, there's nothin to it" he sang while doing a little dance.

The harsh "jeaah, jeaah" of a blue jay from behind the white blossoms of a nearby dogwood accompanied MG as she walked off stooped and cradling her swelling hand.

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"Casey Stengel telled them Met pitchers to hit the first three?" asks Jo breaking the silence on the bench before the game.

"Nah, just an occasional bean ball to keep 'em honest but just think what three in a row'll do to their heads" Q grins.

Jo looks the bench up and down while kicking up the dirt at her feet.

"I declare, mah cousin Huldie Gibson's uncle Bob was the awneriest pitcher'n baseball and he never's tryin to hit a batter."

She stands up slowly and then jogs out to centerfield with the rest of the team following to their positions.

"Hey, where'd she get that number?" Q sputters, doing a double-take before realizing Jo had used black tape to turn seventy-seven into twenty-two.

"Here comes the first pitch" I point out, saved from an explanation by the start of the game.

Shawna places her left foot on the corner of the pitching rubber and eyes the catcher's mitt on the inside corner slightly behind the lefty lead-off batter. She steps back with her right leg and explodes toward the plate, launching her blond locks along with her hips and left arm

toward the plate. The hitter squares to bunt and is nailed in the gut by the fastball. A gasp erupts from the Bridgewater bench as she doubles over with a grimace before standing up and trotting to first.

"C'mon Shawna, put it where you want it" Q calls, pretending to encourage her to throw strikes.

The number two hitter steps into the rear of the right-handed batter's box as far away from the mound as she can get. Shawna shifts her grip, rears her lean body back, and delivers a spinning curveball that plunks the batter on the thigh as she steps into the pitch. She throws down her bat and walks down to first base glaring out at the mound. Their coach runs in from the third base coach's box to complain to the home plate umpire. Coach Q trudges out to the pitcher's mound with hands jammed into his jacket pockets, hopping over the foul line and spewing a stream of brown-flecked tobacco juice before placing both hands on Shawna's shoulders.

"Everything all right?" he calls out before leaning in and whispering "Two down, one to go."

She twists away from his grasp and steps up onto the mound as he skips back over the line and sits on the bench.

There are runners on first and second base with no outs as their big third batter steps into the box, digs in with her cleats, pounds the plate with an aluminum bat, and drops into a slight crouch staring out at Shawna's left hand.

"Ca-ha-ha" laughs a big black bird perched on the top rail of the football bleachers poking out into right centerfield.

"Shawna, Shawna are you ready?" sings Jo from out in centerfield.

"Shawna, Shawna are you ready?" the rest of the fielders respond.

"Ready" she sighs.

"Boogie woogie up and boogie down" Jo continues.

"Boogie woogie up and boogie down" the girls all repeat.

"What the fuck?" Q mumbles from the bench.

A small smile spreads up Shawna's face as she winds up and delivers the next pitch over the backstop for ball one.

"All right pitch, settle down" calls the umpire as he steps out and tosses her a new ball.

That little smile remains at the edges of her pursed lips as Shawna's second pitch bounces in the dirt and skips past our catcher Cat Kent. The runners move to second and third base on the passed ball and the pitch count advances to a hitter's count, two balls and no strikes for their best hitter. Shawna steps lightly toward home and lobs a chest high grapefruit right over the outside corner of the plate. Out in centerfield Jo sees the batter cock her arms and starts moving left as the bat uncoils to send a high line drive screaming toward right centerfield. Number twenty-two takes off toward the ball's trajectory but has to pull up at the edge of the bleachers. The base runners see the ball still rising and take off for home. Then the big black bird flaps up from the rail and is plunked. Both ball and bird drop like ripe apples in an autumn wind, and Jo basket catches the bird in her big Rawlings glove as she stabs the ball with her bare hand. The base umpire raises his right arm for the out signal as Jo sets down the crow under the first row of seats, leaps around, and fires a rope to Ronki standing on second base, just beating the runner scampering back for the second out.

Coach Q leans forward, spits into the dirt, and plops back onto the bench.





## Chapter 4: Grand Slam

"You wanna cheer, cheer this" calls Coach Q, chanting a work song down the aisle of the bus to Mary Washington College.

A groan arises from the long green bench at the back where Toni, Shawna, and Cat Kent are sprawled.

"Ah reckon not" mouths Jo two rows ahead and kneeling up on her seat to look back.



After practice on the evening before the trip I had entered the cafeteria door and quickly turned left into the line of students waiting for trays, trying to ignore the stares of half the campus already seated in the big front room. After loading up with some nondescript balls of meat, half a dozen corn fritters, and a mess of collards spiked with bacon, I wandered around looking for a friendly face, finally spying the softballers in the back room.

"Yo Zo, no appetite after a hard practice?" laughed Toni as she kicked out a chair.

"Who can resist Miss Shack's meatlump?" I answered, joining the softballers at the corner table.

"Best goddamned meatlump in the whole goddamned south" she quipped. "So what's with Jo?"

"She doesn't like Coach Q's chew" answered VeRonkica.

"What's wrong with a little Red Man?" Toni wondered.

"I like mine big is what's wrong, like that one over at the KA table" joked Shawna. "Hey Januzzi, go see if he's going to Happy Hour tonight."

"What's up, big man?" greeted the tall red-haired guy reaching out his hand. "Seth Calhoun the fifth but call me Quinn."

"Enzo Januzzi" I replied, returning the handshake as he gave my wrist a couple of taps with his fingertips.

"Nuzzi's a region in the Italian piedmont" piped a squat guy sitting next to Quinn.

"That's Burkhardt" Quinn explained, "the resident professor of Kappa Alpha Order."

"Burkhardt's also a town on the west bank of the Rhine" I ventured, recalling a map of the Nazi homeland defenses from my European history class.

"Aren't you two the intellectual pair" laughed Quinn. "Hey, are you coming to our oyster roast on Saturday night?"

"Sounds cool but that blond chick over there's wondering if you're going to Cousins tonight."

"I'm there" he smiled, glancing over at Shawna who pretended not to notice.

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"All my life I wanted to be a Jacket" groans Ronki from shortstop during fielding warm-ups, repeating Coach Q's chant as he hit a fungo grounder on the Mary Wash infield.

"Work hard, work hard" repeats the rest of the team.

"All mah life I wanna be a Jacket" Jo shouts from out in centerfield while basket catching Q's high fly ball.

"Work hard, work hard."

"All my life I want to wear a jacket" sings MG, waving her casted hand from over on the bench.

"Work hard, work hard."

"Sat on the can and ended up a Jacket" squeaks Toni in a high pitched voice from out in left field.

"Work hard, work hard" they all chant as Q hits one way over Toni's head and she waddles after it.

"Asked for a loaf and only got a baguette" snorts Cat behind the plate as the relay throw comes in from Ronki.

"Work hard, work hard."

"Keep singing this and put me in a jacket" moans Shawna, charging in from the mound to field an imitation bunt.

"OK ladies, let's get this show on the road" interrupts the home plate umpire walking up to begin the game.

"Take un and pass it on" calls Jo from the other end of the bench, cracking open a pack of Big Red chewing gum as we lead off in the top of the first inning. "Tis better'n his pizen."

"We'll need it against that chick" nods Ronki toward the mound, ripping off the foil and popping a spicy stick into her mouth as she steps up to the plate.

The first pitch is a hard fastball in on her hands from the tall Mary Washington pitcher. Ronki drops the bat at the last second and lays down a drag bunt along the third base line. She tears down the base path and beats the throw to first by a step.

"There you go, Leskuski" calls Coach Q from the third base coach's box. "Now c'mon Toni, bring her around."

She watches two high fastballs to bring the count to no balls and two strikes. The next pitch is another high and hard one which she manages to tap into right field for a bloop single.

Next up is Jo who faces down their pitcher with three foul tips.

"F-O-U-L, foul ball, foul ball" cheers the bench, each syllable shouted by a different player as Q scowls.


Jo manages to tip three more sliders before finally watching one pass outside the strike zone for ball four and a walk.

The bases are loaded with no outs as big Cat Kent steps into the batter's box. She assumes the hitting position and chomps down on her Big Red, dirty-blond curls spilling out of her black batting helmet. The pitcher unleashes a low fastball over the inside corner of the plate. Cat lunges into it with a huge golf swing, swatting a towering fly over the leftfielder's head. The ball bounces the length of the unfenced outfield as Cat lumbers around second base.

"Cat Kent, we miss you, we really really miss you, please come home, please come home" sings the bench.

Coach Q holds out his hands for her to stop at third base but she runs right past and keeps chugging toward home.

"What's in that Big Red?" mutters Q as Cat high-fives Jo, Toni, and Ronki lined up at home plate to celebrate her grand slam.

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## Chapter 5: Triple Play

"I'll tell you what Dodger great Duke Snider told us at spring training in 1963" Coach Q announced before the girls took the field in the bottom of the seventh inning at Washington & Lee. "Never give up and you'll be a winner."

"Them lawyer chicks is goin down" Jo added, cracking open another pack of Big Red and tossing two to Shawna as she walked out to the mound of the groomed intramural field on a back hillside of the Lexington campus.

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The night before the game I had gathered up Shawna down at the motel dorms and Jo and MG in Alma Wood before heading over to the KA oyster roast. A ragged lineup of would-be fraternity pledges were in the dormitory courtyard singing at the top of their lungs:

In eighteen-hundred and sixty-five at Washington and Lee  
there was a band of soldier boys as brave as they could be.  
They'd fought with Lee and Jackson  
from the mountains to the bay  
and when the war was over  
they founded old KA."

"We have no chapters in the North nor any in Japan.  
We have no need for chapters in any foreign land.  
We'll live and die in Dixie  
so give a rebel yell  
and if you don't believe it  
you can simply go to hell!

Before the song was even over Jo was backing away toward Alma Wood.

"Quelle horreur" laughed MG hooking one of Jo's elbows.

Shawna took the other and we paraded her around the back of New Dorm and down the driveway to the front of the oldest building on campus. The antebellum fieldstone fraternity house along the railroad tracks dated back to the College's 1868 move from Danville in the middle of Virginia's Albemarle country to a hotel resort in the woods west of Richmond.

"Who cooks for you, who cooks for you too" echoed down from a barred owl up in an old oak, spurring us onto the brick porch between two white columns where Burkhardt tended a half barrel turned up onto a log stand.

"Can you say aphrodisiac?" he asked, deftly prying open a dozen of the misshapen green shells, giving them a quick lemon squeeze, and passing the plate to Jo.

"Ah reckon" she laughed, slurping down a salty mollusk and passing them on.

The girls polished off the plate as I waded across the crowded dance floor clutching four plastic cups sloshing Old Milwaukee onto the worn floorboards.

"This band really rocks" Shawna shouted as we squeezed into a back corner of the room.

"Roadstar" called Quinn reaching down a hand and pulling her up to join a dozen others bouncing on an old wooden table.

Before long Shawna had pulled up Jo, and Burkhardt appeared beside Quinn.

"So, where ya from?" Quinn mouthed, staring down into Shawna's blue eyes.

"Toity toid stweet where da boids sit on da coib eaten doity woims" she yelled back, clutching him around the waist and leaning into his tall body as his ribs chuckled at her affected New York accent.

"How about your pretty friend?" he whispered into her ear, nodding over at Jo.

"Philippi in West By-God Virginia" Shawna called out just as a song ended.

"There's a Melungeon community on Chestnut Ridge above Philippi" boomed Burkhardt as the applause died down.

"The malangu were Angolan men brought into Jamestown before interracial marriage was banned" I chipped in from down on the floor.

"Their mixed race descendents had to flee into the mountains after 1697 or risk being hanged" Burkhardt continued.

"Later settlers called them Indians because they were already there" I added, ducking as Jo leapt over my head and out the door.

"Hey assholes, back off with that shit" Quinn shouted as the band pounded out the rocking beat of a new Journey song and the lead singer kicked in with "Something about you baby, really knocks me off my feet...."



It's the bottom of the seventh inning and we're winning 3-2 on Toni's two run double to right center in the top of the inning. Shawna is hanging on despite being wiped out after spending the night at the KA house. W&L law has runners on first and second on a leadoff bloop single and a four pitch walk. Women aren't accepted into the otherwise all male college.

The third batter steps in with her pleated royal blue skirt and white blouse with Lady Generals sewn neatly below the right collar. Shawna chomps down on her gum, licks her left fingers, and toes the rubber. She steps back with her right foot and flows forward, propelling the big ball toward the plate.

"Ball one" calls the ump as the pitch sails past the batter at foot level.

Cat Kent scoops the ball out of the dirt and tosses it back to Shawna. Coach Q calls for time out and walks out to the mound with hands jammed into his black Yellow Jackets jacket pockets.

"What do you say we call it a day?" he asks, holding out a palm for the ball.



"I can hold on for three more outs" pleads Shawna, eager to complete the game against the snooty W&L law students.

"You didn't listen against Bridgewater and had to be saved by Jo" he counters.

"Wait Coach, didn't you tell her to give em a hit in that game?" asks Ronki, joining the huddle on the mound from her position at shortstop.

"I better not regret this" he mumbles shaking his head and walking off the field, skipping back over the foul line.

"Ooh la la, do it for Quinn" encourages MG from the bench.

Shawna rears back and delivers a slider on the inside corner, her blond hair swishing toward the plate. The batter steps into it and the bat clangs with a hard liner up the middle. Shawna leaps and misses, not even close to grabbing the ball shooting past her. We jump up from the bench as the runners take off and the ball heads for centerfield. Out of nowhere Ronki lunges and gloves the ball. She skims second base with a foot as she skips past the bag and then races down the baseline to catch the runner halfway back to first.

"The first unassisted triple play in ODAC history" I note from the bench.

Coach Q strides out to the mound extending a hand to Shawna. She turns away and high fives Ronki running over to celebrate. The team crowds the mound pushing Q to the edge of the huddle.

"We're all for one" Ronki chants.

"We're all for one" they respond.


"We're one for all" Ronki continues.

"We're one for all" they answer.

"Together we stand  
Together we stand  
Together we fall  
Together we fall  
But in the end  
But in the end  
We win them all

We win them all."

None of the girls see Q throw down his hat and storm off the field.

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fielding		<b>B:1 S:0 O:0</b>							hitting			
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		R	H	E
<b>Jackets 3-1</b>		1	0	0	0	0	0	2		3	8	1
<b>W&amp;L 1-2</b>		0	0	0	0	1	1	0		2	7	2

□

## Chapter 6: Perfect Game

"How d'ya learn to crack backs" Toni asks in the locker room before the game at James Madison University.

"I was the first girl on the Jeff Davis wrestling team" Cat Kent answers while hooking Toni's arms from behind and leaning her back over a knee.

"Ahhh, there's only one thing better and it's not chocolate" Toni laughs.

"I'm next" pleads Shawna, her left shoulder wrapped in a heating pad.

"We'll run the spine for my pitcher" answers Cat, grasping Shawna's crossed elbows and arching backward to lift her with a belly bounce. "Scholarships schmolarships, now you're ready for that D1 lineup."

"You've got a fan in high places" Coach Q calls, tossing each girl a new black visor ordered by President Caine.

Jo passes out sticks of Big Red as they walk from the field house into the midday haze rising off the artificial turf.

"Chuwee, chuwee" cheer a pair of bluebirds skirting past as Shawna warms up in the visiting bullpen.



After the game at Washington & Lee I'd been given permission to ride home in Burkhardt's big green Plymouth instead of the team bus.

"Burkhardt, pull over and I'll grab that statue for Old South" Quinn cried, pointing to a groomed Lexington lawn.

He hopped out in the growing dusk and walked nonchalantly across the yard. When beside the small statue of a man holding up a lantern, he quickly reached down and tucked it under his arm, hustling back and

falling into the passenger seat as Burkhardt peeled out through the residential neighborhood.

Soon we were cruising down interstate 64 with the little man strapped in the middle of the bench seat and a case of Rolling Rock between Quinn's feet.

"We'll paint his face and hands black" he plotted, twisting off the cap of a little green bottle and passing it over to Burkhardt.

"Might that African-American servant image turn-off some of our guests?" Burkhardt asked from behind the wheel as he took a swig of the bittersweet lager.

"That blind piano player will hardly see it" Quinn reasoned. "What do you suppose Januzzi?" he asked handing back a bottle over his left shoulder.

"You never know who might take offense" I answered.

"I was thinking of asking Jo Collins" blurted Burkhardt.

"She'll never go with you after that tactless duet at the oyster roast" Quinn quipped.

"I sat with her in Organic Chem and she apologized for running out on us" I chipped in.

"Hey" Quinn enthused, polishing off a bottle and tossing it out the window, "minus the confederate symbols Old South becomes a costume ball."

"Why don't we show them some real southern hospitality and invite the whole campus?" Burkhardt continued. "Hey Quinn, can the grenades, will you?"

"Change comes hard in the South" he answered, "but maybe the time has come."

---

"Three up" calls Jo from out in centerfield as Shawna warms up to face the Madison lineup in the bottom of the seventh inning.

"Three down" respond the rest of the players at their positions.

"Three up" Jo calls again.

"Three down" they all answer.

"Three up, three down, pass it all around" sings the team.

"Three up" Jo begins again.

"Quit jinxing her" shouts Coach Q to stop the cheer. To those of us on the bench he adds "it's just one more inning in one more game of a long season."

It's the bottom of the seventh and the scoreboard reads two outs, no runs, and no hits for JMU, no errors for us, and no walks for Shawna – a perfect game with one out to go. She brushes her blond locks under her visor and steps to the rubber, staring over the top of her glove at Cat squatting behind the plate. Our catcher flashes a single finger down and then points it up and toward the left handed batter's head to signal a fastball high and tight. Shawna nods and steps back into her windup. The hitter steps toward first base to try a drag bunt but pops it up in front of the plate. Pitcher and catcher scramble and dive for the ball, colliding in the grass between home and the mound. The batter sprints down the first base line. Cat is up first and reaches one hand down to Shawna, her other hand holding up the mitt with a snow cone peeking out.

"Batter's out" calls the umpire to complete Shawna's perfect game.

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**F2**

---

fielding



BOS002

---

**10K, OBB**

---

pitching

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			R	H	E
Jackets 4-1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0			1	4	0
JMU 10-3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0	0	2

o

## Chapter 7: Double Header

"Tyeep, tyeep, tyeep, tyeep" calls a red-breasted bird from the newly cut outfield grass out in right centerfield.

Ronki hits a pop fly to the right side of the infield for what will be the last out of game one.

"I got it" calls the Longwood College pitcher settling under the descending ball along the foul line.

The ball drifts just outside the white line and into the base path. Ronki tries to swerve but bumps the pitcher's shoulder. The blow knocks them both down as the ball glances off Ronki's helmet.

"Foul ball" calls the umpire.

"Interference" yells the Longwood coach from the third base coach's box.

"Obstruction" shouts coach Q from the bench.

"Unnecessary roughness" complains the Longwood catcher squatting back down behind the home plate.

"This isn't football, young lady" the umpire chides as Ronki steps back into the batter's box.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to hit her" apologizes Ronki.

"Yah big meany" chuckles the umpire.

The pitcher is shaken as she serves up a fastball over Ronki's head. Her next pitch is a curveball in the dirt for ball four to walk the tying run.

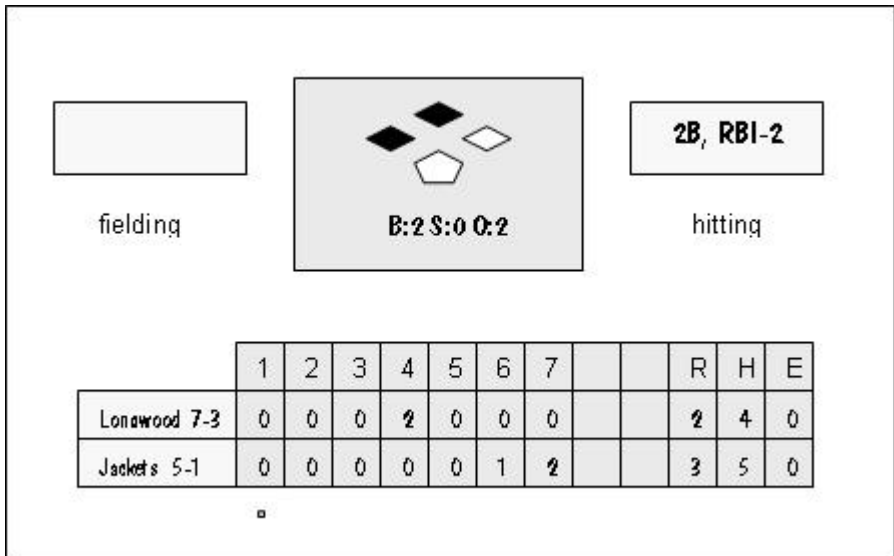
Toni Valenti steps up to the plate so the pitcher take's a big breath and toes the rubber, shaking off the catcher's sign for another inside curve. Instead she heaves a low fastball on the inside corner. Toni slashes it to leftfield to put runners on first and second.

The first pitch to Jo is over her head for ball one. The next is in the dirt, skipping past the catcher as Ronki and Toni move up to second and

third on the passed ball. Jo steps out of the box and pops in a stick of Big Red.

“R-B-R-B-R-B-I” cheers the bench as Jo settles back into her stance.

The pitch is a high hard one right down the pipe. Jo strokes a line drive into right center. The red-breasted bird takes off as the ball bounds through the gap and Ronki and Toni head home for the win.



“Want to run with me?” asked MG during the break between games. She had taken up distance running during practices after the cast had been put on her arm.

“Yeah, to the cafeteria” I laughed, incredulous of both the invitation from a pretty French girl and the possibility of actually doing it.

“We’ll go slow and walk if necessary” she prodded.



“What about my excess baggage?”

“Are you afraid of being seen with me?” she asked, her hazel eyes flashing.

“I’ll get my Converse” I assented.

We started out walking north along the Norfolk & Southern rail line but she coaxed me into a jog as we crossed the tracks.

“They say students should stay out of Dog Town” I cautioned.

“These petite houses are cozy but falling down” she observed. “Who lives here?”

“It’s the African-American side of Magnolia but now mostly old people.”

“Then why is it called Dog Town?”

“A watch dog at every house?” I wonder but for once she has me stumped.

“I like this part of town” she noted “but those Longwood players, they don’t like us.”

“Yeah, Ronki got away with ... bumping their pitcher” I explained, losing steam as we ran on.

“It’s more than that, no?”

“The oldest rivalry in the south ... Gibby-Hank and Hampden Sydney ... 1893 ... extends to the sister school” I huffed.

“Très stupide...” she began but I had stopped running.

“Wait ... I got a stitch” I gasped clutching a sharp pain in my right side.

“Just bend down until the diaphragm spasm subsides” she advised, demonstrating a hands-on-knees rest position.

“Ah, it’s gone but I’d better head back” I said looking over my shoulder as I started walking the way we had come.

“Zut alors, it’s just the beginning” she exclaimed, grabbing my shoulder

and pulling me back with her uncasted hand. "It get's easier every time."

She was right, of course. We ran another half mile down North James Street, even sprinting a little way when chased by a pack of beagle puppies.

"Caw, caw, caw" floated past with a string of big black birds.

"They're all headed west" I observed.

"We follow" commanded MG, turning left onto a dirt road before I could object.

We ran a half mile down the track, drawn by a rising cacophony to a big oak tree on the edge of a farmer's field.

"We look" she decided, climbing through the barbed wire as I held the top wire up and the bottom one down.

"BOOM, BOOM, BOOM" froze her between the wires and triggered a black rain from the tree.

Three guys with shotguns emerged as we took off back the way we had come.

"Why would they kill birds?" MG cried.

"Corn" was the best I could offer.

"Pay 'em no mind, they chickens'll come home ta roost" croaks a stooped old black man leaning onto his cane beside the road.

The little dogs charged again as we jogged back.

"Hé!" screamed MG, leaping behind me and holding onto my waist.

"ROOF" I shouted in my deepest voice, spreading my arms and barking down at the little alpha dog. It took off yipping with the other four in tow.

"My hero" she laughed, planting a kiss on my cheek and taking off toward campus.

That was enough to spur me on for the rest of the run. I finally re-crossed the tracks and pulled up gasping for air so we walked side-by-side the rest of the way.

"Hey fat boy, how do the French kiss?" called a guy from the baseball practice field, laughing with a couple of other players.

"Idiot, ask that to my fiancé in Paris" MG shouted back, taking my arm as we strode back to the Old Gym.

---

Ronki leads off the bottom of the sixth of the second game with the score tied at one. The first pitch is a slider that starts right down the middle and then tails toward her. She smacks a hard liner toward third. The Longwood third basewoman leaps and misses. The ball tails toward the foul line, bouncing just inside it. The leftfielder dives and misses. Ronki's foot catches the inside of second base as the centerfielder chases down the ball.

"Ronki, we miss you, we really really miss you, please come home, please come home" cheer our players jumping up and down on the bench.

Coach Q waves his left arm in a counterclockwise circle from the third base coach's box to send her home.

"An inside-the-park homerun is rare in softball" I mumble, leaping up with the rest of the team.

The throw is cut-off by the shortstop behind third base as Ronki tears toward the plate. Toni points down with both hands from the on-deck circle to signal a slide. Ronki skids onto her bottom about four feet from home plate. The catcher kneels down onto Ronki's legs while reaching for the relay throw.

"You're out" calls the umpire standing over the two girls.

"Obstruction" shouts Coach Q from the bench.

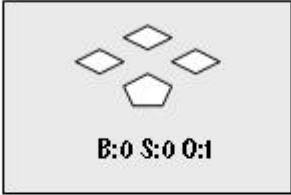
Jo sprints over and knocks the catcher off Ronki's legs. They tumble in a heap as both teams charge the field.

"Break it up, break it up" cautions the umpire reaching for Jo.

"Get your hands off" threatens Q standing between them.

"Good play, catch" says Ronki offering a hand to the catcher to end the confrontation.

"Tyeep, tyeep, tyeep, tyeep" calls a red-breasted bird from the newly cut outfield grass.

<b>8-6-2</b>											<b>3B</b>		
fielding											hitting		
											R	H	E
Lonawood 7-4	1	0	0	0	0	0					1	3	2
Jackets 6-1	0	0	0	0	1						1	2	1
□													

## Chapter 8: Sacrifice Fly

"All right JoCo, lay it down like in our little line-up" whispers Coach Q leaning close with both hands on her shoulders after she called time-out to confirm his bunt signal. "They'll never expect our number three hitter to bunt the winning run home."

She just scowls and marches back up to the plate with chestnut eyes glaring at the Guilford College pitcher about to deliver the pitch that will decide the ODAC championship.

---

Q had been in a good mood on the ride home after another come-from-behind win at Sweet Briar College.

"That's ten in a row ladies" he proclaimed as the bus pulled into a 7-11 at the edge of Charlottesville. "That'll getcha box lunches and a beer."

"Cr-r-ruck ... cr-r-ruck" echoed down from a big black bird flying high overhead as we climbed back into the bus.

"No Buds for you?" Ronki asked, popping open one and plopping down onto the bench seat next to Shawna who was leaning against the window with an ice-pack on her left shoulder.

"This isn't a beer belly I'm nursing" Shawna whispered, her deep blue eyes glistening and angular face breaking into a twisted frown as she fought the tears.

"No shit Shawna?" Ronki wondered, her golden eyebrows raised before recovering and offering "Here, take my box if you're eating for two."

"I do get the munchies something fierce this time of day" Shawna volunteered, "but I don't want your whole supper, maybe just the chips and pickle."

"They're yours" Ronki replied, "and let me know what else I can do."

"How about telling Coach Q?"

"Fuck Q" she hissed and then added "I'll tell him at practice on Monday".

"That, my friend, should be our rallying cry but you should wait until after the Guilford game to tell him."

"No problemo, Ace. So how, you know, how did it happen?"

"Oysters" Shawna said shaking her blond locks back and forth and breaking into a sly smile.

"Hush, here he comes" Ronki warned.

Q had polished off a couple cans before wandering down the aisle and stopping next to Jo who was studying for Dr. Hiss's physics exam under the weak window light.

"Jo babe, that's no way to celebrate" he chided.

"What'd ya siggest?" she immediately regretted replying.

"Well since you asked" he smiled sliding in next to her and slipping a long arm around her shoulder.

She tried to squirm away but was lodged between him and the window.

"STOP RIGHT THERE" shouted Ronki from the next seat back.

"I wanna know right now" added Shawna.

"Before we go any further do you love me?" sang the rest of the players.

"Will you love me forever?"

"Do ya need me?" Jo joined in with a grin.

"Will you never leave me?"

Will you make me so happy for the rest of my life?

Will you take me away and will you make me your wife?

I wanna know right now

before we go any further

do you love me and will you love me forever?"

Coach Q did not reply "let me sleep on it" as Meatloaf would have. He just turned white and slunk back up to the seat behind the driver, disappearing behind its tall back.

---

The game is tied at two in the bottom of the seventh inning with Ronki on third, one out, and a 2-1 count on Jo. The heart of the Guilford order is due up in the top of the eighth so we need a run now with Shawna tiring and our relief pitcher MG just out of her cast.

Jo crouches, eyes the windup, and picks up the spinning ball leaving the pitcher's hand. Ignoring Q's signal to bunt, she steps into a high fastball on the outside corner and strokes a major league fly ball to right field. Ronki jumps back to third, waiting until the ball touches the glove before leaping off the base. The Quaker right fielder makes the catch running toward home. Her throw is hard and straight, hopping near the mound. The ball skips into the catcher's mitt as Ronki charges down the third base line. At full steam she steps over the leg blocking the plate as the catcher sweeps the tag around.

"Safe" signals the umpire as Ronki leaps into Cat's arms in the on-deck circle.

The rest of the team charges over from the bench and circles around.

"Air ya comin' Coach?" offers Jo as she joins the celebration.

"You girls won't win states if you don't listen" he complains as the umpires hustle away and the fans start shuffling out.

The players mill around home plate looking at their feet as Q walks off the field and the Guilford players pack up their gear.

"Give me a Q" Ronki says quietly.

"Q" Shawna answers with that sly smile.

"Give me a Q" Ronki repeats a little louder.

"Q" joins in Jo reaching her hand into the middle of the pack.

"Give me another Q" Ronki says a little louder still and placing her hand on top of Jo's.

"Q" join in Toni and Cat adding their hands to the stack.

"Give me another Q" Ronki shouts as the coach looks over his shoulder before entering the Old Gym.

"Q" cheer all the Yellow Jacket softballers forming a wheel with their arms.

"What's that spell?" Ronki yells with a grin.

"Four Q"

"What's that spell?"

"Four Q"

"What's that spell?"

"Four Q" they all yell.

"A-men" whispers Jo.



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**f9**

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fieldin



**B2S:I0:1**

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**SF, RBI-1**

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hitting

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			R	H	E
Guilford 133	1	0	0	1	0	0	0				8	1
Jackets 114	0	0	0	0	1	1	1				6	0

o

## Chapter 9: Batting Practice

“Hey you, there pitching, let me see you wiggle” calls Ronki from shortstop as Marie-Josee takes the mound against Mary Baldwin College.

“Boom-chi-boom-boom-chi, boom-chi-boom-boom-chi” echo the rest of the fielders patting their gloves to a hand and thigh.

Our new pitcher gives it a little shake before striding into her bocce-like wind-up. She steps from the back of the mound and across the rubber, releasing the ball with an upward flick of the wrist and ending in a statuesque pose with her right arm and left leg lifted. The spinning ball starts high and then drops a foot to plunk their first batter in the knee. The hit batter hobbles to first and our first state playoff game has begun with what looks like it might be batting practice for the undefeated top-seed in the small college bracket.

---

“Here ya go Jo, hit em some flyballs” comments Coach Q handing over his fungo bat so he could pitch batting practice before the game.

She held the slim bat up and looked down its length like it was a pool cue, sighting one of the white sandstone buildings on the hillsides of the pristine Staunton campus.

“All right y'all, one out with a runner on second” she called while launching a high one from the right field foul line toward the outfielders lined up in center field.

“I got it” called our right fielder Karen Lewis waving off the others, settling behind where it would land, and stepping into the catch to propel a hard throw back in.

Shawna, now retired from playing but still helping out, reached up to catch the throw with a growing belly peaking from beneath her jersey.

"Mine, mine, all mine" squeaked Toni running in for Jo's next hit, a blooper to shallow center.

"Hyer's a long one" warned Jo taking a couple of hops and swinging with all her might.

The fungo flew out of her hands and went spinning toward pitcher's mound conking Coach Q on the head.

"Is he dead?" gasped MG running over with the rest of the team.

"We can't get rid of him that easily" observed Ronki. "He's coming to."

Jo's normally dark skin turned nearly white as the coach sat up holding his head.

"Awful sorry coach" she apologized offering a hand, "twarn't tryin' ta hit ya."

"It happens" he groaned, "but you owe me for this!"

"OK team, git back to yore chores" Jo called, suppressing a scowl as Ronki helped Q over to the visitor's dugout.

---

"Shall I pitch to her?" MG asks at a meeting on the mound in the bottom of the seventh inning with runners on first and third and the Fighting Squirrels clean-up hitter coming up.

"They've been intimidated by your windup since you plunked the first batter" assures Ronki heading back to shortstop.

"Marie (clap, clap) Josee" Toni calls from out in leftfield.

"Marie (clap, clap) Josee" the fielders answer.

"In the knee (clap, clap) Josee" Toni continues, sneaking in a warning to the batter.

"Marie (clap, clap) Josee" they conclude and the home plate umpire just shakes his head but can't hide a smile.

MG strides across the rubber and unleashes the ball with a sideways flick of the wrist. It's headed for the hitter before breaking down across the plate. The Mary Baldwin batter keeps her head down on the tailing ball and cuts into it with a downward stroke.

"Clang" sends a hard grounder up the middle.

MG stumbles out of her follow-through pose to avoid being hit in the derriere. Ronki dives past second base for it and misses. The ball's headed to center as the runner on third starts for home for the winning run. Then Debbie Reid running over from a deep second base position lunges in shallow centerfield. The ball pops up into her backhanded glove and sticks. She flips it behind her back as she's stumbling. Ronki barehands it, steps on the bag, and fires a strike to first.

"Thwack" into Patty's mitt beats the runners at first and home by half a step.

The girls all run over to first base to celebrate our first playoff win.

"We're all for one" yells Cat to kick off the postgame cheer. "We're all for one" the women repeat.

"We're one for ..."

"Stop this ... bullshit ... right now" growls Coach Q pulling players from the huddle.

"Coach Quintana, that will be enough" admonishes President Caine walking over from the hillside bleachers.

"Go on ladies, the rest of the season's yours" he continues, holding Q by the arm and walking away.

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**4-6-3**

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fieldin



BOSOO1

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**GIDP, LOB-2**

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htting

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			R	H	E
Jackets 12-1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0			1	3	0
Mary B 19-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0	6	0

o

## Chapter 10: Check Swing

"G-double-O-D-E-Y-E, good eye, good eye" we cheer from the bench as Cat Kent watches another high pitch sail past.

The home plate umpire raises a fist to signify a full count with three balls and two strikes. The bases are loaded and we're down one run in the bottom of the seventh inning against Virginia Commonwealth University for the state championship.

---

After our playoff win at Mary Baldwin I had hopped into Quinn's old car for the ride back to Magnolia. The navy blue Bentley's front end was painted with sharp teeth, forked tongue, and a fiery plume.

"Nice wheels, bro" I exclaimed as he passed me an obligatory Rolling Rock, " but I'll pass on the grenade this time."

"To each his own" he responded taking back the bottle as we wound out of the verdant Shenandoah Valley heading east on I-64. "My grandfather was fond of import cars, God rest his soul"

"Expensive taste for a farmer" I noted.

"It wasn't tobacco they grew before the wah of northern agression" he confided, slipping into a southern drawl while talking about his family. "Maja Seth Calhoun was the lahgest slave trader in the Valley."

"Didn't they lose all that with the fall of the South?"

"Chattel and land, yes, but his granddaughtah married a teacher from up theyah. They took the family wealth up to Jersey with the fall of western Vaginia."

"Perchance, was he George LaMonte and their Virginia estate Wheatland?"

"Januzzi, you are a walking encyclopedia."

"Not really, I just grew up in Bound Brook where the LaMontes were the primary benefactors for public land and community services."

"Well then, we're practically related" he laughed, holding the steering wheel with a knee while popping open another little green bottle.

"My turn to drive the blue dragon" I asserted, pointing to a scenic pullout at the crest of the Blue Ridge.

"Kik-kik-kikkik-kik-kik" rang out from a pileated woodpecker at the top of a white pine and was followed by a thunderous pecking as we switched drivers.

"Quinn, what's up with Old South?" I asked as the diesel engine chugged to a start.

"President Caine was going to shut it down" he replied, "but he likes the idea of an antebellum costume ball. He even offered to sponsor if we change the name and open it up to the whole campus."

The team bus chugged by as I pulled onto the highway so I shifted into overdrive and caught up as we came down off the mountain. Toni and Cat waved from the back window as I drafted behind them through the rolling hills of the piedmont.

"It's a double moon over old Virginia" I laughed as our leftfielder and catcher bared their bottoms against the glass.

"That's it Zo, we'll call the costume ball Old Virginia."

The rest of the way back to Gibby-Hank we sang along to the Queen song "ooh, we gonna let it all hang out, fat bottomed girls they make the rocking world go round."

---

The count is three balls and two strikes with the bases loaded and two outs in the bottom of the seventh inning.

"Make it be your pitch" calls Jo flashing signals while standing on first base.


"Yes sir Coach Collins" Cat jests before stepping back into the batter's box.

The pitch is right down the middle of the plate but beneath her knees, Cat's place de résistance. She steps into it as her arms start down into a golf swing. Just before her wrists pass the middle of the body she pulls up, whipping the bat back.

"Ball four" yells the home plate umpire.

"She broke her wrists" shouts the VCU catcher pointing down to first base to appeal the call.

The first base umpire throws her arms out into the safe signal as Ronki steps on home plate to tie the game.

<b>ER-1</b>									<b>BB, RBI</b>				
pitching		<b>B:3 S:2 O:2</b>							hitting				
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7			R	H	E
VCU	25-10	0	0	0	2	0	0	0			2	6	2
Jackets	12-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1			2	4	0

□



## Chapter 11: Extra Innings

"Time-out" calls Jo from the third base coach's box, "that bag is on crooked."

Toni steps out of the batter's box as the home plate umpire trudges over to fix the base. He's tired because it's the bottom of the ninth inning and the score is still VCU 2, G-HC 2.

---

"Today we run to the river, s'il te plaît" Marie-Josée had announced on the Saturday before the game.

"Quelle horreur" I exclaimed.

"C'est un fait accompli" she laughed, "our mileage is already registered for the CROP walk."

"I'll never make it there and back" I complained.

"We only go there" she concluded. "Allons-y!"

And go we went, jogging along the tracks and through Dogtown before hitting the rolling hills of the Virginia piedmont beneath a brilliant blue sky.

"My God" I gasped pulling up beside a large strawberry patch, "how much farther?"

"We're already halfway" she laughed and took off down the blacktop, her straight black hair bouncing in a braid from the back of a baseball cap and calling me on.

After six more miles we finally stumbled down a rocky bank in the yellow haze of a noonday sun.

"A snake" I warned, steering her upstream from the coil of copper bands sunning on a flat rock at the edge of the clear-running stream.

"Claty-claty-claty-claty-clat" trailed off with a big-headed kingfisher as I plopped down into a little pool between boulders.

"Hé, c'est Jo!" MG exclaimed peeking over a rock and spotting a couple sunning on a downstream boulder.

She started to wave but then ducked back, splashing down into the pool beside me.

"What's up?" I asked climbing up to take a look.

"We leave them their privacy" she answered grabbing my arm.

But I had already glimpsed Jo and Ronki doing a little more than sunning on that big boulder.

"To each her own" I laughed sitting back down in the cool water.  
"Besides, it's a sight for sore eyes and our ride in one swell foop."

"We give them a show, n'est ce pas?" she asked with a mischievous glint in her cat eyes.

"Oui oui, mademoiselle" I agreed following her up onto a flat rock and lying back onto its rough warmth.

She straddled my lap and leaned her hands down onto my chest, exaggerating a slow arch of her back and hips and letting out a loud moan.

"Here I go from my body. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. Help!" I gasped, mimicking the orgasmic ending of Space Monkey from the new Patty Smith album.

"Hey ya'll" called Jo seeing through our ruse as Ronki shifted her clothing. "What's up besides old Zo?"

"Just hitching a ride" I shrugged waving them over.

They hopped from rock to rock to join us on the upstream boulder.

"Ken ya see the stinger?" asked Jo pointing to the back of her knee. "A wasp musta got me."

"No, just two little red lines with some blue veins above them" I answered. "Nothing that a little cold water won't help."

She settled into the pool as Ronki joined us on the rock.

"Where does this fantastique Little River go to?" asked MG.

"It flows out of the Blue Ridge and meets the North and South Anna to form the Pamunkey, the major tributary of the York River down in the Tidewater" I recalled from a topographical map on the Biology classroom wall.

A dark-skinned boy with a cane fishing pole shuffled past trying to ignore us.

"What county you reckon this is?" Jo shouted.

"Louisa" he called back and was gone.

"Mammaw always said 'Iffen they ask tell em Portugee but we Collins's really come acrost from Monkey Crick 'way down in Weezy.'"

---

"Yikes" screams the umpire leaping back as a sleek black snake shoots out from under the bag, undulating toward the rows of bleachers brought in to Dusk Field for the state finals.

With two swift leaps Jo steps on it, breaking the snake in half. The tail flops a few times and settles down but the head keeps slithering away, heading under the stands as people scurry away. Jo picks up the tail with both hands and carries it across the street, gently placing it behind a big oak tree.

"The feller's head'll search out his tail" she calls out as the fans settle back into the stands.

Then Jo walks over to Toni and whispers "just tap it to third, Ronki'll do the rest."

"Play ball" yells the umpire.

Toni digs in with the score tied and one out in the bottom of the ninth as the tall VCU relief pitcher toes the rubber.

"You reckon they's more?" whispers Jo as the thirdbasewoman shifts a couple of steps away from the bag.

Ronki leans off first ready to run. The Rams pitcher rears back and propels herself toward the plate. Ronki takes off just as the ball leaves her fingertips. She's halfway to second as Toni stabs at the ball and hits a chopper to third. Ronki's rounding second as the thirdbasewoman bobbles it. She heads for third with the throw to first.

"Out at first" calls the umpire as Ronki rounds third base.

She's three steps past the bag and sees the firstbasewoman carrying the ball back to the pitcher and the catcher walking out to the mound.

"Go, go, go" hisses Jo as Ronki takes off for the plate.

"Home" shouts the VCU coach leaping up from the bench.

The catcher scrambles back and straddles the plate. The throw hits her glove as Ronki streaks down the line. The tag sweeps down and hits Ronki's thigh but her front foot is already on the plate.

"Safe" yells the home plate umpire throwing out his arms.

The girls swarm Ronki as the VCU players just stand there and watch.

"We're all for one" Jo chants.

"We're all for one" the Yellow Jackets reply.

"We're one for all" she continues.

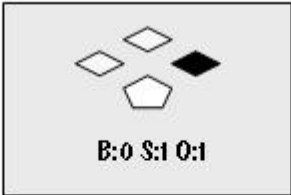
"We're one for all" join in the Rams.

"Together we stand.  
Together we stand.  
Together we fall.  
Together we fall.

But in the end  
 But in the end  
 we win them all.  
 we win them all."

"Nice call Jo" says the VCU coach walking over with open arms.  
 "What are you doing next year? I need an assistant."

"I swan" Jo laughs accepting the hug, "pears the Collinses air finally  
 comin' back to the Commonwealth."

<b>5-3</b>	 <p><b>B:0 S:1 O:1</b></p>	<b>RBI</b>																																							
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	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 10%;"></th> <th>1</th> <th>2</th> <th>3</th> <th>4</th> <th>5</th> <th>6</th> <th>7</th> <th>8</th> <th>9</th> <th>R</th> <th>H</th> <th>E</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: left;">VCU 25-11</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>2</td> <td>6</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: left;">Jackets 13-1</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> <td>1</td> <td>3</td> <td>5</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E	VCU 25-11	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	6	2	Jackets 13-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	3	5	0	
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