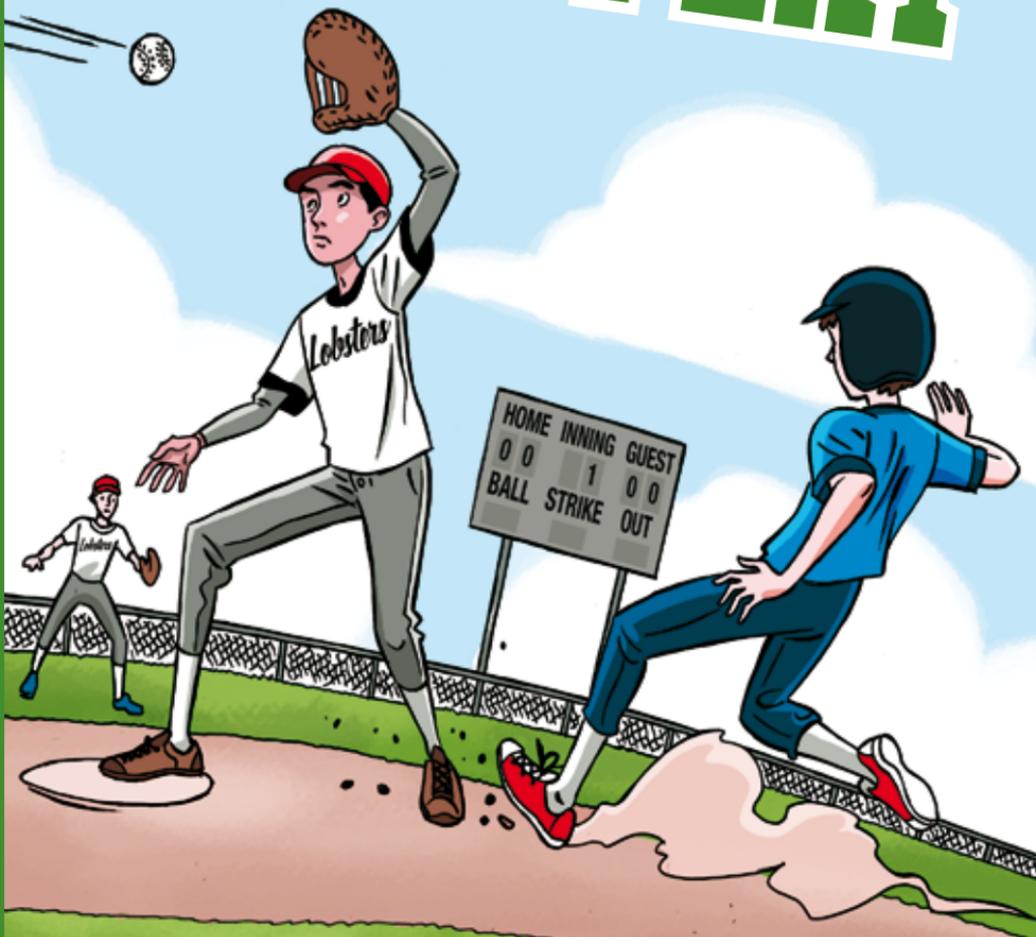


PLAY HARD

FORCE PLAY



Jennifer Liss

Force Play

A Play Hard Book

Jennifer Liss

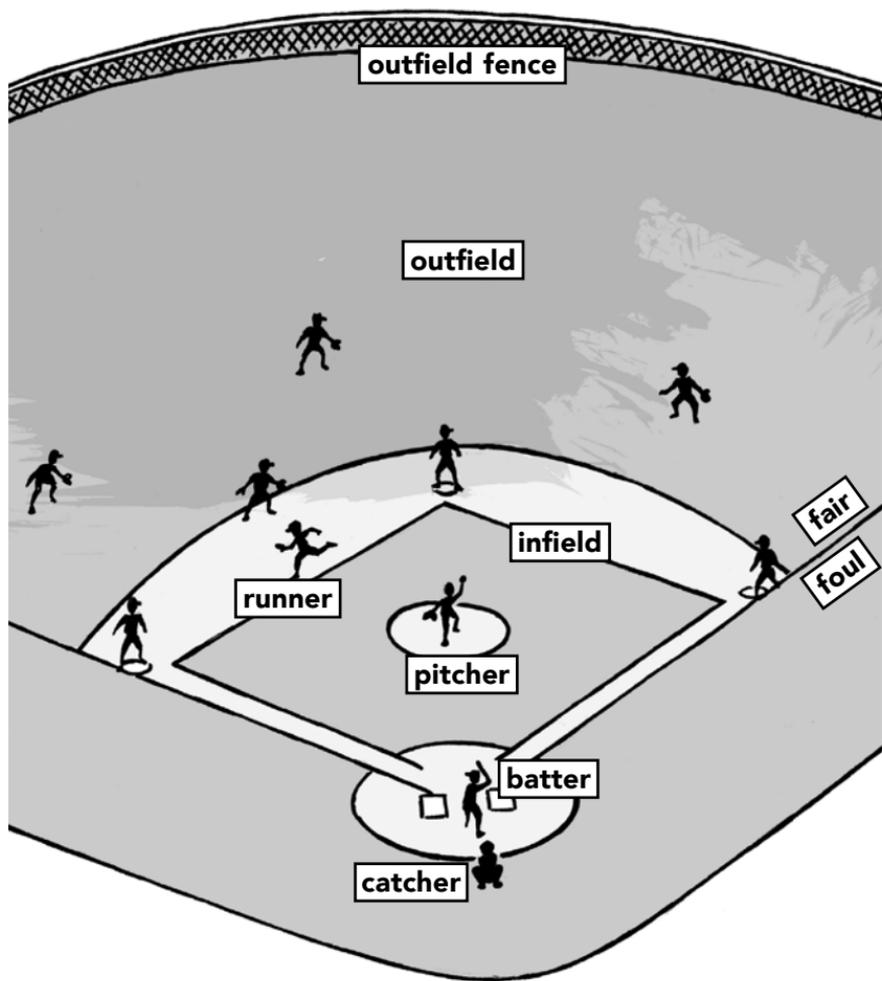
High Noon Books

Novato, CA

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On the Baseball Field



Chapter 1

The New Kid

It was a sunny day at the baseball field. Daniel and Ana were in the dugout. They were with their team, the Lobsters. They were waiting for their game to start.

Ana put some bubble gum in her mouth. The rest of the team watched her. They knew how much she liked bubble gum. She blew a bubble the size of a baseball. It popped.

“Hey, Daniel,” Ana said to her brother. “Can you blow a bigger bubble?”

Daniel smiled and said, “Watch me.”

He put gum in his mouth. He started

chewing. He chewed and chewed and chewed.

“Come on, Daniel,” Ana said. “You’re too slow!”

Daniel blew a tiny bubble. Then it grew so big that it hid his nose.

The bubble popped. Daniel had gum all over his face.



Ana and Daniel's dad came into the dugout. He was the coach of their team. There was a boy with him.

"Lobsters!" Coach said. "I want you to meet Kevin. He is a new player on our team. He's just going to watch this game, but he'll play soon."

"The first inning is about to start," Coach said. "Ana, you play third base. Daniel, you're on second. Enzo is pitching." He told all the players what to do.

Daniel started to leave the dugout. Kevin stopped him. "Does that girl play third base?"

"She sure does," Daniel said. "She's pretty good, too."

“But I play third base,” Kevin said.

“Maybe you can play in left field,” Daniel said. He ran to second base.

“We’ll see about that,” Kevin said.

The Cougars were at bat. Enzo threw a fast pitch. “Strike!” yelled the umpire.

Enzo threw the next pitch. The batter hit the ball to Ana. She dropped it. She threw it to first, but the runner was already there.

The next batter also got a hit. He started to run to first base. The runner on first base had to get to second base. The ball bounced to Ana. She picked it up. She threw it to Daniel to get the runner out at second. It should have been an easy force play.



The ball hit Daniel's glove and went into right field.

The runner kept going. He was almost at third base. *The runner might score, Kevin thought. And it will be the second baseman's fault!*

Chapter 2

Third Base

The runner ran past Ana at third base. The player in right field threw the ball to the plate. The catcher caught the ball, but it was too late. The runner slid into the plate.

“Safe!” the umpire yelled.

The Cougars cheered. The score was 1 to 0.

Ana was mad. “Daniel! Why didn’t you catch my throw? It was an easy out.”

Daniel did not look at Ana. “Sorry,” he said.

The Lobsters played a good game, but

the Cougars won. The score was 7 to 6. The two teams came out of the dugouts. The Lobsters and Cougars gave high-fives to each other. Daniel just wanted to go home. He was thinking about Ana's throw. The Lobsters lost the game because he didn't catch the ball.

The Lobsters' next practice was held after school. Ana had to stay late to talk to a teacher. *Why is this taking so long?* she thought.

It was 4:15 when Ana left school. When she got to the field, Kevin was at third base. Coach was hitting balls to him. Kevin stopped all of them.

“Wow!” Enzo said to Ana. “Look at the new kid. He’s really good.”

Ana watched Kevin. She didn’t feel good about it. She really wanted to play third base.

“Hey, Dad!” Ana said. “I’m here. Want me to play third base now?”



“You’re late,” Dad said. “Watch Kevin.

He's doing a good job."

Doing a good job? Ana thought. *Will Dad give Kevin my position?*

Then Ana felt some rain hit the top of her head. She looked up. The sky was dark. It started to rain hard. Practice was over. The players went home to eat dinner.

The rain stopped after dinner. Ana started her math homework. Then she saw Daniel and Dad with a baseball bat.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"The rain stopped. We're going to the park," Daniel said. "Dad's going to show me how to bunt the ball!"

Ana had to do a lot of homework. Daniel

was so lucky! He was in fifth grade. He didn't get much homework. She was in sixth grade, and she had a lot.



Chapter 3

On the Bench

Ana was in sixth grade. She had to work hard at school. For two days, she didn't have time to play baseball. Now it was the weekend, and there was another game. This time the Lobsters were playing the Bulls.

Before the game started, Coach talked to the team. He said, "The Bulls are a good team. They get a lot of hits. Their players can't catch our hits very well. We do catch hits well. We can beat them if we hit more than they do."

By the fourth inning, the score was tied

1 to 1. Ana was next at bat. She was standing near the Coach. He was looking at a sheet of paper with notes.

“Try to hit the ball into center field. The player there isn’t ready,” Coach said. “You will get on base.”

Ana looked out to center field. The player was looking up into the sky.

Ana smiled. “You got it, Dad,” she said.

Wait until Kevin sees this, she thought.

She smiled at Kevin in the dugout.

Ana walked to the plate. The pitcher threw a low ball. It was just where she wanted it. Ana swung. She hit the ball to center field, just like Coach told her to do.



Ana dropped the bat and ran. The ball landed near the player in center field.

Ana ran fast. The fans were cheering. *I can make it to second, she thought. I'm going to keep running.*

Ana ran hard to first base. She stepped on the base, but her ankle bent the wrong

way. She fell on the dirt. She could not stand up. It hurt too much.

The umpire yelled "Time!" to stop the game. "Are you OK?" he asked Ana.

Coach ran to help Ana. "Ana, what's going on?" he asked.

"My ankle," Ana said. "I hurt my ankle."

"Daniel! Enzo!" Coach called. "Come out here."

Daniel and Enzo helped Ana.

Coach went to the dugout with them. He gave Ana some ice.

"Put this ice on your ankle," Coach said.

Coach talked to Kevin. "Go to first base. You will be the runner for Ana now. When

the next inning starts, I want you to play third base.”

Kevin nodded. “You got it, Coach,” he said. He smiled and ran to first base.

I wish I wasn't hurt, Ana thought. I should be playing, not Kevin!

Later in the game, Enzo was pitching again. He threw a ball very fast. The batter swung at it and missed. Then Enzo did it again. There were two strikes! The Bulls' batter swung at the third pitch. He hit the ball hard at Kevin. Kevin got it and threw the ball to first. It was a long throw.

The ball's not going to get there in time,
Ana thought.

Ana was wrong. The ball got there fast, and the runner was out.

“Nice throw, Kevin!” Coach yelled.

When the inning was over, Kevin’s teammates gave him high-fives. “I’m so glad you’re on the team!” Enzo told him.

In the eighth inning, the score was still 1 to 1. Kevin came up to bat again. He swung at the first two pitches and missed.

Two strikes, Ana thought. Maybe he’s not a good hitter.

The third pitch was a fast ball. Kevin swung and hit the ball. It flew over the head of the player in left field. It bounced twice and hit the fence.

Kevin ran past first base and second base. He made it to third base!

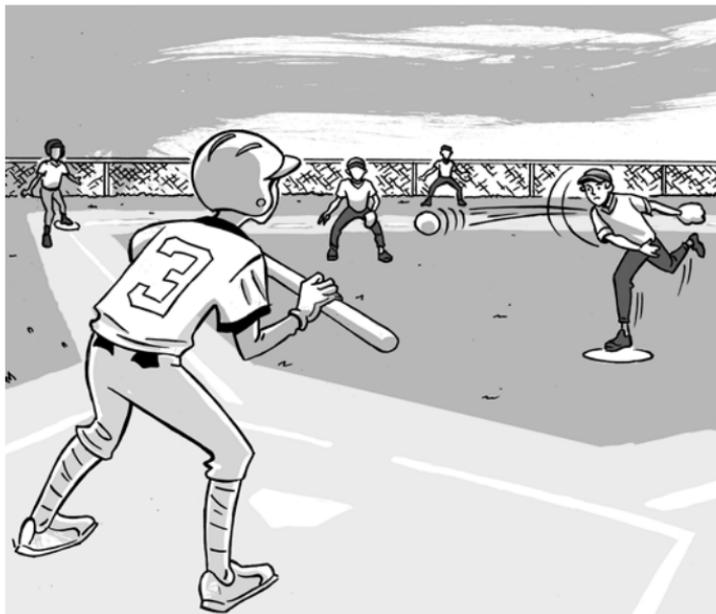
It was Daniel's turn to hit. The Coach said something to Daniel. Daniel smiled and went up to the plate.

The pitcher threw the ball. Daniel changed the way he held the bat. *He's going to bunt, Ana thought. That's what Dad was teaching him!*

Daniel bunted, and the ball didn't go far. The Bulls' pitcher wasn't ready for the bunt. He didn't get the ball very fast. Daniel ran to first base, and Kevin slid into the plate. Now the score was 2 to 1!

The Lobsters cheered. The fans cheered.

I wish I could play, Ana thought.



Ana watched the rest of the game from the dugout. The Lobsters won the game 2 to 1.

After the game, the Lobsters gave each other high-fives. Ana stayed on the bench. *I'm glad we won, Ana thought. So why do I feel so bad?*