

# FOUL BALL



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## Table of Contents

### Prologue ~4~

" Take me out to the ballgame! "

### First Base (Part one)

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Inning ~10~

"The narrow path to the Lord's draft"

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Inning ~14~

"Tab arrives at spring training"

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Inning ~18~

" Being accepted ( making the roster )"

### Second Base (Part two)

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Inning ~26~

"Practice makes perfect"

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Inning ~ 35~

"Batter up"

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Inning ~47~

"Heart of the game"

## Third Base (Part three)

7<sup>th</sup> Inning ~55~

"Saved is safe on base"

7<sup>th</sup> Inning stretch ~62~

"We all need friends"

8<sup>th</sup> Inning ~72~

"Heaven is always right"

9<sup>th</sup> Inning ~78~

"Only fools don't play by GOD'S rules "

Epilogue ~89~

"Safe at home"

The Sinners Prayer ~94~

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## Prologue

### Take Me Out to the Ballgame !

"Strike !!!" Yelled the umpire, as he appeared to be moving in slow motion before Tabitha's eyes. Tab, the nickname Tabatha preferred, nervously bit her lower lip as she attempted to swipe away the curl of stray hair that had escaped from underneath her well-worn ball cap.

Tab's coach had tried to give her a new cap, when the one she wore to each and every practice and game had begun showing its age. But, with her team on a hot streak, Tab did not want to invite any of what she called "bad juju", or bad luck, because she had changed her cap!

*Funny, isn't it...the things we all do so we don't upset our routines, especially if we are on a hot streak! It could be called superstition, but let's face it, we've all done something just like Tabatha.*

Tab was standing all alone out on the pitcher's mound, attempting the impossible. She was fraying a bit at the edges as she adjusted her ball cap back and forth to prevent the beads of sweat from running into her eyes.

Tabitha, having just turned 14 years old a few weeks ago, was now only one strike away on the legendary

Patricia. You know the type... the two time, inner city, girls' fast pitch champion, known by everyone as " Pat the Bat ". Pat had been voted MVP of EVERYTHING Tabitha could remember, that was worth remembering, about the girl's summer fast-pitch softball league.

*I wish I could tell you that Tabitha was as calm, cool and collected as she appeared to be, but as we all know, things aren't always what they seem to be.*

As Tab said a Prayer under her lips, she did not notice the dark rain clouds quickly brewing up one of those fast moving, pop-up summer storms.

Tab didn't hear the cheers of the spectators, most of them the players' family members. She did not even hear the usual jeers of her teammates yelling " Hey Batter, Batter " in their usual distracting banter.

Not even her mother yelling, "C'mon, Tab, you can do it! " registered in Tabitha's mind. All she heard was her own heartbeat pulsating, like a big Indian drum in her ears.

It was after Tabatha Prayed, and she had exhaled a deeply held breath, that she noticed something. That something was Pat the Bat!

Pat was nervously digging at the dirt in the batter's box with her feet. She kept sliding her hands around trying to get the perfect grip on her bat... all the while talking

to herself through gritted teeth. That's when Tab realized that Pat seemed to have the weight of the entire world on her shoulders. Tab could see the self-doubt and fear of failure written all over Pat's face. "Hummm...maybe she's wondering if she's lost her edge", Tab mused.

"All I have to do is throw", Tab thought. "She'll swing at anything because she has to!" At that moment, Tab felt like her whole world was comprised of sunny skies and pretty rainbows. She was in, what champion athletes like to call, the "Zone. " Tab knew that this game was already over. "Thank-You, Lord", she said aloud.

Tab was all smiles now, and this further confounded Patricia, who had a deepening sense of standing in quicksand on rubber legs, as her desperation closed in around her.

Tab thought, "One ball - two strikes...yes, I can afford to throw one in the dirt and maybe, just maybe, Pat might chase after it.

The wind was picking up now, blowing dirt from the infield across the bleachers and into the concession stand, while everyone was hoping that this game would end before the sky cut loose.

Tab wound up hard for her usual veracious fast pitch. Then, just before she released the ball, she re-coiled her strength and let the pitch die in the dirt just a few feet in front of home plate!

As Pat swung for the fences with all of her might, for just a second, she thought she had done it again; that she would be victorious and get another taste of glory! Then, something deep in her brain moaned, "Oh, noooo! It can't be. That girl is too young to use such a clever strategy". Pat the Bat...the Legend... then realized, much too late, that she'd been had...really HAD!

Pat's mighty swing would have peeled the cover off the ball if the ball had been anywhere close to her bat, that is. Instead, it landed quite harmlessly in front of her and rolled to a stop against her foot.

"Steeerrrrrike Three, You're Out !!!" Yelled the Ump. "Game Over", he added. Then, unbelievably to Patricia's ears, the umpire added these words...these unthinkable words, "This year's champions are the Sassy Lassies! Congratulations ladies!"

All the girls cheered, laughed and high five's were exchanged along with a few tears.

*I know, I know, no tears are allowed in league ball.  
But this is a girl's team, so give them a break, will ya?*

Then, the happy champions broke out into their team's custom cheer...they all started barking!

*Yeah, the players understood that the teams name "Lassies" is plural for Lass which means young girl in Scotland. But this cheer comes from the old time, famous, TV show "Lassie". Most of these young girls had never even seen the show, but the internet had clued them in on the famous K-9 with their team's moniker. The rest of the teams in the summer girl's league just called Tab's team "The Dogs"!*

The victorious girls ended their celebration by chanting over and over, "Every dog has its day! "



**1<sup>st</sup> Base**  
**(Part 1)**

".... anyone who competes as an athlete does not  
receive the victor's crown except by  
competing according to the rules."  
2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:5 NIV

"Similarly, I have found that no amount of  
victory, glory, or gold will buy or provide  
any true happiness or sense of  
fulfillment, living outside  
of GOD'S Rules."  
◁LS>

## 1<sup>st</sup> Inning

### The Narrow Path to the Lord's Draft

Exactly five minutes later, as the game gear was being tossed haphazardly into the back of her parents' tan Subaru, Tabitha was in a trance admiring her trophies... one for each hand.

Tab was thinking that these were the first real things that she had won all by herself, in her entire life! One trophy said "Champions", as in league winners. The other trophy said, "Championship Game MVP".

By the way, the trophy for "League MVP" once again went to Pat the Bat. Pat looked at her trophy and you could tell she was not proud of it. It didn't look as shiny to her as the ones she had won before in years past. "League MVP...man, that is a joke!" Pat bemoaned.

Later, during the car ride home, Tab's parents talked enthusiastically about the game. "Were each so proud of you, dear," Tabitha's mother said, as they drove toward home.

"Yes, very proud" Tab's father added.

Tabitha was glad that her father was able to get the afternoon off and attend the championship game. He had only been at one or two of her games before, always arriving in a rush in the last few innings.

"Slow down, dear. Be careful." Tabitha's mother said.

"I know, I know, maybe we should just find a spot to pull over until the storm lets up." Tab's father replied.

Tabitha was riding in the backseat with her head reclined, venting all of her pent up anxiety that she had about pitching in the championship game.

With her release of adrenalin and emotion, Tab was getting sleepy. With a feeling of genuine relief and gratitude, she quietly Prayed, "Thank you for being with me today, Jesus."

"Did you hear me, Tabitha ?" her mother asked.

"She's sleeping, dear" her father replied.

Tabitha was drifting in and out of a light sleep.

The next words to register in Tabitha's mind were, again, of her father's. Wait, he was shouting, "Can you believe this maniac! " Passing us in this storm !! "

Tab opened her eyes just in time to see the large 4x4 move back into the right lane. That is when the large pick-up truck spun out in a hydroplane directly in front of them.

"Look Out! " Tabitha's mother screamed.

Tab's father turned the wheel and stabbed the brakes as the trusty, all wheel drive; Subaru behaved much like a champion itself coming almost completely to a controlled stop.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said of the large 4x4 as it spun around right back toward the smaller Subaru, in a complete, 360 degree turn. The tail end of the pickup truck struck the Subaru directly in the rear right passenger door, right where Tabitha was seated.

Tabitha felt like she was in a daze. She thought she must be sleeping, because her mother's voice now seemed so far away. "What is she saying?" Tab thought, as she strained to listen.

She heard, "Tabby it's OK. Mommy is here. Everything is going to be all right."

Tabitha tried her hardest to open her eyes, and she managed to open just one... just a little bit. "Everything is dusty and dirty", Tab thought, never realizing that all the powdery white dust was from the airbags that had deployed inside their vehicle.

The fact is that their trusty little Subaru had side impact airbags had most likely saved Tabitha's life. The rear bumper of the large 4x4 detached from the pick-up truck and was now directly between Tabitha in the back seat and her mother in the front seat.

Tab was crumpled up and moved over at least a foot from her original position. She faded out again, never realizing that she most likely had a dangerous concussion but, fortunately, for her no trapped limbs.

She heard her father say, "Don't be afraid, honey. The firemen are just cutting the door away to get you out." "Wake up sweetie." said the Paramedic, as he opened Tabitha's eyes gently, one at a time, while shining a small flashlight into them.

Tabitha was bemused a bit when she realized that she could still hear the sound of the window wipers swooshing away. It tickled her that her daddy had forgotten to turn them off.

"Wake up sweetie." Came the medical rescuer's voice.

Swoosh went the wipers again.

"Please, Lord Jesus, be with her." Tabitha's mother tearfully Prayed.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Inning

### **Tab Arrives at Spring Training !**

"Swoosh", went the wipers again, but the sound was different the swooshing of windshield wipers. Tab thought they seemed to be MORE "swooshy", if more were possible.

"Wake up, Tabitha," came the sweetest words from the sweetest voice Tabitha had ever heard. The words sounded like pure honey being poured into her mind.

"Swoosh !" came the wipers again, sounding almost like the sound made by the paddles in the water, where Tab and her father had gone canoeing on the reservoir last summer.

Then that sweet voice came again, calling her, bidding her,  
"Wake up, Tabitha. "

Tabitha awoke on a charter bus, a ball team's bus, to be exact. She was seated directly behind the driver and against the window, as the rain streamed down the glass. Sitting next to her was the owner of that sweet voice; a man dressed in a deep purple, sports, polo shirt. The word "Crusaders" was fully embroidered in gold script across the pocket. Tab estimated him to be late twenties or early thirties, with the deepest blue eyes she had ever seen.

When Tab looked into the man's eyes she felt three things.

First, a peace that she couldn't understand... a feeling that this man could set anything right.

Second, she felt like his eyes could see into her very soul... like there was nothing that those eyes could not see, even with a passing glance.

Third, those deep blue eyes were bottomless like the sea and she sensed their unimaginable intelligence. She'd swear if she looked hard enough into those eyes, she could see the entire earth, complete with oceans covered by cloud.

"That's crazy", she thought as she willingly snapped herself back to the here and now.

The man with the kind voice, the all-seeing eyes, and perhaps the biggest smile Tabitha had ever seen, extended his hand to her and said, " My name is JC, but you can call me Skip."

"I AM"... HE said, and after a pause HE continued, "the manager of this ball club. I AM,... also a friend of your mother's and she asked me look after you while you spend some time here with us."

Something about the "Way "the man referred to Himself as "I AM", especially with Him pausing each

time HE said "I AM".... caused a reaction, of sorts, within Tabitha's being. It was almost like, deep in her soul, something was understood that her conscious mind had not yet recognized.

"I have looked forward to this time so we can get to know each other, Tabitha" JC, the Skipper, finished.

The funny thing was that Tabitha was not afraid at all. She understood that she should be... you know... waking up in a strange place surrounded by strangers and all. Something about the Skipper, though, made her feel at peace..Peace with a capital P!

Tabitha felt loved and safe. "That's it!", Tab thought to herself. She felt like she was at home..like this place was her true home; not her home with her parents, friends and all that she had ever known. She felt...somehow she knew that this place, here and now with JC, the Skipper, was her true home.

"Don't worry Tab", Skip said. "I promise you that when we arrive at the ballpark, no rain or delays will be in our "Way" today." Then HE stood and spoke aloud to the entire team on that team bus.

"Listen up ! Rain falls in each of our lives. Rain fell and darkness shrouded as clouds in my life. And so it shall in yours as well. There will be testing and teaching within the trials and tribulation of temptations. But rest assured, Light emanates from the Heavens, direct from



the Father, given unto the Son, shared through the Spirit to show all the WAY."

And in that magic moment, as if on cue, Tabitha looked out her window and saw light emanating like the sun from inside a very large ballpark. "It's as big as any big leaguer's ballpark", Tab thought, in amazement.

The ballpark was covered by what appeared from this distance to be a huge glistening soap bubble!

Tabitha giggled and heard the murmurs from the other players seated on the bus, whom she had not yet met. They all took notice of the spectacular sight of the ballpark, as they listened to the Skipper.

Then, in an instant and without incident, the bus which had been going through a driving rain, simply passed right through the "bubble "and was inside sunshine.

*Personally I would call it "SONshine."*

### **3<sup>rd</sup>Inning**

#### **Being Accepted (Making the Roster)**

As the team walked across the parking lot, through the tunnel, and into the ballpark, several things amazed Tabitha. The team players hadn't changed clothes, yet as each of them had exited the team bus, their clothing had been transformed into squeaky clean, white, baseball uniforms!

They were the old fashioned traditional ones with buttons; not the modern pull over shirts. The name "Crusaders" was spelled out across the upper chest area in an old fashioned English script.

Tab took notice of her old style, two piece stockings. They were very impressive with black leggings and white socks.

Tabitha did not bother to remove her cap to inspect it because all the ball caps were the same... black, square ones with circular, white stripes, and a large "C" for "Crusaders" front and center. Tab could just feel and somehow knew that her hair was now in a pony tail. It was sticking out the hole in the back of the hat and she didn't want to mess that up.

The other thing that had amazed Tab was that when she looked up at the sky from where she stood, it appeared to be a perpetual sunny sky; not a soap bubble dome! She clearly remembered how the dome over the

stadium had looked as their team bus approached it from the highway. It had reflected all colors of the rainbow, as the raindrops fell upon the bubble and ran down the outside of its shell.

As Tabitha's feet instinctively carried her toward the pitcher's mound, she was struck with an odd sense of *déjà vu*. Somehow, this all seemed so familiar to her.

It was eye opening to see how smooth and well coordinated each team member and the team was handling the ball as they practiced. Smooth... fast...powerful... the ball seemed to fly almost with an unearthly speed from player to player!

With the sun streaming through his hair, the second baseman caught the ball. Then, in a perfectly fluid motion, he tapped the bag while turning and throwing the ball hard to first base. In an actual game, that would have been a classic pick-off double play!

He was stunning... captivating to Tabitha, stealing her breath away. Her heart pitter-pattered as it skipped a beat. "Hot" came the word to describe him in her mind. Then she thought she needed another word to describe him, since "hot" was the word she and her girlfriends used to describe cute boys at school.

This second baseman was a young man, not a boy, and for the very first time in her 14 years, Tabitha thought

the word "gorgeous" would be the right word to describe this guy!

This all took place in a matter of seconds as the "gorgeous" second baseman completed his throw, turned, and noticed Tab staring at him.

When their eyes met, however, she felt like he was not looking at her, but right through her as her face reddened with immediate embarrassment. His eyes were, in fact, looking THROUGH her at the Skipper, walking up behind Tabitha at this very moment.

"I ain't playing ball with no girl, Skip! " said the baseman.

His words crushed Tabitha. If only she could disappear...just ooze away unnoticed. Instead, she felt hurt, demoralized, embarrassed, and ashamed for no reason at all!

"Then you ain't playing ball! "the Skipper snapped right back to the errant second baseman. "And that goes for all of you! " Just then, for some reason, Tab remembered that the Skipper's nickname was J.C.

In a touch of pure kindness, the Skipper reached out and gently touched Tabitha's shoulder... and she audibly gave out a little gasp. A glow, which Tabitha had not seen before, emanated from J.C.'s hand and absorbed into Tabitha. She felt instant emotional relief.

Tab knew that she had every right to be furious with the second baseman, who had embarrassed her so much. But instead, she found she was no longer embarrassed; instead, amazingly she was quite calm and peaceful. In fact, she sort of felt pity on the second baseman. He evidently had issues about something as simple as playing ball with anyone different than him.

J.C. never said word to Tabitha...He didn't need to, He simply tenderly patted her on the shoulder a few more times. He then moved on to the tactless, albeit good looking, second baseman while motioning for him to come face Him.

The second baseman looked like he had just lost his favorite puppy, as his shoulders slumped and his gaze fell to the ground, unable to look the J.C. in the eyes.

A few of the other players now strode up to Tabitha and started to make small talk with her. She reassured all of them that she was fine. Then, she asked them a general question. Actually, it was not really a question... it was more like a puzzling statement.

Tabitha told them, " I was really upset with the second baseman. Then, the Skipper touched me and instantly I felt better."

All the other players started to laugh, further confounding Tabitha. "Don't worry," the man in the

Catcher's gear said. "You'll get used to it...in fact, you'll learn to really appreciate it."

Just then, the crowd around Tabitha parted, like Moses parted the Red Sea, as the second baseman walked toward Tabitha.

Tabitha thought, "Hummm...even though J.C. made things right, I still might hold a little grudge against you."

But the guy sounded almost like a different person to her. "I am sorry Tab...I really am. It was nothing personal against you per say, and I did not mean to make you feel bad either."

"He knows my name", Tabitha thought to herself.

The second baseman continued, "The Skipper determines who makes the team by knowing who accepts Him, His teachings, and who is willing to play by His rules for the betterment of all, you know, everyone...the whole team."

"The Skipper chose you for the team. None of us has the right to question that. "Soooo...we cool, then?" the baseman asked Tab.

"Cool," Tab said, and she meant it.

"Good!" the second baseman replied, while whapping her affectionately on the shoulder with his ball glove. Then, he quickly jogged away.

"I think I liked JC's touch much better", Tabitha mused, while rubbing her smarting shoulder. "Some people just don't know their own strength!".

Then, Tabitha stopped to think...to collect her thoughts. "Man, that dude just said a few words of apology to me and he thinks my hurt and embarrassment should just disappear? Well, I still don't get it but they are gone, thanks to JCs kind words and touch!

Tab found she was still struggling with what had just happened though. Was she supposed to forgive the baseman...just like that?

"Problem fixed."

"What... what was that? Tabitha asked herself.

It was JC's voice inside Tabitha's head. "I said, problem fixed. To him the problem is fixed my child,... understand?"

With that in her mind, a recent memory surfaced that, at the time had really troubled Tabitha.

She was remembering sitting at their breakfast table last Saturday morning, before she had to leave for ball

practice. She'd had to endure a most unpleasant exchange between her mother and father.

"Well, say something! " Tab's mother demanded from her father.

"I did! I told you how to fix the problem ten minutes ago," Tabitha's father had indifferently replied.

"Oh, you're impossible! I don't want you to fix the problem you big dumb oaf. I just wanted to discuss how the problem made me feel! "

"Why? " Tab's father asked, truly bewildered.

With that, Tabitha's mother turned and stormed out of the kitchen.

Then, Tabitha's father spoke again, "Women. Tabby, don't you ever grow up and be like that."

"Don't worry, Daddy. I won't. "Tab had said, not really understanding what had happened.

But now, as Tabitha watched the second baseman jog away, seemingly without a care in the world...feeling all had been resolved... she got it, she really got it!

"Men are problem solvers, period", she deduced. "To men it's all about the solution. To women it's all about the cause of the problem...first finding out what caused



the problem; then preventing it from ever happening again". Tab felt that she was beginning to understand not only the argument her parents had had last Saturday, but the incident that had occurred here in the stadium between her and the second baseman.

"Hummm...maybe I'm getting wiser, all of a sudden", Tab wondered.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Base**  
**(Part 2)**

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,  
whenever you face trials of many kinds,<sup>3</sup>  
because you know that the testing of  
your faith produces perseverance.

<sup>4</sup>Let perseverance finish its  
work so that you may be  
mature and complete,  
not lacking  
anything.

James 1:2-4 NIV

Consider the suffrage of thy soul  
Doth not life demand a toll  
Surely thy discernment  
Shall ever be earned  
Lest our lessons  
Go unlearned  
◁LS>

## 4<sup>th</sup> Inning

### **Practice Makes Perfect!**

"All right lady and gentlemen... gather around please," JC announced while removing his ball cap. The players also removed their caps and instinctively grouped around their manager in a circle, as JC opened practice with a Prayer.

"Loving Father, Your truth is evident within Your loving guidance graciously given to us in Your eternal Word. Your Word governs everything we do; even these very ballgames we play. May we always be aware that our lives are about more than mere wins and defeats but rather the lessons we learn each day. We know that You, Holy Father, do not count our victories as mere wins and defeats; nor do you perceive our worth in gains or losses.

You teach us to ask ourselves: What good is victory that has no honor? Is defeat a loss when we've done our best, with love and sacrifice?

Thank you, Father, for teaching us that life is truly about how we play and how we each love one another. May we never forget this lesson, for a person never knows who they encourage and influence when they walk the straight and narrow path, following Your Word.  
"Amen."

"Play Ball ! " JC, the Skipper, yelled aloud after He had finished with His Prayer. "Tab, you're up!," JC shouted. Tab chose her bat and slowly stepped into the batting cage.

"My, that pitcher is a strange looking fellow," Tab thought to herself. Then she smiled as she remembered that his name was Knuckles.

Knuckles is a good name for him, Tabitha mused. He was quite tall and lanky, with arms so long it seemed like his knuckles could scrape the ground as he pitches.

Knuckles very gently raised his pitching arm and lofted a grimy, dirty old softball into the air.

"Easy, thought Tab. This isn't even a fraction as fast as I can pitch a soft ball.

"I'm gonna rock his world!" Tabitha determined, as she squeezed the bat hard, clenching her teeth. Then, the ball began to move faster, and faster, and faster! Then the ball screamed....yes, screamed!

"aaaaaaeeeeeeeeee!!!!"

As the ball whizzed by Tab's head she did not know what startled her the most. Was it the way the ball increased speed, or was it the way the softball appeared to be alive? It actually had a screaming face as it sped by her unbelievably fast.

"Strike One!" yelled the ump from behind the catcher.

"But what is that sound?", Tabitha wondered?

It sounded like muffled laughter coming from inside the catcher's mitt!

The catcher slowly pulled out a grimy, dirt-stained softball from his mitt, holding it up and turning it around for Tabitha to see.

"How about a kissy?" asked the living face of the grimy ball, complete with puckering motions and kissy, kissy sounds.

"His name is Slobbers," the catcher informed Tab matter-of-factly, as he tossed the ball back to Knuckles, the pitcher.

" Wheeeeeee... she loves me!" shouted Slobbers, the ball, as he sailed back to the pitcher's mound.

JC then spoke up to explain about Slobbers to her.

"Tabitha, each team in this league has advantages and disadvantages; just like in real life. The trick is to utilize the gifts God has given to each team and each player. Understand?"

" I...uh... think so," Tabitha answered.

"Slobbers is this team's advantage." JC continued.

A chorus of sighs and shouts erupted from all the other players around the practice field when they heard the Skipper's words.

"Ah, Shut-Up! " Slobbers yelled to his teammates.

Then, the living ball continued to speak, "You Jerks might lose with me, but you will never win without me!"

"He's right, "the Skipper said, and then He added, "Whether his teammates care to admit it or not, even with their all-star abilities, it is Slobbers who gives this team it's greatest chance at victory. You see, as a living ball, Slobbers can avoid a batters swing".

"But at what cost, Skip? " asked the first baseman.

"Yeah, we gotta put up with his foul, smarty mouth," Chimed in the umpire, from behind the plate.

Then Slobbers spoke up, "Stow it guys! Can't you see that the little Miss has feelings for me?"

At that comment, the Skipper motioned for the ball. Knuckles then tossed Slobbers to the Skipper, who threw him to third base, while moving His arm in a circular pattern. This meant for the team to toss Slobbers back and forth around the field.

Tabitha stood there in amazement at how fast Slobbers moved from place to place. She noticed something else,

too. Not only did Slobbers move from the player throwing him; he also picked up speed and changed his direction, using his own abilities. All the while, conversation traveled with the ball from player to player, as they each had a word or two to say to Slobbers.

"Feelings for you? Questioned the third baseman, she just met you dummy!" he told Slobbers.

"Yeah, I can tell its love at first sight! "Retorted Slobbers, with arrogance.

"Gag! "Yelled the short stop.

"You're delusional, Slobbers! You've been whacked with too many Louisville sluggers," said the handsome second baseman.

The conversation continued around the ball diamond, as Slobbers was tossed deep into the outfield and back and forth. As he was being tossed, each of his teammates chided him about his believing that Tab already had feelings for him.

Then Tabitha lost the flow of conversation when the Skipper called out, "pitchers' meeting," motioning for Knuckles and Tabitha to meet with Him.

"Knuckles,let me officially introduce you to Tabitha"

JC said with a smile. "Oh yes, you like to be called Tab, right?" He asked, looking at Tabitha. She nodded in agreement.

"Hello, Tab, pleased to meet you." Knuckles said politely.

After Tab and Knuckles shook hands, the Skipper continued, "Tab is going to be staying with us for a few days working as our relief pitcher. So... I was thinking that you never seem to get much of a break. Would you like a little vacation, Knuckles?"

"Thank-You, Skip! That sounds wonderful!" Knuckles replied.

"Good-good, where and when my friend,... would you like to go?" the Skipper asked him.

"Hummm," spoke Knuckles, contemplating the Skippers proposal. Then he spoke, "Skipper, I always thought it would be great to observe Noah and his family before, during, and after the flood."

"I think that can be arranged," JC replied.

Then JC turned and said, "What about you, Tabitha? Have you ever given thought about what you would like to see, if GOD gave you a choice?"

"I guess I don't know, Skip," Tabitha stammered, clearly caught off guard by His question.



"Well, you are young, Tab. These kinds of wonderings of the heart and mind will come in time and with experience," JC replied smiling. Then, He walked away.

"Wait a minute, where's Knuckles?" Tabitha wondered.

In the few seconds that JC had drawn Tabitha's attention with His question to her, Knuckles had simply vanished! "Where did he go?", asked Tabitha.

"To observe Noah," came JC's voice once again, this time, inside her head.

"Just like that?!" Tab's mind blurted out.

"Yep!" was JC's single word answer Tab received in her mind.

As Tabitha's astounded mind attempted to sort out everything that had just happened, she thought about the choice that the Skipper had offered to Knuckles. "Where and when would you like to go?"

Tabitha had to admit that Noah's Ark was a fine choice. Seeing and experiencing such a thing first hand would indeed be marvelous.

Likewise, she thought that perhaps seeing Jesus, in the tomb, rising from the dead would be amazing. Or perhaps, seeing the earth created, or even Adam and

Eve being created from the dust of the Earth, would also be breathtaking.

Speaking of breathtaking, Tabitha thought of all the wonders and hidden beauty throughout GOD's universe. To see such beauty, in places unseen by anyone other than GOD Himself, would be miraculous beyond words.

As Tabitha thought of the wonders, available with such a treat offered to Knuckles, she realized that for her, signs and wonders of GOD were in the smallest of details.

Indeed, Tabitha's favorite miracle of Christ in the Bible was one of His little ones; NOT that rising from the dead, or raising the dead weren't impressive! Of course curing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf were amazing. But, she had to admit, not even Jesus walking on the water was her favorite miracle.

What Tabitha enjoyed most was the story of the Lord feeding a great multitude of people with one small boy's lunch. It consisted of a few loaves of bread and two fishes. She smiled, imagining the baskets of fish and bread just pouring out over and over to feed everyone..

Then, Tabitha shouted, " I've got it...I know!" as in what her wish would be if GOD gave to her the same choice He'd given Knuckles. It would not be a big event, a "where" or a "when". In Tab's case, it would be a "what".

Tabitha smiled and she blurted out, in her mind, "A donut tree! Yes, a tree that grows donuts...chocolate, frosted, custard, jelly, cream filled, maple, coconut, sprinkles....her mind interrupted...mmm," she mused.

"Really?" came JC's voice in Tabitha's mind once again, sounding amused.

"Yep!" was the single thought answer Tabitha gave back to JC, with a dry, funny sense of humor.

Tabitha could actually see the Skipper now seated in the dugout, smiling and shaking His head in amusement.

## **5<sup>th</sup> Inning**

### **Batter Up!**

Tabitha awoke on the team bus, with an awareness that they had been traveling for quite a while.

"Good morning, sleepy head." Slobbers said to her, tucked down in the seat beside her. That seat was where JC had been seated, the last time she rode this bus.

"Slobbers, I don't remember finishing practice, or for that matter, I don't remember anything at all about last night!"

"Road game today, sweetie," was Slobbers only reply.

"But I really don't remember much about practice yesterday," Tabitha continued.

"Doesn't matter. Road game today, I said. Hey, tell me. Are all pretty girls as hard of hearing as you are?" Slobbers asked, with a grin.

"Hey!" Tabitha answered, getting annoyed.

"Well, at least you gave me a kissy before beddie- bye, last night." Slobbers said to Tabitha, with a wink and a smile.

"No-way! " Tabitha blurted out, exasperated.

"Oh, brother "commented an unseen player, who had overheard Slobber's comment to Tabitha, from his seat directly behind them.

"She said she doesn't remember!" Slobbers snapped back to his doubting, behind-their- seat, teammate.

"Yeah, I'd admit that, Slobbers." said the voice from behind the seat, dripping with deep sarcasm.

"What-what? " Slobbers replied, in surprised confusion.

Then the voice from behind the seat replied, "I would NEVER admit that I kissed a girl and she did not even remember it!"

"All right! All right! Slobbers confessed in exasperation, "I made it up!"

"Of course you did," said the voice from behind the seat, with a great sense of satisfaction.

The rest of the bus ride was quiet, and after a short while, JC offered a Prayer and a few words of advice for each of the players.

"Slobbers, do your best today. Try keeping your mind on the game and not on how witty you can be. OK?" said the Skip to Slobbers. "Today is Tabitha's first

game and it is against the Guardians, so she needs your best today."

"Tabitha needs my help, Skip?" Slobbers asked JC.

"Yes, Slobbers. Tabitha needs your help, so can we have a clean game from start to finish?" JC replied.

"She needs me! She needs ME!" Slobbers exclaimed, to no one in particular.

Later, while out upon the field warming up, Tabitha noticed one of the opposing players walking up to her. "Guardians," Tabitha thought, "that is what the Skip called the other team."

"Hello Tabitha. I could not resist saying hello in this realm," said the lady Guardian player, who seemed strangely familiar. Tabitha felt like she had known this woman for her entire life, as they shook hands.

"My name is Roxella."

"Have we met before, Roxella?" Tabitha asked. "You seem so familiar."

"Oh yes, my child." Roxella answered with a broad smile.

"Rox, best to let it go for now," came JC's voice, from somewhere, sight unseen."

"Good luck in the game today, Tab. I just love watching you pitch!" Roxella told her, walking away.

Tabitha thought about Roxella's words for a few minutes longer and could not shake the notion that she knew her from somewhere.

But, the most surprising thing about today's game, to Tabitha, was not her face-to-face meeting with Roxella and feeling like they knew each other. Instead, it was the Skipper, who teammates also called "JC".

You see HE is the Skipper for both teams!! What?? At first, Tabitha thought that maybe the Skipper had a twin brother or something like that. But, the more she watched HIM, the more she became convinced that it was HIM...you know...HIM! Different uniform... but HIM.

Then, JC answered in Tabitha's mind, "Yes Tabitha, it is I coaching both the Crusaders and the Guardians. You see, GOD, our Father, is outside of time. That means HE is omnipotent...all powerful and capable of being in all places and in a single place at the same time. I know...hard to understand...but true. It means HE can be anywhere, anytime, for anyone.

And what is GOD'S such as His ability to be anyplace at any time He also entrusts unto His SON.

About the game...Slobbers came through, and not just for Tab, but for the entire team! The score was 6-5 in favor of the Crusaders, with two out and two on, in the bottom of the ninth, when the PA system crackled to life. The crowd quieted down to hear the announcement.

"Now, substitute batting for the Guardians, is designated hitter..... Samson!!"

"Oh NOoooooooo....!" wailed a chorus of voices, from her teammates around the field, to Tabitha's ears.

"Who is Samson? " Tabitha asked Slobbers.

"Sorry, Tab. I either strike him out or he knocks me to the moon... no in-between with Samson," Slobbers commented somberly.

Tabitha swallowed hard, as Samson walked to the plate. He was the size of a truck and had muscles upon muscles. But, it was his hair that amazed Tabitha the most. Samson was a man, but he had the most beautiful hair that she'd ever seen. It was braided all the way down his back with its tips covered in red beads that touched the ground.

However, it was the "Bat" in his hands that scared her the most! Not only did it look like half a tree... it was Alive!!!!...just like Slobbers!



Tabitha then remembered...JC had said that each team and even different players had advantages and disadvantages. Then Tab thought, "this giant of a man gets the advantage of using a living bat. Not only that, but that "bat" is bigger than I am!" Tabitha correctly surmised..

A living ball verses a living bat, with a man as big as a mountain swinging it!

Now that, my friend, is a match up!

Then, it was Slobbers who broke Tabitha's thoughts.

"Want me to strike that big ox out?" Slobbers asked.

"Can you do it?" Tabitha asked.

"Yep,...uh... well, sometimes," Slobbers replied.

"Play Ball!" yelled the Umpire, from behind the plate, tired of waiting on the conversation between Tabitha and Slobbers to end. Tabitha wound up and threw Slobbers as hard as she could, while inwardly Praying that Slobbers knew what he was doing.

"What WAS Slobbers doing?" Tabitha wondered. First, he zigged...then he zagged... taking wild-wide angles toward the plate. Then, just before Slobbers entered into the batting box, he started to drop down

and Samson let go with a swing that Tabitha would describe as...well... indescribable.

Good thing it was just a trick move on Slobbers part. If that mighty swing of Samson's had connected with Slobbers I would have most likely never seen him again. Tab thought inside to herself.

You see, just after he started to dip, Slobbers rose-up through the strike zone in a most unnatural way.

Strike! Yelled the Umpire.

"Quit zig-zagging around Slobbers!" yelled the living Bat in Samson's hands. But, it was Samson who spoke next, "Don't let him get in your head! Just remember... no matter what he does, he has to finish over the plate," snapped Samson to his bat.

Tabitha had to remind herself to breathe. She had a sense of amusement while thinking back on how much Pat the Bat had intimidated her. She thought it was very similar to her situation here, and what she faced now.

Then, Tabitha smiled when she remembered how she had gained an advantage over Patricia by taking the pressure off herself and letting it rest upon Pat.

Tabitha held her glove up to her face with Slobbers inside and whispered.;

"Slobbers, think about it, he's waiting to crush a pitch."

"Yeah, he's overconfident if anything." Slobbers replied.

"That big man would never expect us to have the gumption to jam him." Tabitha said with a sly grin on her face.

"Now you're talking! Let's do it!" Slobbers said excitedly.

Tabitha wound up and Slobbers was off in a flash. He picked up some speed and appeared to be headed right for the sweet spot above the plate.

Samson gritted his teeth and squeezed his Bat hard while it was the living bat who actually spoke, "Say bye-bye to Slobbers, Sweet Stuff."

But, as Samson swung his living lumber, Slobbers veered right toward him, forcing Samson back onto his heels and out of the batter's box!.

However, the Bat and Slobbers still made glancing contact. Unbelievable, to Tabitha's eyes, Slobbers was foul tipped backwards; not just into the stands, but clear up and over the nose-bleed, cheap seats.

Tabitha stood in amazement. She had never seen a ball hit that far before. While watching Slobbers fly foul, up and out of the stadium, the umpire asked Samson, "Should I give her a warning... you know... about pitching you inside."

As Samson looked at the official, and then out at Tabitha, his funny bone was tickled by the absurdity of it all.

The big man let out a hearty laugh and boasted, "No, no, my BAT is larger than she is!" Samson laughed some more, and then he added, "I was crowding the plate, you know. "

Then, as if on cue, a beautiful glowing lady Angel, surrounded by an aura of light, flew into the ball park and settled to rest... just a few feet in front of the pitcher's mound.

The Angel, very Gracefully, reached out and handed Slobbers to Tabitha.

"Thanks for the lift lady, but no kissy for you with my girl watching," Slobbers informed the angel. The Angel wrinkled her nose in disgust and hastily flew away.

"Jamming him worked good but now what? We still need one more strike," Tabitha told Slobbers

"I know what to do, " Slobbers replied

"You do? What? Tabitha asked.

"Trust me." Slobbers told Tabitha.

Tabitha took a deep breath and sighed, "Ok... if you say so."

"Good! Pitch me way outside, nice and easy, like you intend to walk him." said Slobbers.

"Maybe we should just walk him?" returned Tabitha.

"Oh no, not this time... I have a plan," Slobbers finished.

Tabitha very easily pitched Slobbers way outside of the batter's box, and the Umpire called "Ball !"

As the catcher tossed Slobbers back to Tabitha, Slobbers stopped in mid-air, turned, and spoke to Samson. "Hey Samson, guess who's back in town ?"

" I don't know, Slobbers, but I bet your going to tell me!" Samson said, with a hint of indifference.

"Delilah! " Retorted Slobbers.

" Reeaaaaally" said Samson, through gritted teeth. He knew it was not a question of whether Delilah was back in town but that Slobbers was trying to get him mad. He was using the same old put down that everyone had been using on Samson since time immemorial.

"Yeah! Slobbers fired right back undeterred. She is opening a barber shop since she learned how to cut hair while practicing on you."

Samson sighed and just said, "Go away, Slobbers."

Slobbers then flew in a high lazy arc back to Tabitha yelling all the way, "Deeeeliiiiilllahhh."

The very instant Slobbers touched the inside of Tabitha's glove, Slobbers fired back at the plate like he had been shot out of a cannon! Tabitha herself was taken completely by surprise, so Samson would have been surprised too...right?

*Well, he would have been, if his thoughts were not a million miles away in another place and in another lifetime.*

Slobbers was moving so fast that he left a rainbow trail of light in his wake.

Properly distracted, Samson swung at Slobbers, of course, but alas, too late.

This day belonged to Slobbers and Tabitha !

Walking away Samson paused and spoke to Tabitha.

"Nice job kid... but NEXT time...", Samson swung his bat at Tabitha and motioned a long hit outta here.

"Not with all of that hair in your eyes, caveman!"  
Slobbers yelled at Samson.

"You stay out of this Slobbers or I'll whack you so hard next time your great grand-children will feel it!"  
Samson yelled, as he walked away mumbling something about a big mouth, little, foul ball.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Inning

### Heart of the Game

On the bus ride back home, ("that is, wherever home even IS, in this place," Tab mused), it was just as she was ready to fall asleep, when she heard...

"Pssst...Tab," whispered Slobbers, from deep down in his seat beside her.

"Hi, Slobbers, what's up?" Tabitha replied, with a smile on her face. Her happiness about the thrill of striking out the big man with the living "Bat" was still glowing within her.

"Umm...could I ask a favor, please? Slobbers asked.

"Of course you can," Tabitha replied, adding, "But NO kissy."

"No, no kissy, but could you hold me in your hand, Tab?" Slobbers asked.

"What,... say that again?" Tabitha said, not sure about what she had just heard.

"This is hard for me to say Tab. I'm a little bit afraid of the dark, so... could you hold me please?" Slobbers asked.



Tabitha noticed that Slobbers was looking down toward the bus floor, feeling ashamed of himself for his fear of the dark. He was unable to make eye contact with her, while he was ever so slightly shaking.

"He's serious," Tabitha thought. "Slobbers is afraid of the dark".

"Ok", Tabitha said, as she held out her hand to him, palm side up.

"Thank-you," Slobbers said, with a large smile, as he hopped into Tabitha's right hand, closing his eyes.

It took less than five minutes for Slobbers to fall soundly asleep, unafraid of the dark in Tabitha's hand. However, it was his snoring that caused quite a stir on the bus, as all of the other players took notice of Slobbers sleeping quietly.

"Huh, this is the only time we've ever heard that little big mouth quiet," said the voice from behind the seat.

"Yeah", came another voice from still further back on the bus. "Maybe we should get Tabitha to rock Slobbers to sleep on every bus trip ! "

With that, a small round of laughter went around the bus.

"Mind if I sit down, Tab?" It was the calm, pleasing voice of JC.

"I'll know that you have a few questions to ask of me?" JC said, while taking the now empty seat next to Tabitha.

*Tabitha did have a few questions for the Skipper. She realized that every time she had a question for Him, He just seemed to show up or even answer her in her mind. There was just something special about the Skipper.*

"Skipper, I have an idea about Slobbers, but I need to know a few things first," Tabitha said.

"Yes, I know what is on your heart, but tell me... are you truly ready to take on such a task and follow it all the WAY through?" the Skipper asked Tabitha, putting an emphasis upon the word "Way".

"Yes, Skipper. I am," Tabitha replied. "Slobbers needs a friend...someone to help him become a better person. He has the potential, if he would only believe in himself and others."

"So, ask your questions, Tabitha" The Skipper said, looking in her eyes.

"Skip, why is Slobbers... you know, so mean?" Tabitha asked Him..

He's hiding, Dear... hiding his pain, fear and rejection behind a mask of false bravado, JC replied.

"I had a feeling there was some reason for his foul behavior. What is he hiding from?" Tabitha asked JC.

"Tabitha, all of creation has a purpose and a reason for being. Slobbers was made for this game and this league. As such, he was made to forever be almost childlike. He has an innocent enthusiasm that will never tire for the game, and talents that will constantly improve as he gains experience. As players come and go in this league, each fulfilling their very own dream of what it might have been like to play ball in a pro league, Slobbers remains forever a part of the game."

"I see...I think. Are there many such places and opportunities like this ball league in Heaven?" Tabitha asked.

"Yes, Tabitha. But for now, this league is all that you are allowed to share and experience... so... let's stick to Slobbers and his behavior problems, shall we?" JC said firmly, but with a smile.

"OK Skip, I understand about Slobbers, his existence, and even his life as it is. But, why is he hiding behind a mask of mean?" Tabitha asked.

"You see Tabitha, many games ago... many players ago, Slobbers wanted, more than anything, to be accepted by his peers. But, for a very long time he was nothing more

to them than "the ball." It hurt him very deeply. He Prayed and cried, wishing with all he had, just to be accepted and given a real name.

Then, one day a new relief pitcher played with the team for only a single game. But alas, that single game would become a living nightmare for Slobbers even til this very day. That single game still haunts and torments his very soul.

You see Tabitha, that relief pitcher was vain as well as vile. He could not stand the thought of losing his one and only professional ball game.

So, when he thought no one was looking, he spat disgusting tobacco juice on Slobbers. This made him a spitball, in an illegal effort to make it harder for the batter to hit the ball.

The pitcher was ejected from the game, of course, but poor Slobbers he was horrified. He felt violated and mocked. Fully distraught at the indignity placed upon him, he sat crying upon the bench in his teams dug-out.

Well, his insensitive teammates, at that time, took notice of the "ball's" grief and showed him no mercy or understanding. They all laughed at him. Finally, one of them took to calling the ball "Slobbers". The more offense the Ball displayed, the more the insensitive players became, teasing him with that name. And that was that!

All that little ball ever wanted was to be accepted by his teammates. What he got was an ever reminding name of his worst day ever... the name of "Slobbers".

The little childlike innocent ball was not and is not capable of handling such a rebuke; especially while wanting nothing more than to be loved and accepted for who he is.

Slobbers does not even realize that those players, or anyone who even knew why his name is Slobbers, are long gone from the team. All Slobbers knows is that he has to fight back the only way that he knows how... to be foul". With that, JC stopped speaking.

"Thank-you Skipper. I will try my best." Tabitha said.

"I know that you will," JC replied. Then He added, knowing her thoughts, "Tabitha, what you have in mind is very good and kind, but understand many people are not willing to let go of their pain and grudges. They will fight to the bitter end to resist change; even when they know that such a change would be better for them. Deep down, they may know that forgiving others could make them more joyous, free them of guilt and shame, and prepare the "Way " for a fresh new start. But they still resist change. Do you think you understand? JC asked Tabitha.

She nodded her head, "Yeah, I think I do."

JC said, "One more thing. I also have something in store for two friends of mine here at the game...and for you... and for your parents. After the end of our next game, I want you to go into the stands and find Section 14. Two of my friends will be waiting for you."

"14... like my Jersey number, like my age!" Tabitha exclaimed.

"Indeed, they are one and the same," JC replied. He then lowered his ball cap over His eyes, with the intention of resting for a while.

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**3<sup>rd</sup> Base**  
**(Part 3)**

*For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD,  
"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to  
give you hope and a future.  
Jeremiah 29:11 NIV*

*For only the Lord does know where our paths will go.  
◁LS▷*

## 7<sup>th</sup> Inning

### Saved is Safe on Base

Tabitha arrived at practice a few moments tardy the next morning. When she finally did emerge from the "Ladies" side of the club house, she exited out through the dug-out and onto the playing field.

She was carrying a small bright yellow bucket. Inside the bucket was warm soapy water and a small scrub brush. As Tabitha approached the pitcher's mound, she sat the bucket down and a tiny bit of sudsy froth spilled out.

The handsome second baseman had just caught Slobbers and his attention was on the soap bucket as he said, "I hope that bucket is for Slobbers. Lord knows that he could use a good bath!"

The baseman tossed Slobbers to Tabitha and she spoke to the second baseman, "Yes, this bucket is for Slobbers. But he needs to be cleaned on the inside as well as the outside, and for that we will need the Lord." the baseman watched her with curiosity.

Tabitha wasted no time. As she caught Slobbers, she turned and dunked him down into the soapy water. Slobbers face had a look of complete panic as he went into his bath.



"Wait! " Slobbers yelled, with a mouthful of soap.

Tabitha ignored him and began scrubbing him all over with the brush.

"Hey "Slobbers yelled. "You're hurting me! "

"Am not!" Tabitha stated with authority.

"Soap is in my eyes and in my mouth!" Slobbers exclaimed.

"Then shut them both." Tabitha told him, matter-of-factly.

About that time, cheers and jeers could be heard from Tabitha's and Slobbers' teammates.

"Shush, Fella's", Tabitha instructed, remembering what the Skipper had said about Slobbers needing to be accepted. His teammates teasing and taunting him, right at this moment, was not a good thing.

"There, that ought to just about do it!" Tabitha pronounced, while pulling Slobbers up out of the bucket.

For an instant, even Tabitha was stunned silent. You see, Slobbers was no longer stained and dirty. He was squeaky clean. He looked brand new!

"He's clean!" Tabitha thought to herself. "Just as clean as we are when we accept JESUS and ask Him to forgive us for everything we've done wrong."

*Tabitha's Sunday School lessons were becoming clearer to her and it all made sense! She now understood that her sins, too, had been washed away when she had Prayed and asked GOD to forgive her. That's how we, too, are brand new creatures when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. All of our past sins and stains are washed away!*

"It's almost like Slobbers has been baptized," Tab thought, in amazement, to herself, when she finally stopped thinking and took notice of the expression on Slobbers face. That's when she realized he had only been cleaned up on the outside...not on the inside. "I'll Pray about this", Tab thought. She then stopped thinking when she heard...

"How dare you violate my body !" Slobbers exclaimed.

"If you could only see yourself, Slobbers. Your stains are gone. Now, if you can change on the inside, you'll be clean inside AND out!" Tabitha told him excitedly.

"That's impossible... and besides, I need my attitude to be able to shout at all these morons and survive the game!" Slobbers continued, defiantly.

"No you don't, Slobbers... not anymore." Tabitha then took notice of something. Slobbers was not arguing and debating with her for his own sake. Instead, his eyes kept wandering around the field, looking at his teammates. Slobbers was more worried about what others thought of him in this moment, than what the moment truly meant for him.

"I'm just trying to help you, Slobbers." Tabitha next said.

"You need me, I don't need you! " Slobbers exclaimed, his bad attitude back in full swing.

"You couldn't hit the side of a barn without me!" Slobbers continued, referring to Tabitha's pitching.

"Oh,yeah? " Tabitha asked.

"Yeah!" Slobbers said in an defiant tone.

"Well, guess what, Slobbers?" Tabitha challenged.

"What! " Slobbers replied.

"Looks like I missed a spot. That little foul mouth of yours needs a good washing out as well! "

With those words, Tabitha reached down into the soapy water with two fingers scooped up some suds and put them right into Slobbers little foul mouth!

Tabitha turned as she stood and tossed Slobbers back to the handsome second baseman who had a very amused and rather stunned look on his face, as well.

Then, Tabitha stormed off the field, so upset that she forgot to take the bucket of soapy water.

"While I'll be," said the second baseman, stunned at how good Slobbers looked being squeaky clean.

*On the outside, anyway!*

"What you lookin' at you clumsy dum-dum." Slobbers yelled at him.

"What's the matter, Slobbers? You find a thorn on your little sweet Tabby rose?" The second baseman replied.

Then, the second basemen tossed Slobbers to first base.

"The bloom is definitely off the rose," the first baseman said, while throwing Slobbers all the way across the field to third base.

"What are those two idiots talking about? " Slobbers asked the third baseman.

"They are speaking the language of love, Slobbers, clearly something that you know nothing about. The third baseman said matter- of-factly.

## **The 7<sup>th</sup> Inning stretch**

### **We All Need Friends (In the game of life)**

Later,

"Play Ball! " the umpire behind home plate announced, after JC had led the entire stadium in Prayer.

As Tabitha positioned herself on the pitcher's mound, she thought, "Funny thing... JC had said His Prayer very reverently, almost in the tone of a whisper; yet everyone present had heard every Word that He'd said.

She thought about asking Slobbers about Skip's Prayer, but Slobbers was still very angry at Tabitha for giving him a bath. He was working very hard at giving her the silent treatment.

Tabitha sighed wound up and threw the ball hard. But, Slobbers literally put on the brakes the instant he left her hand and slowed to a near stop. He began to taunt the batter. "Hey you! Does your momma know you're out playing ball with the big boys and girls? Maybe you should run along home little one before you hurt yourself!"

Then, Slobbers added insult to injury by pausing in mid-air to stick out his tongue at the batter.

Then, he flipped himself around giving the batsman his tushy as a target.

"Na-na-nana, Na-na-nana," Slobbers dared the hitter to swing at him, in almost a cadence.

The batsman clearly aggravated by Slobbers antics, gritted his teeth hard and took a big swing for the fences!

"eeeeeeEEEEEEEEOOOOWWEEEEEE!!!" Slobbers yelled, as he was hit from the park.

But more than that, Slobbers seemed to be going faster and faster in the wrong direction. He was clearly still upset and was purposely helping their opponent get a home run off Tabitha.

In a few minutes, that same beautiful lady Angel with the white puffy wings flew down into the stadium and handed Slobbers back to Tabitha.

"Thanks for the lift sister, but like I said before, no kissy for you with my girl watching!" Slobbers said to the lady Angel.

The Angel again wrinkled her nose in disgust at Slobbers' rude comment. Then, she said to Tabitha, "He's all yours sweetheart."...as she flew away.

"What was that!" Tabitha yelled at Slobbers, demanding an explanation for his actions.

"A homer, "Slobbers said very dryly, with a sly smile and one upraised eyebrow.

"Yes, I know that was a homer, Slobbers. But, why would you do that to me?" Tabitha responded.

"You actually have to ask why?" Slobbers stammered, with a mocking laugh.

"Tabitha took a deep breath, and then quietly replied, "I was only trying to help you." said Tab.

"Help me? How? By embarrassing me in front of the whole team... again?" Slobbers shouted.

Tabitha replied, "Of course not... by washing you squeaky clean and getting rid of all the stains that hurt and embarrass you, my friend."

"How did you know those stains bothered me?" Slobbers asked Tab.

"Skipper told me when I asked him why you are so mean."

"Oh" Slobbers said clearly, knowing that there was no arguing or denying anything that JC says.

Then Slobbers asked Tabitha, "Why did you ask the Skip about me?"

"Because you're my friend and I wanted to be able to make you feel better about yourself." Tabitha told him kindly.

"I'm your friend, really your friend?" Slobbers asked Tab.

"Of course you are silly, why else would I try to help you?" Tabitha replied.

"Oh," Slobbers sheepishly replied, in nearly a whisper. "I thought, at first, you were my friend. Then, I thought, just like the others, you were making sport of me by scrubbing me in front of everybody."

"Nope....just removing those stains to make you feel better." Tabitha answered Slobbers. Then she added, "The Skipper warned me that it would not be easy. He said that many people prefer to hold onto their stains, rather than washing them clean and feeling better about themselves."

"Skipper is right, He's always right," Slobbers replied.

"I've noticed that, too. Skipper IS always right!" Tabitha replied.

"You're really my friend?" Slobbers again asked Tabitha.

"Yes, I am Slobbers, and you're my friend too. Right?" Tab said.



"Yes, I am Tab, and I am very lucky to have such a friend. Thank you for everything." Slobbers replied, with tears of thanks in his eyes.

"OK, now that we have that straight, we have a game to win!" Tabitha said to Slobbers.

"Yes, we do, my friend." Slobbers said exuberantly.

*And they did,...win the game, that is, and together Tabitha and Slobbers learned the full meaning and the true value of friendship.*

After the game had ended, Slobbers noticed something. That something was fresh popcorn!

"Popcorn, get your popcorn here!" shouted a young woman carrying the buttery treat up and down, through the aisles of the stadium.

"Hey, Tab, "Slobbers yelled out to Tabitha, while trailing the vendor with the bags of popcorn. "Want some popcorn?" he asked.

"No, thanks, Slobbers. Skipper wants me to meet some people in Section 14." Tabitha replied, remembering the Skippers request that she meet some folks after the game.

"Suit yourself! It sure smells good!" Slobbers replied, as he sped away following the young lady with the popcorn.

Tabitha then made a quick scan of the stands, taking her best guess as to where Section 14 might be. She then headed off the field, running up the stairs of the bleachers in that direction.

As Tabitha entered into Section 14, a young couple, twenty... maybe twenty five years old, rose to greet her.

"Hello, Tabitha. We have been looking so forward to meeting you," said the smiling woman.

"Indeed we have," replied her male companion.

Tabitha could not quite put her finger on it, but something was amiss...especially with the woman.

"It's her eyes," Tabitha thought. "She has my father's eyes...yes...that's it! Her eyes remind me of my father".

They chatted for a few minutes when the man part of the couple informed Tabitha that, "There are some things that JES... I mean, Skip said, that we are just not permitted to talk about with you."

For some odd reason Tabitha thought that the man had almost said the name of JESUS and changed it to Skip.

After some more small talk, the young lady with her father's eyes, said that it had been a pleasure meeting her, and she wished that they could have been there for her.

It was an odd statement for sure; one that puzzled Tabitha.

Then the young man said, "Tell you what Tabitha, we are going to tell you a story about a young boy. Later, when you remember it, will you please tell your father this same story and see what he has to say?"

The young lady part of the couple interrupted him to ask, "Are you sure, Dear... you know... if it's permissible?"

"Well, I sure hope so." he answered her, while smiling.

"OK, but be careful, Dear," the young lady responded.

The young man then told Tabitha a little story that she was sure, at first, that she would never remember.

"You see, Tabitha, once... a very long time ago, was a little farm boy who was a good boy; but he could often be quite mischievous."

"He, once, for no other reason than to have something to do other than his chores and homework, painted all of his father's cows. He painted them blue, red, yellow,

whatever color he could find out in the tool shed using half full pails of left-over paint."

The man paused and the lady half of the couple picked up the story, "'Then, the best part of the story is that the boy turned the painted cows loose out of the pasture field and chased them into town."

"Then, the calls started to come in," the man added to the story. "First the mayor called and asked if we were missing a yellow cow."

"I remember that!" the lady chimed in. "Then a neighbor called and said they had two of our cows in their garden; one red and one blue!"

"Oh my, what a day that was," the man laughed.

"Twenty-five head altogether, painted all the colors of GOD'S rainbow... from one end of the town to the other!" They both chuckled loud, remembering that.

"So Tabitha, you remember to ask your daddy about the story of the bad boy and the runaway painted cows. OK sweetie?" asked the man.

"Ok, I will, " said Tabitha, quietly amused. She was somewhat surprised at herself, for being both genuinely amused with the story and feeling relaxed around this young couple. It was as if she knew them her entire life.

When Tabitha extended her hand to shake, each of them grabbed her up and squeezed her hard, in a loving embrace. The lady, with big joyful tears on her cheeks, nearly squeezed all of the air from Tabs lungs.

Tabitha was a little confused as to why Skip had wanted her to meet these folks, but she was truly very happy that she had. She really liked them!

She even chuckled a little bit to herself knowing her father would enjoy the story of the bad boy and the painted cows. Her father had been raised on a small country farm. She remembered her father was always a little sad when he spoke of his farm days. She knew it was because of the way he had lost each of his parents together in a dreadful traffic accident, a few years before Tabitha had been born.

Her father always says that he was so very grateful to the Lord that Tab's mother was in his life as his new wife at that difficult time. He felt that he would not have survived the loss of each of his parents so unexpectedly, without GOD or his wife to support him.

## **The 8<sup>th</sup> Inning**

### **Heaven is Always Right (In a tunnel of light)**

Startled, Tabitha awoke in the dark, in her now normal window seat, behind the driver on the Crusaders team bus. She couldn't even remember leaving the field and getting on the bus.

Tab was wondering why she was always so sleepy lately, when the sense of something wrong overcame her. Without thinking, she reached down into the seat beside her to check on Slobbers.

He was not there!

Tabitha stood up and turned around to face her teammates on the bus. "Does anyone know where Slobbers is?" she shouted.

After a few awkward seconds and nods of confusion, it was apparent to everyone that Slobbers was nowhere to be found on the bus.

"Skipper", Tabitha cried out. "I think we left Slobbers at the ballpark and... he is all alone... and he is afraid of the dark!"

Then, sight unseen from somewhere in the back seats of the bus, the kind, soothing voice of JC spoke through the darkness, "It's all right Tabitha. I know where Slobbers is. Driver, please turn the bus around and take us back to the stadium."

When the team bus arrived back at the ball park, there were no other vehicles in the parking area; nor were there any lights on at all. The driver positioned the bus the best that he could so it's headlights shone up the tunnel leading into the stadium.

"C'mon Tabitha, let's go get your friend," said JC. He and Tabitha left the bus and walked up the corridor leading into the ballpark.

The further Tabitha walked up the darkened hallway, the more she was glad that the Skipper was with her.

Something with little feet scurried away in the night, just in front of her. Was it a mouse or a bug, Tabitha wondered? Then the darkness felt as if it were closing in around her, almost like a coat hanging heavily upon her.

That was when JC's smooth, calm voice once again spoke, "Tabitha, many people fear walking in darkness alone, but do not be afraid, for I Am,... a light unto your feet and a light unto your path."

With that, JC reached out and took Tabitha's hand. In the same instant, light shone brightly in her eyes. "No-one walks alone in the darkness if they have the Son in their heart." JC told her gently.

As Tabitha's eyes tried to adjust to the new-found light, she was amazed to discover that the light seemed to be emanating from the Skipper Himself; not from the still dark light bulbs hanging above over their heads.

When Tab looked again at the Skipper, she had a sense of relief that somewhere He had found Himself a large walking stick. With the sound of those scurrying little critters feet she had just heard, the sight of JC and His Stick comforted her.

He continued talking, "Yea, as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, my rod and my staff shall comfort thee." JC said.

Then, for Tabitha things got really interesting.

'For my namesake, we walk in righteousness," said the Skipper. Everything around Tabitha and JC dissolved into the white of the light emanating from Him.

"Leading into green pastures and beside the still waters," JC continued to speak. Suddenly a dirt path appeared underneath Tabitha's feet and green grass on each side of them.



Where the slate gray barren concrete walls had been just a few seconds ago, now, on their right, arose a gentle sloping meadow. Most surprising of all, on their left, was a distant mountain with a gentle waterfall falling down into a still calm pond.

It was the most beautiful scene Tabitha had ever seen in her entire life. The colors more vivid than anything she had ever seen, with some colors she had never seen.

The smells of the flowers and the trees carried upon a gentle breeze was exquisite...unlike anything Tabitha had ever smelled before.

Then, Tabitha began to hear a song of praise that seemed to be coming from nowhere and everywhere.

"That singing, Skip, it's coming from the grass! Right Skip?" Tabitha asked JC.

"Yes, Tab. Creation sings out joyfully to the Creator. Tabitha, trust in me. You'll want to go and taste my living waters." JC told her with a broad smile.

"May I?" Tabitha asked JC, while returning a smile.

"Of course, my child," JC said, while holding out his hand inviting Tabitha toward the pond.

Tabitha ran to the pond and knelt down, cupping her hands. She was amazed to see that the water she drew

up was almost invisible in her hands because it was so clear.

Tabitha drank the cool, refreshing water again and again almost as if she had never had a drink of water before.

"All who drink of my water shall never thirst again." JC said.

"Living water" Tabitha said, now completely understanding what the Skipper...JC... was telling her.

"Thank You, Jesus." Tabitha added aloud as she returned down the hill to JC, who stood smiling with His arms wide. Then, He Lovingly embraced Tabitha.

"Let us tarry no longer," said JC. "We have to go find a friend; another poor soul who is lost, but not alone, in the darkness. Remember, no one is alone in the darkness who believes in me, Tabitha. I abide in them."

JC and Tabitha continued on, and soon enough a hole of darkness appeared ahead of them. It was the end of the concrete stadium corridor leading out onto the playing field.

JC said, "Soon Tabitha, your allotted time permitted to be here with us, will draw nigh. Here in this corridor I wanted to show you a little bit more of Heaven than just a few ballparks. For now though, go, take my courage, run out into the night and save your friend.

"We all need a friend to rescue us at one time or another in our darkest hours."

Tabitha did not know how, but she realized she knew what the Skipper knew... that being exactly where Slobbers could be found!

She could see him, in her mind, face down on the rubber square center of the pitcher's mound.

Tabitha ran as fast as she could calling out to Slobbers, "We're here Slobbers! I'm coming to get you! "

Tabitha grabbed Slobbers up and held him tight to her body within both of her hands. "It's OK my friend. I've got you."

"I'm all right Tabitha, really I'm OK," Slobbers said shyly.

Then, he added, ""You see, I knew I missed the bus and that sooner or later you would notice and come back for me. But then it got dark, and I was afraid. That is when I remembered to Pray."

Slobbers rambled on, "Tab, I Prayed that you would hurry and I Prayed not to be afraid. Then, guess what: I felt a peace that I did not understand, I felt Jesus with me the whole time. I knew that I was not alone."

## **The 9<sup>th</sup> Inning**

**Only fools don't play by GOD'S rules  
(Because cheaters never truly win)**

Tabitha knew something. But she did not know how she knew... just that she knew.

She understood that today's game was going to be her last here for now. After the game, she would be going home; to her home with her mother and her father, that is.

No one had said as much to her, save for the comment that the Skipper had mentioned the night before. He'd told her that her time here and now was growing short.

This was somewhat of a mystery for Tabitha, troubling her a little. She had an inclination that perhaps, when a person feels inside that their time is short, that maybe...just maybe, GOD is clueing them in.

Today's game was different in another "Way " as well. The entire team exhibited an almost aversion to it. Even the Skipper was not His usual jovial self today.

The Skipper had said something odd after He had Prayed and blessed their journey today. He'd said something about us needing to know all of reality and that He did not keep it all within His Sonshine.

She didn't know what he'd meant but she felt that things weren't right.

Slobbers had mentioned a few times on the bus ride about how much he hated playing against this team especially on their home turf. They are known as the "red devils."

In fact, from Tabitha's perspective, the bus ride was... in a word... surreal.

As they traveled from the indescribably flowery, blue-skied Heavenly beauty of where they were, to where they were going, it got darker and darker. The further they moved away from their starting point, and the closer they got to their destination, they encountered what was the worst...most violent storm Tabitha had ever seen!

"This storm is a hundred times worse than the storm that had caused the car accident I was in; the one that brought me here!", she thought to herself.

"Huh?...That's right!." Tabitha mused, scratching her head, amazed that her memories were starting to surface. She began to remember how she had arrived here in the first place. She'd been in an auto accident and she knew that her mother had Prayed to Jesus to save her.

The storm intensified as they approached the home of today's game opponents. It was complete with hail and mighty bolts of lightning, so intense it crackled and sizzled, almost appearing as giant spider webs in the awful, blackened sky.

When the lightning flashed, it illuminated large ominous tornado twisters, which wandered aimlessly. They tore up the ground, chewing it up and tossing debris into the air... destroying everything in their path!

Oh, how glad Tabitha was that the Skipper was with them today. She had no real fear or any sense of danger with Him present with them. Despite the tornadoes and storms, they drove along peacefully.

When the bus entered into a dark tunnel that seemed to be endlessly descending, Tabitha remembered the ballpark tunnel that she had recently walked in with the Skipper beside her gently talking to her, while holding her hand every step of the "Way." In THAT tunnel, He had showed to her another reality; a truth that was hidden so that she could find and help another soul lost in the darkness, that someone was her friend Slobbers.

It reeked...the old, dilapidated ball park, that is. Tabitha could see no fire anywhere but it took a few minutes for her to get accustomed to the awful smell. She would describe the smell as the charred remains of an entire world.

It stunk here in every way possible; it seemed to Tabitha...from the awful smell, to the old, run down stadium. It reminded her of photos that she had seen in school, of ancient relics from the old Roman Empire days. Even the lack of manners and crude behavior of the fans in the stands were repugnant as they quarreled, shoved, yelled, pushed and pulled at each other.

But, it was the red sky itself, that appeared to be boiling, to Tabitha. It did not seem like a sky at all, but rather almost like a ceiling high above a vault...or a deep cavern in the ground.

Tabitha was both horrified and amazed that she heard actual sneers and hisses from the opponents, as JC stepped out onto the field. He then began his customary opening Prayer before the start of the game.

Of course, none dared make a sound as the Skipper Prayed.

"Play Ball!" Yelled the umpire, whose yellow, glowing eyes sent a chill down Tabitha's spine. But, it was the umpire's teeth that caused Tabitha to gasp, for they were sharp... all of them..., not unlike a great white shark's teeth, Tabitha thought.

As they stood together before the first pitch out upon the pitcher's mound, Slobber's spoke to Tabitha, "Tab, I know this is your last game, at least for now here with

us. Under other circumstances, we could drag this game out and have some fun time together in a quality goodbye. But, I'm sure you'll agree for now, not in this place. Let's just win and get out of here. OK?"

"I agree with you, my friend. Let's just do our job together and get out of this God forsaken place." Tab replied.

"Amen!" agreed Slobbers.

Tabitha threw hard, perhaps harder than she had ever thrown a pitch before in her life. It was clear that Slobbers was also playing hard, adding every bit of his abilities to her effort, as he sped along only an inch or so off the ground. He then rose up through the strike zone into the batter's box, in what Tabitha thought was the best pitch that she had ever seen.

"Ball!" Again yelled the yellow-eyed monster umpire.

"What!" shouted Slobbers.

"Shut-up! You're not in Paradise anymore whiffle ball," said the official, while smiling a smile that showed off all of his nasty sharp teeth.

Cheers and mocks reverberated throughout the old stadium.



"Toss him out of the game ump, he was insolent!" yelled out a fan from somewhere in the stands behind first base.

In the dug-out, sat the Skipper with his Crusaders' cap pulled down over his eyes. He never even looked up. His legs were outstretched and crossed, and without even seeing the pitch or hearing the errant "ball" call, , but just knowing, He spoke to Himself in almost a sigh, "Never doth evil sleep."

Tabitha was mad now... as mad as the boiling sky. She reached down in her soul and threw with all of her heart; not for her, and not even for Slobbers, but for RIGHT! "What is right is right", she thought to herself, giving her all.

"This time, Slobbers streaked along in a wide arc coming in at the batter at shoulder height and dropped perfectly again through the strike zone.

The batter; a rather strange looking green fellow snarled and swung hard, but alas it was a clean miss. Clearly this batter was no match today for Tab and Slobbers.

"Ball!" Yelled the grinning, fang-toothed, yellow-eyed umpire.

"What?" Tabitha yelled back.

"He swung and missed!" Tab added.

"No he didn't,...Ball." retorted the now obviously cheating official.

"What game are you watching?!" Tabitha demanded from the official.

"Look, if I will accept no guff from that mindless little foul ball of yours, then obviously I will not accept any nonsense from you either. Consider yourself warned!" growled the official as the crowd erupted in cheers, sneers, and pandemonium.

## Until....!!!

You could hear a pin drop as JC emerged from the Crusaders' dug-out and approached home plate.

Then quiet ewww's and ahhhh's could be heard, when out from the red devils' dugout stomped their coach. His very appearance caused a knot to cramp up in Tabitha's stomach. The red devils coach,... was... well, RED!...his skin, that is.

He had evil, glowing, red eyes, dark black hair, and he had ebony black horns; one on each side of his ball cap. The cap had the red devils' pitch fork emblem on the front.

But, the most astounding thing about his appearance, to Tabitha, was not his long red tail coming to a black spade shovel point... but it was the fact that he had no feet. He had hooves (also shiny ebony)!

On the end of thick black hairy animal legs that stuck out from the bottom of the leg openings in his ball uniform.

His serpent- like, split-end tongue darted in and out of his mouth, tasting the air in search of prey.

His gaze at Tabitha conveyed a message, and one message alone, "i HATE YOU. If i can, i will devour you."

Then, Tabitha noticed something else. Wherever this unholy creature stepped... wherever his hooves touched the ground, the grass withered and died.

"Yes, Tabitha. Anything and anyone this one touches without my protection shall perish." said JC, as He walked past Tabitha.

Both Tabitha and Slobbers (now hovering in mid-air), trailed a foot or so behind JC, as a showdown was now in store at home plate.

"Why, Aziel? " was the question that JC asked the cheating umpire, clearly knowing his name.

"Lucifer told me that he could make me the head of officiating for the entire league," replied the cheating home- plate umpire, in nearly a whisper with his eyes downcast to the ground, unable to face JC.

"He LIES!" said the red devils manager, roaring like a lion.

"You lie! " Replied the umpire to the devil.

"Of course he does. He is the inventor of lies, the father of deception," said JC.

"You should have known better, Aziel." continued JC.  
"The devil always uses one's own desires, greed, lusts, pride, or even one's anger or pain, without shame, to tempt and ultimately destroy."

"I only give people what they need...what they deserve!" Shouted the devil.

"You only offer sin, which brings suffering and spiritual loss. All this results in eventual mental and physical death, leading to the eternal loss of one's soul," spoke JC.

"It's my right,..." the devil started to say, when the Skipper sternly and firmly cut him off with a single Word.

**"ENOUGH!"**

Then JC continued, "By your actions, this game is officially declared a forfeiture by the red-devils and awarded to the Crusaders.

With that, the light that Tabitha had seen before in the tunnel of darkness began to emanate from the Skipper.

But this was more..."Way "more.

Brighter and brighter JC shone,

Brighter and brighter, impossibly bright and yet brighter.

JC shone in HIS radiating light as JESUS CHRIST, a thousand times brighter than lightning.

His very appearance transfigured into what was literally living light, driving all shadow of evil far, far away.

Aziel, the demon umpire was gone, the devil... gone.

Even the hissing, booing fans were gone, all scurrying and hiding wherever they thought they could...far from the Christ in His light of Righteousness.

"All evil that men shall do, that anyone shall do, will be exposed unto the light of the Lamb, Tabitha." JC told her.

"Everything you say, all that you do, all that you think, your very wishes and true motives, all that is hidden in the deepest recesses of your mind, heart, and soul will be exposed within my light. So... take care and live by Faith and Prayer," said Jesus who was and IS the light, standing before Tabitha..

"Yes, Lord." Tabitha said, crying as she fell to her knees wrapping her arms around the Savior.

"Thank-you for taking care of me here Lord, for answering my mother's Prayer, and thank you Lord... for going to the cross for me. Tabitha said.

Then Jesus spoke, "I "Will" and shall always take care of all of my children, Tabitha. I AM,... the " Way, " the Truth, and the Life.

You must now return to your life, Tabitha, but you can always rest assured that when your days are complete on earth, in My Love, I shall bring you home to Me again. Now it is time for you to return home, my child. Take care, and say your Prayers,..for I Will, always be there."

With that said; Jesus the Savior began to grow even brighter. In that brightness of Spiritual Life by Christ, Tabitha's living soul was carried back into her earthly, physical body. She'd been at rest, sleeping and healing, by GOD'S Grace, ever since that car accident she had following last week's championship ball game.

## Epilogue

### **(Safe at Home)**

"Wake up, Tabitha," came her mother's sweet voice to her ears.

And so she did,... wake up, that is.

Tabitha awoke as a patient in a hospital bed, with machines beeping and making all sorts of noises beside her.

She was more than a little bit surprised that the dim light, compared to the bright light of Christ, in the hospital room hurt her eyes. But, that was because Tabitha had been unconscious and dormant for several days.

After a jubilant reunion with each of her parents, Tab's mother surprised her when she informed her just how many of her family, friends, teammates, classmates, and church family had stopped in to check on her.

"Even Pat the Bat has been here twice, sweetie."  
Tabitha's mother said with a large smile.

Then Tabitha remembered something.

"Daddy," she said.

"Yes, Dear "her father replied.

"I'm supposed to tell you a story," Tabitha answered.

"A story,...for me? " Tabitha's father answered her, a little bit confused as to why Tab would have a story for him at this time.

Then Tabitha continued, "Dad, I am supposed to tell you a story about a naughty little farm-boy, who painted his family's cows and then turned them loose in town."

Tabitha could not quite understand the odd expression upon her father's face, especially when he turned away from her and faced Tabs mother. He blurted out, in a accusing tone, a single word, "Blabbermouth!" Tab's father said to her mother.

"Don't look at me, I never said anything about you getting in hot water for what you did as a boy on the farm." Tabitha's mother told him.

"Then how else could she have ever known about that Dear? I, most certainly, never told her" Dad replied.

Then Tab's mother spoke to her, ""Tabitha, please tell your father that I never told you about him foolishly painting any cows!"

"You mean that bad boy was you, Daddy?" Tabitha asked, amused.



"Yes, Dear, it was I." said her father.

Tabitha squealed and laughed uncontrollable hard as she kicked her feet at the thought of her always composed and never-do-anything-wrong father first painting, and then chasing cows all over his quiet little home town.

"Tell me Tabitha, how did you learn about me and the cows?" Her father then asked her.

"The young couple I met in Heaven told me that story and they said that I should ask you about it." Tab answered.

"Did you say Heaven, Tabitha?" Tabitha's mother asked.

"Yes Mommy, I was with Jesus when I was sleeping because you asked Him to take care of me when you Prayed, after our car accident." Tabitha replied.

Her father then pulled out his wallet and flipped through the clear plastic picture holders until he found the picture that he was looking for. He handed it to Tabitha. "Tell me Tab, are these the people that you met ,and are they the ones who told you the story about me?"

After a long pause, with Tabitha studying the old photograph, Tab's father spoke again. " Well Tab's?"

"Yes and no, Dad." Tabitha replied.

"What do you mean, yes and no?" Her father asked her.

"The people in this photo look like they could be the parents or the family of the young couple that I met in Heaven, because they look like the people I met. But, the people in the picture are much older than the couple I met," Tabitha replied.

"Out of the mouths of babes." Was the odd statement by Tabitha's mother.

"The good book says no pain, crying, or aging in Heaven." Spoke Tabitha's father.

Then Tab's mother also spoke again, "There is only one explanation. Tab met your parents, her grandparents, in Heaven."

"Wow!" was all that Tabitha's father could get out, with a broken voice and tears in his eyes. Then, after a few awkward moments, Tab's mother understood that her husband was overwhelmed at the realization that Tab had gotten to meet her grandparents. They were all a little bit confused about Tab's obviously supernatural, Heavenly experience.

"Why don't we all agree to think and Pray about this and then talk about it later at home, when Tab is feeling much better." Tabitha's mother smartly suggested, and they all agreed.

When Tabitha's father regained his composure, he spoke with a smile, to Tab again. "'Sweetheart, I almost forgot. I saw this silly thing in the hospital gift shop, and I just knew that I was supposed to buy it for you."

Tab's dad handed her a small white cardboard gift box. Tabitha smiled, as she took the box and shook it a little bit.

Then she opened it and saw that it was a brand, spanking new shiny softball. Tab loved the idea that her dad had bought her a new ball, as she reached down inside the box to pluck it out. When Tabitha turned the ball around and its opposite side faced her, she gasped.

"Slobbers! " Tabitha yelled out in joy at seeing her friend.

The ball was Slobbers! Not alive of course, but it was him with his silly little grin.

"Oh thank-you Daddy! I Love him, he is my friend." Tabitha said, as she, right on top of Slobbers' head...

**Gave him a kissy!!**

## The "Sinners" Prayer

JC, as in Jesus the  
Skipper was with Tabitha every step along her "Way."  
Tabitha discovered the truth of life found in Christ.  
He is GOD'S saving Grace, so that we do not ever  
have to face living out our days in darkness alone.

You too,  
Can begin your journey, your walk of life with Jesus  
Christ, by saying and meaning this small Prayer:

I Pray to you, Jesus up above  
Who died for me, with your Love  
You rose again & to Heaven you went  
To GOD your Father of whom you were sent

I will follow you for I do believe  
That my sins you have relieved.

And may it show  
As I learn and grow  
That there be less of me  
And ever more, more of Thee.

"For GOD so loved the world that HE gave HIS only  
begotten SON that whosoever believes  
in HIM shall not perish but  
have everlasting life"  
John 3:16