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The Magnificent Mulligans



SMOKE IN THE AIR!

Bill Myers

The Magnificent
Mulligans™

BOOK THREE

SMOKE IN THE AIR!

Bill Myers

Illustrations by Greg Hardin

FOCUS
ON THE FAMILY®

*A Focus on the Family resource
published by Tyndale House Publishers*

The Magnificent Mulligans: Smoke in the Air!

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A Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

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Cover and interior illustrations by Greg Hardin. Cover design by Michael Harrigan.

For manufacturing information regarding this product, please call 1-855-277-9400.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

ISBN 978-1-64607-119-7

Printed in the United States of America

29 28 27 26 25 24 23
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish
but have eternal life.”*

JOHN 3:16

*For Parker, as you continue on your
adventure of being a big sister.*

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Just for Starters . . .

“COME ON, JESS!” Mom stood and shouted while holding baby Al on one hip. “Outta the park, sweetheart. Knock it outta the park! You can do it, girl!”

When it came to softball, Mom was Jessica’s biggest fan. Of course, she didn’t know anything about softball, but that didn’t stop Mom. Mom was the biggest fan of anything we did.

As Jessica stepped up to the plate, Mom whistled and yelled, “You got this! Outta the park, babe! Woo-hoo! You go, Jess! Woo-hoo! Go girl! Go, go, go! Woo-hoo!”

The rest of our family glanced nervously at those around us.

“Mom,” Stephie whispered.

“What’s that, dear?”

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Stephie motioned to all the staring people.

Mom saw them and gave a little nod. “Sorry,” she said as she slowly sat back down.

Back at the plate, Jessica took a couple of practice swings and waited.

The pitcher checked second and third, then fired a sizzling fastball that

thwup-ed

hard into the catcher’s mitt.

“Strike one!” the umpire shouted.

“Strike?” Mom leaped back to her feet. “Is he out of his mind?”

“Mom . . .” Nick reached for her.

“That was out by a mile!”

“Mom—”

“That’s so unfair. She never even got a chance!”

“Mom!”

Mom looked down at Nick.

“She gets two more strikes.”

“Oh, right,” she said. Glancing around, she slumped back into her seat. “I knew that.”

Yup, that was Mom doing her Mom thing. But you can’t blame her. We were all pretty excited watching Jessica in the first game of the softball playoffs. (Why they call this game *softball* is beyond me. Have you ever tried eating one? Hard as a rock. I almost broke a tooth. And taste? Let’s just say Dad’s TV remote has better flavor.)

Anyway, it was the last inning of the game with one out and runners on second and third. If Jessica knocked it out of the park, which we all knew she could, she'd score the winning run and be a hero.

"Shake it off, girl!" Mom shouted. "You can do this!"

I joined in with a little of my own *OO-oo AH-ah EE-ees*.

As the pitcher prepared for the next pitch, cute little Julie tugged on Mom's arm.

"I gotta go to the bathroom," she said.

"Now?" Mom couldn't take her eyes off the game. "You went three minutes ago."

"I have to go again."

The pitcher fired the ball and

thwup!

"Strike two!" the umpire shouted.

The crowd booed, and Mom was back on her feet. "Come on, Ump!"

"Mom . . ." Julie continued to tug.

"What's that, baby?"

"Now. I gotta go *now*."

Poor Mom. You could tell she was torn between watching Jessica and helping Julie.

Luckily, eleven-year-old Stephe offered to help. She's got a heart as big as a river, which is why we're best friends—even if I am a chimpanzee and she's just a human (which I don't hold against her because it's not her fault). She reached for Julie's hand. "Here, I'll take you."

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Julie pulled away. "I want *Mom*."

"Julie . . ."

"I want Momma," she repeated as she wrapped her arms around Mom's waist and held on tight.

Suddenly, down on the field, Jessica leaned across the plate and

bunt-ed

the ball.

"A squeeze play!" Nick shouted.

"She's making a sacrifice?" Lisa, who is blind, yelled. She relied on us to tell her what was going on.

"Yeah!" Nick shouted as the pitcher ran off the mound, snatched up the ball, and threw Jessica out at first base . . . giving the runner on third base time to race home to score.

Of course, everyone cheered for the scoring runner. They shouted and clapped for her.

And Jessica? No one paid much attention to her as she trotted back to the dugout.

No one but Mom. "That's okay, Jess!" she called. "You gave it your best! You tried!"

"Well, she did more than try," Nick said.

"What do you mean?" Mom asked.

"She sacrificed herself at first so the runner on third could score."

Mom looked confused. "And that's good?"

"Good?" Nick laughed. "She just set us up to win the game!"

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Mom leaped back to her feet, whistling and shouting, “Woo-hoo! Atta girl, Jess! Great work! Woo-hoo!”

None of us knew then that we’d soon be watching a sacrifice play a thousand times greater than the one we just saw.