



Ballpark Blues: A Novel

C.W. Tooke

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Russ Bryant, a lonely and downtrodden reporter trapped in a job he hates, stumbles onto the story of a lifetime when he is befriended by Casey Fox, a promising rookie catcher on the local minor league team. Possessed of mythic talents but mortal insecurities, Casey isn't even sure he wants to play in the major leagues (and unless he improves his attitude toward the team's management, he may never get the option). Still, when circumstances in Boston lead to an offer from the Red Sox, the lure proves irresistible, and Casey moves on the fast track from the anonymity of the minor leagues to stardom at Fenway Park.

Russ's dormant dreams of journalistic glory soar as well, as his near-exclusive access to the hottest figure in sports puts him in national demand. And having the world's leading home-run hitter for a best friend has other benefits. While he used to pass solitary evenings watching *SportsCenter*, he spends his nights in the company of professional athletes, getting the kind of access that other fans would do anything for. His growing acquaintance with Casey's foster sister, Molly, gives him something to look forward to away from the world of sports, offering the possibility of love and maybe even redemption.

The closer they get to their goals—Casey to a triumphant season finale, Russ to a plum job at *Sports Illustrated*—the more they struggle with the dissonance between professional success and personal happiness. Both men begin to wonder whether there's still a place for heroes in a world where sports has become a hard-nosed business and the media is steeped in cynicism. As Casey's brilliance becomes increasingly offset by his troubles away from the ballpark, both Casey and Russ wonder if they should abandon professional baseball—and its accompanying dreams—in order to find happiness.

All this in the most edge-of-your-seat season Red Sox fans have ever seen, with the excitement of the fans ringing in your ears and the smell of freshly-mown grass and stale beer.

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