

The fight

His dad ran to Billy at superhero speed, standing over him, not seeming to care who could hear what they were saying to each other.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing,” Billy said.

“It didn’t sound like nothing to me,” his dad said. Still not letting this go. “If you’ve got something you want to say to me, go ahead and say it,” Joe Raynor said.

For one quick second, Billy felt that burn you get inside your eyes when you think you might start crying, but he put his head down so nobody could see him, squeezed his eyes shut until the feeling went away.

When he was positive he wasn’t going to cry, he looked up at his dad. Usually when he was in trouble about something, his dad would have to order Billy to look him in the eyes.

Not today.

“I guess I just need to know something,” Billy said. “Are you my coach today or my dad?”

OTHER BOOKS YOU MAY ENJOY

<i>The Big Field</i>	Mike Lupica
<i>The Boy Who Saved Baseball</i>	John H. Ritter
<i>The Devil and his Boy</i>	Anthony Horowitz
<i>Free Baseball</i>	Sue Corbett
<i>Heat</i>	Mike Lupica
<i>Long Shot</i>	Mike Lupica
<i>Miracle on 49th Street</i>	Mike Lupica
<i>Over the Wall</i>	John H. Ritter
<i>Safe at Home</i>	Mike Lupica
<i>Samurai Shortstop</i>	Alan M. Gratz
<i>Stand Tall</i>	Joan Bauer
<i>Summer Ball</i>	Mike Lupica
<i>Travel Team</i>	Mike Lupica
<i>Two-Minute Drill</i>	Mike Lupica
<i>Under the Baseball Moon</i>	John H. Ritter



HOT HAND
a Comeback Kids novel

MIKE LUPICA



PUFFIN BOOKS/WALDEN MEDIA

PUFFIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Young Readers Group, 345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700,

Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland

(a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre,

Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive,

Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand

(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue,

Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Registered Offices: Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

First published in the United States of America by Philomel Books,

a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2007

Published by Puffin Books, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2009

This book is published in partnership with Walden Media, LLC. Walden Media and the Walden Media skipping stone logo are trademarks and registered trademarks of Walden Media LLC, 294 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Mike Lupica, 2007

All rights reserved

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS HAS CATALOGED THE PHILOMEL EDITION AS FOLLOWS:

Lupica, Mike. Hot hand / Mike Lupica. p. cm. "A Comeback Kids novel."

Summary: In the wake of his parents' separation, ten-year-old Billy seems to have continual conflicts with his father, who is also his basketball coach, but his quiet younger brother Ben, a piano prodigy, is having even more trouble adjusting, and only Billy seems to notice.

ISBN 978-0-399-24714-9 (hc)

[1. Family problems—Fiction. 2. Fathers and sons—Fiction. 3. Basketball—Fiction.

4. Brothers and sisters—Fiction. 5. Bullies—Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.L97914Ho 2007 [Fic]—dc22 2006034562

Puffin Books ISBN 978-0-14-241441-5

Design by Gina Di Massi Text set in Bookman.

Printed in the United States of America

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party Web sites or their content.

This book is for my sister, Susan.





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks, as always, to those who so generously read my books as they are being written: my wife, Taylor; Esther Newberg; William Goldman; Susan Burden; and, of course, Michael Green.

And, as always, I thank the children whose spirit runs through all these books: Christopher, Alex, Zach and Hannah.





HOT HAND





ONE

It had been three days since Billy Raynor's dad told them that he was going to live in a different house.

His mom explained that it was something known as a “trial separation.”

Yeah, Billy thought, a separation of thirteen blocks—he'd counted them up after looking at the map in the phone book—plus the train station, plus the biggest park in town, Waverly Park, where all the ballfields were.

His parents could call it a “trial separation” all they wanted, try to wrap the whole thing up in grown-up language, the way grown-ups did when they had something bad to tell you. But they weren't fooling Billy.

His dad had left them.

Now his mom was leaving, too.

She wasn't leaving for good. It was just another one of her business trips, one Billy had known was coming. She'd told him and his sister and his little brother that she had to go back up to Boston for a few days because of this big case she was working on. A *real* trial, instead of a dumb trial separation. That was why it was no big surprise to him that her suitcases were in the front hall again, lined up like fat toy soldiers. And why it was no surprise that the car taking her to the airport, one that looked exactly like the other long, black, take-her-to-the-airport cars, was parked in the driveway with the motor running.

Another getaway car, Billy thought to himself, like in a movie.

From the time his mom had started to get famous as a lawyer, even going on television sometimes, she always seemed to be going somewhere. Now it was because of a case she'd been working on for a while. She said it was an important one.

But as far as Billy could tell, they all were.

So she was going to be up in Boston for a few days. And his dad was now on the other side of town, even though it already felt to Billy like the

other side of the whole country. Billy was ten, and both his parents were always telling him how bright he was. But he wasn't bright enough to figure out what had happened to their family this week.

He wondered sometimes if he was ever going to figure out grown-ups.

His best friend, Lenny, said you had a better chance of figuring out girls.

All he knew for sure, right now, the end of his first official week of living with only one parent in the house, was this: It was about to be no parents in the house. And on this Saturday morning, with his sixteen-year-old sister, Eliza, still at a sleepover and his brother, Ben, already at his piano lesson, pretty soon it would be the quietest house in the world. With their dad gone, at least the arguing between his parents had stopped. Only now Billy couldn't decide what was worse, the arguing or the quiet.

Of course, Peg would be around. Peg: the nanny who had always seemed to be so much more to Billy.

To him, Peg had always been like a mom who came off the bench and into the game every time suitcases were lined up in the hall again and one

of the black cars was back in the driveway. It had been that way with Peg even before his dad had up and moved out.

Billy's mom had finished up a call on her cell phone while he finished his breakfast. His dad used to make the pancakes on Saturdays. But his mom had done it today, maybe trying to act like things were normal even if they both knew they weren't.

His mom, whose first name was Lynn, sat down next to him on one of the high chairs they used when they were eating at the counter in the middle of the kitchen.

"Hey, pal," she said.

"Hey."

He speared the last piece of pancake and pushed it through the puddle of syrup on his plate.

"I'm sorry to be leaving so soon, after. . . ." She hesitated, like she would sometimes when Billy would hear her upstairs in her bedroom, practicing one of her courtroom speeches at night.

"After Dad left us," Billy said. "That's what you were going to say, wasn't it?"

"You're right, I was," his mom said. "So soon after that. But you understand it can't be helped,

right? I know you don't think your dad and I did a very good job of explaining what's happened to us all. But I hope I explained why I had to go back up to Boston today."

Billy the bright boy said, "Mom, I know it's your job."

"And," Lynn Raynor said, "you understand why I'm having you and Ben and Eliza stay here with Peg and not move over to your dad's place, don't you?"

His mom had already gone over this about ten times. Now Billy was afraid she was going to do it all over again. Maybe it was something lawyers did, explained things until you practically knew them by heart.

"I understand that part, Mom," he said. "This is our home. And you don't want us to get in the habit of going back and forth between you and dad until—"

"Until this whole thing sorts itself out," his mom said, finishing his thought for him.

Billy nodded, even though that was the part he really didn't get, since it seemed to him that things had sorted themselves out already.

They were here.

His dad was there.

Case closed, as his mom liked to say.

“Got it,” he said.

“Hey,” she said, getting down off her chair.

“How about a hug?”

Billy jumped down and gave her one, harder than he’d planned. What she had always called the Big One.

“You be the man of the house while I’m away,” she said. “Okay?”

“Okay.”

It was the same thing his father had said on Wednesday before he drove away.

But Billy Raynor didn’t want to be the man of the house.

He just wanted to be a kid.