

# Sister Carrie

By Kevin Michaels

## June 24, 1984

### AMERICAN LEAGUE WEST STANDINGS

	W	L	Pct.	GB
California	37	35	.514	—
MINNESOTA	35	36	.493	1-1/2
Chicago	34	36	.486	2
Oakland	34	38	.472	3
Seattle	33	40	.452	4-1/2
Kansas City	30	37	.448	4-1/2
Texas	32	40	.444	5

#### CHICAGO

	AB	R	H	BI
RLaw cf	4	1	1	0
Fletchr 2b	3	0	1	0
Baines rf	3	0	2	1
G Walkr dh	4	0	1	0
Kittle rf	4	0	0	0
Paciork lb	4	1	1	0
Squires lb	0	0	0	0
VLaw 3 b	4	0	0	0
Skinner c	3	0	1	0
Dybznsk ss	3	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>

#### MINNESOTA

	AB	R	H	BI
Puckett cf	4	0	2	0
Hatcher lf	3	0	2	0
Hrbek lb	4	0	0	0
Engle c	4	1	1	0
Bush dh	4	0	0	0
Brnnsky rf	3	1	1	0
Teufel 2b	4	1	1	3
Gaetti 3b	3	0	0	0
Jimenez ss	2	0	0	0
DBrown ph	1	0	0	0
RWshntn ss	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>

Chicago 011 000 000 — 2

Minnesota 000 000 003 — 3

Game winning RBI — Teufel (6).

LOB — Chicago 5, Minnesota 6. 2B — Hatcher 3B — Puckett

HR — Teufel (7). SB — Paciorek (2), Skinner (1). SF — Baines.

	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Chicago						
Dotson L, 9-4	8-1/3	7	3	3	2	4
Minnesota						
Schrom W, 1-2	9	7	2	2	1	2

One out when winning run scored.

WP — Dotson. T — 2:08. A — 12,196.

When Steve pushed through the revolving doors and into the lobby of the Metrodome, he felt his ears pop. Carrie was already inside, standing in an open doorway across the concourse, her back to him. She was gazing down through the door at the green baseball field below, her hands gracefully folded together behind her. It was a sign that their argument had at last flickered out. Steve approached her cautiously. He looked over her shoulder at the players warming up down on the field.

"Did your ears pop?" he asked. Carrie nodded. "The air pressure in here is higher than outside. That's what holds the roof up."

Carrie turned around and faced Steve. She smiled, touching off warm shivers of memory in his brain: cool satin sheets sliding against his skin, Carrie greedily pulling and tugging his body into hers—the morning's love-making. Which had been followed by the argument. *That* had begun even while they still lay in each others' arms. Like all of their recent fights, it ignited suddenly, without warning, and spread quickly to burn up the whole morning. In brusque silence they had dressed, left Steve's apartment, and driven to the ballpark. But now, in the Metrodome lobby, the argument was over. Steve rested a hand upon each of Carrie's shoulders, feeling the warmth of her skin through the soft yellow fabric of her dress. He looked at her face and remembered a line he had written in a love letter months earlier: "If coal

burned green, it would burn the color of your eyes."

"Jesus you look beautiful," he said.

He drew her toward him. She closed her eyes, turned her face upward, and they kissed.

"I love you, Steven," she said.

"I love you too."

While they were still in the outer concourse, Steve bought his scorecard at a souvenir stand. The ancient vendor was fat and had a gnarly face.

"Aren't you gonna buy a yearbook for your lady friend?" the vendor asked as he handed Steve his scorecard.

Steve found the man repulsive, but Carrie was smiling at him.

"C'mon fella, don't be a skinflint. Six bucks. A small price to pay to keep a beauty like her happy." The vendor was talking to Steve, but he winked at Carrie.

"Yeah, Steven," Carrie said. She squeezed his arm playfully. "I'm worth it, aren't I?"

Steven pulled a twenty from his wallet and handed it to the man, who slid a yearbook across to Carrie and then pulled a roll of bills from his apron and fingered out Steve's change. Steve folded the soft, green bills back into his wallet.

"This your first trip to the Metrodome, Blondie?" the vendor asked Carrie.

"Yes."

"Well, thanks a million," Steve said, slicing off the conversation. "I bet you make a fortune here."



The vendor grinned, exposing a mouth full of yellow teeth.

"Enjoy the game, folks."

Steve guided Carrie down into the grandstands to their seats, his arm around her waist. He had picked out the seats a month earlier, when they had selected Sunday, June 24, to be the day they would spend entirely together. They had been frustrated for months by schedules that refused as stubbornly as the positive ends of two magnets to come together. Steve worked seven-day, eighty-hour weeks as manager of a shopping mall shoe store. Carrie worked afternoons at a candy store downstairs in the mall, and evenings she was usually in ballet lessons or at a community theater rehearsing or performing in a musical comedy—she had auditioned for and won three small roles in the six months Steve had known her. The last two weeks in May, they saw each other only late at night, when Steve picked her up at ballet school or the theater. It was then that they had circled June 24 on their calendars and vowed to keep the day free. Steve had scheduled an

extra person to cover for him at the shoe store. It was easier for Carrie to duck her afternoon shift at the candy store: She had called in sick that morning, using the telephone on the table next to Steve's bed.

Their seats were twenty rows from the field, even with third base. Walking down the aisle steps, they passed a clump of three guys a few years younger than Steve, closer to Carrie's age. Two of them wore T-shirts from a U of M fraternity; the third wore a T-shirt reading "Nuke the Ayatollah." All three had the thick necks and arms of weightlifters. When they spotted Carrie, the three simultaneously shut up. Steve found the seats, and he and Carrie sat down. He heard the three begin talking again, five rows behind him, in low voices—he heard the word "babe." Carrie sat rigidly on the front of her seat; she was listening to them.

"I can't take you anywhere these days," Steve said, and she laughed.

The batting orders for the game flashed onto the scoreboard screen. Steve folded his scorecard open on his lap and copied the names down. Ken Schrom was the Twins' starting pitcher. Steve watched the right-hander loosen up his arm. Schrom stood just fifty feet away, along the third-base line, and after each warm-up toss he glanced up into the stands. Had Schrom noticed Carrie?

"That's Ken Schrom, the Twins' starting pitcher," Steve told Carrie. As he spoke, she was darting her green eyes back and forth around

the stadium. "He isn't great, but he ought to be good enough to beat the White Sox. I hope so, anyway."

Carrie faced Steve.

"I thought you liked the White Sox—they're from your hometown," she said.

"I like the Cubs," he said. "You had to grow up in Chicago, I guess. I grew up a Cubs' fan. I used to go to games at Wrigley Field with my old man. The White Sox are everything I hate about Chicago rolled up into a baseball team."

Carrie looked down at Schrom for a moment and then resumed swooping her eyes through the sections of the stadium.

Most of the seats around them were empty. Only one person sat in the row in front of them, a man with thinning blond hair who wore a white sport shirt and, around his neck, a thick gold chain. The man was using the back of the seat in front of him as a writing surface for his scorecard. The man drove a Porsche, Steve decided; the car was silver and had tinted-glass windows. He imagined the Porsche sailing past his own brown Chevette on the freeway, and Carrie gazing out the passenger-side window after it.

Carrie pounded a fist on Steve's knee.

"I'm hungry," she said. "Let's eat some of the ballpark hot dogs you like so much."

Carrie had wanted to go to a new pasta restaurant in downtown Minneapolis for lunch before the game. Steve had insisted on ball-

park hot dogs—why he had insisted so adamantly, he was no longer sure. That had been the first spark in the morning's argument.

Steve walked back up the aisle stairs. The three guys watched him as he left, igniting an uneasy feeling in his stomach. At a concession stand in the concourse, Steve ordered four hot dogs and two plastic souvenir cups of Diet Coke, carried them on a flimsy cardboard tray over to a fixings bar along the opposite wall, set the tray down on a counter lined with tubs of ketchup and mustard, bins of relish and chopped onions, and then he stopped.

After five months of going out with Carrie, of practically living with her, Steve didn't know what she liked on her hot dogs. He knew that she liked blueberries on cheese-cake, a sprinkle of salt instead of dressing on her salads, and that her favorite drink was a Screaming Orgasm—he blushed every time he had to order her one—but he had never eaten hot dogs with her.

The seats were too far away to go and ask, and he wanted to finish with the hot dogs quickly and sit back down at her side to ward off any advances from behind. Carrie usually liked things plain and simple. He left one hot dog plain, and on another he pumped out a thin line of ketchup. On the third hot dog he dished out a little of everything except sauerkraut and relish. One of those ought to please her. The last hot dog, his, he larded with ketchup

and mustard and then piled on chopped onions, relish, and sauerkraut so high that he couldn't close the foil wrapper back around it.

He picked up the tray. When he turned into the doorway that led to their aisle, he looked down at the seats. Two of the guys sitting behind them had moved up and now sat next to Carrie. She was laughing. The Cokes and hot dogs were balanced like pick-up sticks on the tray, yet Steve tromped rapidly down the steps and burst into the row, standing over the three of them. The two guys sprang to their feet. One said, "Well, good-bye now, Carrie. It was nice talking to you again."

Steve leaned back rigidly to let the two step past him out into the aisle. He thought for an instant about dropping the tray onto Carrie's lap. He could pretend that it was an accident. But instead, he set the tray down on the cement floor in front of their seats. He yanked out one of the Diet Cokes and handed it to her.

"Here." He was looking at the tray, not her. "I didn't know what you liked on your hot dogs, so I made them all different. Take the one that looks best."

He opened the wrappers. His hands were trembling. Carrie looked at the four hot dogs and chose the one heaped high with everything.

Steve took the hot dog with only ketchup and bit into it. The bun was two weeks old and stale and left a taste in his mouth that he needed to

flush out. He grabbed his cup and gulped down a mouthful. His hands wouldn't stop trembling. When he set the cup back onto the floor, he knocked it over. A quarter of the soda and crushed ice had slopped out onto the concrete before he could snatch the cup and set it right.

He felt Carrie watching him. After a moment, she spoke in a soft voice.

"You shouldn't get so jealous," she said. "I met those guys at a frat party last year with my friend Karl. You know Karl." She smiled.

Steve was using paper napkins to blot up the mess on the floor. He said nothing.

"Oh, don't sulk," Carrie said, and she poked him in the ribs with her index finger. "Don't be mad at me. You shouldn't be so possessive."

He realized that he was clenching his jaw.

The man with the gold chain around his neck suddenly stood up. Steve realized that the opening bars of the "Star Spangled Banner" were being played. He rose to his feet and faced the flag that hung from the roof of the stadium, but his mind still thrashed about in a swamp of jealousy. She was right, he knew. He shouldn't be so possessive. If he wrapped himself around Carrie she would throw him off. But his attempts to back off from her drove him crazy. Two weeks earlier, at his suggestion, they had tried a night of dating other people. Steve endured the evening; worries about Carrie gnawed at him. He ignored Sara, his

date, and when they ran into a group of Sara's friends at a bar, he left her with them and drove home alone. He went to bed early, but lay awake most of the night hoping Carrie would call. At the mall the next day, during their lunch break, she talked and talked about her date and the disco where they had danced until midnight—Steve didn't like to dance.

"Why didn't you call me when you got home?"

"It was late. I thought you were asleep. I'm sorry."

That night they went out with each other, to a disco, but he was still so bruised by jealousy that he started an argument with her.

As Steve stood near Carrie in the Metrodome, mouthing the words to



the national anthem, an icy truth coalesced before his eyes. Wisps of thought that had haunted him for weeks suddenly combined into a single vision that lingered on and blinded him to the baseball game around him. For many weeks, he realized, he had been exhausting himself in a hopeless struggle to keep Carrie happy. In February, the intense delight which she took from life had attracted him to her, but now the effort to keep himself at the center of that delight was bleeding him dry. A second realization startled him, the thunderclap after a flash of lightning: He had to break up with Carrie. The thought frightened him and he chased it from his mind.

"O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave."

A ripple of applause spread through the grandstands, and the Twins' players ran out onto the field. Schrom fired his last warm-up pitches to the catcher, Dave Engle. The home plate umpire pulled his mask down over his face and stepped in behind Engle. Chicago's Rudy Law entered the batter's box. Steve sat forward in his chair, his pencil and scorecard at the ready. Carrie settled into her seat, her hands resting on the purse in her lap. The game began.

Law flied out to center field.

"That's Kirby Puckett, the Twins' new center fielder," Steve told Carrie.

She nodded.

Scott Fletcher bounced out to

Schrom for the second out. With two outs, Number 3 strode to the plate.

"This is the White Sox' best player," Steve said.

"What's his name?"

"Harold Baines."

"Never heard of him."

"He's the only Sox player I like."

Baines singled. The next batter also singled. Men on first and second. But then, as Schrom prepared to pitch to Ron Kittle, he whirled and threw to Tim Teufel at second, who had snuck over to the base behind Baines' back. Teufel caught Baines flatfooted off the base for the third out. The surprise play elated Steve. He clapped and hollered as Schrom and Teufel walked to the dugout, and then he turned to Carrie, his face bright with joy.

"Wasn't that terrific?"

"It was," she said.

In the second inning, Joel Skinner singled home the White Sox' first run. Carrie hollered out encouragement to Schrom.

"Get 'em out, pitcher!" she shouted, her hands cupped around her mouth, and then she looked to Steve for approval, her eyes as warm and lustrous as polished emeralds.

Randy Bush struck out to lead off the bottom of the second inning. Carrie, looking over at Steve's scorecard, asked him what a K meant. He explained, and the second inning ended. White Sox 1, Twins 0. Steve started in on another hot dog.

Schrom wobbled in the top of the third. He had allowed runners to reach first and third with no outs

when Harold Baines strode back up to the plate, frowning like a haughty professor who has been corrected in class by a freshman. He hit a sacrifice fly to score the runner from third. White Sox 2, Twins 0.

Steve, tapping his scorecard pencil against his knee, could feel Carrie's enthusiasm die away. As the bottom of the third inning began, she was gazing up at the mostly-empty second deck seats above first base. Steve searched for anything that would reawaken her interest.

"This is the shortest player in the Major Leagues," he told her.

"Oh?"

Her gaze wandered down from the second deck and settled on Houston Jimenez long enough to see him loft a lazy fly ball to center. Her eyes drifted back upward, to the glowing white roof over center field. Steve guessed that Carrie was thinking about the sunshine outside, about how she could be getting a suntan on an afternoon like this. He imagined her in her yellow bikini, lying on a blanket in her parents' backyard, the sweat and coconut oil on her skin shimmering in the sunlight.

The crack of a bat and cheers. Puckett had singled, and Mickey Hatcher was up. The Mickey Hatcher fan club in left field cheered. Hatcher singled. Kent Hrbek took a mighty practice swing and walked toward the plate. The three frat boys stood up and shouted encouragement to Hrbek. Carrie

clapped her hands energetically. At the plate, Hrbek swung wildly three times, as if he were trying to smash a butterfly with his bat. He struck out.

The three frat boys booed Hrbek as he walked back to the dugout. Carrie cupped her hands around her mouth to join in. Steve glared at her. She lowered her hands from her mouth and sat back against her seat. Steve smiled apologetically.

"White Sox fans boo," he said.

Dave Engle grounded out to end the inning. Still White Sox 2, Twins 0.

A glacial quiet settled over the crowd. Vast oceans of empty seats isolated the small islands of people from each other, preventing any excitement from flowing through the grandstands. The Dome's air conditioning system, designed for a much larger crowd, kept the air inside chilly. Steve sat on his hands between innings to keep them warm.

"Baseball shouldn't be played in air conditioning," he told Carrie. "You really do have to come to Wrigley Field with me sometime."

The game crawled on, still White Sox 2, Twins 0. In the bottom of the fifth, with two outs, Puckett tripled. Hatcher came to the plate, and the crowd in left field cheered. He hesitated, swung, and grounded out to second.

Behind Steve and Carrie, the three frat boys complained noisily to a beer vendor that the Twins should give them free beer for their

pains in sitting through such a lousy game. Carrie turned her head to look at them.

During the seventh-inning stretch, in spite of the air conditioning, Carrie said she wanted ice cream. Before he left to buy, Steve asked her to keep track of any plays he missed for his scorecard. The lines at the concession stands were long now, and he was still several people away from the counter when the organist wrapped up the second verse of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

He finally got the ice cream and hurried back to their seats. The scoreboard showed two outs. Gary Gaetti was at the plate.

"What happened with Hrbek and Engle?" he asked Carrie, handing her a Frosty Malt and taking back the scorecard from her lap.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't paying attention."

She shrugged apologetically, a shrug that goaded Steve's irritation. He stared at her for a second and then leaned down to ask the man in the white sport shirt. Steve filled in the blanks on his scorecard. Still White Sox 2, Twins 0.

Between innings, Steve scraped Frosty Malt out of the cup with a flat wooden spoon and glumly pressed the ice cream between his tongue and the roof of his mouth, squeezing out the juice.

He set the ice cream down on the floor as the top of the eighth began. He gripped his scorecard pencil tightly, its flat head twitching back

and forth between his fingers. The pencil froze in a moment of anxiety when Greg Walker axed a breaking pitch deep into center field. But Puckett chased the ball down and caught it on the warning track. Steve looked at Carrie to see if she had appreciated the play. She was paging through her pocket engagement calendar. Her ice cream was sitting unopened on the floor in front of her. Again, the awful realization pierced Steve's thoughts: He had to break up with Carrie soon. Like the second apparition of a ghost, this time the idea was less startling and more distinct. Once more, though, he denied the notion and swept it from his thoughts.

As the White Sox took their defensive positions in the bottom of the eighth, Carrie turned toward Steve, placing her warm hands palm-down onto his thigh.

"Steven, if the Twins don't score, can we go after this inning?"

"No. I never leave ballgames early."

He could tell that his answer surprised Carrie and that she would try cajoling him. He looked away from her to the field and sat up stiffly, showing her only iciness. She pulled her hands off his leg and slumped back into her seat. Steve ignored her. He was determined to concentrate entirely on the game for the inning and a half that remained.

Hatcher came up with two outs in the bottom of the eighth. The people in the left field seats cheered, but Carrie pointedly refused to notice

them. She gazed steadily at the press box, away from Steve, away from the field. He felt his resentment of her solidifying. He resented her draining off his attention and happiness, her standing in the way of his enjoying the baseball game. Hatcher drew a base on balls. Steve cheered loudly, knowing that it would annoy Carrie. Hrbek struck out to end the inning.

The frat boys made a drunken exit during the top of the ninth.

"Same old Twinkies," one of them belched. "Good-bye, Carrie."

She waved and watched them stagger up the aisle. She looked back at Steve, but he kept his eyes rigidly fixed on the field.

Before the bottom of the ninth, Carrie gathered up her purse and the Twins yearbook, her elbow jostling against Steve's as she made ready to bolt up the aisle the moment the final out was recorded.

Engle opened the bottom of the ninth with a single. Bush popped up to third, but then Tom Brunansky singled. The Twins had men at first and second, and Tim Teufel, walking to the plate, was the potential winning run. The small crowd started cheering and calling out Teufel's name as he cocked his bat and waited for the pitch. The man in the white sport shirt stood up and clapped. Steve set his scorecard down on the seat to his left and stood to cheer for Teufel.

Teufel swung at the first pitch and looped it toward right field. Harold Baines began charging in on

it the instant the bat slammed into the ball. A surge of excitement hit Steve like a splash of hot water: The ball was going to drop in front of Baines. He was charging too hard on it. You could not do that on the Metrodome turf. Steve wanted to communicate this enormous fact and its implications to Carrie in the instant before the ball landed, but all he could utter was a startled, "Oh!"

The ball crashed six feet in front of Baines, who realized what was about to happen and, too late, had halted his charge forward. The ball took a maniacal, superball bounce—Steve imagined a cartoon soundtrack "Boinggg!"—far over Baines' head and into the right field corner, where it lay dead on the green carpet after sliding down the canvas outfield wall.

A moment of stunned silence was followed by wild cheering. Carrie jumped to her feet and clapped her hands above her head. Steve started laughing. Baines scrambled back toward the outfield corner. First Engle crossed home plate, then Brunansky. Teufel rounded third. Baines saw the futility of his efforts and gave up on the ball. When Teufel reached home, he jumped up and down on the plate. Twins win, 3-2. Teufel's teammates raced out from the dugout and mobbed him, Schrom leading the pack. Carrie was bouncing up and down on her feet and cheering, like everyone else in the stands. An enormous pile of tinder-dry tension had stacked up over eight innings,

and Teufel had suddenly ignited it with his hit.

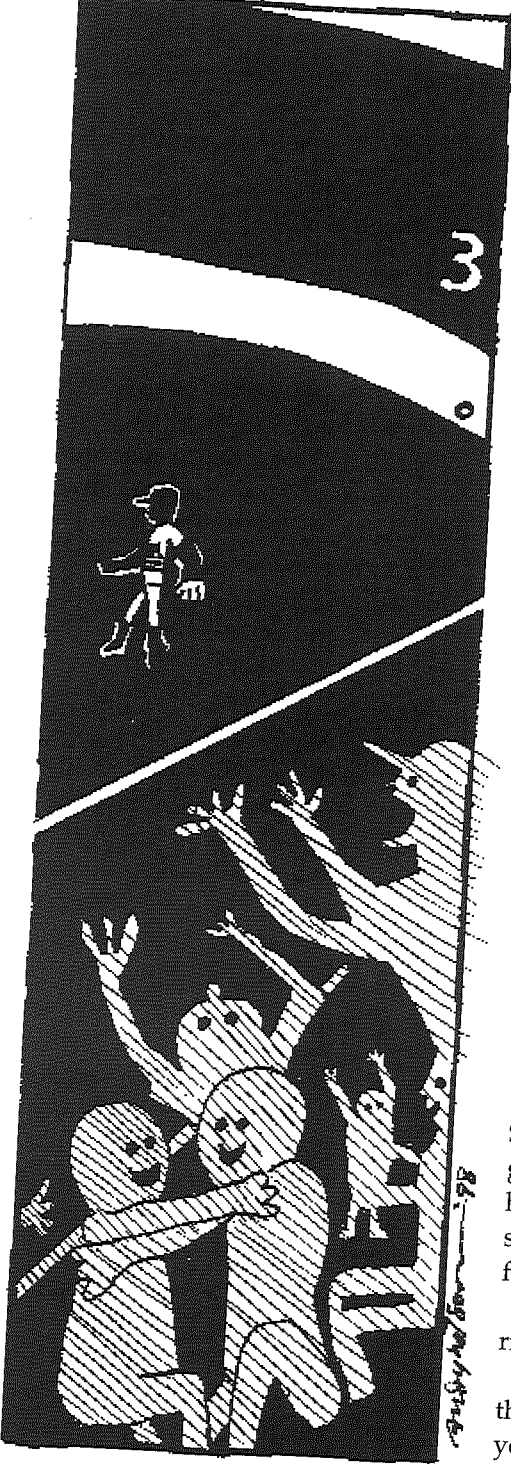
Steve stopped laughing when he saw Harold Baines. The consummate right fielder had turned his back on the ball and was walking deliberately toward the White Sox dugout. His proud eyes were fixed straight ahead, refusing to acknowledge the existence of either the Twins' players celebrating at home plate or the cheers cascading down from the stands. The sight sent a chill through Steve. The Twins had won, but it had been a bush-league victory. A Metrodome special.

Carrie threw her arms around Steve's shoulders and kissed him.

"Steven, I'm glad we stayed," she said.

She kissed him again, her tongue dancing through his mouth. She picked up her purse and Twins yearbook and started up the aisle stairs. Steve followed her, two steps behind. She stopped to wait for him to stand next to her—she wanted him to hold her hand. With Baines' image still fixed in his mind, Steve took her hand into his.

At the top of the stairs, Carrie, still giddy with excitement, turned and pulled Steve into her for another kiss. They were standing in front of the doorway, blocking the exit of the people below them on the stairs. Steve guided her out of the aisle and into an empty row of seats. Her hands left a wake of goose bumps as they slid down his back, past his belt. She pulled his torso into hers and kissed him again.



"I love you," she said. He wrapped his arms around her, taking care not to crush his scorecard against her back. Still hugging her, he looked around the inside of the Metrodome. When he had gone to ball games with his father, the two of them had always stayed on after the game to look at Wrigley, at the grass, the ivy on the outfield wall, the old-fashioned scoreboard. Steve stood there, holding Carrie, looking at the Metrodome. He watched a groundskeeper drive a golfcart-sized vacuum cleaner over the green carpet in right field. He looked up from the field to the Teflon roof that glowed a yellowy white in the afternoon sun. It was a crazy stadium. He replayed in his mind the wild bounce the ball had taken on the plastic carpet and Harold Baines' slow walk back to the dugout.

The tenacious idea offered itself up again to Steve's thoughts: He had to break up with Carrie. This time, the idea was as clear and palpable as a baseball. He could see it in great detail, and he accepted it. He could exhaust himself no longer. Today, in the car, he would tell her. She would be surprised, but she'd get over it soon. Much sooner than he would. When word got out, she'd have a dozen guys calling her for dates.

Carrie poked a finger into his ribs.

"Let's go," she said. "Let's go to that Italian restaurant I was telling you about. I'm hungry."

"Let's go back to the car first."  
Steve answered.

They walked up the last few steps into the lobby. Muggy wisps of hot city air slipped in from the outside and licked Steve's arms and

face. He watched Carrie, beautiful Carrie, walk ahead of him through the revolving doors to the city outside. Then he pushed his own way through. The air pressure changed. He felt his ears pop. —EFQ



KEVIN MICHAELS is now writing and teaching in, of all places, Southern California. This story is excerpted from a novel-in-progress about the Twins' 1984 season.

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