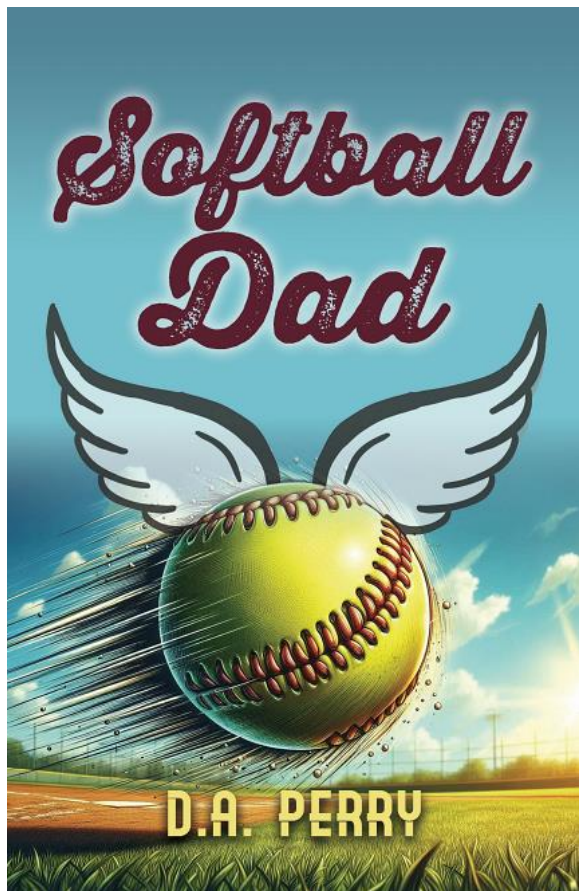




After a drunk-driving crash kills his wife and daughter and leaves him paraplegic, softball coach Dave loses all hope. A service dog, a new team, and unexpected love help him find the courage to live again.

Softball Dad

By D.A. Perry

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Softball Dad



D.A. PERRY

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Chapter 8

Facing the Music

The following day, I wake up groggy with a headache. Everything that happened yesterday feels like a nightmare. My outburst is a blur of anger and frustration. How did it get that bad so fast? I'm ashamed of how I acted. This isn't who I am or want to be again. My heart starts to race as I hold the buzzer in my hand. It's time to face the music, so I hit the button.

Deb smiles and asks, "Are you feeling better?"

"After yesterday, it can't be any worse," I say as I rub the bridge of my nose.

"You would be shocked at what happens around here."

"That still doesn't excuse how I treated Julie."

"You scared us. We weren't sure what was going on."

"Is Julie okay?"

"She's fine and will be in later with Dr. Nelson."

"An appointment with Dr. Nelson might be exactly what I need. Hopefully, she can help me get things under control."

Deb walks over, looks deep into my eyes, and calmly says, "Yesterday is why you're here. Our job is to teach you how to handle what happened."

"It shouldn't be your job to deal with abuse by the patients. I owe Julie an apology."

"You will see Julie soon enough. Before that, how about some breakfast?"

My stomach growls, and I say, "I'm hungry, even if it is hospital food. I want to try to feed myself. But I'm worried I will make a mess."

"Don't worry, I will put a big sheet over you to make cleanup easy."

"That may work."

Deb gives me a friendly pat on the shoulder and says, "Give me a minute."

Deb comes back with two large sheets. One she drapes around me, and the other she places on the floor.

"I will be right back with breakfast."

Deb returns with a tray of food. She lifts the lid to reveal pancakes and sausage, with orange juice and toast.

"Oooh, my favorite," I say with a smile.

"I put your juice in a hard plastic cup with handles. That should make it easier to grab."

"Thank you."

"This is the first time I've seen you smile since you arrived. I hope to see it more often."

"Maybe Dr. Nelson can help me do that. I feel so lost."

"I'm sure she can if you're open and honest with her."

"I will try."

"Do you need anything before I go?"

"Nope, I'm good."

"I'll be back to check on you."

I'm starving, I haven't eaten anything since lunch yesterday. My hands shake as I pick up my fork. Frustration builds as I unsuccessfully attempt to cut a sausage link with my fork. I don't have enough strength to cut through a simple sausage. No matter what I do, it slides out from underneath the fork. I decide to try the pancakes, but I still have issues. My frustration is now turning to anger. I set my fork down and take a few deep breaths. I could ask Deb to help. But I need to do this. I take a drink of orange juice. Grabbing the cup by the handle is much easier.

My stomach growls again. I decide to try to eat caveman-style with my hands. I move the pancakes to one side of the plate, then make a syrup pool on the other side. Slowly, I tear off the pancake pieces, dip them in syrup, and eat. They taste better than expected. It's embarrassing to eat with my

hands. But I'm also proud of myself. Before long, I've eaten everything. The only problem is that my hands and face are covered with sticky syrup.

I carefully bump the call button without getting everything sticky. A few minutes later, Deb walks in.

"Wow, you ate everything. And you didn't even make a mess."

I hold my hands up and say, "I wouldn't go that far. I ended up eating with my hands."

Deb smiles and says, "No problem, we will get you all cleaned up. Are you still hungry? We have a few extra servings available."

"No," burp. "I'm stuffed. Thanks for the cup with handles. It worked great."

"With your type of disability, it's common to have issues with grip. The handles allow more control."

I shake my head and say, "I have so much to learn. How am I ever going to figure all this out?"

"I hate to sound like a broken record, but that's why you're here."

"I guess you're right."

Deb looks at me concernedly and says, "I know you have an appointment with Dr. Nelson later, but would it be okay if I came back so we can talk about a few things?"

I nod and say, "I would appreciate it."

Deb smiles and says, "Great. First, we will get you cleaned up. Then I have a few things to take care of."

"Okay"

Deb takes my tray, then returns with a couple of soapy washcloths and asks, "Can you wash your hands and face, or do you need help?"

"I got it."

While I wash my hands and face, Deb grabs the sheet that was draped over me and the floor. Then I hand her the washcloths.

"Deb says, "See, everything is cleaned up, no problem. I will be back for our chat."

"Okay, thanks."

When Deb returns, she slides a chair over and says, "I want you to know a few things. Yes, I know your story, and I'm so sorry. I won't say I know what you're going through because I don't. But I have helped many people in your position live meaningful lives." She squeezes my hand. "You will, too."

I sigh and say, "I hope you're right. No matter what I do, I'm not getting better. I'm still struggling with the same things since I woke up from the coma."

"Could that be because you haven't embraced your treatment plan?"

I throw my arms in the air and ask, "What plan?"

Deb looks me square in the eye and asks, "Have you been honest about your emotions and everything you're going through?"

I look down, shake my head, and say. "No."

"The longer you hold everything in and resist opening up to Dr. Nelson, the harder you're making it on yourself."

"You have a point."

"Another thing, you can't compare how easily you did things before. You have limitations you've yet to experience or understand. While you survived the accident, part of you didn't."

"That makes sense. It's just hard to forget, "Oh, I could do this or that without a problem. "

"It will take time, but you now live in a world not built for you."

"That's going to be hard to deal with."

"Being disabled will not be easy. There will be times when the smallest things bring the biggest frustration. People will treat you differently. They will look down on you solely because of misconceptions. Life will be a battle."

"You're not sugarcoating anything."

Deb smiles and says, "That's not my style. Sugarcoating things never helps anyone. I tell it like it is."

"I appreciate that."

"Then you understand what I'm saying."

"Totally"

Deb looks at her watch and says, "I need to check on some things. Dr. Nelson and Julie will be here soon. Think about what I said."

I will, thanks."

"Anytime,"

After Deb leaves, I reflect on the past few days. The chat with Deb has me rethinking my plan. Ryan was right. My plan was stupid. The way I'm handling things has to change. I need to work with Dr. Nelson and embrace her plan. My fear is that I'm too late. What will I do if Dr. Nelson or Julie refuses to work with me? If that happens, I only have myself to blame.

After I finish lunch, Dr. Nelson and Julie come in. While I'm happy to see them. I'm still apprehensive, wondering what they will say. There's a lump in my throat as I ask, "Can I talk first?"

They both say "Yes."

"Julie, there's no excuse for my behavior yesterday. That isn't who I am. I promise it won't happen again. I hope you will still work with me."

Julie says, "No apology needed. Don't worry about it. I will gladly work with you."

"That's a relief. To get through this, I need your help."

Dr. Nelson asks, "Can we talk?"

"Yeah, sure."

She pulls a chair. Julie closes the door.

Dr. Nelson asks, "What happened yesterday?"

I take a deep breath and say, "There has been a fire inside me for a while. It has taken all I have not to lose it. Not to mention, I haven't been sleeping well due to nightmares. Yesterday was a culmination of things I've been keeping bottled up."

"Tell me about the dreams."

I tell Dr. Nelson about my dreams involving Jen and Ally.

"How long have you been feeling angry?"

"It started when I found out my family died, and it's been building."

"So you felt this way in the hospital?"

"Yes"

"Why didn't you say anything?"

I look down and say, "I've been scared and ashamed."

Dr. Nelson squeezes my hand and says, "There's no need to be scared. You've done nothing to be ashamed of."

"I'm ashamed of my anger. I can't deal with this." I cover my face with my hands.

"Tell me why you're angry."

I shake my head and say, "I can't, I just can't."

Dr. Nelson grabs my hand and says, "Yes, you can. I can't help unless you tell me what you're going through.

I glare at Dr. Nelson, raise my voice, and ask, "You really want to fucking know?"

"I need to know."

I wipe my eyes and say, "Okay, I'll tell you. I'm mad at god. I'm mad at myself for not protecting my family. Hell, I'm even angry at Jen and Ally." Yesterday, I got mad at two little girls I was watching play with a ball because I will never play catch with Ally again."

Tears are flowing freely.

"You're mad at Jen and Ally?" asks Dr. Nelson.

I nod.

"Why are you mad at them?" asks Dr. Nelson.

"Jen and I have always been a team. We never went to bed mad. We worked out everything together. Ally never went to bed mad or upset at us. We talked through everything. The night of the accident, I had every intention of talking it out with Ally when we got home." I sob. "But we never made it."

"That still doesn't answer why you're mad at them."

"Because they left me behind. You never leave a teammate behind. I would do anything to be with them."

"You understand they didn't have a choice."

I nod and say, "That's why I'm mad at god."

"Do you want to die?"

"No, I don't want to live without them."

"That's understandable. We will be working on how to move forward without Jen and Ally. Do you feel better?"

"Yeah, I guess." I run my hands through my hair. "It hurts so much."

"It's not going to be easy. But we can lessen the pain and its control over your life. Is there anything else bothering you?"

I wipe the tears and say, "I'm bored. I don't have a TV. All I do is sit and think."

"Can anyone bring you what you need?"

I nod my head and say, "Ryan and Maygen are coming tomorrow. They're bringing the things I need."

"Who are Ryan and Maygen?"

"Ryan is my best friend and assistant coach. Maygen is his daughter and Ally's best friend. Ryan was at the hospital several times, but I haven't seen Maygen. I need to see and hug her."

"If you let the anger and pain control you, they will dominate everything. To have the life you deserve, you will need to control your anger. Anyone in your situation would feel the same way. But holding it in and lashing out isn't the answer."

The more Dr. Nelson and I talk, the more I like and trust her.

"As for your boredom." Dr. Nelson looks at Julie. "Maybe Julie can leave some puzzles and activities for you to work on."

Julie says, "I can do that." She glares at me. "Just don't throw them."

I look at Julie and say, "I won't, I promise."

Julie says, "I will be right back."

She comes back with the puzzles I had issues with yesterday.

Julie asks, "Will you try again while Dr. Nelson is there?"

My hands start to shake as I grab a puzzle piece and try to put it in place. After a few tries, I get the piece in place. The second piece goes in easier. By the third piece, my hands stop shaking. After a few minutes, I finish the puzzle and move on to a second one. My hands work better if I concentrate and focus. There's a small internal voice saying that a child's puzzle shouldn't be this hard. Then I remember what Deb said, and ignore it.

Dr. Nelson gets up and says, "I will leave the two of you alone. I have other patients to see."

Julie says, "I will stay and work with him a little longer."

I look at Julie and say, "Again, I want to say I'm sorry for yesterday."

"Don't worry, I learned to not take what happens at work personally."

Julie goes through exercises she wants me to do and brings me some hand strengtheners to help my grip.

Julie says, "You should do occupational therapy for an hour. Then do physical therapy exercises."

"Glenn warned me about pushing myself too hard. What I failed to realize is he meant both mentally and physically."

Julie pats me on the shoulder and says, "You're doing great. I'm going to leave now, but keep up the good work."

"Thanks, I appreciate it."

Not long after Julie leaves, Glenn comes through the door.

"Hey, Dave, how are you doing?"

"Doing good, man."

Glenn claps his hands and asks, "Are you ready to ramp things up?"

"What do you have in mind?"

"How about adding five-pound weights to each leg and see how that goes?"

I smile and say, "Yeah, let's give it a shot."

"I want you to do leg lifts in sets of five. Then, as you get stronger, we will add reps".

"Okay"

"How's the pain?"

I grimace and say, "Nothing I can't handle."

"Glad to hear it. You're doing much better than I expected. There's one more thing I want to add to your workout routine."

"What's that?"

Glenn reaches into his bag and pulls out a trapeze-looking thing with a chain.

"I'm going to attach this to your bed. It will allow you to pull yourself up to help Deb or the orderlies when you go to the bathroom or change clothes. You can also do pull-ups to work out your arms. Maybe do a set of leg lifts, then a set of pull-ups."

"I can do that."

"Give it a try."

At first, I struggle to do a pull-up, but eventually, I get the hang of it.

"If you feel up to it, add reps."

"Okay"

By the time Glenn leaves, I'm exhausted. This could easily be the best day of my recovery. The past few months have been hell. There has been nothing positive going on until now.

I ask Deb, "Can you give me something to help me sleep? Ryan and Maygen are coming tomorrow. I need to make sure I'm rested."

"No problem."

The real reason I asked for the sedative is that I doubt I will sleep otherwise. I'm so excited to see them. Seeing Maygen worries me. What will her reaction be? Will she be afraid to touch me? What will I say if she asks about softball? Hopefully, everything goes as well as I need it to.

Chapter 9

A Much Needed Visit

Just before noon, I hear voices coming down the hall. Maygen bursts through my door with all the excitement and joy I have grown to love. She has a giant bag over her shoulder and is pulling a suitcase. Ryan enters with my TV under one arm and a laptop under the other. They quickly set the TV on the stand and my laptop on the table.

Maygen smiles and says, "I have a surprise for you." She reaches into her oversized purse and pulls out two giant freezer bags full of cookies. Maygen has mad baking skills. My mouth starts watering.

I say, "Ooh, give me."

"Do you want one?"

Maygen waves them in front of me. I grab the bags of cookies. After some difficulty, I get the bag open and inhale deeply. The scent of brown sugar and bitter-sweet chocolate fills my lungs. I grab a chocolate chip cookie.

"Oh my god, thank you." I say as I take a big bite.

Ryan laughs and says, "Bro, it's just a cookie."

"They're more than a cookie. This is the first non-hospital food I've had in months."

I grab the second bag and open it. This time, my lungs fill with vanilla and the buttery, sweet smell of fresh homemade buttercream. I bite into a frosted sugar cookie and close my eyes to remember happier times.

Maygen says, "Are you allowed outside food?"

"I don't know. I should check to make sure."

I ring my buzzer, and Deb strolls in.

She says, "It's good to see you smiling. What can I help with?"

"Will these be a problem?" I hold up the bags of cookies.

"You have no dietary restrictions, so you can eat anything."

I ask Deb, "So if an amazing friend were willing to get takeout, that would be fine?"

Ryan laughs and says, "Subtle."

Deb smiles and says, "Yes, that's fine."

"After what happened the other day, the least I can do is give you one of the best cookies ever made."

Deb says, "Okay," and grabs a frosted sugar cookie. "Wow, these are good. Who made them?"

Maygen says, "I did."

"They are delicious, thank you."

Ryan said, "I will get food after I set up your TV."

While he hooks that up, Maygen helps me set up my laptop.

She asks, "What happened the other day?"

"I had a meltdown. But I'm doing much better now."

Ryan says, "Let me guess, bro, your plan didn't work."

"Nope, you were right."

Ryan asks, "Do you have a new plan?"

I grin and say, "Yep, listening to Dr. Nelson and behaving."

Ryan smiles and says, "Thank god."

Maygen asks, "Is someone going to fill me in?"

"No"

Ryan says, "Coach thought he knew better than the doctors and could ignore everything."

Maygen says, "That seems stupid."

"Yeah, it was a dumb idea that backfired."

Maygen asks, "Are you doing better?"

I pull her toward me and onto the bed. She cuddles next to me.

I kiss her forehead and say, "I am now."

"Am I hurting you?"

"A little, but I need your cuddles more."

Maygen hugs me tight. Tears fill my eyes. Words cannot express how much I need this.

Ryan hands me a box and says, "My friend bent some rules to get you a new phone. Don't ask questions."

"Thank you so much."

"I didn't do anything with the girls' phones. My friend suggested hiring an attorney to handle that."

"That's a good idea. There's so much I need to start working on."

Maygen is lying next to me. Her smile is hiding her pain. The sadness in her eyes tells the truth. I squeeze her tight.

I say, "I love you,"

Maygen squeezes me and says, "I love you too."

Maygen grabs the phone, and starts setting it up.

She says, "You should have all your information once it connects to the cloud."

Ryan has my TV set up and turns on Michigan football.

Ryan asks, "What food do we want?"

"I have been craving pizza and wings with breadsticks."

Maygen says, "That works for me."

"Nothing is better than a Saturday full of good food, family, and Michigan football."

Maygen asks Ryan, "Can I stay here while you get the pizza?"

He says, "That's fine."

Once Ryan leaves, it's just the two of us.

"How's school going?"

"It's okay, I just miss Al..."

Maygen tries to change the subject. We both know what she was about to say. The air around us feels heavy.

I take a deep breath and hesitantly say, "Look at me."

Maygen looks up with tears in her eyes. I kiss her forehead and say, "You don't need to avoid talking about Jen and Ally to protect me. It helps if we let it out."

She gets up, and in a broken voice, Maygen says, "I brought you a few things." She pulls out a pile of cards and letters from her bag. "They're from everyone around school."

I grab the pile and put it on my table.

"Tell them I said thank you."

"I will. Will you be home for the start of winter conditioning?"

"I'm not sure."

"Dad can run things, and I can help lead drills until you're ready."

"That might work." I say hesitantly.

I don't have the heart to tell her I may not be coaching.

Maygen grabs her bag and says, "I have a few more things for you,"

She hands me the team picture taken after the championship game. Tears are flowing as I see Ally and I are right in the middle.

I run my finger over the picture and say, "My precious Ally! God, I miss you."

Suddenly, I feel warm and a faint smell of Ally's strawberry shampoo hangs in the air.

I whisper, "I love you, sweetheart."

Maygen starts sobbing. Her hands shake as she slowly hands me another picture. My heart sinks as I see the family picture with the championship trophy. Jen and I, side by side, with Ally in front.

"Oh, my loves, why are you gone, and I'm still here?"

My heart aches with every sob. I pull the picture to my heart and squeeze it tightly. Maygen climbs next to me. Maygen and I are holding each other, balling. When Deb comes in.

Deb walks over and asks, "Are you okay?"

I nod my head and hand her the family picture. Deb takes the picture and stares at it. With tears in her eyes, she hands it back. Then leaves, closing the door behind her.

Eventually, we start to calm down. I feel so bad for Maygen. I have no idea how she's holding it together.

Maygen asks, "How's rehab going?"

"It's going okay. But I'm just getting started. My hands don't work right. I've been scared to try the other activities my therapist left me."

"Are these the exercises?"

"Yes"

Maygen finds one that involves throwing and catching bean bags. She locates the bean bags in a plastic container.

Maygen gets up and tells me, "No more pity party. We have work to do."

I raise my eyebrows and ask, "Do I have a choice?"

"Nope," Maygen says with a smirk.

She quickly moves things, so we have a path to play catch. There's no point in protesting.

Maygen asks, "Are you ready?"

I smile and say, "As ready as I'll ever be."

Maygen lobbs the bean bag. It bounces off my hand and lands in my lap. Then I grab it and toss it back. My throw goes way offline and almost hits the TV. That's when it hits me: Dr. Kern is right. If I can't catch or throw, how can I coach? I hang my head and start to cry.

Maygen comes over to me and asks, "What's wrong?"

The last thing I want to do is ruin the visit, so I lie and say, "I'm just upset because I can't catch or throw."

She says, "It's not about the results. Your focus should be on getting one percent better each day."

It takes me a second to realize this little brat is using coach speak on me. Maygen smiles, knowing what she's doing. It's all I can do not to laugh.

"Are you using my pep talk against me?" Her smile gets bigger. "You're a brat."

"And proud of it." She says with a devilish grin.

"It's good to know some of my talks got through. But I never expected to have them used against me."

Maygen grins and says another of my favorite lines, "Life is hard and full of challenges. It's how we handle those challenges that define who we are."

Maygen is loving this. We continue to throw the bean bags. After I catch one, she gives me a huge hug. As I'm about to ask if we can take a break, Maygen's phone rings.

She says, "It's my dad. He needs help bringing food in."

My stomach starts to growl. Ryan walks in carrying enough food to feed an army. Maygen follows behind with bags from the grocery store. Ryan bought two large pizzas, a container of wings, and a bag of breadsticks. He even went to the store and bought me my favorite snacks and candy.

I can only shake my head and say, "Thanks, Ryan."

Ryan pats me on the shoulder and says, "Don't worry about it, bro. You would do the same."

"That's what softball has always felt like. We aren't just a team. We're a family. We do anything for anyone who needs it."

Maygen loads a plate with as much as she can fit and hands it to me. I'm so hungry I dive right in.

Maygen asks, "Can I sit beside you while we eat?"

I slide my plate over, and we share my bedside table.

Maygen jokes, "You're making a mess."

"I don't care. Hospital food is bland, I'm finally eating food with flavor."

We talk and laugh while we eat. For the first time in months, I'm happy to be alive. Instead of being surrounded by doctors and nurses, I'm around people I love and who love me. Things could be worse.

Maygen yawns and announces, "I'm full and ready for a nap."

"Take one."

She cuddles up next to me. I rub her back and run my fingers through her hair until she's out like a light. My guess is she hasn't been sleeping well. I cover her with my blanket.

Ryan looks over and asks, "Is Maygen sleeping?"

"Yeah"

"Are things getting easier?"

"Rehab hasn't been fun. The hardest part is all my mental hurdles. Today reminds me I still have a lot to be thankful for. Wait till you hear what Maygen did. She used my pep talks against me."

Ryan laughs and says, "That's how she is."

"Her pep talk did help. Maygen's right when she says how I handle this will define me. Now that I have my laptop and a phone, I can finally start working on things."

"If you need my help, let me know."

I take a deep breath and say, "There is one thing I need to talk to you about. I've decided I should resign as head coach. My physical limitations prevent me from being the coach the team deserves."

"Bro, there's no need to decide now. Winter conditioning is three to four months out, and practice is six months away."

"It's best for the team if they know who their coach will be. You're more than capable, but I have a few concerns."

"Like what?"

"Well, until now, your dating habits have been the punch line of jokes. As head coach, you must make decisions that are best for the team."

"My dating habits have never interfered with softball."

I glare at Ryan and ask, "What about Tiffany's mom?"

Ryan throws his arms up and says, "She told me she was separated. How was I supposed to know?"

"We all knew. You didn't want to know. You're lucky I talked Tiff's dad out of killing you. If you want to be a real life Charlie Harper, then go ahead, but keep it away from softball. No dating players' moms.

"After what Theresa did, do you blame me?"

"I'm not saying what Theresa did to you, and Maygen is okay. But you seem to be dating your way through every mom in the area."

"It's not that bad."

I roll my eyes and say, "It's worse than you think. Drama can kill a team faster than poor play. You have to be the one they depend on.

"Okay, I will be more careful and won't date any player moms. I still think you're making a rash decision. What makes you a great coach is how you are with the girls. They love and trust you."

"It's not just that. There is a mental side, too. I'm not sure I can handle being around Fenton and the constant reminder that Jen and Ally are gone."

"That makes sense. Does that mean you'll be moving?"

"I will need a new house that fits my needs. A fresh start in a new city would be best." I look over at Maygen, still asleep. "I don't know how to tell her."

"Be honest, she will understand."

"I love her so much." I look at Ryan, "I love both of you."

"We love you too. But you better come to a few games. Just your presence will mean a lot."

"I will try."

Near the end of the Michigan game, Maygen starts to wake up.

I smile and ask, "Did you have a good nap?" She nods and stretches.

Ryan tells Maygen, "We need to pick things up before we go."

"Okay"

There's still a lot of food. I ring Deb to see if she or the other nurses want any.

Deb says, "I already ate, but I have a better idea. Many patients don't have visitors. Would it be okay to let them have it?"

I say, "That's an awesome idea."

Deb smiles and says, "Great," then sets about packing stuff to take it around.

Maygen asks, "Do you need help?"

"Yes, that would be great, thank you."

"Here, you can hand out the rest of the cookies."

Maygen looks at me wide-eyed and asks, "Are you sure?"

"You will make me more, right?"

Maygen gives me a hug and says, "Of course."

While Maygen is gone with Deb, Ryan puts the snacks and candy within reach. Then, texts and calls my phone to make sure it works. We also test out the laptop.

I tell Ryan, "Thanks for everything. No way could I do this without you."

"Stop it, bro. We have your back no matter what."

Maygen returns to the room and says, "Everyone said thank you."

I pull Maygen onto my lap and say, "I need a big favor from you. It won't be easy."

"Okay, what do you need?"

I let out a heavy sigh and say, "I have to sell my house because it won't work for my needs with my disability. Before I can do that, I need someone to go through Ally's things. You are the best person to do it. I want a few things and will text you a list. You and the team can take whatever you want. I will donate the rest."

Maygen buries her head in my shoulder and nods.

"Have you passed driver's training yet?"

Maygen wipes tears, nods, and says, "I passed over the summer and will take my driver's test soon."

"I want you to have Jen's car. We were planning on giving it to Ally. We had new tires and brakes put on it."

"Are you serious?" asks Maygen.

"She would want you to have it."

Ryan says, "Let me pay you for it."

I hold up my hand and say, "No, it's payback for all you've done and will probably do for me in the future."

Maygen hugs me and says, "Thank you."

Once Ryan and Maygen leave, the loneliness hits hard. At least I have things to keep me occupied. I scan through my emails. I log into Facebook. I can imagine the shock everyone must have experienced as word spread. Messaging us, praying we would reply. By the time I get through everything, it's late.

I can't sleep. My decision to quit coaching has my mind racing. I love softball so much, I hate to give it up. My physical limitations will make it impossible, and memories of Ally will haunt me. I wish I had told Maygen. It will break her heart. Finally, at about 3 am, I write a post on the team's Facebook page.

Dear team,

First, thank you for all the letters Maygen brought me. It means so much knowing I have all of you with me during this difficult time. Second, Jen and Ally loved you very much! They will always be in our hearts. Finally, I want to say how proud you made me for playing and honoring their memory at regionals. I have told you many times that the final score tells only part of the story. No one will ever understand what you went through leading up to the game. But we won because you played.

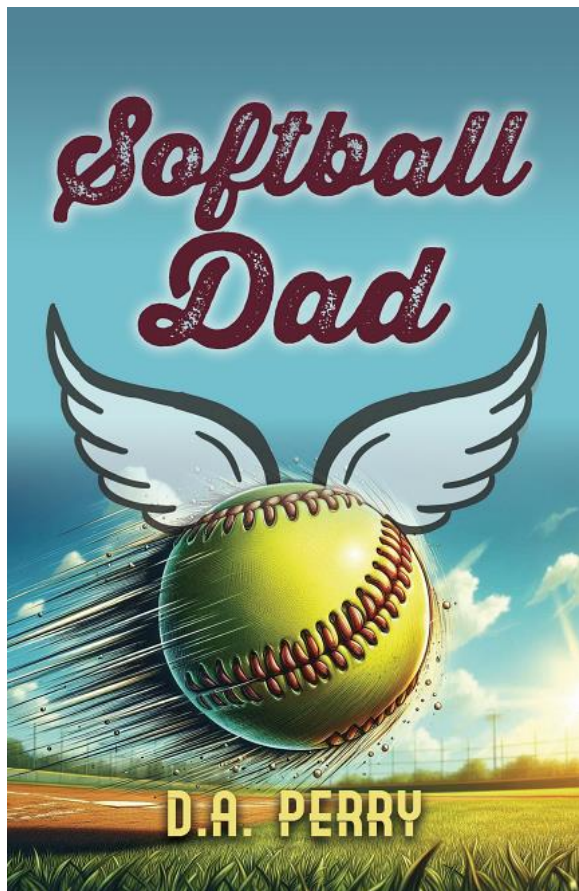
I've said in pep talks, it's not how you handle the easy times that will define who you are. Instead, it's how you handle the tough times that determine your character. Nothing is testing that more than right now. I'm finally out of the hospital and in a rehabilitation facility as I heal. My doctors say I'm doing well, but I have a long way to go. Unfortunately, I feel it's best to quit coaching.

My new limitations make coaching impossible. While I may not be your coach, I will still be here if you need me. We are not just a team but a family! Thanks to Coach Ryan, I have my laptop and a phone. Feel free to text or message me. It may take me time to reply if I'm busy, but I will get back to everyone as soon as possible.

Love always,

Coach Dave

The hard part of typing the letter was not the words, but how I did it. I used to type eighty words a minute. Now, I can only type with two fingers. It took me a while, but I'm proud I did it myself. Now, all I have to do is wait for the fallout. The only reaction that worries me is Maygen's. Hopefully, she will understand. I'd better get some sleep. Tomorrow could be rough.



After a drunk-driving crash kills his wife and daughter and leaves him paraplegic, softball coach Dave loses all hope. A service dog, a new team, and unexpected love help him find the courage to live again.

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