

REVERE

Chapter One

Hips. Hips. Swing them back; thrust them forward. That's it. Hips. Feels good now. Bam! Who's your daddy? Feel those hips. All I'm thinking is hips. All I'm feeling is hips. Ugh! Hips. Turn them. Pull them back; swing them forward with a thrust and a turn. Yeah, baby. That's it now. Hips.

“Freddy! Yo, Freddy, I’m booking. Hit the lights when you’re done. Make sure you get all of them.”

What does he think I am, stupid? Bam! That last one was for Dave. Whap! Big, fat, dumb Dave. Bam! Dave again. Okay, so he’s not that fat. Slap! He’s not that big, either. Bam! Just dumpy. Dumpy, frumpy, and undisciplined. Whack!

I slam balls for another I-don’t-know. I’m in a dream, a zone. I don’t care about time. I got nowhere to go. But eventually I get tired. The hands hurt a bit -- not much, but a bit. When I stop to think about it, the shoulders, the lower back, and even those beautiful, machine-like hips -- they’re sore and tired, too.

I key off the machine. Dumpy Dave’s all right, giving me this key. This whole set-up is sweet; that’s why I would never diss the roly-poly son-of-a-bitch to his face. I leave the cage and put the bat back in the rack, then slowly walk around picking up loose balls and stuff them back in the machines. It’s a cool-down and I need it. I feel like a marathoner walking it off by the Pru, twenty-six miles off my back and done for another year. Dave turned out most of the lights before he left, so this old barn is pretty dim and creepy. I never think about it when I’m hitting, but now it kinda creeps on me. But it’s a good creep, if there is such a thing.

The last thing I do is check the clock and yeah, it’s later than I thought. The busses have stopped running, but that’s fine. I go outside, look up at the sky, catch my bearings, and begin jogging home.

Most of the houses are dark. A few have their little TV sets blaring light out at me, but I cannot care less what is on. I laugh when I see some not-so-little ones -- big-ass plasma screen mofos in these shit little houses. What a waste. Losers in their little

bungalows with all their money sunk into a blazing idiot box. Me, I watch my money. I don't spend a dime that isn't getting me closer to where I want to be.

The night air burns my lungs, but I even relish the feel of that in my own crazy way. Night air seems cleaner. I know it's the same damn air, but it just seems cleaner to me. The only problem with jogging at night is watching your step. A lot of these sidewalks are cracked and in some places they just stop for no good reason. I could twist an ankle and then where would I be?

I know exactly where I'd be. I'd be where I was back in high school. I think about this and get really careful about the ground below my feet.

Back in high school, I was your basic doofus. Played three sports, partied, got laid. The sports, man, they were fun, but most of the time I was just thinking about the partying and the getting laid.

My best sport was baseball. Always was, always will be. It was the spring of my junior year; right before baseball practice was to start. Four of my buds and me cut right after lunch and went to Tommy Bryson's to shoot hoops and mess around in his pool. Bryson was so rich he had an indoor pool, and neither of his parents was ever home.

I went up for a rebound and came down on somebody's foot. My ankle turned with all my weight on it while the other guy slid his foot out from underneath it. All I know is that I blacked out from the pain for an instant. Next thing I know, I'm staring up at the sky and holding my leg -- the one with the hurt ankle -- up in the air. I stopped gazing at the sky and looked at the ankle. The thing was the size of my head. I had only been on the ground for a second or two and the damn thing was already forty times its normal size. I wonder how the human body can do that.

As much as I remember the incident, I can't remember the pain. I guess that was just a given. Like I said, I went blind for a second when it happened, then I seemed to go deaf, because guys were crowding around me asking questions, or at least it looked that way, 'cause I couldn't hear them. A few of them looked at the ankle and turned pale.

My hearing finally came back and everyone started arguing about what to do. This is when people show what they're really about. Suddenly, all anyone cared about was how to make sure we didn't get in trouble for cutting school. They carried me inside to Bryson's pool and got me ice. They had me sit there; icing the ankle until three o'clock, when they thought it was safe to take me to the hospital.

The fucker was broken. There went my baseball career. I sat out my junior year, the year when all the scouts come around. Pros, colleges. Manny Snoggins -- that bastard could hardly carry my jock -- gets picked for the American Legion State All-Star Team. Goes to Fenway! Gets his ass struck out three times by a guy who got signed by the Tigers. I used to remember the pitcher's name, but now I forget. I think he made it to the majors for a cup of coffee, but no biggy.

That could have been my shot, but I blew it. Senior year I came back and played, but the scouts were looking at the next class by then. I played decent, but my spirit was gone. Too much partying; too concerned with getting laid. I went to UMass-Amherst. My mom told all her friends I was at Amherst, but that's another college, one I could never get in to. I was at State. Coach there took me as a walk-on. I lasted two semesters, then realized I wasn't the college type.

By this time Olivia was in my life. I stopped looking for tail and we moved in together. We drank, we screwed; we got stoned. We screwed, we got stoned; we drank.

We got stoned, we drank; we screwed. Suddenly, years had passed; we both went through a series of shitty jobs, and the routine started to include less screwing, replaced by way too much eating, her going out with her girls, me going out with my guys, but always, always drinking and getting stoned.

One night while Olivia was out, I sat on our torn-up sofa watching ESPN -- a bottle of beer in one hand, the remote in the other, a doobie in the ashtray, and my gut nearly blocking the screen. The house stank. It smelled like beer, weed, B.O., overflowing litter box, and stale leftovers. *I* smelled like all those things.

I started flipping channels. ESPN 2, ESPN Classic, ESPN For Lovers, whatever. I started thinking about my life. It may have been the first time I ever did that. I saw Tiger Woods on one channel and while I hate golf, I stopped and watched for a moment. The guy started swinging a club when he was in diapers. All he did was play freakin' golf. I changed to another channel and there were the Williams sisters. Playing tennis, whacking that little ball around, running like bullets. I turned to another channel and there's some fourteen-year-old ice skater twirling in the air like a spinning top.

It hit me. What was the difference between them and me? Natural talent? Not the way I saw it. I had the tools; always have. The body, when it was in tune, could do almost anything I wanted it to. No, the difference between them and me was focus. All those gabillionaires with their endorsement deals and TV commercials were no better than me; they just blocked out the bullshit and *focused*. I don't know if Tiger Woods ever played baseball or if the Williams sisters ever shot hoops, but I do know, I *think* I know, that they didn't waste their life away on weed, beer, and sex. They picked one

thing, one very specific thing, and focused their entire being on it until they became the best.

I moved my shit out the next day. Olivia wasn't happy, but she wasn't that unhappy, either. I moved here to Revere because it had everything I needed and it suited my style: honest, affordable, funky, and close to Boston. Here, I set up my new life. Today, I am focused on one thing and one thing only. I am Frederico Avila and I am going to be the greatest baseball hitter who ever lived.