

MIKE LUPICA

HEAT

#1

*New York
Times*
BEST SELLER!



1

MRS. CORA WALKED SLOWLY UP RIVER AVENUE IN THE SUMMER HEAT, SECURE within the boundaries of her world. The great ballpark, Yankee Stadium, was on her right. The blue subway tracks were above her, the tracks colliding up there with the roar of the train as it pulled into the station across the street from the Stadium, at 161st Street and River.

The two constants in my life, Mrs. Cora thought: baseball and the thump thump thump of another train, like my own personal rap music.

She had her green purse over her arm, the one that was supposed to look more expensive than it really was, the one the boys upstairs had bought for her birthday. Inside the purse, in the bank envelope, was the one hundred dollars—Quik Cash, they called it—she had just gotten from a Bank of New York ATM. Her food money. But she was suddenly too tired to go back to the Imperial Market. Mrs. C, as the kids in her building called her, was preparing for what could feel like the toughest part of her whole day, the walk back up the hill to 825 Gerard from the Stadium.

Now she moved past all the stores selling Yankees merchandise—Stan's Sports World, Stan the Man's Kids and Ladies, Stan the Man's Baseball World—wondering as she did sometimes if there was some famous Yankee who had been named Stan.

He hit her from behind.

She was in front of Stan's Bar and Restaurant, suddenly falling to her right, onto the sidewalk in front of the window as she felt the

green purse being pulled from her arm, as if whoever it was didn't care if he took Mrs. Cora's arm with it.

Mrs. Cora hit the ground hard, rolled on her side, feeling dizzy, but turning herself to watch this . . . what? This boy not much bigger than some of the boys at 825 Gerard? Watched him sprint down River Avenue as if faster than the train that was right over her head this very minute, pulling into the elevated Yankee Stadium stop.

Mrs. Cora tried to make herself heard over the roar of the 4 train.

"Stop," Mrs. Cora said.

Then, as loud as she could manage: "Stop, thief!"

There were people reaching down to help her now, neighborhood people she was sure, voices asking if she was all right, if anything was broken.

All Mrs. Cora could do was point toward 161st Street.

"My food money," she said, her voice cracking.

Then a man's voice above her was yelling, "Police!"

Mrs. Cora looked past the crowd starting to form around her, saw a policeman come down the steps from the subway platform, saw him look right at her, and then the flash of the boy making a left around what she knew was the far outfield part of the Stadium.

The policeman started running, too.

The thief's name was Ramon.

He was not the smartest sixteen-year-old in the South Bronx. Not even close to being the smartest, mostly because he had always treated school like some sort of hobby. He was not the laziest, either, this he knew, because there were boys his age who spent much more time on the street corner and sitting on the stoop than he did. But he was lazy enough, and hated the idea of work even more than he hated the idea of school, which is why he preferred to oc-

casionally get his spending money stealing purses and handbags like the Hulk-green one he had in his hand right now.

As far as Ramon could tell at this point in his life, the only real job skill he had was this:

He was fast.

He had been a young soccer star of the neighborhood in his early teens, just across the way on the fields of Joseph Yancy park, those fields a blur to him right now as he ran on the sidewalk at the back end of Yankee Stadium, on his way to the cobblestones of Ruppert Place, which ran down toward home plate.

“Stop! Police!” Ramon heard from behind him.

He looked around, saw the fat cop starting to chase him, wobbling like a car with a flat tire.

Fat chance, Ramon thought.

Ramon’s plan was simple: He would cut across Ruppert Place and run down the hill to Macombs Dam Park, across the basketball courts there, then across the green expanse of outfield that the two ballfields shared there. Then he would hop the fence at the far end of Macombs Dam Park and run underneath the overpass for the exit from the Deegan Expressway, one of the Stadium exits.

And then Ramon would be gone, working his way back toward the neighborhoods to the north, with all their signs pointing toward the George Washington Bridge, finding a quiet place to count his profits and decide which girl he would spend them on tonight.

“Stop . . . I mean it!” the fat cop yelled.

Ramon looked over his shoulder, saw that the cop was already falling behind, trying to chase and yell and speak into the walkie-talkie he had in his right hand all at once. It made Ramon want to laugh his head off, even as he ran. No cop had ever caught him and no cop ever would, unless they had begun recruiting Olympic sprinters for the New York Police Department. He imagined himself

THE ARM OF A CHAMPION

Michael Arroyo has a pitching arm that throws serious heat. But his firepower is nothing compared to the heat Michael faces in his day-to-day life. Newly orphaned after his father led the family's escape from Cuba, Michael's only family is his seventeen-year-old brother, Carlos. If Social Services hears of their situation, they will be separated in the foster-care system—or worse, sent back to Cuba. Together, the boys carry on alone. But then someone wonders how a twelve-year-old boy could possibly throw with as much power as Michael Arroyo. With no way to prove his age, no birth certificate, and no parent to fight for his cause, Michael's secret world is blown wide open, and he discovers that family can come from the most unexpected sources.

"Heat is a terrific book for every kid who dreams big, and for every mom and dad cheering in the bleachers. Mike Lupica has written another winner." —Carl Hiaasen, author of *Hoot*

★ *"Top-notch entertainment!"* —*Booklist*, starred review