

**A Promise Forged**  
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(excerpt - not for print or distribution)

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The taxi rolled to a stop, and Kat Miller wanted to pinch herself. Make sure she really sat outside the Chicago landmark. Wrigley Field. Women streamed through the gates in ones and twos, some swaggering but most staggering a bit as if star-struck by their location.

Wowzers.

When a man showed up at a softball game she played in a few months ago, she never dreamed it would lead to an invitation to play for the nascent All American Girls Professional Softball League. She'd heard rumors of the forming league, but she hadn't hoped someone would consider her or that her parents would give their blessing.

No, Kat was many things. But dreamer never topped the list. She had a strong head on her shoulders. Knew what to expect from life. This was not it.

"Calm down, Katherine Elizabeth Miller." She mimicked her mother's strong tone that talked her out of many a crazy phase. "Get out there and do what's needed. You received a letter and you belong here as much as the next girl."

The driver looked at her through the rear-view mirror. "You done talking to yourself? Ready to pay and get out of my cab?"

"More ready than you imagine." Kat fished a bill from her pocket and handed it to the man. Grabbing her baseball glove, she slid to the door and opened it. "Have a great day, mister."

"Yeah. You, too, kid." The man shook his head with a slight grin creasing his face.

She stepped out, and the cabbie peeled away, already intent on his next fare. Kat stood rooted like concrete to the sidewalk, stomach churning at the thought she was this close to the home of baseball greats. Now that she stood closer, the others walked with shoulders back, heads high, ready to take the field and use her to clean it up. Why had she come all the way from Dayton on the basis of one letter?

Simple words. Yet words that launched a dream she hadn't realized she'd harbored. We invite you to the tryouts for the All-American Girls Softball League. The rest of the letter contained a list of details. When to show up. What to bring. What was at stake. The salary range if she landed a contract.

Her breath heaved in and out until she saw black spots. She wanted this. A chance to spend the summer traveling the region. And a team that would pay her to play a game she loved. She had to succeed this week at tryouts. She refused to go home with her head hanging.

Kat took a step toward the stadium.

Ready or not, she'd arrived.

Mom and Dad hadn't discouraged her, and she'd spied a shadow of pride on her big brother Mark's face. Get paid to play softball? Why wouldn't she try out? She'd loved the sport since the moment Mark let her tag along to his games. Over time she'd badgered him enough to make him show her the basics. Hitting, bunting, throwing, catching, sliding, she did it all. Did it well enough that eventually Mark's team put her in when one of the guys didn't show.

Even Mom supported her, despite many of her mother's friends seeing the activity as less-than-feminine and downright questionable. What girl would choose to play in the dirt and bruise and batter her body in the pursuit of a small ball?

Someone jostled past Kat, bringing her back to the present. The uniforms the gals wore were as varied as the women. Some wore short skirts with leggings that made her long pants appear out of place. Others wore shorter pants reminiscent of men's teams. Most wore their team jackets, the different hues creating a kaleidoscope of colors. As she walked through a turnstile at one of the gates and into the stands, Kat tried to absorb it all.

A woman with cropped curls, a baseball cap shoved on top, slammed into her. "Whatcha gawking at?"

Kat wrinkled her nose. Was that chew in the woman's mouth? Maybe it was a good thing her mother hadn't accompanied her after all. "Excuse me."

"Excuse yourself. See ya on the field. May the best one win." The gal grinned, revealing crooked teeth. "That would be me." She scampered down the stairs, not turning to see if Kat followed.

Father, help me. I want this — Oh how she wanted this. If she was selected, maybe her friends would realize she really did excel at softball. That it wasn't merely a strange obsession to be tolerated with a grin — but even more, Lord, I want to be Your light. Show me why You have me here. Surely He had a reason.

As she stared at the more than two hundred assembled women, she prayed He did.