



# waiting for PUMPSIE

Barry Wittenstein

*Illustrated by*  
London Ladd

For Anne and Sam. And in memory of poet and  
Harpur College creative-writing instructor  
Robert Pawlikowski, who lives within  
these words.

—B. W.

To my mother, Victoria.

—L. L.

**I'm Bernard**, and I'm crazy, crazy, crazy  
about the Red Sox. Everybody in Boston is.  
It's just something you get born into.  
We're lucky, I guess.

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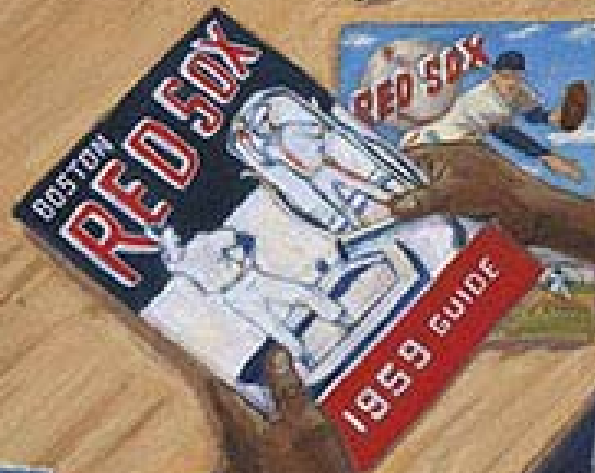
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We always want the Sox to win.  
But Mama says we gotta root for all the  
colored players, no matter what team  
they're on.

“How come the Giants got Willie  
Mays, and Jackie Robinson retired from  
the Dodgers, but we still don't have a  
Negro player?” I ask Papa.

“That's a good question,” Papa says.  
“It's an excellent question.”



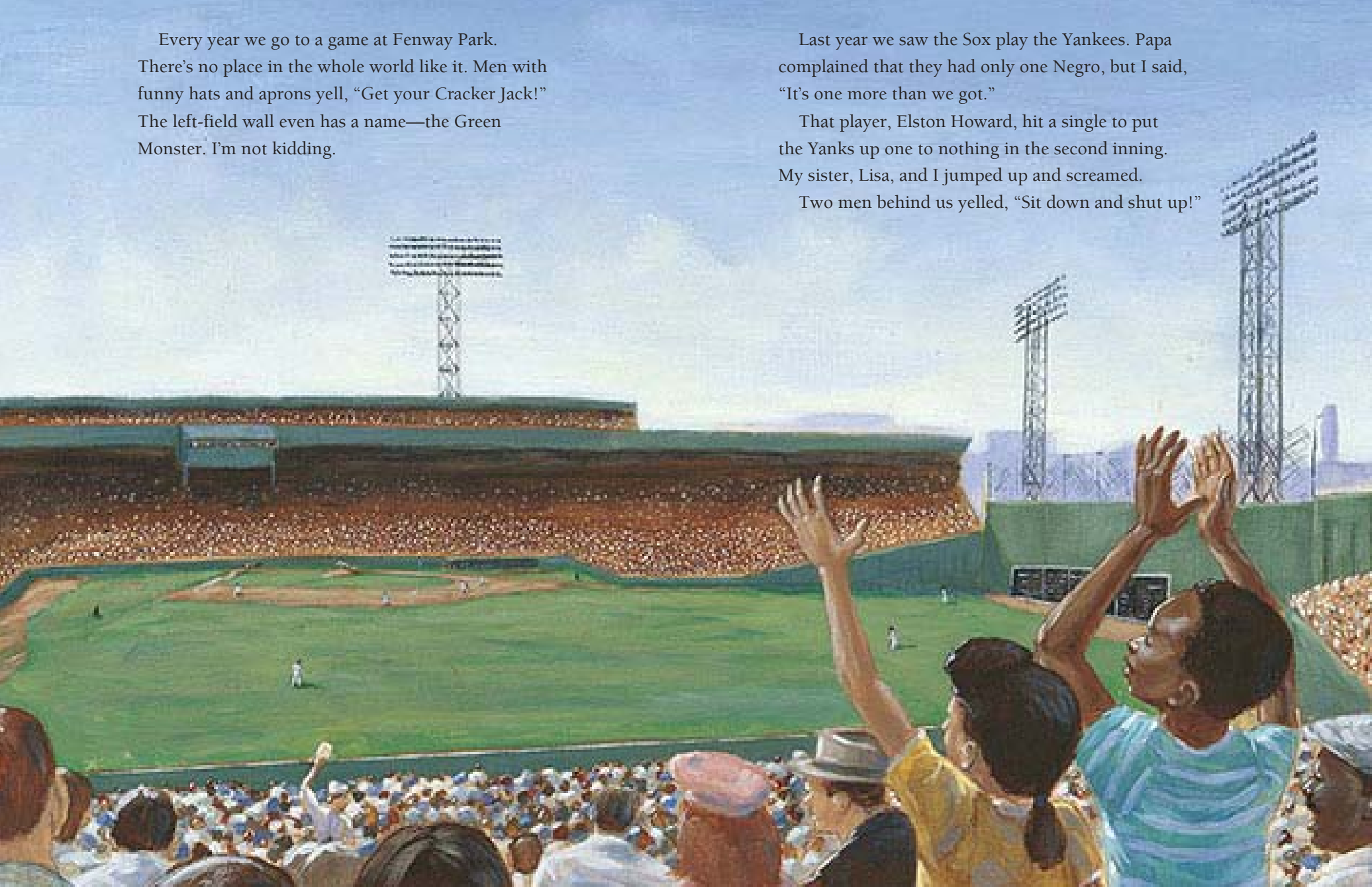


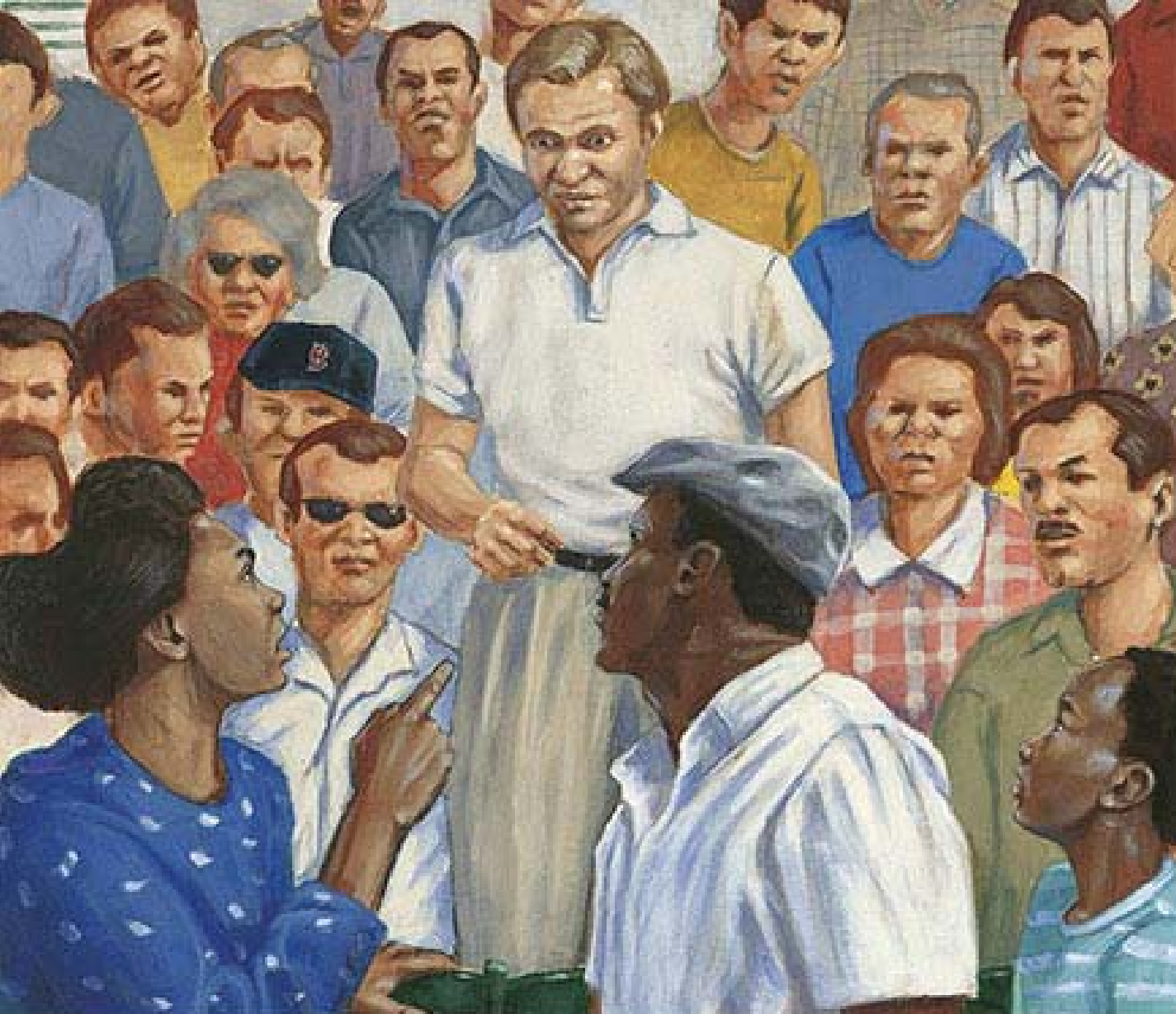
Every year we go to a game at Fenway Park. There's no place in the whole world like it. Men with funny hats and aprons yell, "Get your Cracker Jack!" The left-field wall even has a name—the Green Monster. I'm not kidding.

Last year we saw the Sox play the Yankees. Papa complained that they had only one Negro, but I said, "It's one more than we got."

That player, Elston Howard, hit a single to put the Yanks up one to nothing in the second inning. My sister, Lisa, and I jumped up and screamed.

Two men behind us yelled, "Sit down and shut up!"





Mama and Papa spun around real fast. One man said a bad word. Mama pointed a finger in his face. "Who do you think you're talking to?" she said.

Then a policeman came over. He said, "You people need to learn how to behave." He said it to us!

I don't ask Mama and Papa anymore why more colored people don't come to Fenway. I'm old enough now to know.



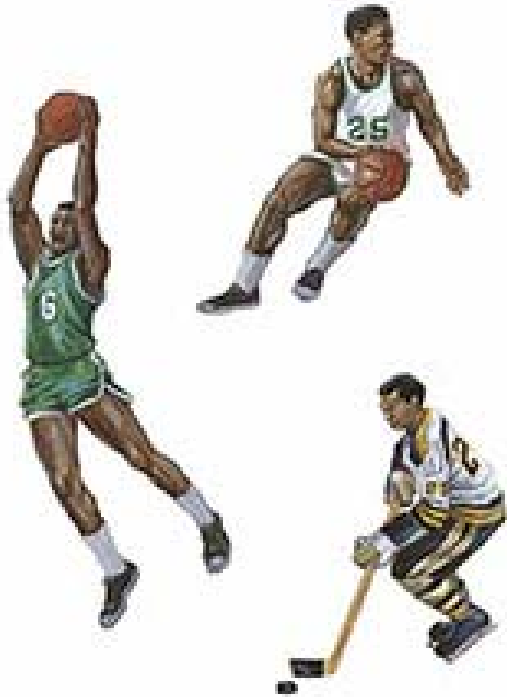
“Change is coming real soon,” Mama said, like she could see the future.

“Is she right?” I asked Papa.

He laughed. “Your mama’s always right!”

Then we all laughed, especially Mama.

Besides, the Celtics already got Negro stars Bill Russell and K. C. Jones. Even the Bruins, our hockey team, have a colored player. So why not the Sox?



During spring training we hear about this Negro in the minor leagues, Pumpsie Green. What a great name! Papa says he's the best rookie. Every Sunday I pray for him to make the lineup. Opening day is almost here.

Maybe I don't pray hard enough, 'cause at the last minute they tell him, "Sorry, Pumps. You're not ready."

"Makes no sense," Papa says, shaking his head. "The owner doesn't want colored players on his team. This proves it."

"I don't think it'll ever happen," I say.

Papa's big arms pull me in. "We waited this long, Bernard. What's a little longer?"

Days turn into weeks. Weeks turn into months. The Sox are dropping like a rock into last place.

Papa's newspaper says important colored and white folks are getting mighty angry. They say Pumpsie deserves a chance.



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