

SAFE AT THIRD

a short story by

WALTER G. MEYER



Based of the Characters
from *Rounding Third*

Safe at Third

by
Walter G. Meyer

Introduction and explanation:

"Safe at Third" is not the sequel to the critically acclaimed "Rounding Third." Incorporating the main character from his novel, Walter G. Meyer has used parts of "Triple Play" as a short story as part of The Real Story Safe Sex Project provided free to readers. The Real Story is an-all volunteer organization created by "Geography Club" author, Brent Hartinger and dedicated to using entertainment and popular culture to spread the word about HIV/AIDS and safe sex to gay and bi male teens and twentysomethings. For more information: brenthartinger.com/therealstory

Look for the complete novel "Triple Play" in late 2014. "Triple Play" is the sequel to the critically acclaimed "Rounding Third." Since its publication the author, Walter G. Meyer, has been traveling the country speaking about bullying and LGBT awareness, the topics at the heart of his novel. You can learn more about him and his work at waltermeyer.com.

SPOILER ALERT: If you haven't yet read "Rounding Third" but plan to, stop now, read "Rounding Third" then resume reading. Otherwise too much will be revealed about how that book ends.

"Safe at Third" takes place several months after the end of "Rounding Third," so Rob has had time to reflect on his relationship with Josh, to grow up a bit, mature, and be ready to move on with his life by finding someone else to date.

"Safe at Third" is much more explicit than either "Rounding Third" or "Triple Play" so if you are easily offended or turned off by sex, don't read it. If those books are PG, this short story is R, but it is graphic to make a point.

If you are sexually active, even if you don't read this story, please take the time to get tested and learn about the risks STIs can pose.



Safe at Third

by
Walter G. Meyer

"Wardell! Wait up!"

Rob turned to see another student approaching him. "You don't remember me, do you?" The boy did look familiar to Rob. He was about Rob's height, five-seven, but his shoulders were much wider on a solidly-built frame. Above sparkling blue eyes, his very blond hair was close-cropped, just slightly longer than a buzz-cut. The boy smiled. "Maybe if I tried to break your legs again you'd remember."

"You were the Vikings' catcher!" Rob yelled.

"Yep, on your squeeze play," he said. He extended his hand. "Bryan Murray."

They shook. "Rob Wardell. But I guess you knew that."

"I owe you an apology."

"You were just doing your job, trying to block the plate. No hard feelings." Rob smiled.

"Not about that. But sorry about that, too. You weren't hurt were you?"

"No, I was fine. And I was safe."

The boy's smile slid sideways. "I had your leg..."

"...Just *after* my hand touched the plate. You couldn't have seen that, but the ump sure did."

Bryan smiled his charming smile again.

"I didn't recognize you without your catcher's mask," Rob said. "So why else do you owe me an apology?"

"I outed you to your roommate."

"That's how he found out?"

"Yeah, sorry. I didn't know he'd freak out like that. I was telling him how you and your boyfriend were..."

"Wait. You knew about me and Josh?" Rob cut off the former catcher.

"Well, when your high school's team sort of disintegrated senior year, the word got around the league that most of your guys had gotten booted off the team for gay bashing your star pitcher and that you were Schlagel's boyfriend. And remember, I was there when you guys kissed on the field."

"I didn't know the whole league knew."

"It was kinda hard not to when your coach showed up the next year minus all of his starters. Then I saw you on campus and thought, cool, Wardell is going to Oberlin, there will be at least one other decent guy on this baseball team besides me."

Rob shook his head, "I'm not going to play."

Bryan took a step back, "You've got to! These guys sucked last year. They could use your speed on the bases and your glove in the field. And it looks like you've bulked up since I last saw you." He took a step forward and squeezed Rob's biceps.

"If the team's so bad, why do you want to play here?"

"I'm not good enough to make the team at a big ten school or any really good team, but at a little school like this, I could start. And as I'm sure you know, this is the gay-friendliest college in Ohio."

"You mean...?"

"Duh! Why do you think I paid so much attention to you and Schlagel?" Bambam asked. "Besides the fact that you were both so cute and really good ball players, it's not every day you see a pitcher kiss his second baseman. I was jealous!"

Rob appraised the cute guy in front of him with a whole new regard.

"Hey, I'm supposed to meet some guys from my dorm for some hoops. Wanna play?" Bambam asked.

"I'll have to change."

"Me too. But I haven't really apologized yet. It never occurred to me that Devon might be a homophobe. I didn't think anyone at Oberlin could be. It just sort of slipped out. He sits next to me in Anthro. We were waiting for the instructor and just started talking about where we were from, who our roommates were and everything. When he said his roommate was Rob Wardell, I said I sort of knew you. Or knew of you. And he asked how...the next thing you know...I'm really sorry. As soon as I said it, his eyes crossed and I knew I had blown it. I'm sorry. I was in the closet all through high school and I just resolved to come out from day one here. I just assumed you were out."

"It's not that big a deal. I was going to tell him soon anyway. It just kinda caught me off guard."

"So no hard feelings? It won't happen again."

"Not a problem if it does." Rob hugged Bryan.

Bryan held the hug a little longer. "Thanks. I was going to send you an email, but then I saw you and got up the guts just to say hi."

"I'm glad you did."

They hugged again. "Run back to your room and change. I'll meet you at the courts in Phillips in fifteen," Bryan said.

"K." Rob sprinted away. He looked back over his shoulder and saw that Bambam was also looking back over his shoulder and smiling.

Rob changed clothes as quickly as he could and ran to the courts. He had never liked basketball until Josh got him to play and had convinced him he really didn't suck at the game. Rob walked into the gym and was very pleased with what he saw. Bryan and six other guys were already there and all had their shirts off. It was hot in the gym so Rob stripped off his own T-shirt and threw it next to the others against the wall. Josh's constant admiration of Rob's body had gotten him over the embarrassment he used to have about his lean frame.

"Hey," Bryan said, coming over immediately. Bryan looked good without a shirt. He probably had thirty or forty pounds on Rob, and it was all muscle.

"Playing hoops will have you in shape for baseball season. Not that you're not in great shape now," Bryan said, looking Rob over.

Rob smiled. "I told you I'm not going out for baseball in the spring."

"I heard what you said. And I know by spring I'll get you to change your mind."

"I'm not that good."

"The two plays I saw you make were great."

"You were pretty good, too. I remember your teammates chanting *Bambam! Bambam!* What was that all about?"

"They had our initials stenciled on our practice jerseys. Mine are B-A-M. Bryan Andrew Murray. So people started calling me Bam, which led to..."

"...Bambam. That's cute."

"At first I didn't think so, but now I like it. It could've been worse. It sucked for Aaron Stewart Straub."

As soon as Rob figured out the initials, he laughed. "Do you want me to call you Bambam?"

Bryan smiled ever wider. "Only my teammates call me Bambam, so I guess that means you're going out for baseball with me!"

Rob smiled back, and without saying anything knew that he'd be trying out for a spot on the Oberlin Yeomen along with Bambam.

By the time the game ended, Rob and Bambam were slick with sweat in the warm gym. As Rob started to walk towards his dorm Bambam fell in beside him, wiping his body with his T-shirt.

"Do you remember our centerfielder, Toby Montgomery? Toby and I had been fooling around since we were about twelve, but we never kissed, 'cause Toby said that would make us gay. If we just stuck to sex, he'd say we were just doing *guy stuff*. I'm not sure if he knew we were lying, but I decided once I came to college, I'd come out and be honest about it."

They had reached Rob's dorm. "That kiss on the field was an accident," Rob said. "It just sort of happened. Want to come up and see my room?"

"Sure."

They each slipped their shirts on before heading upstairs. Once in the room, Bambam looked at the photos on the desk of Rob with his boyfriend. "Are you and Josh still together?"

"No. We sort of had a no-fault divorce when he went off to college in Florida at the start of the summer."

"Does that mean you're single?" Bambam asked, moving closer.

"Yep," Rob said as he smiled and closed the gap the rest of the way. "Are you?"

"Very much so," Bambam answered. "You have such big brown eyes, like a baby deer." Bambam leaned closer. "And such nice hair," Bambam felt Rob's brown hair still wet with sweat. Bambam's face was now within inches of Rob's. "I've never kissed a guy..." Bambam hesitated.

Rob knew he wanted life at Oberlin to be different and to replace his past with new experiences, but hadn't expected the opportunity to come so quickly and in such a handsome form. He only hesitated a moment before he purged those thoughts and leaned close to whisper, "This guy wants to kiss you." He put

his lips on Bambam's as their arms slid around each other's sweaty lower backs.

"Can I test your eight-pack and see if it tastes as good as it looks," Bambam said.

"Oh yeah," Rob smiled.

A while later Bambam stopped kissing and said, "I have to tell you, Rob, this is so much fun." He continued lightly stroking Rob's perfectly smooth chest. "With Toby, we always felt guilty and rushed and like we were doing something wrong. It's so great to be able to really touch a guy without having to worry about him weirding out like Toby did if I went too far."

Rob leaned back and put his hands behind his head. "My body is your playground. Touch anything you like."

"I feel like a kid who's been locked out of a candy store for eighteen years."

"I'm perfectly willing to be your all day sucker," Rob said.

Bambam moved on top of him, started to kiss him again and slid his hand down Rob's pants.

"Do you have a condom?" Rob whispered. He felt so awkward saying the word--especially to a relative stranger--that he didn't want to say it loudly.

"I don't. I've never had to use one," Bambam whispered back.

Rob broke their clinch. "What do you mean you don't use condoms?"

"I never have. Toby and I were the only guys we ever had sex with, so there was no reason to. And I trust you."

"And I trust you," Rob gave the automatic response he was expected to, but he wondered if he did trust Bryan. Other than a brief encounter on a baseball field, they had known each other for only a few hours. Was he as new to sex with guys as he said? As attracted as Rob was to Bambam--and he was very attracted, the bulge in his pants made that impossible to deny--he really knew very little about him or his sexual history. "But, c'mon, I don't even know Toby so I have no reason to trust him. How do you know for sure that he wasn't fooling around with anyone else?"

"Well, I was the only guy. He was having sex with his girlfriends, but..."

"Did he always use a condom with them?"

"I dunno. I guess. None of them ever got pregnant." Bambam said, starting to nibble Rob's earlobe.

"That makes me kinda nervous. I think for both of our sakes, we should go to student health and get tested. In the meantime we can still do it, just use protection."

"Is that really necessary? I mean I've never been sick or got anything," Bambam protested softly into Rob's ear.

"That you know of. I mean, I don't want to accuse you of being diseased or anything, but I think it would be better for both of us if we got tested, just to be sure."

Bambam looked Rob in the eye. "Did you and Josh always use condoms?"

Rob took a deep breath. "Yeah." He definitely didn't want to get into the reasons why. Just the thought gave him a shudder that was about to kill the moment.

Bambam jumped up off the bed. "Okay, let's hit the health center, then the drug store."

"I think student health is closed on Sundays," Rob said. "And even if we get tested, we still can't have full-on unprotected sex for a while."

"Why not?"

"Well, there's no way to know tomorrow if we're both totally negative. I mean, besides herpes, HPV, syph, all sorts of gross stuff I really don't want to talk about without really killing the mood--we can't even know about HIV tomorrow."

"I thought they had instant tests now, like pregnancy tests you can get at the drug store and know right away?" Bambam asked.

"They're a good first step, especially considering that something like twenty to twenty-five percent of people who are HIV-positive don't know it."

"Okay, how do you know all this?"

"We had health ed in tenth grade--which was already too late for some people." Rob hesitated before going on, "And because of some of the stuff with Josh, I did a bunch of research on my own and made us both get tested. Didn't you have sex ed at your school?"

Bambam let out a half a laugh. "Yeah, right. *Sex is bad. Sex is evil. Sex must wait until marriage.* With our ridiculous school the only thing they were allowed to teach us was: *abstinence is the only form of safe sex.*"

"Really? Like telling teenagers not to do something ever works," Rob smirked.

"Yeah. When they dropped the sex ed program three years ago, the number of pregnant girls started going up within nine months--what a coincidence. The school had to add a day care for the babies of students. Kinda sad. The girls got shamed for being sluts, but nothing happens to the guys. Who knows how many kids got STDs--it's not as noticeable as being pregnant. But I guess I'm just as dumb as the couples who got pregnant. I was having unprotected sex with Toby. It wasn't something anyone talked about, really, and we sure didn't learn about it in school."

"Not dumb, just under-informed," Rob said, giving a reassuring touch to Bambam's chest.

"So why can't we just do the drug store test?" Bambam asked, holding Rob's hand over his heart.

"The main problem is that it's a rapid test. To get the results so quick, it tests for anti-bodies, meaning it can only find the things that are fighting the disease in your body. It can take like three months for them to be enough of them to be measured. So it doesn't know if you've been infected in the last few months."

"But you said Josh left months ago, so if you've haven't been with anyone else you should be okay?"

"I should, true," Rob said. "But I can't expect you to risk your health on it considering we just met. And when did you and Toby last fool around?"

Bambam frowned. "Isn't there a test for HIV itself so we could know if we have the disease not just the anti-bodies?"

"They can do a blood draw test, but it'll usually takes a week or two to get the results back. And no offense, even after we get tested, until we get to know each other better, I'd still prefer to use protection." Rob realized it made it sound like he was doubting Bambam and he definitely didn't want to scare him off, so he added, "Lots of bad back story with Josh. It'll definitely get me out of the mood if I get into it. I had to learn a lot more than I ever wanted to."

Bambam's cute forehead furrowed. "Like what?" he asked.

"Like if you think you might have been infected--like a condom breaks or you do something thoughtless while you're drunk--you can run to a doctor and if you start taking the right drugs within a day or two, keep HIV from ever taking hold."

Rob kissed Bambam to get things back on track. "In the meantime, I can think of a few fun things to do to you that don't require condoms," he whispered before kissing him again.

"Like what?" Bambam said with an impish grin. "You make it sound like nothing is totally safe."

"I hate to say it, but the idiots in your school district were right about one thing: the only one hundred percent way to avoid any sexually transmitted infections is complete abstinence, but what fun is that? Kissing is very, very low risk. And a lot of fun," Rob said and then he kissed Bambam long and hard.

Rob stopped to add, "I know Oberlin has safer sex night in November, and I'm sure we'll both learn a lot at that, and probably at student health tomorrow, but I'm not sure we can wait that long."

"I know I can't," Bambam said with a mock pout as he looked down at the bulge in his shorts that was starting to soak through the fabric.

Rob pulled down Bambam's shorts. "As I said, nothing is completely safe except nothing, but oral sex is relatively safe as long you don't have any cuts in your mouth or sores or anything." Rob pulled down Bambam's jock. "And lucky for you I don't!"

Rob took one lick and then stopped. Bambam groaned as his entire body tensed. "What now?"

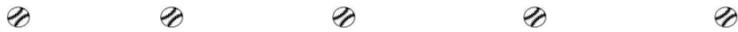
Rob smiled. "Oh, don't worry, big boy. I'm going to get you off. Then we can go to the store for some condoms and other things for your next lesson in safer sex!"

Rob barely slid Bambam's shaft into his mouth before he felt Bambam's body go rigid and his back arched to force himself deeper into Rob's mouth. Rob slid his mouth off just in time to watch the geyser erupt all over both of them.

"Sorry that was so fast," Bambam mumbled as he heaved with relief.

"I'm not. That was fun to watch," Rob said. Rob tossed Bambam a towel and used one for himself to wipe himself down. "I guess the health ed lecture didn't soften you a bit," Rob said with a devilish smile. "Now, to the drug store! Do you have a car?"

He had picked up the habit with Josh of going to large chain stores outside of town where the frequency and size of their purchases would be less noticeable.



At the drug store, Bambam quickly selected three of the large economy boxes of condoms.

"You know they'll give us all the free condoms we want at student health tomorrow?" Rob asked.

"I figured. But I was wondering if these would be enough to keep us busy until then." Bambam smiled, checked the aisle to make sure they were alone and gave Rob a quick peck. "And don't worry, I'm buying."



After comparing schedules they found a time that worked for both of them to meet at the health center on Monday. The staff member explained the tests and let them take both kinds of HIV tests. She also explained what else their blood would be tested for and when they could get their results. Before they left, she gave them each a bunch of brochures and held out a jar full of condoms for them to help themselves.

Bambam grabbed about five and Rob about ten. Bambam stuck his hand back in and grabbed ten more. "Is there a limit?" he asked sheepishly.

"Take as many as you want," she laughed.

As he stuffed his pockets, Rob felt like a kid on Halloween at that one house in the neighborhood that would let kids have all the candy they could grab.



Acknowledgements:

Thank you and a tip of the baseball cap to Allan Acevedo, Dan Manes, Morgan Pitts, and Dr. Joel Trambley for their reading of this story and input which made it a much better and more accurate piece. If errors remain, they are mine and mine alone.

And thanks to Joshua Romero and *Lead the Way San Diego* for some of the health information presented here, but nothing in this story should be taken instead of professional medical advice: get tested and get informed about HIV/AIDS and all Sexually Transmitted Infections.

Thank you to David Maxine of Hungry Tiger Press for contributing the cover design using the artwork of Joe Phillips.