**Home Run by** Steven Millhauser

**Bottom of the ninth, two out, game tied, runners at the corners, the count full on McCluskey, the fans on their feet, this place is going wild, outfield shaded in to guard against the blooper, pitcher looks in, shakes off the sign, a big lead off first, they’re not holding him on, only run that matters is the man dancing off third, shakes off another sign, McCluskey asking for time, steps out of the box, tugs up his batter’s glove, knocks dirt from his spikes, it’s a cat ’n’ mouse game, break up his rhythm, make him wait, now the big guy’s back in the box, down in his crouch, the tall lefty toes the rubber, looks in, gives the nod, will he go with the breaking ball, maybe thinking slider, third baseman back a step, catcher sets up inside, pitcher taking his time, very deliberate out there, now he’s ready, the set, the kick, he deals, it’s a fastball, straight down the pipe, McCluskey swings, a tremendous rip, he crushes it, the crowd is screaming, the centerfielder back, back, angling toward right, tons of room out there in no man’s land, still going back, he’s at the track, that ball is going, going, he’s at the wall, looking up, that ball is gone, see ya, hasta la vista baby, McCluskey goes yard, over the three-hundred-ninety-foot mark in right center, game over, he creamed it, that baby is gone and she ain’t comin back anytime soon, sayonara, the crowd yelling, the ball still carrying, the stands going crazy, McCluskey rounding second, the ball still up there, way up there, high over the right-centerfield bleachers, headed for the upper deck, talk about a tape-measure shot, another M-bomb from the Big M, been doing it all year, he’s rounding third, ball still going, still going, that ball was smoked, a no doubter, wait a minute wait a minute oh oh oh it’s outta here, that ball is out of the park, cleared the upper deck, up over the Budweiser sign, Jimmy can you get me figures on that, he hammered it clean outta here, got all of it, can you believe it, an out of the parker, hot diggity, slammed it a country mile, the big guy’s crossing the plate, team’s all over him, the crowd roaring, what’s that Jimmy, Jimmy are you sure, I’m being told it’s a first, that’s right a first, no one’s ever socked one out before, the Clusker really got around on it, looking fastball all the way, got the sweet part of the bat on it, launched a rocket, oh baby did he scald it, I mean he drilled it, the big guy is strong but it’s that smooth swing of his, the King of Swing, puts his whole body into it, hits with his legs, he smashed it, a Cooperstown clout, right on the screws, the ball still going, unbelievable, up past the Goodyear Blimp, see ya later alligator, up into the wild blue yonder, still going, ain’t nothing gonna stop that baby, they’re walking McCluskey back to the dugout, fans swarming all over the field, they’re pointing up at the sky, the ball still traveling, up real high, that ball is wayway outta here, Jimmy what have you got, going, going, hold on, what’s that Jimmy, I’m told the ball has gone all the way through the troposphere, is that a fact, now how about that, the big guy hit it a ton, really skyed it, up there now in the stratosphere, good golly Miss Molly, help me out here Jimmy, stratosphere starts at six miles and goes up 170,000 feet, man did he ever jack it outta here, a dinger from McSwinger, a whopper from the Big Bopper, going, going, the stands emptying out, the ball up in the mesosphere, the big guy blistered it, he powdered it, the ground crew picking up bottles and paper cups and peanut shells and hot dog wrappers, power-washing the seats, you can bet people’ll be talking about this one for a long time to come, he plastered that ball, a pitch right down Broadway, tried to paint the inside corner but missed his spot, you don’t want to let the big guy extend those arms, up now in the exosphere, way up there, never seen anything like it, the ball carrying well all day but who would’ve thought, wait a minute, hold on a second, holy cow it’s left the earth’s atmosphere, so long it’s been good ta know ya, up there now in outer space, I mean that ball is outta here, bye bye birdie, still going, down here at the park the stands are empty, sun gone down, moon’s up, nearly full, it’s a beautiful night, temperature seventy-three, another day game tomorrow then out to the West coast for a tough three-game series, the ball still going, looks like she’s headed for the moon, talk about a moon shot, man did he ever paste it outta here, higher, deeper, going, going, it’s gone past the moon, you can kiss that baby goodbye, goodnight Irene I’ll see you in my dreams, the big guy got good wood on it, right on the money, swinging for the downs, the ball still traveling, sailing past Mars, up through the asteroid belt, you gotta love it, past Jupiter, see ya Saturn, so long Uranus, arrivederci Neptune, up there now in the Milky Way, a round-tripper to the Big Dipper, a galaxy shot, a black-hole blast, how many stars are we talking about Jimmy, Jimmy says two hundred billion, that’s two hundred billion stars in the Milky Way, a nickel for every star and you can stop worrying about your 401K, the ball still traveling, out past the Milky Way and headed on into intergalactic space, hooo did he ever whack it, he shellacked it, a good season but came up short in the playoffs, McCluskey’ll be back next year, the ball out past the Andromeda galaxy, going, going, the big guy mashed it, he clob-bobbered it, wham-bam-a-rammed it, he’s looking good in spring training, back with that sweet swing, out past the Virgo supercluster with its thousands of galaxies, that ball was spanked, a Big Bang for the record book, a four-bagger with swagger, out past the Hydra-Centaurus supercluster, still going, out past the Aquarius supercluster, thousands and millions of superclusters out there, McCluskey still remembers it, he’s coaching down in Triple A, the big man a sensation in his day, the ball still out there, still climbing, sailing out toward the edge of the observable universe, the edge receding faster than the speed of light, the ball still going, still going, he remembers the feel of the wood in his hands, the good sound of it as he swung, smell of pine tar, bottom of the ninth, two on, two out, a summer day.**

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