

BIG COUNTRY

A

Screenplay

by

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NADJA PRODUCTIONS

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BIG COUNTRY

FADE IN:

EXT. MOBILE MANOR - NIGHT

Beaten-up trailers in rows, rain thrashing their aluminum siding.

An old pick-up truck bounces across the ruts and pot holes in the muddy road that splits the trailer park.

INT. MCCARTER TRAILER - NIGHT

Eleven-year-old RAY MCCARTER, wearing a Houston Astros baseball cap sporting a Little League all-star pin, sorts through baseball cards in a shoebox on his bed.

Ray hears a pick-up truck chug up to the trailer and pull to a stop.

Ray's alert.

Banging on door.

VOICE

Dixie! Open up, you cunt!

Ray rises, goes to door.

RAY

Dad?

EXT. TRAILER - NIGHT

Grizzled JUNIOR MCCARTER (mid-40s) carries a gas can, lifting it as he speaks.

JUNIOR

She out with that wetback
cocksucker? Where is she?

The rain increases.

JUNIOR

Daisy's Saloon?

INT. TRAILER - NIGHT

Ray lifts the phone off the hook.

JUNIOR

(OS)

I'm a-gonna torch this place, son,
you don't give 'er up! Ray! Ray
McCarter!

Ray dials 9-1-1.

EXT. TRAILER - NIGHT

Junior, circling the trailer, spatters gasoline on its walls.

JUNIOR

You got one minute to get outta
there!

SIREN APPROACHING.

Junior fumbles with his matches.

The rain won't permit their ignition.

A Sheriff's car skids up.

Two DEPUTIES leap out, guns pointed.

As DEPUTY #1 handcuffs Junior:

DEPUTY #2

Dammit, Junior!

Ray pokes his head out the trailer door.

JUNIOR

You doublecrossed me, Ray. Din't
ya?

RAY

Dad...

As Junior is led to the deputies' car:

JUNIOR

Stay away from wimmen! You'll have
time for 'em when you're growed up!

MORE

RAY

I'll be outta here way before then,
Pa.

EXT. YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, ABOVE LOWER YOSEMITE FALLS -
DAY

Ray, wearing his Houston Astros cap with the all-star pin,
hikes with UNCLE LYLE, the brother of his mother.

Yosemite Valley spreads out below and beyond them.

Just below the trail, Yosemite Creek burbles emerald green.

As Uncle Lyle huffs and puffs, Ray trots ahead, stopping
every now and then to work on his right handed batting
stance or to pitch an imaginary ball.

UNCLE LYLE

Lookin' good, Ray. Hold up, will
ya?

Ray pauses and assumes a left handed batting stance.

UNCLE LYLE

Switch hitter, are ya?

RAY

Someday, Uncle Lyle.

Uncle Lyle catches up with Ray.

UNCLE LYLE

Let's take a blow.

Ray and Uncle Lyle sit on a boulder forty feet above
Yosemite Creek.

UNCLE LYLE (cont'd)

Miss your Pa?

RAY

Nah.

UNCLE LYLE

Me neither. How's things with Paco?

RAY

Why you askin'?

UNCLE LYLE

My stepdad turned my life around.

MORE

RAY

Paco's just a Mexican in our trailer. I been workin' on a pickoff move. Wanna see it?

UNCLE LYLE

There's some things I wanna cover with you.

Ray is up, moving toward a flat ledge covered with pine cones and needles.

RAY

(assuming a pick-off stance)
Top of the ninth, seventh game.
McCarter sweeps the rubber. Checks the runners. They'll be going on the 3-2 pitch. McCarter fakes the move to third, whirls and throws to first!

Ray spins, mimes a throw.

Ray's lead foot slides on pine needles.

Ray loses his balance, flails, lands on his stomach on a tilted mirrored granite slab.

Uncle Lyle leaps up, rushes toward Ray, who is sliding down the glacier-polished granite.

RAY (cont'd)

Help!

Ray goes over the edge, toward the creek.

Ray slams into the edge of a pool, his head underwater, his lower half twisted on the rocks.

As Ray pulls his head out of the water, his Astros cap bobs downstream and out of sight.

RAY (cont'd)

Uncle Lyle! My cap!

Uncle Lyle picks his way down the draw, toward Ray, who thrashes in a vain attempt to pursue his cap.

UNCLE LYLE

Don't move!

EXT. BELOW LOWER YOSEMITE FALLS - DAY

Ray's Astros cap plunges over Lower Yosemite Falls.

Clouds gather in the Sierra Nevada sky.

EXT. YOSEMITE CREEK - DAY

Lyle cradles Ray by the creekside.

VOICE

(OS)

Everything okay?

Forty feet above, a MAN peers down at Lyle and Ray.

UNCLE LYLE

(looking up)

We're up shit creek! Get to
a phone! Get a helitack up here!

MAN

I'm on it!

Lyle assesses woozy Ray.

Lightning splits the dark sky.

Ray's right femur is bent funny, his right foot hangs limp
at the ankle, his left wrist is swollen.

Thunder peals.

Hailstones the size of hummingbird eggs pelt the pair.

Uncle Lyle spreads his windbreaker over Ray.

RAY

'm I gonna die?

Ray passes out.

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA - DAY

INSERT: SEVEN YEARS LATER

Junior college baseball, played by major league wannabe's,
all of them ex-high school all-stars.

ANGEL "EL BRUJO" PAGAN, five foot seven inches of snarling
ethnic pride, is on the mound for the Monterey Peninsula
College Lobos, wearing number 42 on his jersey.

MORE

The scoreboard says MPC leads the Chabot College Gladiators in the top of the eighth inning, 6-4, with two outs.

Men on first and second as a POWER HITTING GLADIATOR, a strapping black man, swaggers into the box as the go-ahead run.

The CATCHER, RICH BURNSIDE, trots out to the mound.

ANGEL

What the fuck, *pendejo*?

RICH

(into his glove)

This guy's hit you hard all day.
Don't give him anything good.

ANGEL

Good? That showboat'll get my best.

On the dugout steps, MANAGER KENT AOKI, leans forward, ready to join the conference.

Rich Burnside starts to slap Angel's backside. He reconsiders, pats Angel on the back.

Manager Aoki backs down the dugout steps.

Rich squats behind the confident Gladiator batter and wig wags his signals to Angel.

Angel gives the universal fast ball sign, four fingers down, flicked toward the batter.

ANGEL

(in the stretch, checking the runners, muttering)

Here, hit this.

Angel slings a hopping fastball right down the middle.

The big-eyed batter loads up, measures the pitch, and swings.

The batter slices air.

BATTER

(to the catcher)

Let 'im try that again.

RICH

(tossing the ball)

Careful what you wish for.

Angel gets the sign, shakes it off.

Angel signals to the batter a curve is coming.

Angel checks the runners, throws the pitch.

It's nasty biting curve ball, starting at the batter's head, snapping down and away.

The batter nearly slips a disc as he windmills around the ball.

AOKI

Okay, Angel, put 'im away!

Angel takes the sign and sends a fastball humming past the batter's jaw as the batter wheels away and hits the dirt.

BATTER

(brushing himself off)

Try that again, *mojado*, I'll slap you back to Mexico!

UMPIRE

That'll do. Hey, pitcher. Let's play some baseball.

ANGEL

Little chin music never hurt anyone.

AOKI

(about to leave the dugout)

C'mon, Angel. Shut your mouth and shut 'im down!

ANGEL

Yes sir, Mr. Aoki!

Angel takes the sign, checks the runners, and throws.

The pitch drills the batter in his ribs.

The batter takes a step to the mound, bat held high.

Rich grabs the batter in a bear hug. The batter throws Rich aside like a rag doll. Rich lands on his right wrist.

Both benches start to clear. The managers scream at their players to stay where they are.

The batter, glaring at Angel, trots to first as Kent Aoki walks to the mound.

MORE

Rich joins them. The other infielders come to the mound.

AOKI
You've put the go-ahead run on
base, Angel.

ANGEL
Guy's a showboat. I'll get the next
one.

AOKI
No you won't.

Aoki looks to right field, pats his right forearm with the four fingers of his left hand.

The right fielder trots toward the infield, limping barely perceptibly, but without pain.

In the stands, TWO MAJOR LEAGUE SCOUTS look up from their scorecards and notes.

One of the scouts is RICK SCHROEDER of the Houston Astros. Schroeder, poker-faced, keeps his own counsel.

The other scout is ERIC MEYER of the Anaheim Angels.

MEYER
Here comes the reason we're here.

The right fielder joins the conference on the mound.

He's huge.

AOKI
Okay, Ray. We're four outs away.

RAY
You can count on me, Coach Aoki.

AOKI
Rich. Your wrist. Can you continue?

RICH
It's nothing, Coach Aoki.

Aoki examines Rich's wrist. Rich flinches.

Aoki turns to Angel.

AOKI
Okay, hothead, strap on the tools.
(to Ray) You know what to do on your
first warm-up.

Ray nods.

In the stands, Meyer nudges Rick Schroeder as Angel straps on the catching gear.

MEYER

That kid has character issues.

SCHROEDER

You try being five-and-a-half feet tall with a big league dream.

Angel squats to take warm-up pitches from Ray.

Ray launches his first pitch over Angel, and over the on deck BATTER, where it sticks in the chain link fence.

The on deck batter turns toward his dugout.

CHABOT MANAGER

Don't let 'im get in your head!

Ray lasers several fast balls. They explode in Angel's mitt.

The two scouts move down behind the plate, their radar guns aimed at Ray.

Ray snaps a curve and signals he's ready.

Bases loaded, two outs.

Ray nods to Angel's signal, winds up, and throws.

The batter can't see the pitch, but he hears it.

MEYER

(checking his radar gun)

Ninety-three. What's this McCarter kid, eighteen?

Ray takes Angel's sign, launches another flaming bolt.

The batter swings and misses.

Angel sees that "Showboat," the first base runner, has strayed from first and is slow getting back.

Angel snaps a throw to the FIRST BASEMAN.

"Showboat" streaks for second, hoping that in a rundown the runner on third will score before he's tagged out.

Ray streaks over to first base to back up the first baseman, who is tossing the ball to the SECOND BASEMAN.

MORE

As "Showboat" dances back toward first, the second baseman throws the ball over the first baseman's head.

The runner on third, already part way down the line, streaks for home.

Ray, backing up the first baseman, catches the errant throw, then wheels and fires a strike to Angel, who is blocking the plate as the runner bears down on him.

Angel starts low to the ground. The runner, like a fullback smelling the end zone, blasts Angel with a low shoulder.

But Angel's even lower. Angel digs under and up, tagging the runner as he rises, flipping the runner into foul territory.

Three outs, inning over, no runs scored.

The Lobos high five each other as they tumble into the dugout.

Rick Schroeder likes what he's seen.

In the Lobos' dugout, Coach Aoki gestures to Angel.

Angel sits by Coach Aoki.

AOKI

You're a student of the game. Stop playing the hothead dunce.

ANGEL

(unstrapping his shin guards)
If I ain't got fire, I got no desire.

Aoki looks hard at Angel, considering him.

AOKI

You're in the hole.

DISSOLVE

FADE IN

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

The scoreboard shows the Lobos still leading the Gladiators, 6-4, with two outs in the top of the ninth.

MEYER

McCarter hasn't missed the strike zone.

MORE

SCHROEDER

Catcher knows how to frame a pitch.

Ray McCarter, moving smooth as a freight train, pours a fastball right at Angel's target, A FEW INCHES OUTSIDE THE STRIKE ZONE.

UMPIRE

Strike one!

The BATTER is careful not to look back at the umpire.

BATTER

You owe me one, Blue.

UMPIRE

See ball, hit ball, run like hell, batter.

Ray looks in at Angel's target, now two inches more off the plate.

Ray blazes a fastball right between Angel's knees, popping the glove.

UMPIRE (cont'd)

Stee-rike two!

The batter is clearly irritated.

The batter steps out of the box, glares at the umpire.

ANGEL

I got some tacos in the microwave.
They'll be ready in a minute, 'bout
the time you're back on the bench.
Unless of course you choose to stay
out there all afternoon.

The umpire laughs in spite of himself.

The batter, fuming, steps back into the box.

Angel sets his target another two inches outside.

Ray winds, throws.

It's a change up, a foot outside the plate.

The batter swings and misses.

MORE

UMPIRE
You're outta here!

ANGEL
Hey, batter, why you swingin' at a
pitch a foot outside?

The batter lunges at Angel, then catches himself.

Angel trots to the mound and high fives Ray.

RAY
You call a great game.

As the players file off the field, Rick Schroeder approaches
Coach Aoki.

SCHROEDER
Hey, Kent. Mind if I have a word
with McCarter?

AOKI
Give us a minute.

The players assemble on the bench.

AOKI (cont'd)
Once Ray took the mound, that team
was climbing uphill. Ray, from here
on out, we call you Big Country.

RAY
Thanks, Coach Aoki.

AOKI
Okay. Practice tomorrow. Tonight,
crack those books! Everybody gather
'round.

The players come together, extending their hands over each
other.

AOKI (cont'd)
Angel?

ANGEL
Okay, 1-2-3--

THE WHOLE TEAM
LOBOS!

AOKI
(to Ray as the players
scatter)
Someone wants to see you.

Coach Aoki nods toward Rick Schroeder.

Ray cautiously approaches Schroeder.

RAY
Sir?

SCHROEDER
Hi, Ray. I'm Rick Schroeder,
Houston Astros. We're plan to draft
you. You plan on finishing college?

RAY
Mister Schroeder, playing in the
big leagues is all I ever wanted.

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

The team is broken up into groups, working on various
fundamentals: batting, infield work and shagging flies in
the outfield.

In the bullpen, Coach Aoki studies Ray as he works out with
Angel.

AOKI
Ray... (Ray takes a throw from
Angel) George Omachi taught this to
me.

Aoki takes the ball from Ray, stands on the rubber.

Aoki signals a fastball to Angel.

Aoki winds up. As he releases the ball, Aoki gives a tiny
"kee" scream.

The ball snaps smartly in Angel's glove.

AOKI
That's qi energy. The life force.

Ray takes Angel's toss and straddles the mound.

Ray winds up and throws.

MORE

RAY

Kee!

AOKI

Good. Work with that.

As Ray practices the "kee," Aoki speaks in a low voice.

AOKI

Rick Schroeder says you're a seventh round draftee. (Ray nods)
You have an agent?

RAY

No sir.

AOKI

I'll negotiate for no fee. If that's okay with you.

RAY

Coach...that'd be great. I can't read a shopping list, much less a contract.

AOKI

Dyslexia's overrated. You're a winner.

Aoki walks away, his sharp eye on the workout.

Ray kees another pitch.

AOKI

Okay! Everyone in the dugout!

The Lobos trot to the dugout and sit on the bench.

AOKI

You're working hard. The scouts are paying attention. Some of you will play for universities, some for the pros.

Aoki passes his gaze over each player's face.

AOKI (cont'd)

There are three traps. They are, one: drugs. Two: alcohol. Three: bad women.

ANGEL
Shit, all the fun stuff!

The team breaks up.

AOKI
Laugh now, Pagan. Avoid these traps, and you--you, Angel--can go very far in baseball. Despite your handicap.

RICH BURNSIDE
Let's keep his height outta this!

AOKI
(over the chuckles)
I am referring to attitude.

Aoki gives the team another once-over.

AOKI (cont'd)
Memorial Day weekend. Have a great holiday. Our next opponent, final game: Cabrillo College. Focus. Focus. Focus.

Aoki gives a signal. The team comes together, hands on hands. Aoki nods to Rich.

RICH
One, two, three...

THE WHOLE TEAM
Lobos!

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD PARKING LOT - DAY

Carrying their equipment bags, Ray and Angel stroll to Angel's car, a black Pontiac Trans-Am.

ANGEL
Seventh round, huh?

RAY
Looks like.

ANGEL
Let's do some long toss over the weekend.

RAY
That'd be great.

ANGEL
Need a ride?

RAY
Nah.

EXT. PRUNEDALE, CALIFORNIA - NIGHT

A bus pulls up to a stop in the Prunedale Shopping Center: fast food joints, liquor stores, a hardware store, gas station.

Ray, carrying his equipment bag, steps out of the bus.

Ray walks up a hill, out of town.

EXT. GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE, OUTSIDE PRUNEDALE - NIGHT

Built in the 1920s, this old two story house is well-kept.

Ray mounts the porch steps, where the light is on.

Ray enters the house.

INT. GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ray's grandmother, DOROTHEA, rocks in her chair, knitting, listening to a preacher on the radio.

Ray leans over and kisses Dorothea.

DOROTHEA
Supper's ready.

RAY
Thanks, Grandma.

Ray climbs the old carpeted stairway.

INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ray opens the door, throws down his equipment bag, flops on his bed.

Ray leans over, pulls the string on a lamp, and when the light goes on, sees:

An OLD MAN sitting in the corner.

Ray gasps.

MORE

RAY
Dad?

JUNIOR
None other.

Ray glances toward an open window, and sees the top of a ladder.

RAY
Come here to burn us out?

Junior smiles. He's missing a front tooth.

JUNIOR
Fer cotton pickin' sakes, Ray.

RAY
What can I do for ya?

JUNIOR
Vice versify that, Ray.

RAY
Grandma finds out you're here,
she'll summon the law.

JUNIOR
I'm free, white and twenty-one.
Gainfully employed, to boot.

RAY
Go on.

JUNIOR
I'm based outta Chico. Manage a
pallet-making plant.

RAY
Still got Thelma?

JUNIOR
Nah. She drank.

Junior nods toward Ray's equipment bag.

JUNIOR (cont'd)
Goin' well?

RAY
All-league right fielder and relief
pitcher.

JUNIOR
Scouts come callin'?

RAY
Nah.

JUNIOR
Lissen. I got a cousin in the
University of Alabama Admissions
Apartment.

RAY
No more college for me.

Junior's eyes narrow.

JUNIOR
You got somethin' better, Mister
Hoity Toity?

RAY
Coupla irons in the fire.

DOROTHEA
(OS)
Raymond! Supper's gettin ' cold!

Ray goes to the door, opens it a crack.

RAY
Be right down!

DOROTHEA
You talkin' t' yerself in there?

RAY
Prayin'.

Ray closes the door.

JUNIOR
My ex-mother-in-law made you a Holy
Roller yet?

Ray paces his bedroom.

RAY
Okay. What can you do for me?

Junior pulls a dog-eared manila envelope from his coat.

JUNIOR

(handing envelope to Ray)
Yer worthless Daddy just mighta
done a good turn here. Found this
one night, cleanin' out the
factory.

Ray won't open the envelope.

JUNIOR (cont'd)

Go ahead, son.

Ray opens the envelope.

Ray pulls out a sheaf of paper money.

JUNIOR

'Sall yers, son!

Ray examines the bills: Confederate money.

JUNIOR

Why, I figger like a nigger, them
bein', what, a hunnert fifty years
old, they mighta doubled their
value!

RAY

(heaves a sigh)
Junior...

JUNIOR

I'm yer Daddy, son.

RAY

These're worth maybe a penny each.

JUNIOR

I won't put up with bein'
downgraded. Got enough o' that from
yer wetback-lovin' mother. (Ray
looks out the window) Beware the
gift horse in the mouth, huh? Okay,
give 'em back.

Ray holds out the envelope.

JUNIOR (cont'd)

Here. I'll trade ya. (He pulls out
a PENTHOUSE magazine from his coat,
hands it to Ray as he takes the
envelope) Found that under yer
mattress. (He begins backing toward

MORE

JUNIOR
the open window) Always figgered
you for a HUSTLER man.

RAY
Fuck you. Junior.

JUNIOR
(as he disappears down the
ladder)
Call me when you've come t' yer
senses.

INT. KITCHEN, GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT
Ray's clearing the table after a huge meal.
Dorothea sips sherry.

DOROTHEA
You'll put 'em off for a coupla
years, right?

RAY
And do what?

DOROTHEA
Continue with yer schoolin'.

RAY
I don't wanna hear anything about a
fallback position. I will be a
major league pitcher.

DOROTHEA
Or bust.

RAY
There'll be no bust. There'll be
Big Country McCarter, taking the
mound in the ninth. For the Astros.

INT. PAGAN HOME, EAST SALINAS - NIGHT

Angel Pagan and his AUNT MECHE sit on the floor of a room
lit by candles.

Angel waves a smoking branch of herbs, filling the room with
aromatic vapors.

As a portable tape recorder spins a cassette (the "record"
light is on), Meche, eyes rolled back in her head, chants in
Nahuatl, the ancient Aztec tongue.

MORE

Meche stops chanting and, clicking off the "record" button, re-enters our world.

Meche hits the "rewind" button.

ANGEL

What's Miguel say, *Tia*?

Meche hits the "play" button. She listens a bit, hits "pause."

MECHE

Miguel says this man's bad fortune will be your good fortune.

Meche hits "play," listens a bit, hits "pause."

MECHE

You will bury three hummingbird eggs at the base of the cherry tree out back. Then you will urinate on them. Within days, you will have the results you seek.

INT. KENT AOKI HOME - DAY

Kent Aoki meditates cross-legged on the floor of his beautifully laid out studio, complete with Samurai swords and Samurai paintings mounted on the walls.

An immaculate bonsai garden sits on a corner table.

In another room, a phone rings.

WOMAN

(OS)

Mister Schroeder. How good to hear from you. (beat) Kent's meditating.

Aoki opens his eyes, leaps nimbly to his feet, his Japanese robe flying.

AOKI

I'll take it!

Aoki's wife SOLEDAD, moving with a dancer's ease, enters the studio and hands the phone to Aoki.

Soledad, a head taller than her husband, bows and retreats.

AOKI (cont'd)

Rick! Thanks for returning my call. How are you?

INTERCUT BETWEEN AOKI'S STUDIO AND

INT. HOUSTON ASTROS' OFFICES - DAY

From his office, Schroeder can look out over the Astros' diamond.

SCHROEDER

Great! We'll be breaking ground for the new park soon.

AOKI

Enron! Solid corporate backing!

SCHROEDER

Enron Field. Just kinda rolls off the tongue.

AOKI

(tending his bonsai plants)
So, Rick, what's a seventh round draft choice worth this year?

SCHROEDER

Off-the-record?

AOKI

Of course.

SCHROEDER

The Astros have two mill for signing bonuses.

AOKI

Only two million?

SCHROEDER

Given these lean years...a seventh rounder can expect a fifty grand signing bonus.

AOKI

Sixth and eighth rounds?

SCHROEDER

Seventy-five and forty.

AOKI

And if I come in at sixty?

SCHROEDER

Can't advise you further than that, old pal.

MORE

AOKI
Understood.

Schroeder terminates the call.

The phone peals.

AOKI
Kent Aoki.

RICH BURNSIDE
(OS)
Bad news, Coach.

AOKI
Where are you?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM, MODESTO, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Rich Burnside lays in a hospital bed.

Rich's right leg is missing below the knee.

RICH
Modesto Hospital.

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

Ray and Angel play long toss, an exercise designed to strengthen throwing arms.

Angel is in the left field corner, Ray in the right field corner.

Angel's throws, while strong, bounce once before reaching Ray.

Ray's lasers fly parallel to the ground and snap Angel's glove, poised at his chest.

With each Herculean throw, Ray shouts out the *qi* given him by Coach Aoki.

ANGEL
We're gonna call that "The Samurai
Scream"! "Big Country's Samurai
Scream"!

Ray grins.

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

Game day.

Kent Aoki has assembled the MPC Lobos in right field, where they crouch, kneel, sit and stand.

AOKI

Listen up, men. One of ours has fallen. Rich. He lost a leg in a water skiing accident.

This gets the attention of lanky lefty pitcher AARON RICHARDSON.

AARON

Excuse me?

AOKI

The rope wrapped around his knee as he went down.

The players buzz.

AOKI (cont'd)

Rich is okay. Angel, you're behind the dish. Aaron's on the bump. Aaron: stop trying to make 'em miss the ball. Try to make 'em hit it.

AARON

Coach Aoki. I saw scouts.

AOKI

You can impress the scouts with your heater. Or you can play to win. What's it gonna be?

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

In the stands, Eric Meyer sits with his notepad, writing.

Behind the plate, Angel squats as a left-handed Cabrillo College BATTER wags his bat.

ANGEL

You the speed merchant with 33 straight steals?

BATTER

34, soon's I get on base.

MORE

ANGEL
I'll make you famous.

The first pitch comes in letter high.

UMPIRE
Strike one!

Angel throws the ball back to Aaron.

BATTER
I'm already famous. Thirty-three
straight's the league record.

ANGEL
But you ain't been caught by me
yet.

The batter chuckles.

Aaron winds up, pitches.

The ball comes in at the knees.

The batter lays a bunt down the third base line.

Angel pounces on the ball as the batter streaks to first.

Angel's throw is a bit wide, pulling the first baseman off
the bag.

RAY
(from the dugout)
C'mon, Four-two, shake it off!

In the stands, Meyer makes a note.

UMPIRE
(brushing off home plate)
You got a mouth on ya, Pagan.

The next BATTER settles into the box.

ANGEL
I'm gonna make that guy on first
famous.

BATTER
What, you gonna steal his hubcaps?

Aaron, in the stretch, checks the runner.

Aaron lobs a throw to first. The runner easily returns to
the bag.

Aaron checks the runner. He pauses. The runner lengthens his lead.

Aaron snaps a throw. The runner dives back.

The batter checks the THIRD BASE COACH for a sign.

Angel signals the next pitch to Aaron.

Aaron launches a breaking ball, low and away.

The runner breaks for second.

The batter fouls the ball over the first base dugout, into the eucalyptus trees.

Ray bolts from the dugout, chases after the foul ball, watched by Coach Aoki.

In the stands, Meyer makes a note.

Angel flashes his signs.

Aaron winds, and pitches out, high and outside.

The batter, protecting the streaking runner, swings at the pitch.

Angel dodges the bat, snags the ball, and rifles it to second.

The runner slides head first, his fingers stretched across the dirt.

But the ball's there first, three inches off the ground, as the runner's fingers collide with the shortstop's glove.

INFIELD UMPIRE

Out!

As the infielders throw the ball around, Angel faces the runner as he trots off the field.

The runner sneaks a look Angel's way.

Angel mimes a gunslinger, blowing on his right pointer finger, twirling an imaginary gun, then sliding it into an imaginary holster.

In the dugout, the Lobos break up.

Except for Coach Aoki.

Angel settles in behind the plate.

MORE

BATTER

Okay, now he's 33-for-34.

ANGEL

Baseball statistics're like a girl
in a bikini. They show a lot, but
not everything.

Ray returns to the dugout, signals the umpire, then tosses
him the ball.

AOKI

Save your legs, Ray.

RAY

Keeps me loose, Coach.

Aaron takes the sign from Angel, then winds and throws.

The batter pops the ball up, meekly, up and behind the
plate.

Angel rips off his mask, dives backwards, and catches the
ball as he's parallel to the ground.

In the stands, Meyer makes more notes.

Three outs. The Lobos trot off the field.

Aoki's waiting for Angel.

AOKI

You NEVER show up another player.
You protect your pitcher. A
humiliated opponent is just that
more dangerous.

ANGEL

Sure, Coach.

AOKI

Hey. I'm serious. If I had another
catcher, you'd be warming the pine
so long, you'd have termites up
your ass.

ANGEL

Sorry, Coach.

AOKI

McCarter! You're on the hill next
inning!

RAY
(to himself)
Good thing I stayed loose.

INT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - DAY

Ray and Coach Aoki sit cross-legged in a classic Sushi restaurant's private booth, feasting on sushi and saki.

AOKI
The pitcher has to find out if the
hitter is timid. And if the hitter
is timid, you have to remind the
hitter he's timid.

RAY
I don't wanna hurt anybody.

AOKI
This is war. That batter's out to
steal your future. He wants your
wallet.

RAY
Nothin' in it anyway.

AOKI
I did the best I could.

RAY
Huh?

AOKI
Here, try some of this.

Ray chopsticks a slice of something to his plate.

AOKI (cont'd)
(raising his saki)
I got you a signing bonus.
Twenty-eight thousand dollars. Best
I could do.

Ray needs a moment for the news to filter past the saki.

RAY
(clicking Aoki's cup with his)
TWENTY-EIGHT GRAND! Thanks, Coach!

AOKI
I urge you not to blow it on fast
cars and bad women. Some associates
and I are investing in some real
estate...

MORE

RAY
Sure, Coach!

AOKI
Think long term, Ray.

RAY
Top of the ninth, seventh game.
McCarter sweeps the rubber. Checks
the runners. They'll be going on
the 3-2 pitch. McCarter winds, here
comes the pitch...Strike three, on
a 99 mile per hour hummer! The
Astros win the Series! The Astros
win the Series! (beat) That long
term enough?

EXT. A MODEST HOME, SAN JUAN BAUTISTA, CALIFORNIA - DAY

On a suburban street, a RED MUSTANG CONVERTIBLE wheels into
the driveway.

Ray, at the wheel, slaps the horn.

A YOUNG LADY dressed in a jogging suit and running shoes
bounds out from the front door and down the porch steps.

She's KYRA MATSUOKA, half-Latina, half-Japanese American,
and one hundred per cent fun.

KYRA
Hey, good lookin'! Whatcha got
cookin'?

Ray, in jogging suit and running shoes, emerges from the
Mustang.

While Ray circles the Mustang to open the passenger side,
Kyra vaults over the closed door, into the passenger seat.

KYRA (cont'd)
Don't just stand there! Let's go!

EXT. FREMONT PEAK STATE PARK - DAY

Ray wheels the Mustang into the parking lot.

Ray and Kyra stretch out in the parking lot.

They run in place a bit.

MORE

KYRA
Ready?

RAY
Set.

KYRA
To the observatory! Go!

Kyra sprints up the trail from the parking lot.

Ray checks the contents of a pocket.

Ray pulls out a SMALL BOX, then returns it to its hiding place.

Ray takes off after Kyra.

The trail winds through rock formations and meadows.

The blue blanket of Monterey Bay spreads out below, with Monterey to the south and Santa Cruz to the north.

Kyra and Ray run with animal joy and ease.

Fifty yards from the observatory, the competition begins.

Kyra's still in the lead, with Ray closing fast.

Kyra reaches the observatory first.

Ray, gasping, pulls up a few seconds later.

KYRA (cont'd)
Not bad. For a baseball player.

RAY
You got rockets in them shoes.

KYRA
Only a first stage booster.

RAY
(finally catching his breath)
God, you're beautiful.

KYRA
This is true.

Ray and Kyra regard the view.

KYRA (cont'd)

From this vantage point, John C. Fremont claimed California for the U.S. of A.

RAY

Don't start in with The Great Theft.

KYRA

What else would you expect from a post-modernist History major?

RAY

I'd expect you to pack off to Eugene on a full ride track scholarship.

Kyra kisses Ray.

Ray fumbles in his pocket.

Ray puts his hands behind his back.

Ray holds out his fists to Kyra.

RAY (cont'd)

Choose.

KYRA

I'll take the pitching hand.

Ray opens his fist, revealing the little box.

Ray opens the box and hands it to Kyra.

KYRA (cont'd)

(pulling out a ring)

This is lovely. Slip it on?

Ray slips the ring on the ring finger of Kyra's right hand.

KYRA (cont'd)

Meaning?

RAY

We're goin' steady.

KYRA

Cautious Raymond.

RAY
When I'm down in Kissimmee, I'll
call you every day in Oregon.

KYRA
Kissimmee? Kiss-a-you!

Kyra throws her arms around Ray and smothers him with
kisses.

EXT. GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE, BACKYARD - DAY

As dusk settles over Prunedale, Ray sits at a picnic table
behind his grandmother Dorothea's house, saddlesoaping his
baseball glove.

Ray wipes the soap off the glove, then picks up a can of
shaving cream.

Ray squirts shaving cream all over his glove, then lovingly
rubs the cream into the leather.

DOROTHEA
(OS)
Raymond!

RAY
Yeah?

DOROTHEA
Telephone.

Ray carries the glove into the kitchen.

As Ray takes the phone, he places the glove in the
MICROWAVE, sets the timer for one minute, closes the door,
and activates the oven.

RAY
Yeah?

AOKI
(OS)
Hey, Big Country. You coming in on
that real estate deal?

RAY
No, Coach Aoki. I'm sorry. I've
made other plans.

AOKI
(OS)
We're lookin' at a 40% return in
five years.

MORE

RAY
Sir, I'm leavin' for Florida
tomorrow.

Pause.

AOKI
(OS)
I understand. You take care of
yourself, y'hear?

RAY
Yessir.

Ray hangs up the phone as the microwave's buzzer sounds.

Ray removes his glove.

DOROTHEA
What in tarnation?

RAY
Lanolin softens the leather.
Microwave gives the glove back its
pocket.

DOROTHEA
I was a-feared you was gonna eat
the damn thing...oh, your mother
called about that loan. (she
produces a torn piece of paper)
Dixie left her checking account
number. Said you can deposit the
funds directly.

EXT. NEW MEXICO, EAST OF SANTA FE - DAY

The red Mustang hurtles forward through the green bushes,
red rock landscape, patchy with snow.

"FIELD OF DREAMS" AUDIOBOOK
(OS)
Ray, there was a reason they chose
me, just as there was a reason they
chose you and this field. (beat)
Why? (beat) I gave an interview.
(beat) What interview? What are you
talking about? (beat) The one about
Ebbets Field. The one that charged
you up and sent you all the way out
to Boston to find me.

INT. RAY'S MUSTANG - DAY

With one eye on the road, Ray holds up the audiobook box for FIELD OF DREAMS, glancing at it.

Ray recites the dialogue as it flows from the CD.

AUDIOBOOK AND RAY

You lied to me. (beat) Well, you were kidnapping me at the time, you big jerk! (beat) Well, you lied to me! (beat) You said your finger was a gun! (beat) That's a good point. (beat) Ray. Ray. Listen to me, Ray. Listen to me. There is something out there, Ray, and if I have the courage to go through with this, what a story it'll make: Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa.

Ray snaps off the CD player.

RAY

(overjoyed, shouting it out)
Shoeless Joe Jackson comes to Iowa!

Up ahead, Ray sees a HITCHHIKER holding a sign.

As Ray pulls closer, he reads the sign: PLEASE.

Ray pulls over, rolls down his window.

The wispy-bearded hitchhiker wears an old ski jacket. His backpack sits at his feet.

HITCHHIKER

Thank you, brother!

RAY

(pulling the passenger seat forward)
Throw your backpack here.

The hitchhiker lays his backpack in the backseat, climbs into the Mustang.

RAY (cont'd)

Buckle up.

As the hitchhiker snaps himself in, Ray pulls back onto the highway.

MORE

HITCHHIKER
Freezing today.

RAY
Happy to help.

The hitchhiker picks up the CD box.

HITCHHIKER
Great flick.

RAY
The book was better.

HITCHHIKER
Book's always better. (beat) Say,
my name's Hank.

RAY
Ray.

HANK
Where ya headed?

RAY
Florida. You?

HANK
Lubbock.

RAY
What's in Lubbock?

HANK
(singing)
That'll be the day-ay-ay that I
die!

RAY
No shit?

HANK
Gonna lay a wreath at his
birthplace.

RAY
All the way to Lubbock to pay your
respects?

HANK
Lubbock's just my first stop. I'm
on my way to Jerusalem.

MORE

RAY

What, to put some flowers in a manger?

HANK

I'm gonna re-translate the Bible. From the original text. (beat) So what's in Florida?

RAY

Spring training.

Hank looks Ray up and down.

HANK

I'm in a Mustang with a goddamn major league ballplayer!

RAY

Rookie League. Deep minors.

HANK

When I brag I got a ride from the guy on TV, what do I call you?

Ray considers the question.

RAY

(trying it on for size)
Big Country.

HANK

Far fucking out.

EXT. NEW MEXICO, EAST OF SANTA FE - DAY

The red Mustang rolls eastward, across the Pecos River.

HANK

(OS)

Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, Big Country?

INT. DENNY'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ray and Hank are hunkered down in a booth.

HANK

Every Sunday morning after church, we'd take brunch at Denny's.

Hank rips the tip off a straw covering, then pulls the paper down the length of the straw, to the formica table top.

MORE

Ray, reading the menu, cocks an eye toward Hank's hands.

Hank removes the straw cover's accordion and lays it on the table.

Hank dips the straw into his glass of water. He closes off the top of the straw with a fingertip, then lifts the straw out of the water.

HANK (cont'd)

The morning we heard the story of
Adam and Eve, my Dad taught me how
to "do the serpent."

Hank places the end of the straw over the accordion-squished paper covering. Hank lifts his fingertip from the straw.

Water drips on the paper.

The paper twists, writhing and stretching.

HANK (cont'd)

Arise, Satan!

Ray puts down his menu.

RAY

You can pay for your dinner, right?

HANK

For unto whomsoever much is given,
of him shall be much required: and
to whom men have committed much, of
him they will ask the more, Big
Country.

RAY

Huh?

HANK

Luke 12:48.

RAY

Your translation?

HANK

King James, unfortunately.

RAY

Why should I buy you dinner?

HANK

You're the bonus baby, B.C. I am
but a penniless vagabond, spreading
theology.

Ray pulls out his wallet, opens it, revealing a half-inch
thick deck of paper money.

Ray pulls out a ten, tosses it to Hank.

RAY

Get your snake oil the fuck away
from my table.

HANK

Surely a man of your means--

Ray gets up, leaves the restaurant.

Hank follows, pocketing the ten dollar bill.

EXT. DENNY'S PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Ray unlocks the Mustang, pulls out Hank's backpack, throws
it a hundred feet, into a ditch.

Ray climbs into the Mustang, fires it up, snicks it into
gear, and pops the clutch, spraying gravel all over Hank.

HANK

I forgive you, sinner!

INT. MUSTANG - NIGHT

Ray chuckles, turns on the radio: "Not Fade Away."

RADIO

I'm gonna tell you how its gonna
be. You're gonna give your love to
me. I'm gonna love you night & day.
Well you know my love won't fade
away. Love for real & not fade
away. Love for real & not fade
away.

RAY

Signs and wonders!

EXT. NEW MEXICO HIGHWAY - NIGHT

As Ray's Mustang pulls ahead into the night, Buddy Holly fades away too.

FADE OUT

INT. MOTEL ROOM, SOMEWHERE IN TEXAS - NIGHT

Ray sits on the bed, eating spare ribs, a bib tucked into his collar, watching ESPN on the television.

Ray mutes the television, wipes his hands as clean as possible, then picks up the phone and dials a number.

RAY
Kyra? Hey, baby.

INTERCUT BETWEEN RAY AND KYRA:

KYRA
What's shakin', bacon?

Kyra has just showered and, wearing a white terry cloth robe, is doing scissor leglifts in her dorm room, with a UNIVERSITY OF OREGON pennant on the wall. The body of the phone sits on the floor by her bed.

Kyra stops. She regards Ray's ring on her right hand.

RAY
I'm somewhere in Texas, missin' you.

KYRA
Me too, baby.

Kyra plays with the ring.

RAY
How'd the meet go today?

Kyra absentmindedly pulls the ring off the ring finger of her right hand.

KYRA
Personal best in the 400. Got a third in the 200 meters. Huskies boxed me in.

RAY
Good enough for the Olympics?

MORE

Kyra slides the ring over the tip of the ring finger of her left hand. She plays with it.

KYRA

Not yet. So how's the drive?

RAY

Books on tape make it bearable. I mean audiobooks.

Kyra slides the ring past the knuckles of the finger.

KYRA

"Field of Dreams." I know you like that one.

RAY

I miss you something terrible.

KYRA

Hmmm. Wanna know what I'm wearing?

Kyra regards the look and feel of the ring as an imaginary wedding band.

RAY

Yeah.

KYRA

Just out of the shower. My muscles all taut from the track, under a white robe. Thinkin' about my Big Country.

RAY

(feeling arousal's pang)
I'm eatin' spare ribs. Texas style.

KYRA

Long an' greasy ones?

RAY

(missing Kyra's hints, maybe intentionally)
They stuck a bib in the bag.

KYRA

That's all you're wearin'?

RAY

Don't be ridiculous.

KYRA
Wanna fool around?

RAY
On the phone? Kyra, I heard the FBI
sometimes listens in. If their
computers hear any key words.

Kyra slides the ring off her finger and wraps it in her fist.

KYRA
Oh, right. "Bib." There's a threat
to national security.

RAY
Baby, I just can't.

EXT. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE GULF COAST - DAY

Ray's Mustang glides along Highway 10, outside Pensacola, Alabama.

RADIO
This is WLDX Christian radio. We're
speaking with Theresa Brewer of the
Pensacola Pentacostal Church.
Theresa? Visitation by angels?

INT. RAY'S MUSTANG - DAY

Ray's listening to the radio.

RADIO
(Theresa, OS)
The feathers thing has been truly
amazing. I believe it started when
we had the Prophet Bobby Connors
come to our church for a series of
meetings.

Ray picks up his glove from the passenger seat, caresses it as he listens.

RADIO (cont'd)
(Theresa, OS)
During ministry time people would
see feathers fall from the ceiling
and Bobby explained it as a sign of
angelic activity... I'm not sure if
he was saying they were angel
feathers or not. But ever since he
came, we have seen feathers falling
from the ceiling...

MORE

RAY
(searching for other
programming, using his knees
to steer)
What crap...

EXT. HOUSTON ASTROS' MINOR LEAGUE TRAINING FACILITY,
KISSIMMEE, FLORIDA -DAY

Ray lifts his baseball duffel bag out of the Mustang's
trunk.

Ray looks across the parking lot toward the baseball field.

A BILLBOARD says: WELCOME TO HOUSTON ASTROS MINOR LEAGUE
TRAINING FACILITIES, KISSIMMEE, FLORIDA!

Ray cocks his ears: the lowing of CATTLE.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Duffle bag over his shoulder, Ray enters the minor leaguers'
locker room.

Covered by a swirl of boombox music, YOUNG MEN are loading
their gear into lockers.

Ray finds an empty locker.

In a corner, there's a card game in progress.

Ray hears a familiar voice. He looks toward the card game.

ANGEL
Jeeze, my motel maid! Nothing like
finding out you're out of toilet
paper and soap the hard way...at
least there was a little shampoo
left, so my ass hairs are shiny and
manageable!

The card players guffaw as Angel rakes in his winnings.

Angel looks up and sees Ray.

ANGEL
Big Country!

Ray gives the "what's up?" sign.

ANGEL (cont'd)
Non-roster invitee! (beat) Amigos,
meet the Master of the Samurai
Scream, Ray "Big Country" McCarter!

Ray, wrapping his head around Angel's presence, nods to everyone.

ANGEL (cont'd)
We're booked at the Holiday Inn.
Okay, who's dealing?

EXT. HOLIDAY INN SWIMMING AREA - NIGHT

Angel and Ray are soaking in the hot tub.

RAY
(looking up)
Was that a bat?

ANGEL
Screw the bats. This time o' night,
the chickadees emerge. Last night a
threesome gaggled their way into
this very tub.

RAY
Angel: I really appreciate you
fixing me up with a place to stay
and all, but I gotta focus on
baseball. And I'm goin' steady.

ANGEL
The track star?

INT. HOLIDAY INN ROOM - NIGHT

Ray and Angel, in their swimming trunks, watch a West Coast track meet on TV.

Ray squeezes a rubber ball with his right hand.

RAY
Kyra's up next. Turn up the sound!

Angel clicks the sound up a notch.

TV ANNOUNCER
...In lane three, from Arizona
State, Olga Moysov. In lane four,
from the University of Oregon, Kyra
Matsuoka.

ANGEL
You got a hot one.

RAY
Kyra wins this, she's in the
Olympic trials.

TV ANNOUNCER
They're off! Jackie Ruiz leads the
pack into the first turn...trailed
by Moysov...

TV COLOR COMMENTATOR
Looks like Matsuoka's stuck in
traffic...

TV ANNOUNCER
She told us her trainer's been
working with her on tactics and
strategy.

RAY
C'mon, Kyra. Kick it!

TV ANNOUNCER
In the back turn, heading into the
stretch! Matsuoka's making her
move! What a kick! Moysov and Ruiz
seem tired...Here comes Matsuoka!

RAY
Go, baby!

TV ANNOUNCER
Approaching the wire! Matsuoka is
flying! Will there be enough track
left?

ANGEL

CATCHING THE SPIRIT
Go! Go!

TV ANNOUNCER
Matsuoka, with a furious kick! At
the wire! It's Matsuoka!

RAY AND ANGEL
Yes!

As the announcers discuss the race:

RAY
(rising)
Gonna shower.

Ray departs.

MORE

Angel's intrigued by the broadcast.

Kyra's talking with a FEMALE INTERVIEWER.

A HANDSOME MAN has his arms draped over Kyra's shoulders.

TV INTERVIEWER

Kyra, that was your personal best.
It appeared you were boxed in for
half the race.

KYRA

Donnie here, my trainer, worked me
hard on escaping these traps.

Kyra kisses Donnie. It's more than a co-workers' tap on the
cheek. Kyra is not wearing Ray's ring.

KYRA (cont'd)

I owe it all to you, honey cakes!

Angel snaps off the TV.

Angel considers what to do with this information.

EXT. KISSIMMEE FIELD - DAY

Behind the centerfield fence, a cattle auction is in
progress. We will hear the auctioneer and the lowing of
cattle in every scene at this minor league training
facility.

Ray, along with other pitchers, is running a rope ladder
exercise, watched by AFRICAN-AMERICAN PITCHING COACH/MANAGER
BEN TUCKER.

In the exercise, the pitcher steps quickly in and out
between the rungs of a ladder stretched out on the grass,
alternating lateral movements with forward movements along
the length of the ladder.

For a big man, Ray moves with surprising grace and speed.

TUCKER

Where you from, McCarter?

RAY

Mobile Manor Trailer Park, sir.
Moss Landing, California.

TUCKER

You move well. Learn that runnin'
from the meth lab explosions?

MORE

RAY

Sir?

TUCKER

Just funnin' with ya. Listen, we're gonna start you in the intrasquad game. I hear you like to throw to that guy Pagan.

RAY

Whatever you say, sir. Angel's fine.

TUCKER

Your pal needs a big game to make the team.

EXT. KISSIMMEE FIELD - DAY

Ray's on the mound, in the stretch.

Runner on first.

Ray checks the runner, looks in at the batter.

Angel signals Ray to throw to first.

Ray, mongoose fast, snaps a throw to first, catching the runner leaning the wrong way.

Three outs.

Ray and his teammates pile into the dugout.

TUCKER

That was greased lightnin',
McCarter.

RAY

Catcher called it. I just threw it.

Angel, pulling off his gear, hears this.

Ray slides next to Angel.

ANGEL

I appreciate that, Big Country.
You're throwin' great.

RAY

(and this is why)
I had this fantastic dream last
night. About Kyra.

MORE

ANGEL
(after a moment)
She's quite a girl.

Angel grabs a helmet and bat, pulls his batting gloves out of his back pocket, pulls them on as he strides to the plate.

The CATCHER receives the final warm-up pitch, throws a strike to second base, and as the INFIELDBERS thread the ball around the infield, Angel takes his place in the left hander's batter's box.

CATCHER
(settling in, speaks with
Venezuelan accent)
How's it goin', *winepega*?

ANGEL
As you would expect for anyone
who's got two home runs and a
double.

The first pitch comes, low and away. Angel takes it.

UMPIRE
Strike one!

ANGEL
What's *winepega* mean, *vato*?

CATCHER
Glue sniffer.

ANGEL
I take it for you that's no term of
derision.

CATCHER
Huh?

The next pitch comes in low and inside.

Angel golfs it high down the right field line.

As Angel trots down the first base line, he leans to his left, willing the ball to stay fair.

Angel throws his arms high as he rounds first base.

Angel takes his time with his home run trot.

As Angel approaches home plate, he points to the catcher. Then he blows on his pointer finger, "twirls the pistola," and slides it into his imaginary holster.

ANGEL
(crossing home plate)
Sniff that, *pendejo*.

INT. BEN TUCKER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Tucker's tapping on a word processor keyboard.

Angel taps on the door.

Tucker glances up.

TUCKER
Pagan, yes, c'mon in. Take a seat.

ANGEL
(fearing the worst)
Look, sir, I know I got a lip--

TUCKER
I just wanted to congratulate you.
There was a lot on the line for you
today. You came through in the
clutch.

ANGEL
I respond well to pressure, sir.

TUCKER
Three home runs and a double, while
catching a three hitter. That's
Johnny Bench territory.

ANGEL
Well, I wouldn't--

TUCKER
We're assigning you to the Quad
Cities River Bandits, Class A.

ANGEL
I'm geography-deficient, sir.

TUCKER
Iowa, son! You like corn?

ANGEL
Make my own tortillas, sir!

TUCKER

You're a shuck-and-jiver of the first order, Pagan. Glad to see you movin' on.

EXT. SOMEWHERE IN IOWA - DAY

A BUS, with the QUAD CITIES RIVER BANDITS logo painted on its side, threads its way through miles and miles of cornfields.

INT. BUS - DAY

Twenty-five YOUNG MEN of every race sit in pairs. They wear slacks and dress shirts.

MANAGER CLAY BUZZMONT and TWO COACHES sit in the front. The two coaches doze, while Ozzie writes on a legal pad.

One of the umpteen ROCKY movies plays on overhead screens.

In the middle of the bus, a BLACK PLAYER and a WHITE PLAYER argue.

Ray, seated behind the pair, is awakened from a dream by the outburst.

BLACK PLAYER

Fuck you! I'll kick your Mormon ass!

WHITE PLAYER

I really don't think that's called for.

The black player, ANTWAN SHABAZZ, turns around to Ray.

BLACK PLAYER

Hey, RayMac. You tell me. Mormons s'posed to be neat as pins, right?

RAY

So I've heard.

BLACK PLAYER

I volunteered to be this guy's roomie on account I believed in a stereotype.

RAY

Stereotypes are bad.

MORE

BLACK PLAYER

What I didn't know is that
Mormons're mama's boys who never
had to pick up after theyselves.

WHITE PLAYER

I won't take orders from you,
Antwan.

ANTWAN

Why not Jimmy? 'Cuz I got the mark,
right? I'm laminated!

JIMMY

It's "Lamanite." And no, I don't
buy into that stuff.

RAY

Hey, guys. We're a team.

ANTWAN

Well, that's original.

RAY

I'm not a word guy.

In the back of the bus, Angel is running a card game. His substantial winnings rest on the fold-out tray in front of him.

ANGEL

(shuffling the cards)

Okay, Sad Sacks. You've failed at
blackjack. But you're baseball
players, and baseball is a game of
failure. I'm gonna give y'all
another chance. We're gonna play
"31."

PLAYER #1

Blow it out your ass, Pagan.

ANGEL

Twenty-one is to 31 as two is to
three. You'll have a 50% greater
chance of winning. Two tens or two
face cards plus an ace, you win.

PLAYER #2

We playing "banking" version or
"West Lansing Cut Throat" version?

Angel can't reveal he doesn't know what the other guy's talking about.

MORE

ANGEL
 (dealing the cards)
 "East Salinas Drive-By" version.

PLAYER #2
 Even-numbered red cards wild again?

ANGEL
 Black sevens. Place your bets, all stars.

Ray, half-asleep, stares out the window at the passing cornfields and telephone poles.

Up ahead in the distance, Ray sees what appears to be JESUS CHRIST, CRUCIFIED TO A TELEPHONE POLE.

As the bus draws closer to the vision, Ray sees it's a STEPDOWN TRANSFORMER attached below the "cross," with many BIRDS on and around it.

EXT. RIVERVIEW STADIUM, CLINTON, IOWA - DAY

This decrepit pit called Riverview Stadium, built in 1937, affords no view of the Mississippi River.

Pre-game warm-ups: Players stretch, run wind sprints, throw long toss before batting and fielding practice.

Angel and Antwan finish a lap around the field's perimeter, then trot to the dugout.

An 11-YEAR-OLD BOY, wearing a CLINTON LUMBER KINGS uniform, double zeroes on the back of his jersey, is filling buckets with batting practice balls.

ANGEL
 Hey, kid.

KID
 Hi, sir.

ANTWAN
 You the bat boy?

KID
 Yes, sir.

ANGEL
 First time?

KID

Yes, sir.

ANTWAN

Got a name?

KID

Rufus.

ANGEL

Howdja get the job?

RUFUS

My Mom won it in a PTA raffle.

ANTWAN

Lookin' sharp, Rufus.

ANGEL

Like a ballplayer.

Rufus grins.

ANTWAN

We'd like to help a fellow rookie.

ANGEL

Go get the key to the batter's box,
will ya?

ANTWAN

And after that, get a left-handed
fungo bat for our manager.

ANGEL

And finally, fill a bucket fulla
knuckleballs. We got a
knuckleballer on the roster.

ANTWAN

You remember all that, Rufus?

RUFUS

Yes, sir.

ANGEL

So whaddya waitin' for? You got any
questions, go ask the ump. He's
over there.Rufus finishes filling the buckets. He trots over to the
umpire.

Ray strides up.

MORE

RAY

What're you two up to?

ANTWAN

(to Angel)

We scarrin' the kid for life?

ANGEL

You kiddin'? He'll have a story to
get him a drink in any bar in
America. For-EV-er.

As Angel and Antwan loosen up with leadened bats, they watch Rufus speaking with the UMPIRE.

Rufus points at Angel and Antwan.

ANTWAN

Uh-oh. Busted.

Rufus trots over to the pair.

ANGEL

Blue help you out?

RUFUS

He said to tell you both to expect
a larger-than-normal strike zone
when you're up to bat.

ANTWAN

Without the key to the batter's
box, I don't see how we'll even get
there.

RUFUS

He says you're a pair of
pranksters.

Antwan and Angel raise their palms to Rufus.

ANGEL

Rufus, you're cool.

Rufus slaps the players' palms, goes over to arrange the bats.

RAY

(to Angel)

Have a word?

Antwan trots away.

MORE

RAY (cont'd)

Kyra's never there. She doesn't return my calls.

ANGEL

She's a track star with a full academic load.

RAY

I don't see how I can pitch.

ANGEL

After five straight appearances? He'll rest you tonight.

EXT. RIVERVIEW STADIUM, CLINTON, IOWA - NIGHT

Led by a YOUNG LADY with a 1970s hairdo singing into a microphone behind home plate, the few hundred FANS sing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" during the 7th inning stretch.

The scoreboard shows the Lumber Kings trailing the river Bandits, 6-4, going into the bottom of the 7th inning.

INT. BROADCASTERS' BOOTH, RIVERVIEW STADIUM - NIGHT

HOWARD BERMAN and EDDIE STANDER, fresh out of broadcasting school, call games for the Clinton Lumber Kings.

HOWARD

Apparently, Celine Dion wasn't available.

EDDIE

Look who's coming in to relieve.

HOWARD

Big Country McCarter, for his sixth straight game.

EDDIE

He's a big California kid, two and 0, with a 1.34 ERA and five saves.

HOWARD

A classic flamethrower from a hardscrabble childhood.

EXT. RIVERVIEW STADIUM, CLINTON, IOWA - NIGHT

Ray warms up, a little wild.

HOWARD

(OS)

These kids play 140 games in 152 days. It's a bruising marathon for a lot of these young men.

EDDIE

(OS)

That's pint-sized Angel Pagan behind the dish.

HOWARD

(OS)

McCarter seems to thrive when Pagan catches him.

EDDIE

(OS)

The receiver's shown surprising power, with 19 home runs and a .343 batting average.

Angel and Ray confer in front of the mound as the infielders weave the ball around the infield.

ANGEL

You got a two run cushion. Just pitch your game. Any of these chumps crowds the plate, you know what to do.

Ray nods. Angel trots away, then squats behind home plate.

The FIRST BATTER digs in, tight to the plate.

Angel signals for an inside fast ball.

Ray hums his pitch down the middle.

The batter jumps all over the ball, caroming it off the left centerfield fence, before he slides into second.

The SECOND BATTER assumes his stance.

Angel signals a change up, outside.

Ray checks the runner, launches a beautiful change of pace.

The batter lunges, swings, and misses.

MORE

ANGEL (cont'd)
(throwing the ball back to
Ray)
Attaboy, Big Country!

Having set up the batter with a slow outside pitch, Angel places his glove inside for the next pitch.

Ray shakes off Angel.

Angel trots to the mound.

ANGEL (cont'd)
What's the deal?

RAY
Don't wanna pitch inside.

ANGEL
Why not?

RAY
Don't wanna hurt anybody.

ANGEL
Are you insane? This is BASEBALL.
The Astros'll be callin' you up in
September.

RAY
Don't wanna hurt anybody.

The UMPIRE strides to the mound.

ANGEL
You wanna risk returning to that
trailer park?

RAY
No.

UMPIRE
C'mon, boys. You can plan your
social life later.

ANGEL
This is a Daddy issue, isn't it?

Ray bristles.

Angel walks back to the plate with the umpire.

Angel sets his target on the inside corner.

Ray checks the runner on second, then grooves another pitch belt high, down the middle.

The batter slams the ball into deepest centerfield.

Antwan turns his back to the plate and sprints to the wall.

Antwan raises his glove as the ball arcs back to earth.

Antwan slams into the fence. He's knocked cold. The ball dribbles away.

The RIGHT FIELDER sprints to the ball as one run scores.

The batter flies between second and third.

Ray runs to back up Angel at the plate as the shortstop takes the cut-off throw, wheels, and throws home.

The throw is off line. Angel catches the ball and swipes the tag as the runner slides home, under the glove.

Score tied, 6-6.

RIGHT FIELDER

Time! Let's get a medic out here!

The right fielder kneels over Antwan, who wakes up.

ANTWAN

What's goin' on?

Antwan rises to a knee, then stands upright.

ANTWAN

(to the trainer trotting out to him)

I'm okay! (to the right fielder) No way I'm leavin' this field. Not with the call-ups comin'.

RIGHT FIELDER

He's okay!

The trainer turns back to the dugout.

As Angel and Ray walk slowly back to the mound, Manager Clay Buzzmont joins them.

BUZZMONT

I'm gonna let you pitch through this, Ray.

Ray nods. Buzzmont returns to the dugout.

MORE

Ray stands behind the rubber, rubbing the new ball.

ANGEL

You're dogshit tonight because of
some worthless bitch?

RAY

Hey. Don't go there.

ANGEL

You wanna know why she never
answers the phone or calls back?

RAY

You've been warned.

ANGEL

I know her true colors.

Ray fumes.

Angel returns to his position.

Ray nods to Angel's sign. He winds and launches a steaming
fastball just below the BATTER's chin.

ANGEL (cont'd)

That's my Big Country!

DISSOLVE

INT. BROADCASTERS' BOOTH, RIVERVIEW STADIUM - NIGHT

Commercial break.

EDDIE

(holding up a can of soda)
And just remember, when you got a
thirst as big as a mountain, it
hasta be Shasta!

HOWARD

We've got a tight one, huh, Eddie?

EDDIE

Since the Kings knotted it up in
the seventh, McCarter's been
unhittable.

HOWARD

Ever since Pagan delivered that pep
talk.

MORE

EDDIE

Speakin' of el diablo, Pagan's due
up second, here in the top of the
ninth.

EXT. RIVERVIEW STADIUM, CLINTON, IOWA - NIGHT

Angel's rubbing the rosin rag on his bat handle.

ANGEL

(to Ray)

We're gonna win this one for ya.

Down in the dugout, Ray still fumes.

The FIRST BATTER swings at the first pitch and grounds a
single up the middle.

Angel pauses outside the batter's box to get the sign from
the THIRD BASE COACH. There's a play on.

Angel steps to the plate, batting left handed.

The pitcher checks the runner, then delivers.

As the runner breaks for second, Angel fakes a bunt.

The umpire calls a ball.

The CATCHER throws a perfect strike to second, but the
runner beats it.

The pitcher, rattled, regains his composure.

The pitcher checks the runner, then delivers.

High and outside.

CATCHER

C'mon, Cliff, eat this clown alive!

Angel ignores the catcher as he checks the third base coach
for a sign.

The next pitch...

Angel takes a borderline curve for a ball.

Angel checks for a sign on the 3-0 count. He nods.

The pitch whizzes in, low and inside.

MORE

As Angel tosses his bat in the air, toward the third base foul line, and begins his trot to first base, the runner on second decides to try a delayed steal for third.

The catcher stops his move back to the pitcher and throws to third.

But the ball hits Angel's discarded airborne bat and bounces toward the shortstop.

Angel's on first, with a runner on third.

The Lumbers Kings' MANAGER runs onto the field, toward the home plate umpire.

Angel looks toward Ray as Ray takes his bat from the bat boy and strides to the on deck circle.

ANGEL

We're settin' the table for ya!

Ray nods.

The Lumber Kings' manager and the umpire are deep in discussion.

The umpire points at Angel.

UMPIRE

Batter's out! Interference! Runner,
back to second!

Angel, a la Kirk Gibson, charges from first base, straight into the umpire's face.

River Bandits' manager Clay Buzzmont flies out of his dugout.

ANGEL

You are fucking insane, Blue!

The umpire walks away.

Angel follows the much taller umpire, and runs around him, to stay in his face, screaming at his belly.

Buzzmont tries to block Angel.

BUZZMONT

Lemme handle this, Pagan!

ANGEL

Fuck you! (to the umpire) There's no way that was intentional! It's gotta be intentional!

UMPIRE

(to Buzzmont)
Get this midget outa my navel!

ANGEL

Conyo mama webo! (he's so out-of-control, spittle flies out of his mouth, upward, into the umpire's face) I'll eat your mother's dried out pussy and spit it out!

UMPIRE

Yer outta here!

The umpire walks away as Buzzmont wraps Angel in a bear hug.

INT. BROADCASTERS' BOOTH, RIVERVIEW STADIUM - NIGHT

HOWARD

Pagan's gone berserk.

EDDIE

This may mean a season-ending suspension for the Salinas fireplug.

HOWARD

Only one game left.

EDDIE

Maybe it'll start next season. I predict 50 games.

EXT. RIVERVIEW STADIUM, CLINTON, IOWA - NIGHT

EDDIE

(OS)
Next up, centerfielder Antwan Shabazz.

HOWARD

(OS)
Showing no ill effects from his encounter with the centerfield fence, he's 2-for-3 tonight.

Antwan checks the third base coach, climbs into the box.

MORE

The pitcher checks the runner on second, then launches a hanging curve.

Antwan belts the ball to right field.

The RIGHT FIELDER, already deep, camps out under the ball as the runner tags up at second.

The right fielder steps forward as he catches the ball and throws a one hopper to third as the runner sprints to the bag.

The runner slides, the ball arrives.

UMPIRE

Safe!

Two outs, man on third, the go-ahead run.

As Ray comes to the plate, banished Angel peeks onto the field from the clubhouse tunnel.

ANGEL

(sotto voce)

C'mon, Ray.

The third base coach's signs are perfunctory now.

EDDIE

(OS)

You see an intentional walk here,
Howie?

Ray waves his bat a bit. He's a still and balanced hitter with a classic right-handed stance.

HOWARD

(OS)

As dangerous as McCarter is with
the bat, it's two outs, which rules
out a sac fly. The hurler's gotta
get a hit, or the Lumber Kings come
up in the bottom of the ninth
needing only a run to win.

The pitcher decides to throw from the stretch. He checks the runner on third, and...

Ray times the pitch perfectly, launching a sharp line drive to centerfield. The runner on third scores as Ray rounds first base, then holds.

MORE

EDDIE

(OS)

This teen-ager not only throws in
the low 90s, he handles the bat
like a clean-up hitter!

INT. RIVERVIEW STADIUM LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The players celebrate the victory, each in his own way.

Utility infielder ARCHIE FUNSTON, knotting his tie, looks
around the old locker room.

ARCHIE

Hey, who wants to go to church
tomorrow morning?

ANTWAN

You implyin' God had a hand
tonight? That wasn't God, that was
Big Country McCarter!

ANGEL

Sorry, Archie. I'm a dedicated
pagan. Take Betty and Veronica.

RAY

(always favoring the underdog)
I'll go with ya, Arch.

Manager Clay Buzzmont appears in the doorway.

BUZZMONT

Pagan. In my office.

INT. BUZZMONT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

About the size of a storage closet, walls gray with old
cigarette smoke, barely room for a desk.

BUZZMONT

I'd say take a seat, but...

Angel stands square shouldered.

BUZZMONT (cont'd)

You got a Plan B?

ANGEL

2140 on the SAT. Creighton
University. Excellent Business
Department. You?

INT. MOTEL ROOM, CLINTON, IOWA - NIGHT

RAY
 (on the telephone)
 Kyra. It's Ray. Please pick up.

Ray waits a bit, then hangs up.

ANGEL
 Lemme do you a favor.

RAY
 You stay outta this.

ANGEL
 She's fuckin' her trainer. (Ray advances on him) I saw it on TV, when you were in the shower. She was all over the guy.

RAY
 But I gave her my ring.

ANGEL
 She wasn't wearing any ring. Well, maybe through her clit, but--

Ray raises his fist, then thinks better of it.

INT. BIBLE STUDY ROOM, CLINTON, IOWA - DAY

A large rectangular wood table is surrounded by MEN and WOMEN, elderly folks who look as though they stepped out of Grant Wood's AMERICAN GOTHIC.

The walls are white, the windows large, the bookshelves groaning with BIBLES and other RELIGIOUS TEXTS.

Printed NAME TAGS sit before each participant.

Ray and Archie sit side-by-side. Their cards read MYSTERY GUEST.

The clock on the wall reads 7:20.

The BALDING MAN, MEL KIZZADECK, (mid-60s) at the head of the table, has a calmly authoritative demeanor.

Ray can't take his eyes off a point in the white wall across from him.

MORE

CHURCH MEMBER #1

What does Kierkegaard have to do with Matthew 19, Mel?

MEL

If you'd let me proceed...

CHURCH MEMBER #1

I mean, I can't see that some 19th century Danish *existentialist* has any place in a Bible study class.

MEL

If you'd let me proceed... (the church member shrugs) Kierkegaard wrote of three possible outlooks on life: the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious. We're all born esthetes. We become ethical and religious through our choices.

ARCHIE

If I may? (Mel nods) The esthete doesn't ask if something is good or bad, but only "is it interesting?" He judges things by purely sensory impressions and personal taste.

MEL

Exactly. He therefore thinks he is "free." Yet he lives an accidental life, driven by tastes and impulses. (looks around the table) How many of us conduct our marriages this way? We seek the thrill, and when the thrill is gone...

Pause. The church members let this sink in.

RAY

(still enraptured by what he sees on the wall)
That's really cool.

MEL

Pardon me?

RAY

There, on the wall.

Everyone follows Ray's eyes.

MORE

CHURCH MEMBER #1
It's a blank wall.

RAY
I see Jesus.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN, PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CLINTON, IOWA - DAY

Mel Kizzadeck and Ray stroll among the roses.

RAY
Do I have to get baptized?

MEL
Eventually, I suppose.

RAY
There's a pool over there.

MEL
What's the urgency?

RAY
I don't know if I can play baseball anymore.

MEL
From what you've told me, you have a magnificent future.

RAY
Baseball doesn't give the answers I thought it would.

MEL
And they were?

RAY
I thought by turning pro I'd feel peace. That I'd feel worthy.

MEL
And you believe accepting Christ will do that?

RAY
Yes.

MEL
He can't stop your suffering. He can help you to bear it.

They walk a bit.

MEL (cont'd)
Glorify Christ through baseball.
(Ray is mystified) Dedicate every
pitch you throw, to Jesus. Let His
light shine through your work.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

The Quad City River Bandits bus sits, engine idling.

INT. QUAD CITY RIVER BANDITS BUS - DAY

The team sits in their seats, waiting.

ANTWAN
Here he comes!

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Ray, carrying his luggage, sprints across the parking lot to the bus.

The DRIVER takes Ray's luggage, lays it in the open cargo space.

INT. QUAD CITY RIVER BANDITS BUS - DAY

Ray climbs aboard.

Manager Clay Buzzmont grabs Ray's arm as Ray passes.

BUZZMONT
There'll be a fine.

RAY
Yes, sir.

Ray slides in next to Angel as the bus moves out.

(ANGEL)
Where ya been?

RAY (cont'd)
With the Lord.

EXT. SOMEWHERE IN IOWA - DAY

Seen through waves of shimmering heat, the River Bandits bus rolls through farmland on its way to Beloit, Wisconsin, home of the Beloit Snappers.

The bus belches smoke out its exhaust.

INT. QUAD CITY RIVER BANDITS BUS - DAY

The DRIVER checks his gauges.

The OIL PRESSURE drops.

The driver turns over his shoulder to Clay Buzzmont.

DRIVER

What time's the game in Beloit
tonight?

BUZZMONT

We gotta be there by 5:30.

The driver checks his watch, pulls the bus over to the side
of the road.

DRIVER

(picking up his short wave
radio)

I know a company nearby.

Players are bitching and moaning about the unplanned stop.

ANTWAN

Air conditioning's off. We open the
windows or keep 'em closed?

PLAYERS

Open!

All the windows slide down.

DISSOLVE

FADE IN:

INT. QUAD CITY RIVER BANDITS BUS - DAY

The players, dripping sweat, have stripped down to their
undershirts.

ANGEL

Can I interest anyone in a game of
cards?

No takers.

We hear the APPROACHING WHINE of a large vehicle.

MORE

ARCHIE
Our ride's here!

EXT. SOMEWHERE IN IOWA - DAY

A 1937 GREYHOUND pulls up behind the Quad Cities bus.
The DRIVER kills the engine, and it wheezes into silence.

INT. 1937 GREYHOUND - DAY

The driver, LUCIANO MAROTTA (mid-50s) wears an old but well-kept uniform, with a cap like an airline pilot's. His face is horribly pockmarked.

Duct-taped to the shiny vertical stanchion just behind Luciano is a SMALL TV/VHS PLAYER.

A FRAMED PHOTO of PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON graces the dashboard.

Luciano addresses the team, all seated.

LUCIANO
Hello, ath-a-letes. I am Luciano,
and while I am not "Lucky" Luciano,
I am one lucky man. Welcome to my
Queen of the Road. I will endeavor
to get you to Beloit in record
time! I know a shortcut!

ANTWAN
What about air conditioning?

LUCIANO
Windows and the large vents above
you.

ANGEL
What about entertainment?

LUCIANO
(patting the tv/video player)
Videotapes! Rocky. Rocky Eye-Eye.
Rocky Eye-Eye-Eye. Rocky Eye-Vee.
Rocky Vee.

ANTWAN
Wow. The entire collection?

BUZZMONT
That'll do, Shabazz.

INT. 1937 GREYHOUND - DAY

The windows are wide open, the upper vents show blue skies above.

Nobody's watching the Rocky videotape. Several players doze.

ARCHIE

I'm dying of thirst.

ANTWAN

Maybe Luciano's got some wine. You could turn it into water.

LUCIANO

(over his shoulder)

Mister Buzzmont. Would you mind steering just a second?

Buzzmont walks the few steps to the driver's area.

LUCIANO (cont'd)

Hold her steady.

Buzzmont holds the wheel. Luciano deftly removes his jacket, then his tie, then his soaked dress shirt.

LUCIANO (cont'd)

Heard about Playboy's new edition for married men? Same centerfold every month.

Luciano's undershirt is a size too small and pocked with moth-eaten holes. The hairs on his back poke through the holes like porcupine quills.

LUCIANO (cont'd)

You may return to your seat now.

As Buzzmont sits down, SMOKE STARTS OOZING FROM UNDER THE BUS'S HOOD.

The smoke seeps through the floorboard.

The sound of pistons clanking, and a drive shaft seizing tight.

INT. 1937 GREYHOUND - DAY

All of the players have stripped down to the underwear, and drip with sweat.

Outside, Luciano and Buzzmont are under the hood, tapping away.

Angel plays solitaire.

Antwan, passing the time watching a ROCKY VIDEO, sits in front of Ray.

ANTWAN

(turning to Ray)

I hear Stallone parked his car in a producer's driveway, honking his horn until the producer agreed to let Sly star in his own screenplay.

RAY

Stallone wrote ROCKY I?

ANTWAN

So the legend goes.

RAY

But Rocky's so dumb.

ANTWAN

As written and played by Sly. You believe in yourself, Ray? As much as Sly believed in hisself?

RAY

I believe in Jesus.

This gets Archie's attention.

ANTWAN

You were a, what, seventh round pick? (Ray nods) Me, ninth round.

RAY

(wondering where this is going)

Hmmm.

ANTWAN

You get a signing bonus?

MORE

RAY

Yeah.

ANTWAN

Five figures?

Angel looks up from his solitaire game.

ARCHIE

Antwan, this is really bad form.

ANTWAN

Hey, Billy Graham, it's not like we're comparin' dicks.

Angel appears near Ray.

ARCHIE

Oh, isn't it?

RAY

\$28,000.

ANTWAN

No shit? I got 64. Who negotiated for you, St. Francis of Assissi?

RAY

My coach.

ANTWAN

You didn't have no letter of intent?

RAY

Never planned to go to college.

ANTWAN

Well, neither did I. But I used my letter of intent as leverage.

ARCHIE

How's that?

ANTWAN

Boy, you Jesus boys's dumb. Look, if the 'Stros think you's college bound, they feel they gotta lure you away.

ANGEL

Twenty-eight grand ain't chump change. Ray here put all his chips on making the Big Show.

MORE

ANTWAN
You ain't mean enough, RayMac.

ANGEL
And you're pure 'hood.

ANTWAN
Picture me in a hoodie, dogg.

ANGEL
Ted McGuire, yo.

Antwan's been busted.

ANGEL (cont'd)
You come from middle-class folks in
Syracuse, New York. Your father is
Dr. William McGuire, Ph.D. I read
his dissertation on brujeria.
Pompous, superficial.

ANTWAN
And what're you? Some midget Spic
straight outta Salinas.

Ray rises, looming over Antwan.

ARCHIE
What's brujeria?

ANGEL
You make \$850 a month, dogg. Just
like the rest of us. (to Ray)
Vamonos, Ray. Tenemos que hablar.

Angel grabs Ray by the elbow, leads him down the aisle to
the exit.

EXT. IN THE CORNFIELDS - DAY

Angel and Ray, in their sweat-droopy underwear, stand amidst
corn as high as an elephant's eye.

RAY
What's on your mind?

ANGEL
This Christian thing. It for real?

RAY
Yes.

MORE

ANGEL
Could kill your career.

RAY
I'll use baseball to glorify
Christ.

ANGEL
Can you visualize Satan at the
plate?

RAY
Huh?

ANGEL
You were always soft. Jesus'll make
you a marshmallow.

RAY
He will fortify me.

ANGEL
You're gonna have to choose. Is it
better for a reliever to have
saves, or to be saved?

RAY
I'll do both.

Angel pities Ray.

A BUS HORN in the distance.

ANGEL
I hear the calling.

As Ray and Angel attempt to find their way out of the
cornfield maze in their underwear...

ANGEL (cont'd)
Okay, a worthless bitch dumped you.
So now you're dating Jesus?

RAY
Please stop.

ANGEL
God created the orgasm. So that
women can moan even when they're
happy.

RAY

What's it take to shut you up?

Angel is seized by a revelation.

ANGEL

You're a virgin!

RAY

What about that night with your mother? Or doesn't a blowjob count? (Angel stares) What, you can dish it out?

ANGEL

From now until your death, I wash my hands of you.

The bus honks.

INT. A NEW, MODERN BUS - DAY

Through the DRIVER's front window, two broken down buses are parked by the side of the road.

As Ray and Angel climb inside, their team mates, now fully dressed and enjoying the air conditioning, applaud.

Ray and Angel are clearly not on good terms.

BUZZMONT

No time to get into your traveling clothes, boys.

Ray sits next to Archie.

As Angel continues down the aisle, to the rear, the driver snicks the bus into gear, and it lurches forward.

Angel staggers, then maintains his balance and his dignity.

INT. BROADCASTERS' BOOTH, POHLMAN FIELD, BELOIT, WISCONSIN - NIGHT

PAT WINTERS (mid-60s) and CHRISSY FONTENOT (mid-20s) survey the field.

WINTERS

It's a lovely late August evening for the Snappers' final game.

MORE

FONTENOT

And it's Fan Appreciation Night,
Pat. With a great post-game
fireworks display.

WINTERS

Let's hope these teams hold off the
fireworks 'til after the game,
Chrissy.

EXT. POHLMAN FIELD - NIGHT

PITCHER VALERIO DE LOS SANTOS (23 years old) warms up with
CATCHER MIKE KINKADE (23 years old).

FONTENOT

(OS)

Volatile River Bandits' catcher
Angel Pagan is not in the lineup.
That should help keep things calm.

WINTERS

(OS)

Okay, we have Valerio do los Santos
on the mound. He's 10 and 8, with a
3.55 ERA.

FONTENOT

His battery mate is usual third
baseman Mike Kinkade, making his
catching debut.

Up in the stands, scout Eric Meyer looks over the program
and fills out the lineups in the box score.

In the visitors' dugout, Ray casually surveys the crowd.

Ray spots Meyer.

Meyer nods to Ray.

Ray walks over to Angel.

RAY

Eric Meyer's here.

Angel ignores Ray.

DISSOLVE

EXT. POHLMAN FIELD - NIGHT

The scoreboard reads 3-2, with the River Bandits leading in the bottom of the 9th.

The bases are loaded with two outs.

Ray, in relief, loosens up with CATCHER MIKE ROLLINGER.

Scout Eric Meyer assumes his post behind the backstop, radar gun raised.

Ray signals he's ready.

WINTERS

(OS)

Mike Kinkade, already two-for-three tonight, steps in with 15 dingers and an even 100 ribbies.

FONTENOT

(OS)

He's hit a hard .304, with a hot August. What can we look for from McCarter?

WINTERS

The scouting report says he won't come inside.

With two outs, Ray will pitch from a wind-up.

RAY

(*sotto voce*)

"What if he did this..."

Ray winds and throws.

Kinkade takes a fastball over the inside corner.

UMPIRE

Strike!

Meyer checks his radar gun: 94 mph.

As Ray looks in at the signal...

RAY

"To make the riches of his glory..."

Ray winds and throws.

Kinkade unloads on a fastball, low and away. He nearly throws out his back as his bat slices only air.

MORE

Meyer checks his radar gun: 95 mph.

BUZZMONT
(from the dugout)
Okay, Big Country, put 'im away!

RAY
(looking in at the signal)
"Known to the objects of his
mercy..."

Ray checks the runners, winds and throws.

Kinkade twists and then tumbles to the dirt as a fastball
hisses high and inside.

Ray checks for the signal as an angry Kinkade dusts himself
off and digs in for the 1-2 pitch.

RAY (cont'd)
(whispered)
"Whom he prepared in advance for
glory."

All six feet three inches and 230 pounds coil and deliver.

Kinkade leans back as the ball approaches his head.

The ball drops as if from a tabletop as it slices over the
middle of the plate, knee high, past the frozen Kinkade.

UMPIRE
Yah!

RAY
(beating his chest)
Romans 9:23, baby!

Game over.

The River Bandits file past each other between home plate
and the pitcher's mound, palms raised for high fives.

As Angel gives each teammate his open palm, he sees Ray
approaching him from down the line.

Ray sees Angel. Angel looks away.

BEHIND THE CENTERFIELD FENCE, SKY ROCKETS HISS UPWARD INTO
THE NIGHT.

Ray and Angel pass each other. Only Ray extends his palm, as
fireworks explode overhead.

Lit by the glow above him, Eric Meyer adds the finishing touches to his notes.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA - DAY

In a DRIVING RAINSTORM, Ray pushes a wheelbarrow filled with dirt up a steep muddy incline.

The construction site phone, located out of the rain, rings.

The FOREMAN (Mexican, mid-30s) answers.

FOREMAN
Ray! Telephone!

Ray parks his wheelbarrow, trudges indoors.

RAY
Yes?

ERIC MEYER
(OS)
Ray? Ray McCarter?

RAY
This is Ray.

MEYER
Your grandmother gave me this number. You have a minute?

RAY
Yes, sir.

MEYER
The Angels want you.

RAY
I have a minor league contract offer from the Astros.

MEYER
Signed it yet?

RAY
No.

MEYER
Will you consider the Angels?

RAY
The Astros have been good to me. They told me I'll be promoted to Triple A.

MORE

MEYER
You believe 'em?

RAY
They've been good to me.

Ray looks around, sees the foreman glaring at him.

RAY
Mister Meyer, thank you. I have to go.

Ray hangs up, walks back out into the rain.

INT. RAY'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Ray's baseball bags are packed by the front door.

DOROTHEA
(handing an envelope to Ray)
This came in the mail today.

Ray looks the envelope over, checks out the return address.

Ray opens the envelope and removes the ring he'd given to Kyra.

DOROTHEA (cont'd)
Just as you're leaving for Florida.

RAY
It's a new year and a fresh start.

The telephone rings.

Ray goes to the parlor, answers the phone.

RAY (cont'd)
Ray McCarter.

CALLER
(OS)
Ray? This is Karl Dellinger of Operations. I have some bad news.

RAY
Sir?

DELLINGER
The Astros can't afford to have seven minor league franchises. We're eliminating your team. Since you're a free agent, we're releasing you.

MORE

RAY

I'm...

DELLINGER

You'll receive this in writing, but out of courtesy I wanted to let you know before you leave for Florida.

RAY

I appreciate that.

DELLINGER

We're sure other teams will consider you. Good luck, Ray.

Dellinger hangs up.

DOROTHEA

Bad news?

Ray goes to his bags, pulls out a small black book, leafs through it.

Back at the telephone in the parlor, Ray dials a number.

BETWEEN ERIC MEYER'S OFFICE AND DOROTHEA'S PARLOR:

MEYER

Eric Meyer.

RAY

Mister Meyer, this is Ray McCarter.

MEYER

Hello, Ray!

RAY

Is that offer still open?

MEYER

Offer? Oh, the offer! Ray, the Angels' minor league spring training rosters are set. Spring training is for pruning, not for adding.

RAY

Sir, I've trained all winter.

MEYER

Go to Germany.

MORE

RAY

Germany?

MEYER

There's a league in Germany. A highly-touted arm like yours should have no problem getting on a German team. If the Angels need a right handed fireballer, you're the first guy we'll call.

RAY

Germany?

MEYER

Great hotdogs.

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA - DAY

INSERT: MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA TEN YEARS LATER

A lovely autumn day.

Two teams, THE LUMBER COMPANY and THE SILVER OTTERS, warm up on opposite sides of the field.

Ray McCarter, thirty pounds heavier, warms up in the the Lumber Company's bullpen.

Player/Manager Kent Aoki trots toward the Otters' bullpen, where Angel Pagan catches the warm-ups of the Otters' PITCHER.

AOKI

Hey, Angel.

ANGEL

Coach.

AOKI

This Over Thirty League has rules. You have to have nine players. I see only eight.

ANGEL

We're forfeited before.

AOKI

The Lumber Company does not accept forfeits.

MORE

ANGEL

Well, unless another guy shows up,
you're gonna have to violate your
little rule. Coach.

Aoki gestures toward the stands behind home plate.

A MAN (mid-30s) watches the teams warm up.

AOKI

Let that guy play. We won't say a
thing. We'll lend him a glove and
spikes.

Angel swivels, looks at the stands.

Watched by Ray as he continues warming up, Angel jogs over
to the man in the stands.

ANGEL

Hey. You wanna play ball?

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

Players' WIVES and CHILDREN dot the stands behind home
plate.

The scoreboard shows the game tied 1-1 in the top of the
ninth.

There's a runner on second.

Angel climbs in the box against Ray McCarter.

Catcher Kent Aoki sends his signals to Ray.

ANGEL

He's lost a few off his fastball.

AOKI

Five years in Germany. Cold weather
hurt him.

Ray checks the runner.

The runner goes as Ray delivers the pitch.

Angel bunts the ball up the first base line.

Ray is off the mound, quick as a cat.

The ball rolls along the first base line.

Ray watches to see if it will roll foul.

MORE

Angel lowers a shoulder and crashes into Ray.

Ray goes sprawling. The ball stays fair.

As Angel sprints across first base, the other runner rounds third and heads home.

AOKI (cont'd)

Come home!

Ray scrambles to the ball, twists around, still seated, and throws a dart to Aoki.

The runner slides in.

UMPIRE

Safe!

Angel chugs into second base as Angel's WIFE and TWO YOUNG CHILDREN cheer in the stands.

The illegal substitute player comes to the plate.

Ray toes the rubber. He checks Angel.

Angel, with a short lead, smirks at Ray.

Ray looks home, checks Angel.

Angel does his gunslinger routine at Ray.

Ray whirls and throws to second.

Angel slides in head first, well ahead of the throw.

The SECOND BASEMAN tosses the ball back to Ray.

AOKI

C'mon, Big Country! We got a batter here!

Ray toes the rubber, gets the signal.

Ray throws.

The curve ball breaks a foot in front of the plate, then skids by Aoki.

Angel takes third.

Aoki calls time, then trots to the mound.

Angel motions the batter to meet him halfway down the third base line.

MORE

AOKI (cont'd)
Pagan's in your head, Ray. Exercise
some mind control.

ANGEL
(whispering to the batter)
You know how to bunt?

BATTER
Yeah.

ANGEL
Know what a suicide squeeze is?

BATTER
Yeah.

ANGEL
Okay. The pitcher's rattled. He's
gonna get comfortable by grooving a
pitch. No matter where the pitch
is, you gotta make contact. Can you
do that?

BATTER
Yeah.

Angel walks back to third as Aoki crouches behind the plate.

Aoki checks the batter's foot placement, then signals Ray.

Aoki places his mitt belt high, middle of the plate.

Ray winds.

Angel breaks for the plate.

The batter squares.

The Lumber Team INFIELDDERS yell "Squeeze!"

Ray is too far into his release to throw a pitch out.

The ball bounces off the bat and dribbles down the third
base line.

As the THIRD BASEMAN throws the batter out at first, Angel
crosses the plate with the go ahead run.

DISSOLVE

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

The scoreboard reads the Silver Otters leading 2-1 in the bottom of the ninth, with two outs.

The Lumber Company has a RUNNER, Kent Aoki, on third.

Angel, playing catcher, sees Ray trudging toward the plate.

As Angel crouches, he hums Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," loudly enough for Ray to hear.

Then Angel softly sings "Springtime for Hitler" from THE PRODUCERS as Ray waits for the pitch.

ANGEL

"Springtime--for Hitler--and
Germany..."

RAY

(raising his right hand)
Time.

Ray steps out of the box, collecting his thoughts.

AOKI

C'mon, Big Country. Bring me home!

Ray heaves a sigh, steps into the box.

The pitcher throws.

Ray jumps on it, slamming the ball high down the left field line.

Aoki trots home backwards, watching the ball's flight, leaning, willing it to be fair.

The ball curves at the last second, wide of the foul pole.

Ray must jog back to the plate to face an 0-1 count.

AOKI (cont'd)

C'mon, Ray, a hit ties up the game!

Angel's waiting for Ray.

Ray assumes his stance.

ANGEL

(to umpire)
Hey, Blue. You know how
"Deutschland Uber Alles" goes?

MORE

UMPIRE

I wanna go home before it gets
dark, catcher.

Angel crouches, wig wags his signals.

The Otters' pitcher winds and throws.

Ray slashes the pitch up the middle. The ball eludes the
pitcher's glove and bounces toward second base.

Ray springs out of the box, sprinting to first.

Aoki crosses the plate with the potential tying run.

The SHORTSTOP dives to his left, behind second base. He
springs to his feet, sidearms the ball to first.

Ray is running for his life.

The ball slaps the FIRST BASEMAN's glove a split second
before Ray's shoes skids over the bag.

UMPIRE

Out!

Game over.

The Lumber Company gathers in a circle in front of their
dugout.

AOKI

They beat us. Lumber Company never
complains. I don't want anyone ever
breathing a word about what we did.
We'll come back next week, angry as
hell, the Lumber Company the league
has learned to fear. On three. (the
players lay their hands on hands)
One, two, three.

PLAYERS

LUMBER COMPANY!

Ray gathers his things and walks to the parking lot.

To get to his old beat-up Mustang, Ray has to pass Angel's
sparkling new SUV, where he and his wife are loading their
two children into the back seat.

Ray stops.

MORE

RAY

Angel. I'm sorry for what I said
about your mother.

ANGEL'S WIFE

Mrs. Pagan died last week.

ANGEL

And your fucking Jesus won't bring
her back.

RAY

I'm so sorry for your loss.

ANGEL

Y'know what? I hope we meet in the
playoffs. I'm gonna scorch you.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Ray is wrestling with an old water heater.

Ray lifts the water heater and drops it into a wheelbarrow.

Ray cries out.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA - DAY

DOCTOR

You've suffered a hernia. I advise
you to operate on it immediately.

RAY

I have no insurance.

DOCTOR

I'm only offering my diagnosis. If
this hernia rips, you'll have 24
hours to get to a hospital, or risk
death.

RAY

I can't afford an operation.

DOCTOR

Then avoid all strenuous activity.

RAY

I have a playoff game this weekend.

DOCTOR

The San Francisco Giants have a
plyoff game this weekend.

MORE

RAY

I pitch in the city's Over Thirty League.

DOCTOR

If you really must participate, do not push yourself past 80%.

RAY

You don't understand. I'm a race horse. Could Secretariat run at 80%?

DOCTOR

What you are is an overweight 35 year old, Mr. McCarter.

INT. A CHURCH, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Ray kneels among the pews.

RAY

Heavenly Father, I beseech you in my time of need. Please allow me the health sufficient to pitch in--and WIN--the game this weekend. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Ray sighs. He looks up.

Feathers fall all around the cathedral.

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

The city of Monterey has decorated Sollecito Field with flags and bunting for the Over Thirty League championship.

The Silver Otters' full roster stretches, runs wind sprints, and tosses baseballs while The Lumber Company does the same on the opposite side of the field.

Kent Aoki, wearing catcher's shin guards and chest protector, and Angel Pagan, in his batter's helmet, meet at home plate to hand their line-up cards to the home plate umpire as The Lumber Company takes the field.

Angel examines Aoki's line-up.

ANGEL

I see you got baby Jesus pitching this sunny Sunday.

MORE

AOKI

May the better team win, Mr. Pagan.

Ray trudges to the mound as Aoki brings his mask and glove to home plate.

Angel's leading off, batting lefthanded.

Ray steps off the mound, faces the American flag in centerfield.

RAY

(looking down, whispering)

Heavenly Father, please guide me
safely through this game. Thy will
be done.

Ray returns to the rubber, gets his signal from Aoki.

Ray's first pitch is a curve, low and away.

AOKI

Let's go, Big Country!

Ray unleashes a fast ball.

Angel sends it right back at Ray, whistling a rocket past Ray's ear into centerfield.

Angel's wife and children cheer as an OLD MAN climbs the stairway and sits just behind them.

The next BATTER smacks a routine grounder to the SHORTSTOP.

As the SECOND BASEMAN covers second as the double play pivot, the ball takes a crazy bounce over the shortstop's shoulder, into left field.

Angel the opportunist charges into third.

The old man in the stands rises to his feet.

OLD MAN

Shake it off, Raymond!

Ray looks up behind home plate. He sees Junior McCarter, his father.

Junior gives Ray a thumbs up.

The third BATTER slaps a come backer to Ray. He wheels and throws to the shortstop covering second base. The shortstop fires to first, completing the double play...

...as Angel crosses home plate.

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

Ray comes to bat with a RUNNER on second.

Angel sends his signals to the Otters' PITCHER.

ANGEL

Okay, Mein Fuhrer, let's see you
hit this guy.

UMPIRE

We'll have none of that today,
Pagan.

Ray nods to the umpire.

The pitcher checks the runner on second, then throws.

Ray slams the first pitch to right center. It bounces against
the fence on one hop.

The runner on second scores as Ray slides into second, just
under the tag.

Ray grimaces as he stands and dusts himself off.

EXT. SOLLECITO FIELD - DAY

The scoreboard reads 1-1, with one out in the top of the
ninth.

Ray, breathing hard and wincing a bit with each pitch, is
working with men on first and second.

JUNIOR

C'mon, Raymond! Suck it up!

Angel's wife looks back at Junior.

JUNIOR (cont'd)

That's my son.

MRS. PAGAN

You must be very proud of him.

Ray looks in for the signal.

Ray delivers.

The BATTER slaps a grounder through the hole between third
and short.

MORE

The runner on second scores. The runner on first advances to third.

AOKI

Time!

Kent Aoki makes the long walk to his exhausted pitcher.

AOKI (cont'd)

Helluva game, Ray. Take right field.

Aoki gestures to the right fielder, who trots toward the infield, passing Ray as he takes his place in right.

As the new pitcher warms up...

MRS. PAGAN

(to Junior)

Your son did very well.

JUNIOR

And your husband's team is in the catbird seat.

The silver Otters have a 2-1 lead in the top of the ninth, with one out and men on first and third.

The reliever looks in for the sign. He nods.

The batter lifts the first pitch high down the right field line.

As the runner on third tags, Ray positions himself just behind where he judges the ball will land.

As Ray catches the long foul ball, he's already taking a step forward.

Ray deftly transfers the ball to his throwing hand as the runner on third leaves the base.

RAY

((from the bowels of his being))

Kee!

Ray's throw is a backspinning, rising laser that lands ten feet in front of Aoki, who is perfectly positioned to block the plate.

On one bounce, the ball lands crisply in Aoki's glove.

MORE

The runner slides. Right into Aoki's thigh. Aoki tags the runner.

UMPIRE
Runner's OUT!

Ray's just made an inning-ending double play.

As Ray trots to the dugout, wincing, he holds his glove against his stomach.

Ray's teammates high five him.

AOKI
Alright! We're down a run, and
we've got three outs left.

Ray sits at the end of the bench, breathing heavily.

AOKI (cont'd)
You okay?

Ray nods.

AOKI (cont'd)
You're in the hole.

Ray nods.

The first Lumber Company BATTER steps to the plate.

The Otters' pitcher nods, winds, then throws.

The batter laces the pitch to left field.

From the dugout, Aoki signals the next BATTER.

The batter nods.

Ray's in the on deck circle, swinging his bat.

ANGEL
(to his infielders)
Let's be awake for the sacrifice!

The pitcher nods to Angel's sign.

As the pitch comes home, the batter squares to bunt.

The batter taps the ball toward the mound.

As the pitcher lifts the ball, Angel directs him.

ANGEL (cont'd)
First base!

The pitcher wheels and throws to second.

The runner slides.

UMPIRE
Out!

ANGEL
(to his pitcher)
What the fuck? What the fucking
fuck?

PITCHER
I got 'im, didn't I?

ANGEL
Undeniably.

Angel walks back to home plate.

Ray pauses outside the box and mumbles a silent prayer.

Ray checks Aoki. Aoki rubs and contorts. Ray nods.

Angel flicks his signs. The pitcher shakes him off.

Angel sends another sign. The pitcher nods.

The pitcher checks the runner, who has a nice lead.

The pitcher snaps a throw to first. The runner dives back to
the bag.

The pitcher takes the throw from the first baseman. He sets.
He throws.

The runner breaks for second. The second baseman bolts for
the bag, ready to take the throw from Angel.

But Ray executes a perfect in-and-out swing, sending a
ground ball to right field, through the hole created by
second baseman when he covered second.

The lead runner takes third, with Ray on first, and one out.

ANGEL (cont'd)
Alright, let's get two and go home!

Angel squats and signals.

The pitcher shakes him off.

ANGEL (cont'd)

Time!

Angel walks to the mound, glaring at his battery mate.

ANGEL (cont'd)

(hiding his lips with his
glove)

What's your problem with the curve
ball?

PITCHER

My fastball's workin' today.

ANGEL

I'm expecting a squeeze play. Keep
your pitch high in the zone. Harder
to bunt. Okay?

The pitcher nods.

Angel resumes his position.

The pitcher checks the runners, then delivers.

The BATTER squares to bunt. But he's faking the squeeze.

As the infielders react, the batter pulls his back back. The
pitch comes in, shoulder high.

UMPIRE

Ball.

From the dugout, seen by Angel, Aoki signals the batter.

ANGEL

(sotto voce)

I'm onto you, Aoki.

BATTER

He'll be one step ahead of you,
into the grave.

UMPIRE

Let's play ball.

Angel wig wags for a pitch. The pitcher nods.

Ray takes his secondary lead as the pitcher delivers.

The batter slashes a high bouncer between first and second.

Ray's already halfway to second as the second baseman fields
the high hop.

MORE

The shortstop decoys Ray into thinking there'll be a play at second.

As the second baseman throws out the runner at first, foregoing the possibility of a game-ending double play, allowing the runner on third to score, Ray slides hard and low into the shortstop, sending him sprawling.

RAY

You okay?

SHORTSTOP

Yeah. That was clean and hard.

As Ray stands on second with two outs, he's the potential winning run.

Ray's eyes roll as he's stabbed with pain.

Ray clears his head, takes his lead.

Angel takes off his mask, bangs it against his right knee.

The shortstop touches the brim of his cap.

ANGEL

(to the batter)

I'm gonna make McCarter famous.

The pitcher gets his sign, checks Ray, then throws.

The ball comes in high and outside.

Angel catches the ball. As the shortstop breaks to second base, Angel powers the ball over the mound toward second base.

Ray dives back into second.

Angel's throw is wild, and flies into right centerfield.

Ray leaps to his feet and runs to third.

The centerfielder bobbles the ball.

Ray's THIRD BASE COACH windmills Ray to go home for the winning run.

Ray rounds third.

Angel casually tosses his mask three feet up the third base line, right in the base path.

Ray chugs homeward.

MORE

The centerfielder throws home.

Angel blocks the plate, crouching low.

Ray nears home. He sees the mask in his way.

Ray opts not to slide, but to come in standing up.

Angel takes the throw, steels himself for a collision.

Ray lowers his right shoulder.

The umpire is poised to make the call.

NOTHING SHALL STOP RAY FROM SCORING.

Ray comes in low, his shoulder in Angel's face.

The two men collide ferociously.

Angel flies backward. The baseball arcs its way to the backstop.

UMPIRE

Safe!

Junior McCarter leaps to his feet, cheering crazily.

Ray goes straight to Angel, who is dazed.

As Ray lifts Angel...

RAY

I'm sorry, man. You left me no option.

Angel nods weakly.

Ray faints as his teammates mob him.

As Angel's wife runs down from the stands, screaming...

DISSOLVE

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD, CASTROVILLE, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Ray McCarter and a DOZEN BOYS and GIRLS stand in the outfield of a ball field in Castroville, California.

As Ray demonstrates the movements, the children imitate him.

A 12 year old girl, JOCELYN, holds a baseball and a glove.

MORE

RAY

(miming the actions as he describes them)

Okay, kids, here's tip number two. What we're gonna do is take our thumbs down. It automatically brings up our elbows, putting us into a perfect position, ready to throw. Jocelyn?

Jocelyn perfectly executes Ray's demonstration, tossing a strike to Angel, sixty feet away.

The image turns into a GRAINY YOUTUBE VIDEO DEMONSTRATION.

RAY

(into the camera, as Angel joins him in the frame)

Perfect. What this does is keep us on a flat plane, by taking our elbows down and our thumbs up. 'Kay? If you have any questions, you can reach me at RayMcCarter at Facebook dot com.

Ray and Angel give each other a high five, then smile into the camera.

FADE OUT.

Over the CLOSING CREDITS, we hear this song:

YOU HAD IT IN YOU

The double wide was on fire.
Your Daddy lit the match.
You swore that you'd escape
If you could find the latch.

The family war tore your heart in two.
You never knew you had it in you.

You were branded a runaway slave
Who tried to make yourself useful.
You hungered for no reason they gave.
You were just too youthful.

All your questions tore your heart in two.
You never knew you had it in you.

You broke into the home
Of a man under arrest.
You knelt and hid his words

MORE

Inside your spacious breast.

He sent you back into the world
With a mission to forgive
All the blows that broke
Your will to live.

Through all the spikes that ripped and pinned you,
You never knew you had it in you.

God's Riches at Christ's Expense...
God's Riches at Christ's Expense...

THE END

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