

THE PROSPECT

Written by
Eric R. Williams

Based on the novel
PROSPECT
by
William Littlefield

Contact:

Alvaro Donado
Workshop Entertainment, LLC
459 Columbus Ave, Suite 248
New York, NY 10024
(646) 827-9829 T
(646) 827-9843 F
ADonado@WorkshopEntertainment.com

INT. 1965 BLACK IMPALA CONVERTIBLE - DAY

With a baseball GAME barking from the RADIO, a YOUNG PETE ESTEY - white, late 40s, salt and pepper hair, WORN SPORTS COAT - drives down a country road. Spring, 1975.

Windows down. Young Pete thumbs his directions in a TINY NOTEBOOK that sits on top of a worn, folded, road map.

The car follows a soft bend in the dirt road and then...

A Baseball Field - like baseball fields everywhere - through the windshield. A small, rusty backstop. An old scoreboard. Fans sprinkled on old bleachers.

A wooden BAT HITTING A BALL, crisp as the clear blue sky.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD, 1975 - DAY

Young Pete STICKS OUT from the crowd - the ONLY WHITE MAN within fifty miles. WHISPERS. Stares awkwardly disguised. Young Pete watches the plate.

A GANGLY TEENAGER chokes up on the bat. The pitch - fast and tight - whips past. The kid swings, too late. The PITCHER/COACH - a grown man with arms like cannons - sees Pete as the catcher throws the ball back.

COACH

Awright, Junior. That's enough. Take a lap. Cappy! Cappy, get in the box!

YOUNG CAPPY HAYNES - big kid, about 18 years old with a confident way and a devilish SMILE - hustles from second base to the plate... eyeing Pete the whole time.

Off the plate - Young Cappy RUBS EACH WRIST... TWICE, almost religiously. He taps EACH FINGER TO HIS THUMB... and steps into the batter's box. Calm and confident.

Pete SQUINTS. He sees SOMETHING -- something in this kid... in the details... his fingers gripping the bat, his eyes focused on the mound, his elbow just right.

The Pitch - a scorcher. Young Cappy takes a fast ball. SMACK! Deep to center field, bouncing over the fence.

Young Cappy repositions himself, just once. His hands on the bat - he rhythmically moves EACH FINGER TO HIS THUMB.

The pitch - a breaking ball at the knees. SMACK! A line drive to the right field fence. The Coach looks for a reaction - but Young Pete gives nothing away.

Coach hunkers down for a real pitch - rifling it down the pipe like a seasoned pro. THE BALL rushes in - red stitches spinning.

CRACK! The ball sails high, hanging in the air, traveling far clear of the center field fence.

Young Pete thumbs his notebook, glancing up... Young Cappy makes eye contact... and smiles as he takes a lap.

EXT. SMALL TOWN ROAD, 1975 - EVENING

A pick-up truck filled with teens celebrating a victory pulls over to the side of the road.

TEENS

Way t'go Cappy! Great game!

Young Cappy jumps out and waves. Turning, he finds the IMPALA CONVERTIBLE in the driveway of a small house.

INT. YOUNG CAPPY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN, 1975 - NIGHT

The house is poor, but nice. Clean, quaint and simple.

Cappy's MOTHER, 40s, pours a glass of iced tea. A beautiful CHARM BRACELET JINGLING on her wrist.

FATHER (OS)

Mr. Estey... Cappy here's got a hammer all right. That ain't the question.

She turns to the table where Young Pete sits with Cappy and his FATHER. Cappy's Father signals her to stay back.

YOUNG PETE

No, sir. You're right. The question is, does your boy want to play ball? I mean, not in some sandlot, but... *really* play?

YOUNG CAPPY

Hell yeah.

The Father scowls. Cappy looks down, ashamed. They've tipped their hand. Young Pete nods. This is his chance.

YOUNG PETE

All right. Good. Then, here's how it works. I can recommend him, which means someone else'll be down to look Cappy over. He'll hit fine no matter who's watching, so that's no particular risk. So if whoever comes down doesn't see anything he don't like... well, they'll offer your son a bonus to sign. We can do it that way if you like.

His father knows there is more. So does Young Cappy.

YOUNG PETE (CONT'D)

The only problem with that is... well, I don't know when they'll get around to sendin' someone down here. Or what'll happen 'tween now and then... A sprained ankle? The flu? Could be anything.

Cappy's Mother RUBS her CHARM BRACELET.

YOUNG CAPPY
Well, I could play the next year then,
couldn't I? If I got the flu?

Under the table, Young Cappy tapping fingers to a thumb.

CAPPY'S FATHER
It's not like that. You miss a few years
and you're twenty. Miss a few more and
you're too old to even look at.

Young Cappy looks at Pete: *Is he serious?* Pete nods.

YOUNG PETE
The other way it can go is I sign you
tonight. Now, I can't offer any bonus,
but I can make you a member of the Lions'
organization right now, and you'll join
our Class C club in Katalka next week.

Young Pete pulls a contract from his jacket and unfolds
it upon the table. The CRACK of a BAT. CHEERING.

EXT. BASEBALL STADIUM, 1977 - DAY

A small stadium scoreboard reads: MURPHYSBURG. One out.
Top of the sixth. Visitors: 2, Lions: 3.

CARD: TWO YEARS LATER

The small part of the sparse crowd CHEERS as Young Cappy
beats the throw to first. Across the back of his grey
uniform: the word "Katalka".

Young Pete stands against a rail, flipping through his
notebook. Beside him, YOUNG WILT CULLINANE - 40, loudly
and sharply dressed - eating popcorn one at a time.

YOUNG WILT
Petey-Pete! Yer boy's got legs too, huh?
Hear they're moving him up next week.

YOUNG PETE
Might. If you don't jinx it.

YOUNG WILT
Jinx? Shoot, leave that hoodoo in the
Mississippi mud holes where you find
these kids.

YOUNG PETE
Don't doubt the power, Wilt. This boy's
mamma blesses his shoes before the game.

YOUNG WILT
 Musta done something. That boy can run.
 How the hell'd y'find 'em, Petie Pete?
 How the hell do you do it?

YOUNG PETE
 I looked.

ON THE FIELD

One out. One on. A HUGE BATTER at the plate in his white Lions uniform. Young Cappy leads off first, fingers rolling against thumbs.

The Pitch. Young Cappy takes off for second. The Batter swings. CRACK! Line Drive.

The ball hits Young Cappy in the HEAD as he runs. He crumbles to the ground - hands to his face.

IN THE STANDS

Pete watches - stunned, scared. He DROPS THE NOTEBOOK...

Someone in the stands SCREAMS. And the SCREAM become... the sound of a VACUUM CLEANER.

INT. PETE'S APARTMENT, PRESENT DAY - DAY

PETE ESTEY - now 75, fit, a shock of white hair - opens his eyes. Bright sunshine. VACUUM CLEANER turns off.

LOUISE BROWN - 60s, Latin, a dark lady in a bland uniform and a wonderful hair-do - stares straight down at him.

LOUISE
 Huh! Some old folks have nothing to do but sleep away the day.

Pete shakes his head. He's heard it a million times.

PETE
 What the hell time is it, anyway? For all you knew, I mighta been dead here and you're running the sweeper.

LOUISE
 It's get-your-butt-out-of-bed time, and don't you use that type of language with me, Mr. Baseball Locker-Room Tough Guy. I don't have to take your lip.

A simple apartment in a FLORIDA RETIREMENT COMMUNITY. Books on a shelf. A radio. Desk, dresser and a mirror. A bathroom. A FOOTLOCKER at the foot of his bed.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
 Now get up and go live your life so I can clean up in here.

WILT
Caughtcha! I knew you two were shacking
up. Shouldn'ta knocked, huh? Gave you
too much time to get dressed, didn't it?

Louise swats him with her duster.

LOUISE
Hush! I'm just cleaning up.

WILT
Sweetheart, if you dust this room any
more, you should start paying rent.
(Louise blushes)
Let's go, Petey-Pete! Got hot french
toast this morning... and a hot buttered
bun this afternoon! Come on, come on.

LOUISE
A hot buttered bun. Oh, Lord.

WILT
Just cuz it's old, don't mean it's broke.

Wilt winks at Louise, but she is not amused. Pete exits
the bathroom, dressed and quaffed, slipping on his shoes.

PETE
What's broke?

LOUISE
His sense of decency. That's what. Now,
you were telling me about this Cappy
Haynes... Sounds like my grand baby, Jack
Brown. I ever tell you about him?

WILT
A thousand times, honey. But we've got
places to go, people to see.

PETE
Louise, I'm retired.

LOUISE
Retired? From what? Sitting in the sun,
watching boys play baseball?

PETE
(serious)
No. The pain.

LOUISE
Pain? What pain?

WILT
(covering)
I'll tell you "what pain". The pain of
covering six states in a car that gets
seven miles a gallon.

(MORE)

WILT (CONT'D)

The pain of driving a day and a half to watch it rain all afternoon. And the pain of having to talk to grandma's who think their grandsons should be major league all stars. Ain't that right, bub? Let's go.

And with that, Wilt guides him out the door. But Louise catches Pete's eye - a scared, awkward glance as he goes.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Individual bungalows and apartments gathered around a centralized Community Center, Cafeteria and Assisted Living Center. The men stroll between shuffleboard alleys and past a grass filled commons.

WILT

What the hell was that? "The Pain"?

PETE

I had this dream about Cappy Haynes. Mississippi kid? Ran like--

WILT

I remember Cappy. I'm old, not senile.

PETE

Jesus, he could play.
(Wilt refuses to engage)
And hit, too. Like the ball was standing still. I can still see the way he took his swing. Beautiful. Like a... like...

Hustling by in the opposite direction, MRS. IRVING - a dour Norma Desmond look alike and MRS. BABCOCK - giant glasses behind a hand-painted walker. Wilt bows.

WILT

Beautiful like the morning breeze, good morning, ladies! Join us for breakfast?

MRS. IRVING

No time, Valentino. New girl moving in.

WILT

New girl, huh?

Wilt almost changes directions and follows the women, but he chases after Pete instead.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Wilt catches up to Pete.

WILT

Hear that, slugger? New girl in town. Want me to set you up?

(MORE)

WILT (CONT'D)
 We could double date? Take 'em out to the old "ball game", if you know what I mean?

PETE
 Like the engine of a '65 Coup. He was... silent... strong. Strong as hell.

WILT
 Stop it. I don't wanna hear this hoodoo voodoo crap. Come on. All-star game, 1934, American league. First base. Go.

Pete glares. It's a game they play, but Pete doesn't want to play right now. Wilt pushes.

WILT (CONT'D)
 First base. Go. Around the horn.

PETE
 (relenting)
 First base: Lou Gehrig, New York Yankees. Second Base.

WILT
 Second base: Charlie Gehringer, Detroit Tigers. Shortstop.

PETE
 Shortstop: Joe Cronin, Washington Senators. Third Base.

WILT
 Third base: Jimmy Foxx, Philadelphia Athletics. Catcher.

PETE
 Catcher: Bill Dickey, New York Yankees.

Wilt looks over to Pete, nods.

WILT
 Good. You okay? You good?

PETE
 I'm good.

WILT
 Good. Let's get some french toast.

And they stroll into the cafeteria.

INT. FAIR HAVEN, SUPPLY CLOSET - DAY

Tucked behind the cleaning supplies, Louise's own little space where she keeps her street clothes, a few personal items and a PRAYER SHRINE.

A dozen photos hang beneath a small cross - A couple of saints, the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and the largest of them: JACK BROWN, her grandson, in his SENIOR PICTURE from HIGH SCHOOL. Louise lights a candle and kneels to pray.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Pete and Wilt sit alone on some rickety stands down the first base line - watching a ball game. Wilt popping peanuts, a big grin across his face. Pete looks annoyed.

WILT

Look at that. Got a little bitta young Tom Seaver in him, don't he?

PETE

Huh. Reaching back like that... He's gunna pull something.

WILT

Yeah. But watch how he gets that power out of his legs, like Seaver.

PETE

Oh for Chrissakes. Seaver? Seaver was a machine. This kid...

Reveal - THE KID. He's an actual kid... about EIGHT years old. These two guys are at a little league game.

PETE (CONT'D)

This kid can't find the same release point two pitches in a row.

WILT

Alright, alright. I just meant the legs.

PETE

Seaver. Jesus.

KRACK. The Batter hits a grounder through the second baseman's legs and hustles to first.

Center Fielder scoops it up - lobbing the ball over the First Baseman's head and the batter scurries off to second. Typical little-league.

WILT

Kid's a natural, ain't he? Look at that. Turned it into a double. Good hustle!

Pete sees THREE KIDS in the dugout - one named ZEE, who we will meet later. The kids point at the old men, whispering and LAUGHING.

PETE

Watch the game, y'might learn something.

The kids keep looking back. Pete slowly but defiantly... flips them THE BIRD. But it just makes them GIGGLE more.

CHAROLETTE (O.S.)
Well, there you are!

WILT (O.S.)
Whoa. Cover me, sport. Follow my lead.

Pete looks over and sees CHAROLETTE FARMINGTON, 65, wearing a pretty little sweater and a great big smile.

WILT (CONT'D)
Kid's looking good. Solid play.

CHAROLETTE
Oh. You saw that, did you? Well, I don't know. Wasn't that an "error"?

WILT
Aw, no. Solid hit. And he had the throw beat. In my report... I'd uh... I'd mark it as a double. A double, right Pete?

PETE
Your report?

WILT
(with a wink)
What, are you deaf? Make room, chief.

Wilt motions Charolette to sit between them.

WILT (CONT'D)
Pete, this here's Char. Char Farmington.

CHAROLETTE
I think it's just wonderful. The talent. You can see it already. I think they play better when they're being groomed.

PETE
Being groomed?

Wilt wraps his arm around Charolette, scooting close.

WILT
(winking)
Oh, yeah. Move 'em right up. Little league, middle league, big league... Just a matter of time.

PETE
Middle league?

Wilt grins... Pete rolls his eyes. She seems oblivious.

WILT
I think we should discuss your grandson's possibilities later, Char.

(MORE)

WILT (CONT'D)

Maybe over... dinner? You could bring Ruthie. Don't you think she'd like Pete, here? I bet he could put a good word in for Tommy. Ruthie'd like that, wouldn't she? Moving Tommy up to the... Middle Leagues?

Char places a hand on each man's knee with a sensual rub.

CHAROLETTE

Oh, my. I had no idea I was surrounded by such... powerful men. I might have to keep you both to myself. You're a scout too? Do you and Wilt work together?

PETE

Well, yeah. Since we got out of prison. It's easier that way.

Char's smile fades. Wilt's trembles a bit on the edges.

PETE (CONT'D)

That way we only have to register once when we move into a neighborhood.

CHAROLETTE

Register? For what?

PETE

Sheriff's office... you know; likes to keep track of murderers.

CHAROLETTE

Oh.

Pete...

WILT

Char stands up and steps off of the bleachers.

PETE (CONT'D)

Sorry. "Attempted" murderers. Never did find the body, did they? Poor woman.

Chars eyes grow wide as she races away.

WILT

No, Char. Wait. He's kidding. Pete, tell her you're kidding.
(too late)

What are you doing to me?!

PETE

(livid)
I told you, Wilt, I had another dream! Don't mess around with this.

WILT

So what? It's just... a dream.

PETE

Go to hell. If bad luck finds that kid - that Tommy Whoever... it's on you. Not me!

EXT. SMALL TOWN MAIN STREET - DAY

Pete walks down the street by himself as a Greyhound Bus pulls to the curb. Stay with the bus as a 24-year old man in an ARMY UNIFORM steps off with a duffel bag.

JACK BROWN. Not only is he in great shape, but his uniform has hardly a wrinkle. He takes in the sights and sounds of a place long-ago home.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN - AFTERNOON

Mrs. Irving and Mrs. Babcock escort the newest addition to the community -- MRS. GRAHAM, a withering flower-child still captivated by moonbeams and rainbows.

MRS. GRAHAM

...all around, loopy-loop, and ended up landing on my shoulder like a leaf from the tree, but he was no leaf... he was my love. And there he shall always remain.

MRS. IRVING

That's nice dear. And Assisted Living has two areas: Ward A and Ward B.

MRS. GRAHAM

Ooooo. I once knew a bumble-bee. Whee!

She grabs a FLAGPOLE, spinning around it like a child.

MRS. GRAHAM (CONT'D)

Freedom, the first word my daughter said. Crisp, like sunshine. We were skipping through a meadow filled with flowers...

Mrs. Irving rolls her eyes - here we go again. But suddenly, she sees an opportunity to escape...

MRS. IRVING

Oh, Mr. Estes! What a pleasant surprise.

Pete trudges up the sidewalk, returning from the park.

MRS. BABCOCK

Run, Pete.

MRS. IRVING

Pete. I'd like you to meet, Mrs. Evelyn Graham. A new member of our community. Evelyn, this is Mr. Pete Estey.

MRS. GRAHAM

Mr. Estey... Mr. Estey... Hmmm. Did I tell you that my grand-daughters came down the flag pole this morning?

Pete gives Irving and Babcock a look. The ladies smile.

MRS. GRAHAM (CONT'D)
I was worried, of course. You know how my girls can be. They wouldn't let me bring my old flagpole and I was worried that they would get lost on their way.

MRS. BABCOCK
She's from Portland.

PETE
(looking up)
How come they never have a flag flying on this pole? Just doesn't seem right.

MRS. GRAHAM
And they didn't even have an umbrella, poor dears. And then the strangest thing happened? You'll never guess.

PETE
What? No. Don't think I will.

MRS. GRAHAM
A spider came down the flagpole looking for you.

PETE
Oh, really? A spider?

MRS. IRVING
(excusing herself)
Well, it sounds like you two have plenty to talk about. We'll meet you at dinner.

MRS. GRAHAM
A big spider, the biggest I've ever seen. You do know a man named Spider, don't you? Wears a baseball cap?

PETE (CONT'D)
Don't you dare.
(startled, to Graham)
What did you say?

Mrs. Irving winks and leaves Pete to fend for himself.

MRS. GRAHAM
Said he wanted me to give you a message.

PETE
Spider gave you a message? For me?

Pete glances up the flagpole - up to the clear blue sky.

MRS. GRAHAM
Yes. He wants me to tell you: "Don't forget what makes the game so special" Whatever that means.

Pete studies her, a nervous frown across his brow.

INT. DINER - DAY

Late morning in a small town diner. A few old guys sitting around drinking coffee. A waitress on break.

PORKCHOP, 25, pours over law books at the counter.

JACK (O.S.)
Well the way I hear it, there used to be a ball player around here, told everyone he could hit it 500 feet, left handed...

Porkchop doesn't stir. The old men look over nervously.

JACK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Even though the sucker knew he couldn't hit it 400 on a good day... On his best day. For a hundred dollars.

Jack lays five twenty-dollar bills on the counter. Porkchop lays his hands across the bills.

PORKCHOP
I'll take that bet.

The two men stare each other down... the money held tightly between them... until Jack cracks a smile.

JACK
You wish, man. Gimmee back my money.

Jack grabs his money back and Porkchop hugs his friend.

PORKCHOP
Jack Brown, how you been, man?! When'd you get back?! What're you up to?

JACK
(flexes)
Up to 220, man. Hard as steel.

PORKCHOP
Spreading Freedom? All that?

Jack nods, but does not engage.

JACK
You still playin' ball?

PORKCHOP
No. Too old for that. I coach 'em now.

JACK
Coach?! Look at you. They any good?

PORKCHOP
It's a rebuilding year.

JACK
(chiding)
A rebuilding year?

PORKCHOP
(confessing)
They're terrible.

Both men CRACK UP.

PORKCHOP (CONT'D)
They think they're good... but they're terrible, man.

JACK
That's painful, chop. You got a pitcher?

PORKCHOP
A pitcher? I barely have an infield. Got a kid who throws it across the plate but...

JACK
You want one?

PORKCHOP
Do I want one? Hell yeah. Who you got?

Jack holds out his arms - here I am.

JACK
Let me rent that extra bedroom of yours and you've got me.

PORKCHOP
Deal, man. When do you want to move?
(Jack shows his duffel)
Gramma kick you out?

JACK
Please, Chop. I'm grown. Moving up.

The WAITRESS arrives, pad in hand.

WAITRESS
What'll you have?

JACK
Ooooo. Double chocolate milk shake. And large fries with lots of catsup.

She leaves and Porkchop pats him on the back.

PORKCHOP
Eat up. We've got practice tomorrow.
(delighted)
Damn, it's great to see you, man.

INT. FAIR HAVEN, SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Pete swimming, breast stoke. Between breaths, a mantra:

PETE
 First base: Orlando Cepeda; St. Louis
 Cardinals. Second base: Bill Mazerowski;
 Pittsburgh Pirates. Shortstop---

Pete stops at one end of the pool. He looks up and finds
 Wilt kneeling down to the water.

WILT
 Thought you'd want to know. That kid,
 Tommy... he didn't die. He stole home,
 bottom of the ninth to win the game. His
 team carried him off the field on their
 shoulders. The best day of his life.

Pete ducks under water and pushes away from the wall.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

An unkempt grave site reads: "Emanuel Brown 1962-1990"

Jack pulls a weed or two, brushes off some dead grass...

Then he places a PRINTED PROGRAM for a play called "A
 Dream Deferred" - the cover: a picture of a BLACK WOMAN
 in her late-40s sitting on a old set of stairs.

Atop the program, Jack lays A BUNCH OF TORN TICKET STUBS.

JACK
 Woulda made you proud.

EXT. AUTO SHOP - DAY

A "HELP WANTED" sign in the window. Beneath it, a row of
 motorcycles covered in tarps.

Jack walks up and peaks under one of the tarps. He
 checks a wire here and there, rubs the seat, tests the
 grip. Satisfied, he lowers the tarp and walks inside.

MACHINE NOISES and the bark of a WORKING MAN.

WORKING MAN (O.S.)
 Hey, Jack! What do you say?!

Jack's hand reaches over and removes the SIGN.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN COMMUNITY CENTER, FRONT PORCH - EVENING

A huge wrap-around porch. Whicker rocking chairs. A brisk night. Pete TUNES IN a small TRANSISTOR RADIO. Wilt sitting off by himself thumbing the sports page.

Mrs. Babcock watches Mrs. Graham arrange a bouquet of flowers in a vase.

Mrs. Irving sits on the steps, sipping a whiskey and watching the sun set. She pulls out a cigarette.

MRS. GRAHAM
Those'll kill you, you know?

MRS. IRVING
God, I hope so.

A quiet, boring evening; the gang all together. Louise walks by in STREET CLOTHES, grabbing keys from her purse.

LOUISE
Good night, everyone. Good night, Pete.

The gang smiles, shooting Pete glances. Pete looks up.

PETE
Louise, want to join us? Double header.
(re: Wilt)
And I got no one t'cheer with me tonight.

LOUISE
I'd love to hun, but... I've got plans.
Dinner with friends and... give me the
highlights tomorrow, would you?

PETE
I can do that. Good night.

LOUISE
'Night.

She walks off, a slight sadness hidden from view as she leaves a group of friends and walks off by herself.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - EVENING/NIGHT

The sun setting. Jack stands on the mound.

He winds up... pitches one right through a tire propped on a cinder block at home plate.

Nobody else around. Jack reaches down into a bucket of old baseballs. And pitches and pitches and pitches...

ZEE - a spindly, lonely eight year old kid from the game Pete and Wilt were watching - rides around on his bicycle in the setting sun. He still wears his baseball uniform.

He pulls up to the fence at a distance -- this SILHOUETTE OF A MAN, dark against the setting sun -- pitching fastballs from the mound. Zee, fascinated.

Zee watches - pitch after pitch after pitch - always the same, like a machine. ZING. ZING. ZING. Each one through the tire... and then the man STOPS, and WAITS...

As if being guided from above... the SILHOUETTE looks up. The sun sets... darkness creeps closer...

JACK

Wait for it. Wait for it...

And then, as if he feels it... he points to the sky.

POW! The lights POP on around the field - there's only a few, but the lights make the field something special.

Jack smiles. He loves this moment - alone on the mound, surrounded by his dreams and the light.

And Zee sees that Jack is in an ARMY UNIFORM - tall and proud on the mound... like some sort of idol.

ZEE

Wow.

Jack hears him, turns.

ZEE (CONT'D)

Were you in the war?

JACK

Yeah.

ZEE

My dad was in the war. He got blown up.

Jack doesn't know what to say. He grabs a ball instead.

JACK

Sorry to hear that.

Jack fires one right down the center of the tire.

ZEE

He went and got a Pepsi cuz it was hot. And that's when they blew him up.

(Jack throws another)

Did you know my dad?

Jack stops pitching.

JACK
 Maybe. I met a lot of soldiers over there.

ZEE
 He was brave.

JACK
 Yeah. Lots of brave soldiers over there, fighting for freedom, the American dream. Your dad was fighting for that dream too.

ZEE
 (smiling)
 Yeah. He was.

Jack studies the kid... heartbroken.

ZEE (CONT'D)
 You know how to throw a slider?

Jack nods, motions him to the mound. Zee throws down his bike next to Jack's motorcycle and steps into the light.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN COMMUNITY CENTER, FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Mrs. Irving's amber burns while Pete's radio fills the night with a BASEBALL GAME. Wilt pretends not to listen.

ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)
 And Thompko comes flying around first and heading to second.

Pete TURNS IT UP, patting Wilt on the shoulder -- come on, you can be mad at me after this inning.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 Masterson loses it in his glove. He pulls it out and fires it down the line. Russel rounds third. He's going for it.

Wilt turns around in his chair -- SCRULUMPING it across the porch as he turns.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 Mayer makes the relay. Thompko rounds second but Mayer rifles it home.

Pete SQUEAKS his chair forward. Wilt SCRULUMPS LOUDER.

MRS. IRVING
 Pete...?

Pete waves her off... leans in closer.

ANNOUNCER
 Gueres throws off his mask. Russel dives. The ball's in there. Dust everywhere!

MRS. IRVING
Pete! Oh my god!

Pete looks over - Wilt slumps from his chair onto a knee.
Dazed, scared... semi-paralyzed from an ON-COMING STROKE.

ANNOUNCER
Russel caught at the plate. Thompko, the
tying run, left stranded on third..

PETE MRS. IRVING
Get somebody! Nurse!

Pete grabs Wilt violently by the collar.

PETE
You stupid son of a bitch! I told you
not to play with fire.

And Wilt fights back - grabbing Pete by both sides of his
head and pulling them face-to-face. Wilt fights for
every word, his face strangling around it's own skull.

WILT
This. Ain't. About. You.

Help arrives - NURSES, ASSISTANTS, a crash cart. Pete
being torn from his friend, and Wilt from life itself.

Mrs. Irving watches in the dark and lights another smoke.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN COURTYARD - MORNING

Louise pushes her housekeeping cart along the sidewalk,
greeting the new day with A SONG.

She reaches Pete's apartment and keys it open.

INT. PETE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

LOUISE
Wake up, sleepyhead, it's a beautiful day
to be alive.

Louise stops, surprised. The bed made, the room tidy.
Pete nowhere to be found.

INT. WILT'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Wilt, his face furrowed in concentration...

PETE (O.S.)
Come on, Wilt. Show 'em that brain of
yours don't ever stop.

Wilt sits in a wheelchair, staring at two dozen BASEBALL CARDS laid out across a small table.

PETE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Concentrate, now. And sit up straight.
 You hear me? Think now. American League
 All-Stars, 1974... Around the horn. Go.
 First base: Dick Allen, Chicago White
 Sox. Second Base...?

Wilt doesn't move. Beside him - Pete tying Wilt's shoe.

PETE (CONT'D)
 He's fine.

In the doorway - a DOCTOR, two NURSES and an AIDE. They look down on Pete with sorrow and resignation.

PETE (CONT'D)
 He just needs... look. Look at that.

Wilt raises a hand off of the wheelchair, moving it toward the cards. Pete smiles - his point being proven.

PETE (CONT'D)
 Atta boy. Concentrate. Show 'em what
 yer made of, Wilt. Think. We got
 places to go and people to see.

Wilt SLAPS the table - THE CARDS FLYING everywhere.

DOCTOR
 I'm sorry, Mr. Estes.

INT. FAIR HAVEN ASSISTED LIVING - DAY

A lonely carpeted hallway giving way to a LINOLEUM FLOOR half way down. The Aide pushes Wilt in the wheelchair.

Pete walks behind them at a distance... Wilt getting further away... the linoleum getting closer.

They wheel Wilt onto the linoleum and off further down the hall... Further... Further...

Pete stops at the division - his toes ACROSS THE LINE.

Doors swing open at the end of the hall. In the distance, a sterile HISSING and BEEPING.

Pete pulls his toes back across the line, as if he might be pulled to the other side. He stares. Terrified... and his friend disappears behind the doors.

A hand rests on his shoulder... Louise.

LOUISE
 Hun, you okay?

PETE
It was Wilt.

LOUISE
I know. I heard.
(a beat)
Maybe he'll come back.

Pete shakes his head and walks away.

PETE
You don't come back from there.

INT. WILT'S APARTMENT - DAY

Like a zombie, Pete stands in the doorway. Another HOUSEKEEPER is already tidying up. The baseball cards all put away, the bed stripped. The Housekeeper dusts each item on the dresser and places it into a box.

Pete kneels down and picks up a lone CARD from the set. It breaks his heart. He pockets it and walks out.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Porkchop places a proud hand on Jack's shoulder.

PORKCHOP (O.S.)
Gentlemen, I want you to meet Boom-boom Brown. He'll be joining the team today.

Then we see THE SUNS: rag-tag, young, more attitude than fortitude. The Team scowls - arms crossed, sun glasses on. The cockiest one - MARCO, 20 - spits into the dirt.

MARCO
Four games left in the season? What's yer deal, man? Bringing in a ringer?

PORKCHOP
He's no ringer.

JACK
I told Chop I just wanna play.

MOTOWN, 18 and strong as an ox, steps up next to Marco.

MOTOWN
Yeah? My cousin was here for a couple of weeks and wanted to play. He wore a pretty good groove in the bench.

PORKCHOP
We didn't need another first baseman.

MOTOWN

Oh yeah?
 (to Jack)
 What position d'you play?

JACK

Pitcher.

The team all looks at Marco.

MARCO

Aw. Hell no.

INT. FAIR HAVEN SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Pete walks into the room, fully dressed. Alone, the water shimmers before him. He steps to the edge.

PETE

1986 All Star Game. National League.
 First Base - Keith Hernandez, New York
 Mets. Second Base... Sandberg, Chicago
 Cubs. Third base...

Pete seems to be in a daze, struggling...

PETE (CONT'D)

Third Base... First Base - Keith
 Hernandez, New York Mets. Second Base -
 Ryne Sandberg, Chicago Cubs. Third...

He hangs his toes off the edge...

PETE (CONT'D)

Third base... third base...

And steps into the deep end.

UNDER WATER

Pete floats like in a dream. Light shimmers around him. Startling, eerie... a man floating in his own thoughts.

A shape appears above the water - a WOMAN in a bathing suit and swimming cap. She SCREAMS.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - EVENING

Thighs pumping. Cleats digging. Arms flying.

The TEAM runs 60-yard wind sprints side by side - Jack handily out in the lead.

Sweat. Pain. Competition. A WHISTLE blows.

PORKCHOP

Time! Donado, Williams, MacLeith... you owe me twenty. Rest of you: line up.

The last three across the line drop to the ground and start doing push-ups. The others line up to run again.

Jack looks fresh, strong. He peels off his shirt - he's built. Military tattoo on his bicep. He flexes it and wipes the sweat from his arms and face.

Marco and Motown roll their eyes. They give a SIGNAL to other teammates.

PORKCHOP (CONT'D)

Ready?! Run!

Thighs pumping. Cleats digging. Arms flying. Jack dashes into the outfield. He is all alone... he stops, winded, and looks back. The Team hasn't moved.

They peel off their shirts, mockingly wipe sweat from their arms and face... and flex. LAUGHTER, JEERS.

PORKCHOP (CONT'D)

All right, knuckleheads! You can take ten laps for that. Hit the field. Go!

One by one they jog off - some glare, a few give a cocky nod, others simply ignore him - some a little tubby, others a little thin. None really built like Jack.

Jack stands alone in the field, watching them... He pulls his shirt back on. And then hustles off after the last man, falling in... running laps around the field.

Porkchop shakes his head with a smile as he watches his friend chasing an old dream.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN COMMUNITY CENTER, FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Mrs. Irving smokes, while Mrs. Graham designs a bouquet.

MRS. IRVING

On her 65th birthday she decided she'd live another five years. Her husband had died and so she sold everything and divided all the cash into five different bank accounts. Her plan was to empty one account each year and die when the last account was gone. Rented herself an apartment on the bus line and had her groceries delivered. She died two months shy of her 70th birthday, leaving just enough money in that last account to bury her. Quite a trick, wouldn't you say?

MRS. GRAHAM

What, dear?

- 1982: Louise between her Latin son and her African American DAUGHTER-IN-LAW at their wedding - BABY JACK in Louise's arms.
- 1992: YOUNG JACK standing on the mound at Eppis Field, getting ready to pitch a little league game.
- 2002: Jack and Porkchop in HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION GOWNS - Louise standing proudly beside them.

Louise enters, passing the memories without notice.

She looks down the hallway and into a LIT kitchen - a HALF EMPTY glass of milk on the table. A NOISE upstairs.

LOUISE
Jack?! Jack honey, is that you?!

Grocery bag to the ground, she flies up the stairs.

INT. LOUISE'S HOME, JACK'S OLD ROOM - LATE EVENING

A HALF-PACKED SUITCASE on the bed, Jack stands between it and the dresser. Behind him, a room decorated years ago by a baseball fan. Posters, trophies and memorabilia.

Jack seems alien in his old room, like an old man trying on a favorite suit from his youth. Louise rushes in.

LOUISE
Look at you! Just look at you. Oh honey, we missed you.

She smothers him in her arms. He blanches.

JACK
Missed you too, Gramms.

LOUISE
Oh honey. I prayed for you. I prayed every day. Oh, honey... Are you hungry? I've got a big dinner planned.

JACK
I can't. I'm... I already got plans.

LOUISE
(finding humor)
Already got plans? How do you "already got plans"? Home for two seconds... You just take a minute, Mr. I Already Got Plans. You're not in the Army any more. You're home. You can relax.

She takes a stack of BASEBALL JERSEYS from the suitcase and puts them INTO THE DRESSER DRAWER.

JACK
I went to New York.
(Louise stops)
She's in a play, in a little theater off-
Broadway. And she's good, too. Even
kept her name.

She takes a stack of TUBE SOCKS from the suitcase. Jack stops her, placing the socks and jerseys in the suitcase.

JACK (CONT'D)
Gramms, don't. I'm packing, not
unpacking. I rented a place.

LOUISE
Why? What did she say to you?

Jack takes his best mitt from a stack of OLD MITTS on a shelf and places it INTO THE SUITCASE.

JACK
I didn't talk to her. But I watched her
every night. I think she's happy.

LOUISE
Every night? How long've you been back?

JACK
In the States? A couple weeks.

LOUISE
Oh, my. I don't feel so good.

She sits, WEAK-KNEED, but Jack just grabs CLEATS from the closet, puts them in the suitcase and closes it to go.

JACK
I'm sorry, Gramms. But I've grown. I've
got dreams too, you know.

Louise picks the PLAYBILL from the dresser, recognizing the woman on the cover. She eyes Jack suspiciously.

JACK (CONT'D)
Don't worry... I'm still playing ball - day
after tomorrow if you wanna come.

INT. LOUISE'S HOME, STAIRWAY - LATE EVENING

Jack carries his suitcase down the steps. Louise, SURE-FOOTED, walks from the bedroom to the top of the stairs.

LOUISE
Just like your father.

Jack winces but keeps going.

JACK
Maybe. Maybe a little stronger.

LOUISE
Oh yeah, well we'll let the scout be the
judge of that then.

He STOPS but does not turn, Louise looming above him.

JACK
What scout?

LOUISE
A friend of mine. He reps the Nationals.
Says he wants to see you play... But I
guess you'd rather watch some tramp
actress instead.

JACK
She's my mother.

LOUISE
She hasn't been your mother for twenty
years.

JACK
Just because she left doesn't mean she
stopped being my mother.

LOUISE
No, it just means she wasn't a very good
one! Jack... stay.

JACK
Gramms... No. I can't.

He finally turns to her at the top of the steps. She
looks weaker now, pleading... behind her his childhood
room shining with baseball memories.

JACK (CONT'D)
I can't. This is your home. Not mine.
(it breaks his heart)
Come to the league tournament. Starts
the day after tomorrow. Okay?

She nods, trying to act strong...

EXT. LOUISE'S HOME, FRONT PORCH - LATE EVENING

Jack closes the door and leans against it. He breathes
out a SIGH - that was harder than he thought.

He rests heavily against the door, collecting himself.

But then the curtain parts on the small window beside the
door. Louise TAPS ON THE GLASS.

LOUISE
What about the scout?

Jack tries not to... but eventually turns, his curiosity piqued. Louise slowly cracks a triumphant grin.

INT. PETE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT/DAY

Pete in bed. Eyes wide. The sun sets. Evening into night. Shadows. Moonlight. Haunted eyes. Fear.

Night turns to dawn. Still, Pete stares. Stubble on his chin, bags beneath his eyes. Pete finally dozes off...

Then, a golden ray of sun kisses his temple and he hears: THWAP... THWAP... A ball hitting a glove over and over.

I/E. PETE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Pete wakes up. THWAP... THWAP... THWAP...

He looks out his window and sees Jack, jeans and t-shirt, not a care in the world, pitching a ball over and over again to Porkchop. THWAP... THWAP...

Pete opens the window. The THWAP... THWAP... THWAP now crisp. SOUNDS of the day - BIRDS, a LAWN MOWER.

PETE

Get outta here! Do that somewhere else!

Jack looks at Pete. From outside looking in, Pete looks like a prisoner in a dark room wearing dull pajamas.

PETE (CONT'D)

You heard me. Beat it.

JACK

Sir, are you Mr. Estey? The scout?

PETE

I ain't no scout. Now get lost.

Pete closes his window, makes his way back to bed. But then it starts again... THWAP... THWAP... THWAP...

The window flies open.

PETE (CONT'D)

I told you to get the hell outta here!

Porkchop gives Jack a look - let's get out of here.

JACK

Yes, sir. Just... fifty-eight more.

PETE

Excuse me?

JACK
 Sorry, sir. Superstition, I guess. Once I start, I gotta throw eighty-one strikes. Otherwise I'm no good for a week. I'll be done as fast as I can.

Jack turns back to the task at hand and fires. THWAP.
 Pete stares at the kid... taking it in.

Porkchop watches Pete out of the corner of his eye - watching him retreat back into his room and close the window. But Jack doesn't care. He just keeps pitching.

INT. PETE'S APARTMENT - SAME

Inside, Pete watches from the shadows -- the men throwing the ball, and then... He notices Mrs. Graham standing behind them - talking to an invisible someone at the top of the flagpole.

Nothing but a rusty flagpole standing against a blue sky.

Pete's gaze drifts down the flagpole... and back to Jack. He sees the details: the grip of the ball, the alignment of his feet. His eyes. His fingernails. The release.

Jack throws well - smooth, fast, right down the pipe. An American guy just throwing a baseball.

Porkchop catches pitch after pitch.

PETE (O.S.)
 He got anything in there besides sliders?

Porkchop looks up. Pete stands beside him, unshaven but now dressed.

PORKCHOP
 He's got a pretty nice fast ball.

PETE
 Okay. Let's see it.

Porkchop throws the ball back to Jack.

PORKCHOP
 You look a little old to be a scout.

PETE
 Yeah? Well, you ain't fat enough to be a catcher. So zip it up and pretend like you are one and I'll pretend like I'm a scout.

Jack pitches one in... THWAP. He looks at Pete, proud. But Pete shakes his head.

JACK
 What? What's wrong with it?

Pete pauses... he's at the precipice, about to fall into the trap. He knows it. This is the moment to run.

He looks across the way and catches Louise watching them. She hides, busying herself with her cart.

PETE
Give me that ball. And make some sort of plate here. Can't pitch without a plate.

Porkchop smiles and hands the ball to Pete.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN COURTYARD - LATER

Pete places the ball into Jack's hand.

PETE
Awright, now over the next ten pitches I want that fastball to really build. Bring it in as close to the knee, as hard and as straight as you can. I want to see if it naturally does anything on its own.

Pete stands behind Jack, watching. The First pitch, fast. Really fast. THWAP.

The second. The third. THWAP, THWAP.

Jack guides THE BALL... swinging it from underneath... over his shoulder... releasing out from his hand, twisting... in slow motion, towards a home plate made out of a few shuffleboard disks...

It SPEEDS UP and THWAP - right into Porkchop's glove.

PETE (CONT'D)
Good. Now, show me a curve.

Pete watches from behind Jack. First throw. Second throw, third throw. They don't look like curve balls.

PETE (CONT'D)
That's your curve?

JACK
What? It curved.

PETE
Yeah. It curved - a little on the horizontal. But a good right handed hitter'll pick that wrinkle up, wait a beat and slap it into right field even if its moving away. A curve's gotta be devious. Now, show me how you hold that.

Jack sticks out his hand, rotating his wrist in a slow motion demo of the way you should break a curve-ball.

PETE (CONT'D)
Not how y'throw it. Just how y'hold it.

Jack holds it. Pete wrestles his fingers off the ball.

PETE (CONT'D)
Relax. Looser. Looser. You see what I'm trying to do? Loosen your grip. You grab it too tight back here in the heel of your hand and you flatten it out.

Pete wraps his hand around the ball - looser this time - sticking his thumb between Jack's palm and the ball.

PETE (CONT'D)
Hold it like if you squeeze too hard it'll break and cut you. There you go.

Jack winds up. Throws. A REAL CURVE BALL - one that just catches the corner of the strike zone - the ball skipping out into the courtyard. Porkchop gives chase.

Jack's looks like a magician who has just made a quarter disappear and didn't know where it had gone.

JACK
Now that's devious.

Pete nods his approval. The men connect.

PETE
Yeah. Now all we gotta do is find someone who can catch it.

INT. CAFE - DAY

At a table: Motown, CASE, 19, a lanky left field stud and BIG STICKS, 18, a first-base meat head.

CASE
Marco pitches good, coach.

Porkchop sits in his usual seat - law books, a cup of coffee and the three players before him.

PORKCHOP
Marco pitches... Marco does not pitch well. He pitches average. He went 12 and 18 this year and blew his arm out twice. Remember the game against the Hurricanes? Remember that?

BIG STICKS
He's our boy.

PORKCHOP
I know he's Your Boy, Sticks. But do you wanna play grab ass with your friends or do you wanna win a tournament?

CASE
We don't need this guy Brown to win no
tournament. We're good.

PORKCHOP
Not that good.

CASE
Damn, coach...

PORKCHOP
Grandmas and Girlfriends, gentlemen... you
ask them and you're the best in the
world. But if you ask me: are we going
to win four in a row to take the tourney?
I don't think so. Maybe next year.

The players look at each other - it's obvious that they
planned this conversation before hand.

MOTOWN
If Marco doesn't pitch... we're done.
(off Porkchop's look)
The whole team. We walk.

Porkchop considers his options.

TEAM (O.S.)
One, two, three - burn red-hot Suns!

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - EVENING

As the team takes the field, Jack and Porkchop remain
with a few skinny teens outside the dugout.

JACK
You're benching me, Chop?

PORKCHOP
I need help coaching third.

Jack throws his mitt into the dugout.

PORKCHOP (CONT'D)
It's a team sport, Jack.

Jack looks over at the remaining players. They glare
back at him - acting tough, showing their dislike.

JACK
And I'm not on the team.

Porkchop turns away from Jack.

PORKCHOP
Just man the bag, huh?

INT. PETE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Pete sits alone, still UNSHAVEN, fiddling with his radio.

He can't tune anything in... just static. KNOCK KNOCK. Frustrated, Pete turns off the radio. Louise enters.

LOUISE

Pete?

PETE

You were right. Your boy's got an arm.

LOUISE

Pete, are you all right?

PETE

And... back in the day, he'da probably had a job in baseball. No question. He's eager, he throws strikes, he takes instructions. Even got a sense of humor.

LOUISE

He is something, isn't he?

PETE

Yeah. He woulda been... if he'da been born twenty years earlier or five years later. The old days are gone, Louise.

(off her look)

Back then they had a slew of farm teams all the way down to Class D. Not any more. And he's what now, 24? 25? He's too old.

LOUISE

Too old? Who are you talking about, him... or you? Couldn't you... couldn't you just call up some of your friends and tell him how good he is, ask him to give Jack Brown a chance. Just one chance?

PETE

Louise, listen to me. The business outgrew me, a long time ago. Or I outlived it. Nobody... nobody who could help Jack would know me from any other old man sticking my nose into their business. And it's a business. Scouts these days, they want 'em 18, 19 years old. It's a long term investment. These days, Jack's an old man.

LOUISE

But you could try. Even if... even if they said he was too old... at least you tried. The worst they can say is "no".

Cornered. He shakes his head. She touches his arm, pleading. He looks her in the eye.

PETE

Damn it, Louise. I only watched him throwing pitches out my window. I don't even know if he can play or not.

LOUISE

Well, there's only one way to find out.

She pulls the keys out of her purse with a JANGLE.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - EVENING

A base hit to left field. Case moves in leisurely to pick it up. The batter pushes full tilt to first. Jack notices from the dugout.

JACK

(to himself)

He's taking two! Two! Two!

The batter rounds first, arms pumping. Case realizes - too late. He grabs the ball, fumbles it just a fraction of a second, and... lobs it to the cutoff man.

The batter makes it to second. Jack rolls his eyes.

The next batter... a base hit to right field. Right Field grabs it, runner rounding third, throws...

JACK (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Home. Home.

But Big Sticks mistakenly cuts off the throw to the plate to make the out at first. The runner easily scores.

Jack looks over - Pete and Louise arriving in the stands. Zee runs up, grabbing the fence to stop himself.

ZEE (O.S.)

Jack! Jack! A scout's coming. There's a scout. He's coming to your game.

Porkchop and the BENCH-WARMERS turn to where Zee points - right at Pete.

ZEE (CONT'D)

Saw me and my friends play last week. Might take me up to middle leagues!

The Bench-Warmers scoff.

JACK

Middle Leagues, huh? That's great, Zee. You talk to that scout, you tell him to keep an eye on the dugout, huh?

ZEE

Dugout?

JACK
 (half to Porkchop)
 Yeah. Maybe he'll take me to the middle
 leagues too.

MONTAGE 1 - GAME 1

The Suns making a series of small mistakes IN THE FIELD:

Center Field hustling in, but the ball DROPPING SHORT for a base hit.

The short-stop, the brash 17 year old DEUCE, tossing it to third, but the runner slides under it - safe. Third quickly throws to first - too late there too.

Third base and Motown both charging for an out-of-bounds pop fly. They scare each other and both miss the ball.

Louise can't believe it. Pete simply watches - and eyes Jack, who slouches in the dugout, disengaged.

The Suns UP TO BAT, Jack coaching third:

Line drive to left field, Motown rounds first. Jack MOTIONS TO HOLD at second. The throw comes late, Motown reaches second... but he doesn't slide, and his momentum carries him off the bag by a step. Second tags him - out!

Big Sticks - strike three, but the ball gets away from the catcher. Jack MOTIONS - GO, GO! But Big Sticks does not. Catcher picks up the ball and tags him - out!

Runner on First and Marco on Second. Batter hits a grounder to short. Short flips it to second - out. Marco advances to third. Jack windmills to take home.

Second throws to first - batter slow to the base - out. First whips it home. Marco sees it coming, balks, and tries to head back to third. Jack can't believe it.

The throw, high. Catcher jumps and grabs it and throws to third. Jack motions Marco back home... but he runs back to third anyway and it tagged OUT for a triple play.

END MONTAGE 1

Scoreboard shows the Suns trailing 5-0 after 4 innings. Jack kicks the fence in anger.

PETE (O.S.)
 I thought you were a baseball player.

Jack looks up - Pete, alone... watching.

JACK
 Yeah, I thought so too. But they stuck me out here on third. You believe that?

PETE
Well... You don't have to touch a glove to
play the game, kid.

He walks away, letting his words sink in...

MONTAGE 2 - GAME 1

The Suns making adjustments IN THE FIELD:

Jack studies the batter and whispers to Porkchop.
Porkchop inches the outfield in 10 feet. The hit.
Right Field hustles in, just making the catch - out.

Man at first, Jack steps from the dugout, energized.

JACK
Awright! Out's at two! Out's at two!

A bunt out to the pitcher's mound. Marco snatches it up,
looks at one but throws to two - out. A quick throw to
first - safe... but just by a fraction of a second.

JACK (CONT'D)
Time!

Jack storms the mound - Porkchop close behind. On his
way, he motions for Big Sticks to join them from first.

In the stands, Louise and Pete watch a HEATED EXCHANGE on
the mound. Jack lays into Marco, pointing at first. Big
Sticks and Marco argue back. Porkchop in the middle.

LOUISE
What's all that? He got the out.

PETE
I'm not sure...

On the field, the argument moves OFF THE MOUND. Jack
dramatically schools Marco.

JACK
What the hell were you lookin' over at
first for? The play was at second?

MARCO
I don't have to take this.

Big Sticks grabs Marco and has a private word while
Porkchop leads Jack back to the dugout. Jack glares at
Marco the whole way.

UMPIRE
Play ball.

Big Sticks returns to first and A THUG steps up to the
plate. Marco continues to eye Jack in the dugout.

The Runner leads off first, taunting Marco with a KISS... Big Sticks TAGS HIM - the BALL STILL IN HIS GLOVE. The Ump is unsure, but...

UMPIRE (CONT'D)

You're out!

Pete and Louise chuckle between themselves. Porkchop and Jack slapping hands. Jack and Marco exchange a nod.

Now the Suns UP TO BAT again, Jack still coaching third:

Jack motions the batter to shift his feet. Pete notices... nods. And the kid knocks the ball right down the first base line for a base hit.

A double steal. Zee rubbing his hands in glee, Virginia (Zee's mother, who we will meet shortly) enjoying her son's excitement.

A long fly ball caught at the fence, but a runner scoring and another advancing to third.

A base hit knocking in another runner. The Suns catch back up. Visitors 6, Suns 5 - bottom of the ninth.

Deuce on second. Motown swings - CRACK! Deep to left field. Jack motions Deuce to hold... The ball, caught. Jack motions Deuce hold... but Deuce pushes, running full tilt to third.

The throw comes in. Jack motions to slide. The ball, the slide... in at the same time. Safe.

END MONTAGE 2

DEUCE gives Jack a shit-eating grin from third as Big Sticks steps up to bat.

JACK

What's your name, kid?

DUECE

Deuce. What's it to ya?

JACK

You're the tying run, Deuce. You screw this up, I need t'know whose ass to kick.

DUECE

Yeah, right. Sticks is bringing me in.

Deuce tries to laugh it off, but Jack isn't laughing. The pitch - WHIFF, THUD. Big Sticks takes a big strike.

JACK

He ever hit those? Those big power swings.

DUECE
Hell yeah. Sometimes.

JACK
Sometimes?

Jack WHISTLES and nods Big Sticks out of the Batter's Box. Big Sticks steps out and looks over, annoyed.

Jack gives him a signal. Sticks shakes him off. Jack repeats the signal. Sticks looks to Porkchop, who nods.

Big Sticks looks to the dugout. Motown shakes his head. Big Sticks steps back into the box.

JACK (CONT'D)
(to Deuce)
Lead off. Lead off. Get ready to run.

Deuce leads off. The pitcher, into his wind-up.

The pitch. The swing - WHIFF, THUD. Strike two.

JACK (CONT'D)
Time!

Jack stalks to the plate. Big Sticks moves to meet him.

JACK (CONT'D)
What the hell are you doing?

BIG STICKS
I can hit it. I bat .240, 26 RBIs.

JACK
Kid, you haven't hit a damn thing all day. I can see from back there, you got a tight hamstring and a crick in your neck. You've got no action on first for two innings, you're cold. So you got two choices: you can go against me, take another fat poke and strike out and lose the game; or you can take my stupid suggestion and lose the game. Either way, you're gunna lose. You know it and I know it. The only difference is who the team's gunna blame: me, or you.

The two men stare at each other.

UMPIRE (O.S.)
Play ball!

They separate, like fighters to their corners.

BACK AT THIRD - Jack returns.

DUECE
What'd he say?

JACK
 He said "whatever you do, don't slide"
 Said if you slide going across that
 plate, he's gunna take a bat t'yer face.

DUECE
 Sticks said that?

Duece looks at Big Sticks and sees him glaring back with an angry scowl. Duece nods, nervous.

DUECE (CONT'D)
 Right. No sliding.

Duece leads out.

JACK
 (out the corner of his mouth)
 Says he knows your sister.

Third base looks over at Jack, a scowl across his face.

JACK (CONT'D)
 My boy, here... says if he crosses that
 plate, he's gunna take your sister out
 for a home run.

Third's eyes widen. The wind-up...

JACK (CONT'D)
 Go get her, Deuce! Go!!

Duece breaks for the plate... And the pitch flies. Big Sticks squares up... bat down. TACK. A bunt...

Down the third base line. Catcher jumps up - mask off. Duece sprints to the ball, flying past it... Third baseman right behind him. Big Sticks sprints to first.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Go! Go go go GO!!! Go!! Go!!! Go!!!

Pete watches, understanding... impressed.

Third grabs the bunt. Catcher on the plate. Duece barreling down. Third throws home.

PORKCHOP & OTHERS
 Slide! Slide!

Duece does NOT slide. Instead, he puts his arms up block his face as he charges the catcher.

THUD. The ball hits him square in the back - right where the catcher's mitt would have been.

The ball drops into the dirt as Duece BOWLS OVER the catcher and scores the TYING RUN. The crowd ERUPTS.

JACK (O.S.)
Go! Go go go GO!!! Go!! Go!!! Go!!!

IN THE STANDS

Louise shakes Pete's arm with excitement.

LOUISE
Like he had eyes in the back of his head.

PETE
It ain't over yet.

ON THE FIELD

Jack windmills his arms like a madman. Sticks rounds first. The BALL LYING DEAD in the dirt next to home.

JACK (O.S.)
Go! Go go go!!!

Third rushes toward home. Catcher scrambles to the ball.

Jack windmills, windmills, windmills. Sticks runs to SECOND - eyes Jack - grits his teeth and rounds the bag.

Third sees Big Sticks rounding second, heading to third. Catcher pumps to second - too late. Readies to THIRD - nobody there! Left field rushes in to cover...

Sticks - like a locomotive heading to THIRD. Third Baseman sprints back - he might make it. Left Field still rushing in. All three converging on THIRD.

Catcher THROWS. Jack motions - DOWN! Pete on his feet.

JACK (CONT'D)
Be big! Be BIG!

The throw - high. Third leaps. Big Sticks slides - knocking Third's feet OUT FROM UNDER HIM. DUST everywhere. Louise grabs Pete's hand.

UMPIRE
Safe!

CROWD CHEERS. Louise jumps up, celebrating... but then she sees Pete still watching the game - she turns... It STILL AIN'T OVER!

JACK
Go! GO! GO!!!

Sticks looks over - the BALL BEYOND THE LEFT FIELDER who rushed in. Sticks springs to his feet and runs for home! Left Fielder sprints back, grabs the ball. Sticks hauls ass. The Catcher - ready. The THROW - perfect.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Head first! Slide! Slide! Down!

Sticks hits the dirt - the ball right behind him.
 Catcher grabs it, pulls it down... dust...

Umpire pulls off his mask. Stick's HAND ON THE PLATE
 between the Catcher's legs. Catcher's mitt pressed
 against Stick's back. A collective breath... and...

UMPIRE
 Safe!

The park ERUPTS! The Suns SWARM Sticks in celebration.

Then the Suns start to CLAP: CLAP CLAP CLAP. An obvious
 team ritual - the team CLAP CLAP CLAPS as they raise Big
 Sticks up over their heads.

Jack stands dejectedly at third, Big Sticks getting all
 the glory. Players milling onto the field to shake
 hands. No one says a word to Jack. He looks up - Louise
 waving to him from her seat. Pete steps beside Jack.

PETE
 Hell of a game, kid. Now that's what I
 call playing.

JACK
 Thanks. You should see me some time when
 I've got a glove.

PORKCHOP (O.S.)
 Suns, hustle up. Let's go.

Jack runs off to shake hands and join his team. Pete
 watches him disappear into the crowd.

PETE
 I just might, kid. I just might.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN COURTYARD - EVENING

Louise and Pete stroll romantically through the sunset.

PETE
 Wagner. Now there's one I woulda liked
 to have played behind.

LOUISE
 Him I never did see. My daddy always
 said he was the best through.

PETE
 And all they had then were those little
 bitty gloves... not like the baskets kids
 come up with now.

LOUISE
How about in the outfield? Who'd you
like to have played alongside of?

PETE
Outfield? Clemente. But I wouldn't have
been any good playin'... cuz I woulda
been watching him instead of the game.

From the Community Center porch, the women watch Pete and
Louise. They passing knowing glances between themselves.

LOUISE
Clemente? Well, I'll be. Always
imagined Willie Mays was the player
players liked to watch most.

PETE
Not me. Clemente. No doubt about it.

EXT. PETE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Pete turns to Louise, stepping to his door.

PETE
Would you like to come in?

LOUISE
Thank you, hun. But... I shouldn't.

PETE
Why not?

She looks around.

LOUISE
People would talk.

PETE
Let 'em talk. That's all we're doing.

She nods, unsure.

LOUISE
What about DiMaggio? Imagine playing
along side DiMaggio? People said in his
whole career they never saw him miss a
cut-off man or throw to the wrong base.

He touches her shoulder.

PETE
Louise?

LOUISE
What, hun?

PETE
Thank you.

She lays her hand on his. An awkward moment.

LOUISE
For what?

PETE
For not asking me what I thought... about
the game... about Jack.

LOUISE
How could I? You didn't even see him
play.

They stand face-to-face. She reaches her hand to his
bristled cheek and rubs his whiskers.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
And besides, who ever heard of a scout
running around like a boxcar hobo. When
you're serious... I'll know.

She leans in and gently KISSES him.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
You know, I heard that once... just one
time old Joe DiMaggio tried to stretch a
single into a double and got thrown out.
But then, later, the umpire admitted he'd
blown the call.

PETE
Yep. Years later.

LOUISE
Of course it was years later, but he did.
(a beat)
Good night, Pete.

PETE
Good night, Louise.

She turns and walks away. He watches her go...

LOUISE
You know... Since they won, Jack's team's
playing again tomorrow.

He brightens. Smiles.

PETE
I'd love to.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - EVENING

Jack on the mound with half a bucket of balls - Zee at
the plate with the other half behind him on the ground.

JACK
Eye on the ball. Eye on the ball.

ZEE
But how'd you know where he was gunna throw it?

JACK
Cuz if he slides, that's where you want it - waist high, in the pocket. Ready?

Zee nods. Jack pitches an 8-year-old's pitch. WIFF.
Zee misses completely.

JACK (CONT'D)
You're thinking too hard. Watch the ball. Eye. On. The. Ball.

ZEE
But how's he know he's gunna slide.

JACK
Cuz if the catcher's on the plate, you wanna slide to get under him. Ready?

Zee nods. Jack pitches. WIFF.

ZEE
But how's he know the catcher's gunna be on the plate?

JACK
Cuz the catcher needs to block the plate and make the play. All right? Ready?

Zee has no intention of batting until he figures it out.

ZEE
But how's the catcher know he needs to block the plate to make the play?

Jack steps off the mound and approaches Zee.

AT THE PLATE, Jack slowly and methodically re-adjusts Zee around the plate as he explains... spreads his feet at the plate, bat up off the shoulder, chin to the mound...

JACK
Cuz a team's like a family, Zee. They're there for each other. Feet solid. Third baseman covers third, so he's at third, right? Catcher needs to be at home, so he's at home.

ZEE
Like in the army.

ZEE
Throw it again.

Jack looks at the kid - determined. Angry almost. Impressed, Jack grabs another ball from the bucket.

Zee nods. Jack pitches. Zee connects. TINK. Out over second base, a hop into the outfield.

JACK
Nice hit, Zee. Now listen to your---

ZEE
Harder.

Jack nods. He looks at the kid... and understands. He looks over at Virginia... gives her a look. She nods.

Jack looks back at the kid - rock solid, determined.

Jack rifles it in - not as hard as he could, but faster than anything Zee's ever seen. CRACK. The ball flies into the outfield... bouncing over the right-field fence.

Jack turns back to the plate - Zee ready for the next pitch. Zee cracks a devious smile and Jack smiles back. Jack rifles another... CRACK.

And another... CRACK. Virginia leans back against the fence, resigned... but somehow pleased as well.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

THE TEAM - all except Jack - fills booth after booth. Plates of hamburgers and fries, mostly eaten. Milk shakes. Apple pie. Porkchop stands on a chair.

PORKCHOP
We drew home field advantage again tomorrow and we're going to start with the same line-up. Hurricanes're tough. Tougher than today. They hit harder, run faster and they're tighter in the field. Go home and get some rest - all of you. Marcos, ice down that shoulder. We don't need a repeat of last month. Deuce, you go home and go to bed. Alone.

The guys LAUGH. Deuce throws his arm around his GIRL. Marco rubs his arm, concern creeping across his face.

PORKCHOP (CONT'D)
If we win tomorrow, we're in the play-offs. Let's focus. We play to win, so let's play with all we've got. Ready?

TEAM
One, two, three: Burn red-hot Suns!

EXT. EPPIS PARK - NIGHT

Marco and Case walk through the park - the lights still shining on the field. A lone figure on the mound.

ON THE FIELD - Jack on the mound with a bucket of balls.

He throws one down the pipe. ZIP. Across the plate... and into the fence. KA-TING. He picks up another.

Jack winds up and... ZIP. KA-TING. And another... ZIP. KA-TING. And another... ZIP. KA-TING.

CASE

Believe that? Missed the team meeting.
And for what? Pitching to ghosts.

Jack - complete focus. ZIP. KA-TING. ZIP. KA-TING. Every one a strike. Every one an impressive pitch.

MARCO

(sarcastic)
Yeah. What was he thinking?

Marco leans into the fence. Jack rifles it down the pipe. Marco watches him carefully.

INT. STEAK HOUSE RESTAURANT, 1977 - NIGHT

BYRON JONES - a lanky kid at 20, wearing his father's suit - signs a contract and slides it across the table.

Young Pete Estey shakes his hand with a proud smile.

PETE

Congratulations, Byron. How you gunna spend that bonus?

BYRON

It's already spent. And she'll never even see it coming!

INT. SMALL APARTMENT, 1977 - NIGHT

A woman, early 20s - SHAUNTAY - stands in the bedroom, surrounded by NEW DRESSES TORN TO SHREDS. An overturned suitcase on the ground. Tears streak her face.

She hears A CAR DOOR SLAM.

APARTMENT STAIRWAY

Byron climbs the stairs - a pep in his step. He reaches into his pocket, pulling out keys and a SMALL PACKAGE.

SMALL APARTMENT

Byron unlocks the door and steps inside.

BYRON
Baby, close your eyes.

SHAUNTAY
I ain't closing my eyes no more!

She points a gun at Byron and BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! An ENGAGEMENT RING falls to the floor, then Byron - DEAD.

INT. PETE'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM - MORNING

Pete abruptly opens his eyes and stares into the mirror, shaking it off.

He rubs his whiskers... gently, pensively... Then, he begins to shave.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, STANDS - DAY

The stands start to fill up - MORE PEOPLE than yesterday. People serious about their team.

IN THE PARKING LOT

Lot of cars, some tailgating. Marcos walks by on foot.

HURRICANE 1 (O.S.)
Hey, look! It's our favorite pitcher!

A bunch of Hurricanes unload gear from the back of their TEAM VAN. They're big guys - older, rougher.

HURRICANE 2
I'll take another three homers on my stat sheet.

HURRICANE 3
And walk in four like last time, huh!

They all CRACK UP. Marco stops and turns to them, but Motown appears and pulls him away.

MOTOWN
Hey, don't listen to them. That was almost a whole season ago.

MARCO
They blew us outta the water. Twenty-three runs.

MOTOWN
So what? You had a bad game. You feel good today, right?

Marco looks back - he doesn't look too sure of himself.
Jack rolls in on his motorcycle.

MARCO
Yeah. Yeah, sure.

ON THE FIELD

The HURRICANES warm up - a little bit bigger, a little bit better than the previous team.

A BEEFY PITCHER on the mound. QUICK PLAYERS in the diamond. LONG THROWS from the outfield.

IN THE DUGOUT - Duece smirks, spits.

DUECE
Look at those stands, man! Damn. Half the town's here. And look at them. Chumps. Think they're tough. They ain't nuthin. We'll take 'em this time. Right, big M? No sweat, right?

Marco nods... staring at the Hurricanes. Jack lines up the bats, gives Marco a nudge.

JACK
You okay?
(touches his chest)
Game's in here. Not out there.

PORKCHOP (O.S.)
All right, listen up!

Marco and Jack move in as the team huddles up.

PORKCHOP (CONT'D)
Marco?! How's the shoulder feel? Feel good? Strong nine?

Marco stretches... winces.

MARCO
I don't know, coach. I think I slept on it wrong or something. I got this pinch. I can't. I can't follow through.

Motown pulls back his mask: what?! The team looks around as if the rug had been pulled out from under them.

PORKCHOP
You sure?! Maybe a little warm up...

MARCO
I don't know, coach. It just don't feel right. Maybe soldier boy can step up.

The team looks at Jack, unsure. Marco throws him a glove.

PORKCHOP
Anybody have a problem with that?

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Jack on the mound. A BEEFY BATTER at the plate. All eye balls on Jack. Motown gives him the signal.

Straight down the pipe. WOOMP - right into the mitt.

Motown gives the signal. Jack gives the pitch. WOOMP!

Another signal. Another pitch. WOOMP!

UMPIRE
Strike three! Batter's out!

The team looks pleased. Porkchop raises an eyebrow.

IN THE DUGOUT - Marco grins. Behind him, Zee CHEERING.

IN THE STANDS - Louise beams and grabs Pete's arm.

LOUISE
Just like his father.

PETE
We'll see, Louise. Lots of fresh pitchers start out strong.

ON THE FIELD

BATTER #2: WOOMP! WOOMP! WOOMP!

UMPIRE
Strike three! Batter's out!

BATTER #3: WOOMP! WOOMP! WOOMP!

UMPIRE (CONT'D)
Strike three! Batter's out!

Big Sticks on first, turns to Porkchop.

BIG STICKS
He ain't bad.

The Suns run off the field, Motown jogging up to Jack.

MOTOWN
Nice throws.

Jack basks in the compliment. Porkchop watches his friend enter the dugout, a satisfied look on his face.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - LATER

The HURRICANES - just as strong.

Deuce - 1, 2, 3 strikes... Motown - 1, 2, 3 strikes...

Big Sticks - 1, 2, 3 strikes... goes down swinging.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - LATER

Top of the third. Score tied 0-0. Two outs, nobody on.
Jack throws a devious curve. The batter misses by a mile.

UMPIRE

Stee-ri-ke three. Batter's out.

Jack gives a satisfied nod. He struts a little on the mound, looking over his team.

IN THE DUGOUT, Porkchop watches.

PORKCHOP

(to himself)

Easy Jack. Still got a long way to go.

ON THE FIELD - next batter steps to the plate.

Motown gives the signal... but Jack shakes him off.
Motown gives another signal... but Jack shakes him off.
Motown flips him the bird. Jack sneers and fires. WHAM!

The ball soars toward a hole in the outfield. Case races for it. Jack turns, furious.

JACK

Dig! Dig dig DIG DIG DIG!! Get there!

Case makes a tremendous leap and grabs the ball just inches from the grass. Jack breathes a sigh of relief as he and the team head for the dugout.

Big Sticks glares at Jack when he turns his back on Case.

BIG STICKS

Good catch, Case! Way to be there!

IN THE STANDS, Louise looks to Pete for approval.

LOUISE

Not bad, huh? No hitter after three.

PETE

He can pitch all right. Question is: has he got anything to back up that arm?

ON THE FIELD - Jack steps out of the on-deck circle - big as life, two bats slung on his shoulder. He whips them around like he's trying on neck ties... and tosses one.

Jack squares himself to the plate... feet not too far apart... He steps out to spit, and steps back in again.

The PITCHER rears back out of his stretch and skims a fastball over the plate. Jack lets it go by.

He doesn't step out. He stands loose and still at the plate... eyeballing the pitcher and waiting.

IN THE STANDS - Pete leans in. He puts a hand to his forehead and SQUINTS. He sees SOMETHING -- something in this kid... in the details... his fingers gripping the bat, his eyes focused on the mound, his elbow just right.

IN THE DUGOUT - Motown nudges Marco toward the stands.

MOTOWN

That scout? He sure looks a whole lot scoutier today, don't he.

Marco looks out at Jack... then back to Pete and Louise.

MARCO

That's a scout? For real? No wonder Captain America's a one man band.

The Pitcher rolls into his stretch and throws another fastball, letter-high... Jack SLAMS it out of the park.

THE STANDS - Louise stands and CHEERS. The fans ERUPT.

LOUISE

Ever see a pitcher hit like that before?!

Pete gives her a look... then turns back, because he can't stop watching Jack.

PETE

You know about this?

LOUISE

Know about what?

ON THE FIELD - Jack runs the bases with purpose.

PETE

Don't give me that. You've seen Jackie Robinson hit. DiMaggio, Mays... Hell, you probably even seen Josh Gibson.

Louise just keeps smiling, Jack rounding third.

LOUISE

Pete, honey... I saw Satchel Paige. But I don't know what you're---

PETE
 Sure but we're not talkin about pitchers
 now, are we? We're talkin about hitters.

Jack crosses home. Louise takes Pete by the hands.

LOUISE
 He is a hitter, isn't he?!

PETE
 He could be. He definitely... he
 definitely could be.
 (off her look)
 What else can this kid do?

MONTAGE

Jack line drives a curve-ball into center field for a
 stand up double.

He knocks another over the left field fence with two on.

On the mound, he pitches solidly - signalling the players
 to shift left for one batter, or shift right for another...

Jack strikes out a batter... and another...

Motown runs to catch a pop up but Jack beats him to it.
 Motown gives him a hard look for stealing his thunder.

Jack hits a grounder to third... and beats it to first.
 He steals second. Zee CHEERS from the stands.

Jack hits a triple off the fence with two men on.

Jack and Motown race for a bunt - Jack grabbing it with a
 bare handed pick up and, without looking, rotates 180 in
 the air, throwing it to first... Ending the game.

END MONTAGE

Jack sits in the dirt. The Suns start to CLAP. A smile
 creeps across Jack's face. The Suns: CLAP CLAP CLAP.

Jack picks himself up and... watches the team mob the
 dugout, raising Porkchop up over their heads.

Jack watches, stupefied.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, DUGOUT - EVENING

Jack throws bats into a sack. Louise leads Pete up to
 the fence.

LOUISE
 Your father would be so proud of you.

JACK
Thanks gramms. Finally got one.

LOUISE
Army sure brought those muscles out. You look like you could---

JACK
How'd I look, sir?

PETE
Hell of a game, if that's what you mean.

LOUISE
He said you play like Satchel Paige.

Pete shoots her a look.

JACK
Paige, huh? Respect. I can see the similarities. Threw the first no-hitter in the Negro Leagues. You know that?

PETE
Yeah. Also died of a heart attack in the middle of a black-out. You know that?

JACK
No, sir. I didn't.
(looks to Louise)
So, what's next?

PETE
What's next is: I go home and have dinner. Maybe listen to a ball game on the radio and go to sleep. And by the looks of it, you have a party to go to with your team. Have a good night.

Pete turns to go, Louise trapped between them.

LOUISE
Pete...

PETE
What?

She nods his attention back to a bewildered Jack.

JACK
Sir. That was a no-hitter and five runs on top of that. Best game of my life, and you tell me "have a good night"?

PETE
I don't follow you.

JACK
I thought you were a scout.

Pete gives Louise a slow, sideways glance and then focuses back on Jack.

PETE
Well you thought wrong.

Jack, flabbergasted... He shoots Louise a look and she actually staggers back.

LOUISE
Oh, my. Pete, honey...

Pete turns and sees Louise losing her balance. He quickly reaches out and steadies her. Jack does nothing.

PETE
What is it?

LOUISE
My legs, I... I'm all right, just... just help me to the car is all.

Pete helps her along, Louise looking back sheepishly. Jack just shakes his head and returns to the bat bag.

ZEE (O.S.)
Jack! Jack!

Zee and TWO OF HIS BUDDIES run up with Virginia in tow.

ZEE (CONT'D)
See? Toldja I knew him!

RONNIE SMITH
No hitter. Cool. Can I have your autograph?

JACK
Sure. You gotta pen?

The boys search. Virginia hands one over with a smile.

JACK (CONT'D)
Thanks.

Jack, distracted by his disappointment with Pete and the flirtatious looks of Virginia, barely listens to Zee.

ZEE
Jack! Hey Jack! Guess what! I struck the guy out with two on in the bottom of the ninth and then, but... we made it! We're gunna play in the tournament!

Jack gives Virginia a flirtatious smile, but she demurs - focusing her attention back on Zee.

JACK
That's... That's great, champ.

Jack smiles and nods. He signs his autograph for Smith.

PETE

You know... I knew a kid once... Stuey Smalls. Big kid. Rocket for an arm. Even got him a bonus to sign, and that's when they weren't too keen on giving those out. Reminds me a lot of Jack, had that... special something.

He looks for her reaction, but she sits back in darkness.

PETE (CONT'D)

Well... Stuey used that bonus to buy himself a car. Took it out the same day he bought it and he sure wrecked it up good. Crushed both his legs like light bulb glass. Stuey never played again.

She reaches out and touches his arm.

PETE (CONT'D)

I ran into him, a long time ago. Saw him, he was coaching ball at the high school where I'd found him years before. He was up around three hundred pounds. And mad as hell at the world. Smoked three packs a day, had diabetes, drank. You could smell it in his sweat. He was a mess... But he didn't even care.

(turning to her)

What would Jack do, you think? In a situation like that? Ruined. Shattered. Could never play ball again. Ever think... You ever think about that?

Louise watches him, startled.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT

IN THE STANDS - Jack dejectedly twirling Virginia's pen.

Porkchop sits next to him sorting the last of the gear.

JACK

You know... Over there, the war, all I could think about was the perfect game... practice it, picture it... and then, here it is. I had it. And now - poof - it's gone. No one cares.

PORKCHOP

What do you mean? Whole damn town cares. They'll be talking about that game for ten years. Best ball game that's been played here in a long, long time.

JACK

The team sure didn't think so.

PORKCHOP

Well, you didn't let 'em play.

The men sit in silence.

JACK

You know, when we were in second grade, my old man used to stand in the back yard pitching three bucketsa balls at a time.

PORKCHOP

Yeah? Why three?

JACK

Twenty-seven balls in a bucket. Three bucketsa strikes would be a perfect game. Told me if he could pitch a perfect game and be a good father, then he could die happy. Died the next year, and he musta been one sad son of a bitch.

PORKCHOP

Never made it, huh?

JACK

Nope. Neither one.

PORKCHOP

Oh, come on Jack---

JACK

My old man was gone eight months a year playing ball, and when he was back... he was out there with the buckets. Never even saw me play. Not one game.

PORKCHOP

Yeah but your gramms came, Jack. Every week. More than anybody else.

JACK

Grandmas and girlfriends?

PORKCHOP

Well if that's what you want, you gotta let go of us here. This town... There's no one even in your league, Jack. Get outta here. Go strive. Go be, man. Go live those dreams of greatness some where else cuz they can't come alive here.

JACK

Dreams? What dreams?

PORKCHOP

I don't know Jack, you tell me. What the hell did you dream about over there, pitching all those buckets of balls?

Jack accidentally drops the pen into the dirt. He picks it up and blows off the dust. On it: "Virginia's Home Fitness, 1234 Main Street, (123) 456-7890".

EXT. LOUISE'S HOME, FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Pete and Louise sit on the swing, bathed in moonlight.

LOUISE
Pete, now I'm not fool enough to believe everybody you signed got cancer, wrecked his car or got shot...

PETE
No... Just... Just the great ones. I didn't find 'em too often - dozen in all - but when I did... not one of em... not a damn one ever got a chance to show anyone how great they really were.

LOUISE
And you're worried that Jack Brown might be un-lucky number thirteen? Is that it?

PETE
I know it.

He takes her hand.

PETE (CONT'D)
Louise, everyone I ever cared about... they're gone. All of 'em.

LOUISE
I'm still here.

PETE
I know. And I'm scared as hell I'm gunna lose you too.

They look at each other... And then... He leans over and kisses her. Soft. Loving.

LOUISE
I'm still here.

She kisses him back.

EXT. ZEE'S HOUSE - EVENING

A quaint ranch house in a small neighborhood. Jack rides up in pressed slacks and a collared shirt.

He knocks on the door and Zee answers. He studies Jack's attire and grins. Jack holds out the PEN.

JACK
Is your mom here? I forgot... I forgot to give this back to her and---

ZEE
You're gunna ask my mom out, aren't you?

JACK
No, I'm not.

Zee stares at Jack. Jack blushes - caught. He looks inside, trying to see if Virginia is nearby.

ZEE
(shouting O.S.)
Mom! Jack wants to know if you'll go out with him! He's all dressed up!

INT. ZEE'S HOUSE, LAUNDRY ROOM - SAME

Virginia folds laundry - Zee's baseball uniform in hand. She smiles a satisfied smile.

VIRGINIA
(yelling back)
Tell him I'll think about it.

EXT. ZEE'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - SAME

Jack can take a hint. He shrugs, turns to go.

ZEE
She says pick her up at seven. Take her for pizza at Gigis... and invite her son.

Jack turns back around... he can see the look on Zee's face - ignored, somewhat jealous. Jack comes around.

JACK
Good idea.
(kneels down)
Hey Zee. You wanna go get pizza with me at Gigi's some night this week?

ZEE
Yeah. After the tournament?

JACK
Sure. After the tournament. And bring your mom, huh? If you want to.

He tucks the pen back into his pocket.

INT. LOUISE'S HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Louise cooks supper. Jack at the table in a baseball uniform talking with Pete, who wears his old sports coat.

PETE
 I can make a call and recommend you, Jack. What that means is that somebody else will be down here to look you over. Come watch a game or two. You'll hit okay no matter who's watching, so that's no particular risk.

Jack peaks back at Louise, who smiles reassuringly.

PETE (CONT'D)
 The only problem with that is... well, I don't know when they'll get around to sendin' someone down here. Or what'll happen 'tween now and then... A sprained ankle? The flu? Could be anything.

Jack looks discouraged.

PETE (CONT'D)
 The other way we can do it is this...

Pete slides a CONTRACT and PEN across the table.

Jack picks up the pen and looks to Louise. She nods. Jack signs the contract and...

Louise grabs her throat - CHOKING. She falls to her knees. The men struggle to help, but she COLLAPSES.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. LOUISE'S HOME, LOUISE'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Pete wakes up. Terrified. He looks over: Louise sleeping soundly, beautifully. They are in bed together.

The room is quiet, soft, feminine.

Pete climbs quietly out of bed in his boxers and into...

LOUISE'S BATHROOM

Pete gets a drink of water. He looks at himself in the mirror with a post-sex smile. His hair is a mess.

He tries to push it down, to no avail. He open the medicine cabinet looking for a brush.

IN THE CABINET - rows of pills. Pete takes a bottle: LOUISE'S NAME. Another and another - all with HER NAME.

Suddenly, he looks up... Louise standing in the door.

LOUISE
 Aneurysms. They run in the family. My son.

(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

He died when he was twenty-seven but...
don't worry. It's like anything. I just
have to be careful is all.

BACK IN BED

Louise cuddles up next to Pete.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

You know, when my son died, all I wanted
to do was follow right behind him. But
he made me promise. Before he died, I
promised him I'd see Jack Brown through.
That I'd... give him a shot to be happy.
That's all. And that's been my only
dream all these years. And then I met
you... and now I have two dreams.

Pete stares off to her dresser where an old photo of a
BASEBALL PLAYER sits proudly. He lays there, thinking.

INT. LOUISE'S HOME, JACK'S OLD ROOM - NIGHT

Pete looks around the room -- all of the trophies, all of
the baseball memorabilia, all of the dreams.

He explores the room, the memories, as if they were his
own. An old baseball mitt. Photographs of games.
Baseball cards and programs. Torn tickets, an old bat.

He pulls four YEARBOOKS from the shelves, takes them to
the desk. He opens them, thumbing through...

He finds the BASEBALL PAGES - pictures of YOUNG JACK next
to GAME STATS. Pete takes a piece of YELLOW LEGAL PAPER
from the desk and starts to COPY THE STATS.

INT. LOUISE'S HOME, KITCHEN - MORNING

Pete, in a bathrobe, holds a worn business card in one
hand, twisting the phone cord with the other.

PETE

Hi. Emmett? How are you? It's Pete..
Pete Estey.

FLANAGAN (FILTERED)

Jesus, Pete Estey, it's been awhile.
What can I do for you, bub?

PETE

I saw a kid play ball last night, and... I
thought you might be interested in him.

FLANAGAN (FILTERED)

Really? Hmmm. I didn't realize you were
still in the game, Pete.

PETE
Don't worry Emmett. You don't have to put me on the payroll or nothing. Just passing a tip on, is all.

FLANAGAN (FILTERED)
Okay, well... Sure. What's his name? What school? I'll pull up his file.

PETE
Name's Jack Brown, but don't bother. Kid hasn't played any organized ball 'cept a few pick-up games here and---

FLANAGAN (FILTERED)
Another ghost, huh? But you always knew where to find them, didn't you? Musta got your hands on a young one, huh?

PETE
He's twenty-four Emmett, but he's got something in the wrist like you---

FLANAGAN (FILTERED)
Twenty-four?! Jesus, put him in a retirement home. I'll pass.

PETE
Yeah, I know, but he beats the hell outta the ball if he gets half the chance.

FLANAGAN (FILTERED)
Are you deaf, Pete? He's too old. Pass. Put him out to pasture.

PETE
Emmett.

FLANAGAN
Yeah, Pete?

PETE
Your daddy ever tell you about The Stillness? Ever hear him talk about that? Cuz we talked about it often.
(silence)
It's a sign. You know how your daddy was. When I was prospectin' for him back in the day, he said that was the juju. Didn't matter what strikes the kid had against him, if he had The Stillness---

FLANAGAN (FILTERED)
Then all bets were off, you could teach him the rest.

PETE
As long as he could back it up.

FLANAGAN
Well? Can he?

PETE
 He's there, Emmett. 100%. And he's smart as hell. You know, I saw him eyeball a double play two swings before---

FLANAGAN (FILTERED)
 All right, Pete. All right. Tell you what. You can write up a standard report on this guy and I'll... I'll have someone check him out, okay? What's your e-mail? I'll have my secretary zap you the form.

PETE
 E-mail, huh? My uh... my e-mail's not working too good right now. Can you uh... can you send it to me... in an envelope?

FLANAGAN (FILTERED)
 No can do. Too slow. Electronic or in the flesh these days. No exceptions.

PETE
 But... what about the kid?

FLANAGAN
 Electronic or in the flesh, Pete. Check out the web site, you can send the kid to a recruiting camp. All right? It was nice talking to you, drop by some time if you're in the neighborhood. I gotta run.

Pete stands alone in the kitchen, defeated.

He takes a DEEP BREATH... and then re-dials the phone.

PETE
 Yes. I need a cab.

INT. PETE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Pete looks around the room - nothing out of place, the picture of he and his wife staring back at him from the shelf... his footlocker.

He reaches into the footlocker and tenderly pulls out a FOLDED MILITARY FLAG... resting it on the bed.

He returns to the trunk, and pulls out a LONG BOX. Beneath it - HIS OLD SPORTS COAT. He pulls out the sports coat and puts his wife's picture into the trunk.

Unsure for a moment... Pete decides that this is the right thing to do. He puts on the sports coat, throwing the LONG BOX under his arm as he heads for the door.

INT. SPORTING ICON, INC. - MOMENTS LATER

A BEEFY OWNER sits behind a counter -- surrounded with sports collectables. Pete enters with the LONG BOX.

He slides the box to the owner, who opens it. Inside - a signed BASEBALL BAT.

PETE

From the World Series, 1949. It's the one DiMaggio used to hit his homer in Game Five - signed by the Yankees.

The Owner lets out a LONG WHISTLE - then catches himself and tries to act unimpressed.

INT. AUTO SHOP - DAY

Jack, up to his elbows in grease, works on a motorcycle engine. Tinny MUSIC plays over the NOISE of a large FAN, an AIR COMPRESSOR, and ENGINE.

Through a bay window, Jack sees Pete talking with his BOSS in the office. They chat, friendly. Pete counts out some MONEY and the Boss slips it into his pocket.

Pete walks into the garage. Jack stops working.

PETE

Your boss is giving you the next two days off - paid.

JACK

Yeah? Why's that?

PETE

Cuz we're going to DC to meet some people... Bring your mitt.

Pete throws a plane ticket onto the seat of the bike.

EXT. AIRPLANE - DAY

A jet takes off from Florida.

PETE (O.S.)

When I introduce you, give a firm hand shake. Firm, but not too strong. You want him to sense your strength, not feel it. And I answer the questions. He asks a question, you look at me. Understand?

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Pete and Jack sit side by side in FIRST CLASS - Jack in a nice shirt and slacks, Pete in his sports coat. Louise sits in front of them, in a summer dress, listening in.

JACK

Yes, sir. Sure. I understand.

PETE

What we want is for him to see you on the field. "Yes, sir. No, sir." And that's it. I want to get you on the field, see if we can't get you in to swing at a few.

JACK

What about my devious curve?

PETE

Jack. On this trip, you don't even know how to pitch. You're a hitter, get it?

JACK

But, if I'm just a hitter---

Louise turns in her seat.

LOUISE

No "Buts" about it, Jack Brown. You take a page outta Mr. Pete Estey's play book and do what you're told.

Jack sits back in his seat.

PETE

Look, Jack. You're gunna be surrounded by players. By real players. And you've gotta rise above. You've gotta rise above enough that you can be seen... and recognized for what you can be...

JACK

And what's that?

PETE

An honest-to-god baseball player that they'd be foolish to let play for someone else. This is your day to do that.

JACK

(with a wink)
I'm already a player.

Jack cracks a mischievous grin - but all he faces are the stares of Pete and Louise. His grin fades.

JACK (CONT'D)

All right. I'm a hitter.

INT. NATIONALS CLUB OFFICE, RECEPTION AREA - DAY

New carpet. New furniture. A RECEPTIONIST who looks like a model. Pete stands at her desk.

RECEPTIONIST
 Nationals, can I help you? Hold please.
 Nationals, can I help you? Hold please.
 Yes, sir?

PETE
 Pete Estey. Here to see Mr. Flanagan.

Jack stares out through a WALL OF GLASS... down to the STADIUM BELOW -- bright green and lit like a movie set.

He watches ONE PLAYER out in the field taking hits - catching fly balls, throwing them in. Over and over. Moving easily on the perfect field, making perfect plays.

Pete walks up beside Jack.

JACK
 (whispering)
 Thought you said the whole team would be here, I'd get out there with the whole---

PETE
 (faltering)
 They should be... They---

Louise studies photos of the owners on the wall - the last being ED FLANAGAN and EMMETT FLANAGAN. Like a tourist, she takes a PICTURE with a DISPOSABLE CAMERA.

JACK
 Aren't they playing a double header in Chicago?

PETE
 I... Are they?

SAMANTHA GREENHART -- 40s, in a dark suit -- walks up from a deep hallway, one EYE-BROW JUMPING like someone was pulling on it with a string.

SAMANTHA
 Mr. Estey. Mr. Flanagan isn't here. Did you have an appointment?

Jack turns from Pete to his shoes, embarrassed.

PETE
 Yeah. I called him the other day. From Florida. I've got this kid---

SAMANTHA

Well, if you'd just schedule a time with Laura, here... I'm sure Mr. Flanagan would be glad to see you some time next week.

PETE

Next week? No. See, I used to work for his father and---

SAMANTHA

Sir, Mr. Flanagan is out of the office today, and he left no indication that he was expecting you. So...

PETE

I'm sorry, Jack... Come on. Let's go.

Jack looks forlornly back at the field.

JACK

Where're we going?

PETE

Home.

Down the hallway, a door opens and three Assistants bustle out of a meeting. As the door closes, Louise sees Flanagan sitting in his office at his desk...

LOUISE

No. We're not going anywhere. Miss, do you know who you're talking to here?

PETE

Louise. There's no point.

LOUISE

Oh, there's a point, all right. The point's called: "Common Courtesy".

(to Samantha)

This here is Mr. Pete Estey and he gave this ball club some of the best years of his life. I say Some because he's still got a lot of good ones left to give...

SAMANTHA

Have a nice afternoon.

Samantha turns to go, but Louise grabs her by the sleeve.

LOUISE

Don't you turn your back on us.

SAMANTHA

Miss, let go of me. I don't want to have to call security.

Samantha gives the Receptionist a look. The Receptionist presses a button on her PHONE.

PETE
No. Louise... This was a bad idea.

LOUISE
Bad idea or good, we're here now.
(turning to Samantha)
And when your Mr. Flanagan finds out that
Mr. Pete Estey was here with Jack Brown
and that you sent them back to Florida
without so much as a "how do you do"...

Jack watches his grandmother with a tinge of pride.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Well, that'll be your mistake. And
you'll be working little league because
Jack Brown's more of a player on a bad
day than half this ball club. Now what
do you have to say about that?

Samantha... thinking. A DOOR OPENS.

SAMANTHA
Lou? Get rid of these people. Now!

LOU RUCKER - Security Guard, 50s, big white guy with
fists like two Christmas hams - stands in the door.

INT. NATIONALS STADIUM, CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Rucker march Louise, Jack and Pete down a long corridor.
Serious. Silent. A look of concern on Louise's face.

Pete SNICKERS. Louise shoots him a look - shut up. Pete
tries to be serious, but can't. He SNICKERS again.

LOUISE
Hush. We're in trouble enough.

Pete straightens up. Then another SNICKER - but from a
different direction. Louise looks: Rucker SNICKERS.

RUCKER
(imitating)
Get rid of these people. Now!

Pete and Rucker stop walking, exploding in LAUGHTER.

RUCKER (CONT'D)
Aw, shit. Pete. How the hell are you?

PETE
I'm good, Lou. Real good. Jack, Louise...
this here's Lou Rucker... a damn good ball
player back in the day.

RUCKER
You would know. Old Pete signed me to my
first contract.

RUCKER (CONT'D)
 Hey, Pete. Come on, I can show you
 around and all, but I got no business...

But Pete's not listening. He points to the man hitting
 balls off in the distance.

PETE
 Is that Cappy? Cappy Haynes? Hey, Cappy!

Pete marches out onto the field, waving Jack to follow.
 Louise just watches and shakes her head in amazement.

RUCKER
 Dammit, I forgot how stubborn he was.

LOUISE
 (sarcastic)
 Was?

INT. NATIONALS STADIUM, OUTFIELD - DAY

Pete reaches CAPPY HAYNES - barrel chested African
 American in his early-50s - with Jack in tow.

CAPPY
 I'll be damned. I thought you gave it
 up. Honest to God, I really did.

They lock eyes - angry eyes. Pete covers it.

PETE
 Cappy. How are ya? Cappy, this here's
 Jack Brown. Jack, Cappy Haynes.

JACK
 Hello, sir.

Jack reaches out a hand to shake but Cappy ignores it and
 returns to hitting balls out into the field.

PETE
 Jack's a frienda mine. How'd you like to
 hit him a few grounders, see what he can
 do on the turf?

CAPPY
 'A frienda yours...' Shit. You ain't got
 no friends.

PETE
 Jesus, Cappy. Just hit him some
 grounders. Huh? What's it gunna hurt?

CAPPY
 (serious)
 It could hurt plenty. He know that?

Jack doesn't understand. He looks between the two men.

PETE
That was a long time ago, Cappy. And bad marks fade. Maybe it's all washed off.

CAPPY
Maybe it is. But maybe it ain't. You gunna risk his neck to find out?

PETE
(walking away)
Just hit him some damn balls, would ya? If you're that worried about it, then show me he's not good enough to play.

Cappy looks over at Jack - young, healthy, happy...

CAPPY
Don't just stand around like an idiot. Go on in the club house. Get a uniform and some cleats and get back out here.

INT. NATIONALS STADIUM, DUGOUT - DAY

Louise and Rucker stand by the dugout, looking around the stadium... enjoying themselves. Louise taking pictures.

RUCKER
I always thought the perfect time for playing baseball was mid-September, right in the middle of a sunny afternoon.

LOUISE
I'd say perfect's any afternoon you can watch baseball. Rain or shine.

RUCKER
There's truth there, ma'am. And those are your luxury boxes up top.

LOUISE
How sad. I bet you can't even hear the chatter that far up.

Pete walks in from the field - a stern look on his face.

RUCKER
(ribbing)
He still hate you?

PETE
(cutting)
Of course he does. Don't you?

Rucker looks around, uncomfortable. He finds Louise.

LOUISE
Here. Take our picture.

She hands him the camera then sidles up next to Pete. Just as Rucker is about to take the picture, Louise turns and KISSES Pete on the cheek. CLICK.

Tension broken, Rucker CHUCKLES, hands the camera back.

RUCKER
Well, now. So... you got yourself a shortstop?

LOUISE
Mmm Hmmm. Today he's a shortstop.

RUCKER
Meaning what?

PETE
Meaning he'll show Cappy more picking up grounders than he could anything else, except hitting, but that ain't gunna happen today.

RUCKER
The kid's a hitter, huh?

PETE
Oh. Hits like you wouldn't believe.

LOUISE
But not without a pitcher, he can't.

Louise smiles sweetly at Rucker. Louise takes a picture. The CRACK of a bat.

INT. NATIONALS STADIUM, FIELD - DAY

Dressed in a Nationals practice uniform, Jack scoops up a ball at short stop. He rifles it to an empty first base.

CRACK. Cappy smacks another down the third-base line. Jack dives for it... and snatches the ball from the air.

CRACK. Cappy pops one just out of reach. Jack back-pedals... then reconsiders... and turns to sprint...

Jack catches it, just in the nick of time.

CRACK. A line drive. Jack knock it down and pitches it to second. Cappy nods and reaches down for more balls.

RUCKER (O.S.)
Out of the way, old man!

Pete turns around to find Rucker carrying a glove and pushing a shopping cart full of balls.

CAPPY
The hell're you doin', Rucker?

RUCKER

Nuthin. Just restin' your raggedy-assed arm some. What do you care if I throw the kid a few? Get on up there, kid.

Jack makes his way hesitantly to the plate.

CAPPY

Forget it, Rucker. It's been a decade since you threw a ball in anger.

RUCKER

Don't you worry about that. It's like riding a bicycle.

CAPPY

Yeah. On the freeway. And put up that L-screen while yer at it.

EXT. NATIONALS STADIUM, DUGOUT - DAY

Pete and Louise sit together, watching Jack. Pete pulls the papers with Jack's stats out of his pocket, fiddles with them, preoccupied. Louise taking pictures.

LOUISE

Your friend Lou. He's a pretty good guy?

PETE

Good? Rucker could have been a genuine stopper... One of those pitchers who stops losing streaks just cuz every time he goes out to the mound, his teammates look at each other and say, "All right boys, today we're a tough club to beat!" He had all the tools, and they brought him up slow, and he wasn't stupid.

(a beat)

Then he drank himself down to a .500 pitcher for a couple of years. Then he drank himself right out of baseball.

LOUISE

Honey...

PETE

Now look at him. I didn't even know he'd gotten himself sober until just today.

Rucker pitches one off the mound and Jack RIPS it into center field. Cappy tosses another ball to Rucker. A beautiful scene, men playing baseball in perfect harmony.

LOUISE

He's playing the game just fine.

A pitch and CRACK. A line drive. Another - CRACK. Far into right field. Another - CRACK. The hitting: perfect.

PETE
 Everything looks good under these lights.
 But don't kid yourself. He's a security
 guard, not a pitcher.

INT. NATIONAL'S STADIUM, FIELD - DAY

Jack stands at the plate -- Cappy behind the cage.
 Rucker pitches through a SAFETY SCREEN on the mound.

CAPPY
 Awright. Man on second. Nobody out.

Rucker pitches one and Jack SMACKS it between first and
 second - just like you're supposed to do.

CAPPY (CONT'D)
 What are you doing, Rucker?! Don't just
 hang the ball out so he can hit it where
 he's supposed to. Push him around. I
 want to see him move his hands in there.
 (Rucker nods)
 Okay, kid. Now that guy's on third. One
 out this time. What do you do?

JACK
 Sacrifice fly. Bring the run in.

CAPPY
 That's the safe bet... Show me something
 that ain't so safe.
 (to Rucker)
 Hey old man! Give it some spice, huh?

Jack straighten up. The moment of truth.

Cappy and Rucker lock eyes. Cappy winks. Rucker nods.
 Jack tightens his grip on the bat.

Louise leans in - taking Pete's hand.

Rucker winds up - like the pro he used to be.

Rucker releases... The pitch - spiralling low and to the
 outside corner... slow motion, devious...

Jack reaches for it with everything he's got... Rucker
 tips off the mound in the follow-through.

Jack connects - a LINE DRIVE up the middle. It SMASHES
 into the SAFETY SCREEN.

The screen bounces back and drives the cross bar INTO
 RUCKER'S FOREHEAD, knocking him back, and CRUMBLING HIM
 to the mound... the screen collapsing on top.

Louise jumps to her feet. Pete hangs his head.

ON THE MOUND

Cappy and Jack arrive to find Rucker unconscious and bleeding on the ground - a GASH across his brow.

CAPPY (CONT'D)
Get him the hell out of here!

Jack follows Cappy's gnarled old finger to the stands.

JACK
Who? Pete?

CAPPY
Damn right. He's bad luck. Jinxed. And not the kind that loses ball games.

JACK
Yeah? What kind then?

Cappy reaches up to scratch his EYE.

CAPPY
The kind that crushes windpipes.

Cappy REMOVES HIS EYE - a black hole staring at Jack.

INT. NATIONALS STADIUM, CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Pete walks back down the dark corridor - alone.

At the end - Pete pushes open another set of doors and is ENVELOPED by the LIGHT from OUTSIDE.

EXT. VIETNAM MEMORIAL - DAY

Thousands of names etched across the polished granite surface - those who were killed long ago.

Pete searches the names... panel after panel... line after line... The names blur, Pete's reflection of himself...

Pete, mingled with others... rubs of one of the many names on the wall. Eyes closed, remembering.

Pete stares at the wall... the names... the dead... himself. He DROPS HIS RUBBING and walks away, beaten by the memories. LOUISE WATCHES FROM AFAR.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

A little league game in progress. A table full of TOURNAMENT TROPHIES behind the batter's box.

Zee at the plate. He swings and misses.

UMPIRE
Stee-ri-ke two!

Zee looks up to the stands - pretty well packed for a little league game. Virginia sits alone.

Zee pleads with his eyes. Virginia shrugs. Zee looks forlornly back at the pitcher.

The wind up. The pitch. WIFF.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)
Steeee-rike three! Batter's out!

INT. NATIONAL'S STADIUM, FIELD - EVENING

Jack sits alone in the stands, still dressed in the practice uniform. The lights are off. Pete walks in.

PETE
Rucker all right?

JACK
Twenty six stitches across the brow but he'll survive. Said it'll make him look tougher, that he should ask for a raise.

Pete laughs, despite himself.

PETE
Rucker always could see through the fog.
(looks around)
Different in the dark, huh?

JACK
You know, my daddy always talked about it. About playing under the lights. Said it made him feel twelve feet tall.

PETE
You could have that life.

JACK
What life? Always moving, always on the road, on your own... no family. No thanks. I've had that life. It doesn't suit me.

PETE
Doesn't suit you? What doesn't suit you?
(Motions to the field)
Standing out here... in front of all the world. You and the game. Every thing you got. It's the American dream. It's what you fought for, isn't it?

JACK
I fought for my family... for my country. For everybody... for everybody's dreams.

PETE
Then play for those dreams.

Pete moves closer to Jack, lays his hand on his shoulder.

PETE (CONT'D)
 Your grandma... her every thought is about
 you... about your happiness.
 (off Jack's look)
 She's dying, Jack. And she just wants
 you to have a chance.

JACK
 Sir, no offense... but she's been dying
 since I was eight years old.
 (Pete - taken aback)
 Wears it on her sleeve to get what she
 wants. It's why you're here, isn't it?
 To make her happy? Before she dies?

Pete takes this in...

JACK (CONT'D)
 You can take all her damn pills and her
 head aches and her "Oh my, Jack, I don't
 feel so good" and bury them next to my
 daddy where they belong. He was the sick
 one, not her.

Jack takes a good, hard look at Pete.

JACK (CONT'D)
 There. I said it. You know, my momma
 told me, I'll never forget, she said,
 "Scared or not, you only get one chance
 to say your lines in this life Jack, one
 chance, and when you look back... when you
 look back at all those things you have or
 haven't said, you better be damn sure you
 said what you wanted to say."

Jack looks at Pete, waiting for him to say something.

He waits... And waits...

Pete leans back in his chair and stares at an American
 Flag hanging high over the stadium.

INT. GIGI'S PIZZA - EVENING

Zee and Virginia sit in a booth by themselves - Zee in a
 dirty uniform, sad. A TROPHY on the table. Zee throws a
 crust onto his plate.

Virginia wraps her arms around him. He struggles against
 her and then relents. A tear rolls down his cheek.

INT. CAPPY'S HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

An upper-middle class suburban home. An African American woman in her 50s - ANITA HAYNES - reads a book as she cooks dinner. The DOORBELL CHIMES.

AT THE FRONT DOOR

She opens the door to find Pete.

PETE
Hello, ma'am. I'm Pete Estey. I'm... Is...
Is Cappy home?

ANITA
He is. He's in the study. Why don't you
come in and---

CAPPY (O.S.)
Honey, who is it?

Pete steps in the doorway, and sees Cappy down the hall.

CAPPY (CONT'D)
Get the hell out of my house.

ANITA
Charles!

CAPPY
Out!
(approaching, to his wife)
You know who this is? The Grim Reaper
himself.

PETE
I'm... I'm sorry. I never should've...

ANITA
Oh, that Grim Reaper! So, this is him?
My, you've got some power... The man who
knocked your eyeball out? Got you
addicted to pain pills? Made you get in
all those fights?

CAPPY
Anita...

ANITA
Felt so bad that he helped you get a job
when you healed up? The job you've had
for the last 30 years? The one that put
your daughters in private school? Bought
this house? Gave you a life?
(to Pete)
It's nice to finally meet you, Mr. Estey.
What can my husband do for you?

EXT. CAPPY'S HOME, BACKYARD - EVENING

Cappy trims the hedges - they are SCULPTED. This is his hobby, and he is good at it. CLIP, CLIP, CLIP.

PETE
You tell him? You tell Jack what you think of me? What people say?

CAPPY
Yeah. I did.

PETE
What'd he say?

CAPPY
He didn't care. Stupid kid.

PETE
He's a hell of a ball player, isn't he?

Cappy ignores him, concentrating. CLIP. CLIP. CLIP.

CAPPY
You ever wonder... about what kinda player I mighta been? What you took away from me? From Rucker? From all of us?!

PETE
Do I wonder? No. I don't.

CAPPY
Go to hell.

PETE
I'm already there.

Cappy give him a look.

CAPPY
What do you want, Pete?

PETE
I want you to give the kid a chance. Take these stats... take a look.

Pete holds out a folded stack of yellow paper from his pocket. CLIP. CLIP. CLIP.

PETE (CONT'D)
They're a little old, but they'll do - especially with you behind 'em. I'd like you to get Flanagan to send someone down on Thursday to take a look. Kid's got a big game. Just... give him a shot.

Cappy STOPS CLIPPING and stares him down.

CAPPY
You'd do that to him, wouldn't you?

Pete holds out the papers. But Cappy - CLIP CLIP CLIP - shreds them with his clippers. Yellow paper fluttering to the ground. Some still left in Pete's hand.

CAPPY (CONT'D)
Well, I won't.

Pete gets his bearings... then he says what he's always wanted to say.

PETE
It was the top of the sixth, Cappy. One on, one out. Lopez on the mound, Heller at the plate. You were batting .411 going into the game and you had 12 innings 'til they were gunna move you up. Only reason you were on first was cuz you beat an easy out into a single... first rate ball.

Pete tears the remaining pieces of paper in his hands and throws them to the ground with the rest.

PETE (CONT'D)
I don't have to wonder about what woulda happened to you, Cappy. I know. You woulda been one of the best. No question. But I didn't take your damn eye out. No body did. It just happened. And I'm sorry that it happened, but I can't say that I'm sorry that you had a chance to shine... even for a moment, cuz when you were out there, Cappy, when you were out there for the whole world to see... you were the best there was, and no one can take that away.

Pete walks off. Cappy watches him go.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

BING BING. An elevator door opens and Pete steps off. Louise, waiting in the hallway, looks to him.

LOUISE
Where've you been? Jack said you left and wouldn't say where. I was worried.

PETE
You're not sick. You just... You used me to get what you wanted... Well, you got it. Now leave me alone.

LOUISE
Pete, don't. I--- Pete...?

She takes a step back, faltering... but no one comes.
Pete keys his door and steps inside.

The sound of an AIRPLANE TAKING OFF.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

In FIRST CLASS - Louise sleeps, Jack plays with his mitt.
An empty seat beside Jack.

In ECONOMY CLASS, Pete by himself staring out the window.

EXT. IDYLLIC BASEBALL DIAMOND, 1968 - DAY

Everything is BRILLIANT and TIMELESS -- the blue sky, the
clean, crisp uniforms, the field perfectly manicured.

The Batter, a 17 year old FRECKLE FACED BOY - warms up
just off the plate. An even YOUNGER PETE, mid-30s - in
his trademark jacket - stands at the sidelines.

FAN (O.S.)
Give it a ride, Billy!

The Freckle Faced Kid gives a subtle nod as he takes a
practice swing with great confidence.

The pitch - the swing... strike one.

The kid's flustered. He hunkers down and... ball one.

FAN (CONT'D)
Come on, Billy! Get that!

Billy hunkers down. The crowd building pressure. The
pitch... the swing - strike two!

Billy straightens up. He looks over to Younger Pete -
almost pleading. Pete just watches. He puts a calm hand
out to settle the boy.

YOUNGER PETE
(calm, conspiratorial)
Take your time, son. All the time in the
world. No hurry. Just... make it count.

The kid nods, and hunkers down. The pitch... WHACK. He
pulverizes it - clear over the fence where it registers a
loud BANG off a steel shed. The Kid rounds the bases -
Younger Pete trying to control a smile.

INT. PETE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Pete wakes up. Alone. Silence. He looks around.

The room is exactly as it was. He opens the trunk and takes out his WIFE'S PHOTO. He returns it to its spot.

INT. FAIR HAVEN, DINING HALL - DAY

Pete puts some french toast on a tray.

Mrs. Babcock, Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Irving sit around a table with a new guy - MR. BURTON, 70s. Pete arrives.

PETE
Mind if I join you?

MRS. GRAHAM
Mr. Estey, I thought you were dead.

PETE
No, ma'am. Just retired for a spell.

MR. BURTON
Finally, some testosterone at the table.
Glenn Burton, good to meet you.

PETE
Pete.

MRS. IRVING
Pete here used to be a baseball scout.

MR. BURTON
Baseball, huh? Hey. Think quick. Cubs pitcher with the mangled hand, took 'em to the series in 1908. D'you know it?

Pete looks bored.

PETE
Mordecai Brown.

MR. BURTON
Bingo. You're good. Lost two fingers in a farming accident. Did you know that? He was 26 when he joined the majors. That's late, you know. Know how long he played? Played 'til he was almost 40. Did you know that?

Pete nods to himself and takes a bite of french toast.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN COURTYARD - MORNING

Pete weaves through the shuffleboard games, alone. As he approaches his apartment, he sees that the door is open.

SOUNDS of a VACUUM CLEANER. He smiles... and approaches.

INT. PETE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

A CLEANING WOMAN cuts the vacuum when she sees Pete.

PETE
Where's Louise?

CLEANING WOMAN
She quit.

INT. FAIR HAVEN ASSISTED LIVING, DIVISION HALLWAY - DAY

Pete makes his way down the long lonely hallway.

The linoleum floor looms up ahead.

He approaches and... stops short - toes on the line.

BEEPING. HISSING. White light.

INT. FAIR HAVEN, WARD B - DAY

Wilt lays in bed staring at the television - some INANE SOAP OPERA. A nurse adjusts his oxygen mask - paying more attention to the TV than the man.

She leaves, revealing Pete at the side of the bed.

He stares at his friend. No response - just eyes glued to the TV. Pete looks at the TV... then back to Wilt.

Pete picks up the remote and CHANGES THE CHANNEL. He flips it around... and finds a BASEBALL GAME.

He pulls up a chair and sits next to Wilt, watching the game. Wilt reaches over and pats Pete's hand.

They sit together, watching.

INT. LOUISE'S HOME, KITCHEN - MORNING

Louise sits alone with a cup of coffee - still in her night clothes. She stares at a picture of her son.

EXT. ZEE'S HOUSE - DAY

Zee strolls up to the house with a pep in his step - dressed in slacks and a nice dress shirt. He tosses a baseball as he rings the doorbell. Zee answers.

JACK
Hey, bub. Still on for pizza tonight?

Zee runs away - Jack, clueless. Virginia steps out of the kitchen.

VIRGINIA
You've got a lot of nerve. Me? You can stand me up any day. But him? He worships you.

JACK
Stand him up? The tournament's tonight.

VIRGINIA
His tournament was yesterday. You have any idea how it feels, when you think your hero's going to watch you play the big game... but he never does?

JACK
Hey, I didn't ask to be some kid's hero.

He turns and walks away.

VIRGINIA
I can tell, cuz hero's don't run away.

He slows down, as if to turn.

VIRGINIA (CONT'D)
The hero is the one that stays.

She closes the door. Jack turns back - too late.

Jack climbs on his bike and pulls his keys from his pocket. Tangled in the key chain - lint and a worn THEATER TICKET STUB.

Jack turns the stub in his fingers.

INT. ZEE'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

Zee lays face-down on the bed. All around him, baseball posters, newspaper clippings. One TROPHY.

Jack steps into the doorway.

JACK
Hey Zee. I... I messed up, didn't I?

ZEE
It's okay.

JACK
No. No it's not.

Zee rolls over to look at him - wiping away tears.

ZEE
Where were you?

JACK
Remember that scout you showed me?
(Zee nods)
He took me to National Stadium. Gave me
a try-out for the team.

ZEE
Wow.

JACK
I brought this back for you.

He hands Zee the baseball. Zee checks it out -
National's emblem emblazoned beneath the stitches.

Jack looks at Zee's night stand - a PURPLE HEART in it's
box... next to a BASEBALL TROPHY.

ZEE
Are you leaving?

JACK
No. No, I'm not leaving.

ZEE
Why not? It's the majors. You could
play in the World Series.

JACK
It's a long story. Tell me about your
game.

A smile erases his tears.

ZEE
We won! It was awesome.

JACK
No. Tell me. I want to know. Every
pitch.

He sits down on the bed and picks up the trophy. Zee
stands in front of him, on stage.

ZEE
Well the first batter was huge. He was
scary. About this big.

JACK
Big strike zone.

ZEE
Yeah. But scary. So the first pitch I
threw was a fastball. He didn't even
swing. Right in there. Strike one.

Jack claps, as if he were at the game.

JACK
All right! Good pitch. Good pitch.

Zee smiles, and continues. Outside the door, Virginia watches - her heart melting.

INT. CAPPY'S HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cappy sits at the kitchen table, piecing together Pete's YELLOW SHEETS OF PAPER. He tapes them, running his finger across Pete's handwritten stats.

He studies the numbers - rubbing his wrists, tapping each finger to his thumb. A smile of things past.

Cappy nods - impressed. He reaches over and types into his laptop.

INT. FAIR HAVEN, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Pete walks down the hallway - a light from the utility closet catches his eye.

He stands at the door... staring. He reaches for it.

INT. FAIR HAVEN, SUPPLY CLOSET - NIGHT

No one. Louise's sweater draped on a chair, some of her belongings rest on boxes.

Pete steps inside. He finds a PICTURE of Jack and his father on the wall - a young picture, when Jack was eight or so - not playing baseball or anything, just smiling to the camera with his father's arm wrapped around him.

Pete stares at the picture. He rubs his hand against Louise's sweater.

INT. LOUISE'S HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Louise, still in her same night clothes, sits with a slew of newly developed photographs spread across the table.

She stares at one - Pete and Jack on National Field, their arms wrapped around each other.

INT. FAIR HAVEN, WARD B - MORNING

Pete brings in a platter of french toast and a cup of coffee. He sits down next to Wilt who is asleep.

He flips through the channels - nothing. No baseball.

Pete looks over - one of the PATIENTS being wheeled by FAMILY MEMBERS off to an outing. Pete gets an idea...

EXT. EPPIS PARK, DUGOUT - DAY

Marco pitches warm-up balls to Motown on the field. Big Sticks rides up on a bicycle.

BIG STICKS
Damn. And I thought I was early. What are you guys doing here. Game don't start til---

MOTOWN
(hushed)
Shut up, man. Grab a bat and get over here.

Big Sticks picks up a bat and steps conspiratorially to the plate. He whispers back to Motown.

BIG STICKS
What is it?

MOTOWN
Home field stands. Top row.

Motown peeks up.

IN THE STANDS - a man with a hundred dollar haircut and pressed slacks, using his Blackberry.

ON THE FIELD - Big Sticks straightens up, grips the bat.

BIG STICKS
Scout? You think that's a real scout.

MOTOWN
As real as they get.

BIG STICKS
Oh, man. Let's play ball.

Marco fires the pitch and Sticks SLAPS it over the fence.

EXT. EPPIS PARK - DAY

Jack jogs up to the park. It's starting to look like a championship game. Two TEAM BUSES parked in the lot.

A STRONG TEAM on the field. Sharp uniforms. Confident workout. Strength. Precision. A tough team to beat.

And then Jack sees the Sun's dugout - CHAOS.

IN THE DUGOUT - players yelling at each other, kicking the dirt. Some sitting off in a huff. Some pushing each other against the fence. Motown in Porkchop's face.

MOTOWN
If that's the way it is,
I'm taking half the team
with me!

CASE
I ain't playing out field
no more. No one scouts
right field!

PORKCHOP
So walk! I'm the coach and
I'm setting the best line
up to win the game, period.

DEUCE
Well I wanna bat clean up.
You always get to bat clean-
up!

A shrill WHISTLE and everyone stops. They turn to Jack.

JACK
What the hell's gotten into all of you?
Last time I checked, baseball's a team
sport. And we're gunna need a team to
beat these boys.

DUECE
What do you know about playing on a team?

MOTOWN
Yeah, Mr. Hot Shot. You don't seem to
need one when you play.

Jack faces off against them. He starts to roll up his
sleeve. Players tense. Porkchop reaches out.

PORKCHOP
Jack... relax.

Jack pulls his sleeve up over his shoulder - revealing
his ARMY TATTOO.

JACK
See that? That's my team. I played that
team for four year, fighting for you.
While you were playing your video games,
dancing at the Valentine's dance, eating
hamburgers and drinking milk shakes.
Four years. I know what a real team is.
(this shuts them up)
Tank sweeps outside Karbala. When we
were on, we were on. Eyes pealed for
roadside bombs, snipers, what ever. When
we were off, we were still on. Couldn't
shake it.

A few players roll their eyes, they don't need a sermon.

CASE
We're talking about baseball.

JACK
So am I. That's why we played. Every
chance we got - same skills, just...
takes our mind off the bombs and keep
your eyes pealed for fastballs instead.

Jack slowly picks up a bat, and turns his attention to it
as if it were taking him back...

JACK (CONT'D)
 Best game I ever played, I played over there. Fourth of July, a bunch of Marines rolled through and we squared up in 110-degree heat... I remember a kid about as big as you Sticks - name was Sick Sid and he worked a walk that led to our first run.

Big Sticks gives a little grin, leans in closer.

JACK (CONT'D)
 And Two-Toe Joe... about as fast as you Duece - he reached out over this barbed-wire fence to save an easy double. And Danny D, Danny Dynamite... tough as nails, you know?

Jack looks Marco square in the eye. Marco nods.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Danny took a hard grounder off his chest. Like a bullet in the fourth inning. I'm telling ya, it had to break a rib... Maybe two. But he got up and threw a pee to third for the final out of the game.

DEUCE
 (caught up in the story)
 Hell yeah!

Jack smiles... nods.

JACK
 I had a great game that day.

CASE
 Pshhh. Did you even play?

JACK
 Yeah. Maybe. Maybe I pitched a few innings. But it was the team that won. All of us... as a team... together.
 (the men nod)
 I messed up last game. I forgot the team, and I'm sorry about that. But, if we're gunna win this game, this championship, then we're gunna have to play as a team.

Jack sticks his fist out into the center of the group... then, one by one, hands join Jack's in the center.

TEAM
 One, two, three - burn red-hot Suns!

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - LATER

The umpire throws the ball to Marco on the mound.

UMPIRE
Play ball!

IN THE DUGOUT - Jack and Porkchop stand side by side.

PORKCHOP
You sure about this? You want Marco out there? You know there's a ton of scouts out there, right?

JACK
I know. Maybe all he needs is a little encouragement... and about five years of practice.

Porkchop grins and pats his friend on the back.

PORKCHOP
I'm glad you're here, man.

ON THE FIELD - the Suns get ready to play.

SUNS
Hey batta batta batta...

A hard as nails HITTER at the plate. Marco pitches.

SMACK! Hitter pounds it over the left-field fence.

The Suns just watch it go. Marco hangs his head and looks sheepishly to the dugout.

JACK
Shake it off, Marco! Shake it off. No pressure now. No hitter's gone.

Marco shoots him a look, but Jack just LAUGHS. Marco smiles a hidden smile and turns back to the game.

Another TOUGH HITTER steps to the plate.

Motown gives the signal. Marco shakes him off. Motown gives another and Marco nods.

Concentration. Marco fires. THUD.

UMPIRE
Steeee-rike one!

Marco nods with satisfaction.

JACK
Atta way, Marco. A couple more of those!

BESIDE THE FIELD

Like a strange military outfit, the Gang marches across the field armed with blankets and picnic baskets.

Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Irving, Mr. Burton, Mrs. Babcock and Pete... pushing Wilt in a wheelchair - oxygen bottle and mask in tow.

MRS. GRAHAM
Baseball? Now let me see, will there be prizes?

MR. BURTON
No. No prizes. Just a good game, if we're lucky.

Wilt looks up at Pete. Pete shrugs.

PETE
What? It was her car.

IN THE STANDS - The Gang squeezes into the front row, Wilt parking his wheelchair right along side.

Behind them, Marco strikes out the batter.

Pete gets Wilt settled and scans the stands - no Louise.

MR. BURTON
Eye-ballin' chicks, Baseball? The game's already started. One-zip. Two outs.

PETE
I'll be there. Just... I'm just looking for an old friend.

But something catches his eye:

A MAN - slightly out of place in his sports coat and sunglasses. Nice watch, talking on a cell phone.

ANOTHER MAN - binoculars, cushioned stadium seat. ANOTHER - the hundred dollar haircut. And another - Cappy.

PETE (CONT'D)
Excuse me. Keep an eye on him will you?

MR. BURTON
No problem, Sport-o. Hey Wilt, you know who threw the most consecutive strike outs in the American League? I'll give you a hint...

IN THE STANDS Pete walks up to Cappy.

PETE
What are you doing here?

CAPPY
Hey. It's a free country. I'm just watching a game of baseball.

PETE
Is that right? You and about half a dozen other scouts.

CAPPY
Oh yeah? Is that right? Hmmm. Musta seen the same stats I did. Kids numbers are all over the internet.

PETE
They are, huh?

CAPPY
That's what I hear. Of course, I get my tips from an old timer. A friend of mine, from way back. Now stand aside, you're missing the game.

Pete nods. The pieces falling into place.

EXT. LOUISE'S HOME - DAY

Pete hustles up to the house and RAPS on the door. No answer. He RAPS again, LOUDER, and steps back.

The curtains are all drawn. The house looks dark. He checks the driveway - Louise's car. He RAPS LOUDER.

PETE
Louise Brown! You open this door or I'm kicking it in to make sure you're all right! I'll give you to the count of three! One. Two...

The door opens. Louise stands there, still in her NIGHT CLOTHES. She looks terrible. Tear-streaked face, unwashed, unkempt hair. Bags under her eyes.

PETE (CONT'D)
Louise? What's... what's wrong?

LOUISE
All I do is chase away the people I love.

She starts to cry and he comforts her.

PETE
No. No you don't. I'm here.

LOUISE
I'm sorry. I never should have told you I was sick. It was a terrible thing to say. I shoulda kept it to myself, but I wasn't thinking. I was too busy falling in love.

She looks up at him. He wipes away a tear.

PETE
Don't be sorry. I was too.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD

WHAM! Ball four. Motown takes a walk to first.

IN THE STANDS - Mr. Burton checks the scoreboard with his binoculars: 2-0, the Suns are behind.

ON THE FIELD

Jack steps to the plate. The pitcher eyes him... eyes first. Motown leads off.

Pitcher throws to first. Safe. Jack stands still. Eyes the pitcher. Again, the pitcher throws to first. Safe.

IN THE STANDS

Mr. Burton and Wilt share the game.

MR. BURTON
Look at him devil that pitcher.

ON THE FIELD - The pitch... Jack squares around to bunt, but pulls back in the CATCHER'S FACE.

Motown breaks for second. The catcher throws awkwardly around Jack. A bad throw. Motown - safe, the ball - high.

Jack pushes his hands up on the bat.

He eyes Motown. Motown leads off. The Pitcher throws...

SMACK. Jack lines it between first and second. Motown takes off - a bit slow. Ball bounces out to right field.

Porkchop, coaching third, windmills Motown to head for home. Jack watches as he runs...

Right field launches it for home. Jack heads for second - the ball sailing over his head.

Motown digs for home. The ball flies in. Motown hits the dirt - dust everywhere.

Jack rounds second, heading for third - full tilt. Motown rolling into the catcher.

UMPIRE
Safe!

The Catcher sees Jack - rifles it to third. Porkchop signals Jack to drop. The ball flying in.

Jack slides... arching his body out and away from the tag. The mitt comes down... arching... arching.

Fingertips touch the base... the mitt hits his thigh.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)

Safe!

IN THE STANDS - The crowd goes WILD! CHEERING.

Mrs. Babcock suddenly wakes up from a snooze.

MRS. BABCOCK

Is it over?

Pete and Louise squeeze into the stands.

LOUISE

No honey, it's just getting started.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Big Sticks hits a sacrifice fly to knock Jack in and tie the score at 2-2. Cheering.

Marco on the mound - another strike out. And another.

A long hit against Marco.

Intense stares from The Gang.

A catch at the wall - Jack playing left field.

The Gang erupting into celebration. Sandwiches passed around from a picnic basket. Wilt, a gleam in his eye.

Pete pointing out the SCOUTS to Louise.

But THE BRUINS fire back. Marco striking out. Deuce striking out. A third PLAYER striking out.

The Sun's with a double play. The gang doing The Wave.

The Bruins hit a double into short right field - Deuce rifling it to third to save it from a triple.

The pitch. Runner goes to third. Motown throws him OUT!

Suns high-fiving with Porkchop on the bench. Suns on the field whipping it around-the-horn.

But then, suddenly, THE TIDE SHIFTS. A line drive past third base puts a runner on first.

Then a huge hit into right field. Jack goes back... back... back... to the wall. He jumps... but the ball is GONE! A two run homer in the top of the fourth.

The score board reads: 4-2 as the FOURTH INNING ENDS.

END MONTAGE

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - EVENING

The Pitcher throws one down the pipe and THUD.

UMPIRE
Strike three!

Marco goes down swinging.

Motown leads off at first. Deuce steps to the plate.

IN THE STANDS - Mr. Burton leans over to Wilt and addresses the injured man as if there were nothing wrong.

MR. BURTON
We should do this more often.

Wilt reaches a trembling hand up from the wheelchair. He fights against the paralysis of the stroke and pulls down his oxygen mask. He cracks a wry smile.

WILT
I'd like that.

The crowd CHEERS again!

ON THE FIELD

A bunt down the third base line.

Motown advances to second. Deuce makes it to first.

Two on, one out. Jack steps to the plate, swinging bats around his head like neckties again.

IN THE STANDS - The scouts take notice.

They sit up a little straighter. Sliding palm pilots out of their jackets. Putting down their popcorn.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, GRASSY FIELD - EVENING

The Snow Cone Man hands two cherry snow cones to Louise.

SNOW CONE MAN
Looks like quite a game tonight, Mrs. Brown.

LOUISE
Oh, it is Toni. It is. But I've got to go. I think my boy's up to bat.

She hustles back toward the field.

ON THE FIELD - Jack takes a GIANT SWING. THUD.

UMPIRE

Strike one!

He straightens up, a little surprised. He looks around. Getting dark. Hard to see. He looks up at the lights and steps out of the batter's box.

IN THE STANDS - Zee sits next to Virginia.

VIRGINIA

What's he doing?

ZEE

(to himself)

Wait for it... wait for it...

BESIDE THE FIELD - Louise rushes along trying not to spill her snow cones, trying to watch the game.

ON THE FIELD - The umpire looks at Jack.

He just stands there. Then he steps back to the plate.

The pitch down the pipe. Jack swings.

CRACK! A long fly ball... going... going...

KA-FLASH! The lights illuminate the field, the players, the spectators, the ball...

BESIDE THE FIELD - KA-FLASH! The field lights up... and Louise FALLS. Snow cones flying...

ON THE FIELD - The ball soars over the fence, runners advancing.

IN THE DUGOUT - the Suns go WILD!

IN THE STANDS - the crowd ERUPTS. All EXCEPT PETE, who sees Louise falling, falling, falling...

BESIDE THE FIELD - The snow cones land hard, red ice spilling into the grass... Louise landing HARD right behind them. She lays wide-eyed in the grass... unmoving.

ON THE FIELD - Players cross the plate. Jack rounds first. Spirits high. Perfect moment...

Until he sees Louise. He rounds second, really seeing her. A frightened crowd gathering... Pete racing over.

JACK

Gramms?! Gramms!

Half-way between second and third, Jack diverts from the game and runs for the side fence.

LOUISE'S POV

The brightly lit, game in the distance. Pete running toward her...

FADE TO BLACK

INT. AMBULANCE - EVENING

Louise's eyes flutter open. Pete takes her hand.

PETE
Are you in pain?

LOUISE
(shakes her head)
Scared. I was so scared. Laying there,
I opened my eyes and I couldn't move.
Then I saw you... coming to me... and I
knew I'd be all right.

Pete stares at her... speechless. He takes her hand and holds it tight. She fights to stay alive.

Jack watches from the other side of the ambulance.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Louise, in bad shape, wakes up in a dark hospital room.

LOUISE
Sweetheart?

Jack, still in uniform, walks over and takes her hand.

JACK
Yeah. I'm here, gramms.

LOUISE
Jack Brown... How'd you play?

JACK
I played great. I played just great.

Jack kneels, his face close to Louise's - her eyes closed, leaning back... listening.

LOUISE
You did? Tell me about it.

Pete steps into the doorway - listening.

JACK
It was back and forth all game. You
woul'da loved it. Lots of great plays.
Home runs. Double plays. Everything.
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
And then, there we were... bases loaded,
down by three... bottom of the ninth.

Louise nods... she can see it. Pete hangs his head.

LOUISE
And Jack Brown came to the plate.

JACK
That's right, Gramms. That's right. The
pitcher stared me down... I didn't even
blink. And on that first pitch... Just for
you, on the first pitch, I swung with all
my might. And I hit that ball. I swear
I hit that ball a mile long. Going...
going... clear over that center field wall.

LOUISE
(tears down her cheeks)
A grand slam, with all those scouts...

JACK
They said I was a natural. The team
carried me... carried me right off the
field. And there were scouts waiting for
me - all lined up. Three of them already
gave me a bonus to sign.

LOUISE
Already? Your daddy'd be so proud of
you. Did you... Did you sign?

She opens an eye, pushing to sit up.

JACK
No. Not yet. But I got contracts... right
here. One from the Cubs. One from the
Nationals. And one from the Braves.

He picks up her MEDICAL RECORDS ON A CLIPBOARD.

JACK (CONT'D)
Which one do you think I should choose?

LOUISE
Honey, don't worry about me. You choose
the one that makes you happy. That's all
your daddy ever wanted anyway - just for
you to be happy... wherever it is.

And with that... her life fades away. Pete watches Jack
grieve... and then steps away.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Pete stands in an empty hallway - looking out through the
window at the parking lot. He is beside himself.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Jack steps out of the hospital, late at night. He takes a moment to gather himself. Him, the moon and darkness. He walks out to his bike in the lot.

CLAP. CLAP. CLAP. Jack looks around. Marco walks forward from the shadows - CLAPPING slowly, rhythmically. Beside him, Case CLAPPING as well.

Then Jack sees the others - all of his teammates leaning against trucks, sitting on the hoods of cars, waiting. They band together. CLAP. CLAP. CLAP.

They surround him. CLAP. CLAP. CLAP. Embracing him... Consoling him... Accepting him.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Pete watches them carry Jack away... until he is once again alone.

INT. FAIR HAVEN, UTILITY CLOSET - NIGHT

Pete in the close space - tight around him. He picks through Louise's personal things...

Her sweater. A paperback book. He peals Jack's picture off the wall.

INT. FAIR HAVEN, WARD B - NIGHT

Pete and Wilt watch baseball into the night. A blue haze enveloping them. KA-CHING. KA-CHING.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - MORNING

Jack, alone on the mound, pitches his bucket of balls over the plate and into the chain-link fence.

KA-CHING. KA-CHING.

His movements, perfect. Controlled. In the moment.

He winds up... and then stops. He looks over. Zee watching him from the stands. Jack throws the ball back into the bucket.

IN THE STANDS - Jack climbs up and sits next to Zee.

ZEE
Sorry about your grandma. Is she okay?

JACK
Yeah. She's okay now. She's in heaven.

ZEE
Yeah.
(a beat)
Why do people we love have to die?

JACK
They don't have to, Zee. They just do.
They stare out at the empty field.

ZEE
Are you sad?

JACK
Yeah. Real sad.

ZEE
When I found out my dad was never coming
back... I was real sad too. I cried all
the time. You know what made me stop?

JACK
Playing baseball?

ZEE
No. This.

Zee gives Jack a big hug... and squeezes out a tear.
Jack hugs him back and sees Cappy stepping up.

Cappy sits down next to Jack - three generations of
players, side by side.

CAPPY
Sorry about your grandmother.
(Jack nods)
This your boy?

Jack takes a moment...

JACK
Zee, this is Cappy Haynes. He helps
coach the DC Nationals.

ZEE
Wow.

CAPPY
We want your dad.

JACK
Mr. Haynes...

CAPPY
 We want him to come play with us. We'll put him in the minors to start, but he'll move up quick. Big League ball in two years. No question.

Jack hands the card to Zee. Zee's smile fades.

JACK
 No question? You've barely seen me play.

CAPPY
 Anything's possible, Jack, and Pete's eye is pretty right pretty often. Put you on the squad next week and we can give it a shot. What do you say?

Jack looks to Zee. Zee puts on a brave face. Nods.

ZEE
 You could play the world series, Jack. That would make you happy, right?

Jack is torn...

INT. FAIR HAVEN, PETE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Pete sits on his bed holding the picture of his wife. He places the picture aside and...

Opens the trunk at the foot of his bed. Inside - a MILITARY FLAG with a PIECE OF PAPER ON TOP.

He picks up the paper... his RUBBING from the Vietnam Memorial. Emotions wash over him as he opens the paper.

The name on the rubbing: William "Spider" Estey.

Pete studies it. He folds it tenderly, placing it in his shirt pocket with pride. Then, he removes the flag from the trunk.

EXT. FAIR HAVEN, COURTYARD - DAY

Pete walks out into the bright sunlight. He passes Mrs. Graham making her flower arrangements.

PETE
 Beautiful day, Mrs. Graham. I hope your daughters don't mind a little company.

She watches Pete raise the flag up the rusty flagpole. It has been folded for a long time.

Slowly, it inches its way up the pole... then flutters in all of its glory. Pete watches with pride.

JACK (O.S.)
Missed you at the wake, sir.

Jack strolls up the walkway in his full dress uniform.
Pete hangs his head.

JACK (CONT'D)
These are for you.

He pulls out some photos and hands them to Pete:

PHOTO 1 - Jack and Pete, Pete's arm around Jack.

JACK (CONT'D)
I made doubles of that one. Hope you
don't mind.

Pete smiles, uncomfortable. He turns to the next photo.
It breaks his heart.

PHOTO 2 - Pete and Louise, Louise kissing him.

JACK (CONT'D)
It wasn't your fault.

He looks up at the sky to keep from crying.

PETE
Yeah.

Jack follows his gaze -- all the way to the flag.

JACK
Your son's? Gramms told me he---
Vietnam, right?
(Pete nods)
You should be proud of him.

PETE
I am.

Jack takes a step back, stands at attention and salutes
the flag in true military style, releasing the salute.

PETE (CONT'D)
You know what makes baseball so special?
(off Jack's look)
There's no clock. You've got all the
time in the world.

JACK
Sir?

Pete shakes his head, pats Jack's back and walks off.

PETE
Thanks for the photo.

JACK
 Sir, I didn't come here for the photos.
 I came here for you. I need your help.
 (Pete stops, turns)
 I need your scouting expertise.

PETE
 Jesus...

He turns back around and walks.

JACK
 You didn't sign Clemente, did you?
 (Pete stops)
 Cuz he went down in a plane crash. How
 about Dizzy Dean? Hit in the toe with a
 line drive, never played the same again.
 How about the Dodgers? Did you sign the
 Dodgers in '55, cuz that would be
 something. Catcher was Campanella, later
 crippled and confined to a wheelchair---

PETE
 What's your point?

JACK
 Pete. You're not cursed. You're not.
 You're blessed. Everything you did. All
 of it. It worked out just right. I'm at
 the top of my game. I was just playing
 the wrong game, that's all.
 (Pete turns)
 The game ain't baseball, Pete. The real
 game? It's life. Come on. I'll show
 you. Give me an hour, huh?

Pete smiles a reluctant smile. He looks over to the porch - Wilt sitting with Mr. Burton listening to a game on the radio. Babcock and Irving carrying on. Pete looks back up the flagpole... and nods.

PETE
 All right. One hour.

EXT. EPPIS PARK, BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

A WHISTLE BLOWS. Cleats fly by - wind sprints. Elbows pumping, knees pumping. Teeth clenched. Sweat.

JACK (O.S.)
 Go go go go go! Time!

The sprinters collapse in the grass - all YOUNG KIDS, Zee amongst them.

JACK (CONT'D)
 All right! Group A: Time for batting practice! Group B: Over here - sprints!

The kids jump up, scrambling excitedly for the plate. Another group runs from home to Jack in the side field. A hand painted sign: "Summer League Try-Outs"

Pete stands at the plate, fielding the new group. He looks official with a clipboard and whistle, a baseball hat and sweats.

PETE
All right, line 'em up: one, two, three, four, five, six. Mr. Marco is going to pitch you six pitches. I want to see how many of those pitches you can hit. Everybody understand?

ALL THE KIDS
Yeah.

Marco watches from the mound, Motown behind the plate.

PETE
I can't hear you!

ALL THE KIDS
YEAH!!!

PETE
All right, number one! You're up.

Jack observes it all, checking his WATCH and looking at Pete. Pete waves him off with a laugh.

In the bleachers, Virginia peeks over her novel watching Jack line up a new wave of "recruits".

As we pull up and away, we see the next generation of ballplayers, Jack in the middle of them... surrounded by his new family.

At the corner of the field, an AMERICAN FLAG flying high.

FADE OUT