

BAT BOY

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Story by

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FADE IN:

TV FOOTAGE: BOMBS SCORCHING THE FIELDS OF VIETNAM. AMERICAN SOLDIERS with muddy faces hike through rain and muck.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
A lot happened in seventy three.

NIXON waves to the press from the door to Air Force One.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
The Watergate scandal gave Nixon a
run for his money...

PINK FLOYD plays live to thousands of fans.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Pink Floyd released The Dark Side
of The Moon upon the world...

GEORGE STEINBRENNER shakes hands with CBS execs.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
And, most importantly, CBS sold the
New York Yankees to George "The
Boss" Steinbrenner for a mere ten
million dollars. It changed the
game completely. For the better,
some say. I had yet to develop an
opinion...

Back to Vietnam. A black helicopter swoops low over burning
grass, the wind howling...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Two sets of FEET in dirty shoes scuffle along, shoelaces
trailing like broken bird wings. The smaller pair struggles
to keep up.

SAMMY
Charlie! Wait up!

CHARLIE ARCHER, twelve, walks through reeds. A worn baseball
cap and dirty summer clothes, he hauls his battered mitt.
Charlie thinks and acts years beyond his age.

CHARLIE
Stop bellyaching. I won't leave
you behind. Never hear the end if
I did.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

That's me. Charlie Archer. Twelve years old. See how my ears resemble the wings of a 747? So did everyone else.

SAMMY ARCHER, eight, wears his own worn cap, carries a mitt. Sammy is brave, self-sufficient for his height.

SAMMY

Being left doesn't bother me. Snakes in this field do.

CHARLIE

You like snakes.

SAMMY

In books and cages. Not when they got fangs in me, yo.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

That's my kid brother, Sammy. He was eight that summer. Short and skinny, sure, but he had a trigger in him he'd pull on anyone who treated him the way his size made him look. Sammy was ten feet tall inside.

SAMMY

Bat left or right? Come on, Charlie! Left or right?

CHARLIE

Left.

SAMMY

What about pitching?

CHARLIE

Sammy-

SAMMY

Pitching. Left or right?

CHARLIE

Everybody knows The Babe pitched left.

SAMMY

Right. I mean you're right. I mean...aww, hell.

CHARLIE
Watch your language.

SAMMY
Why? Vernon doesn't.

CHARLIE
You aren't Vernon.

SAMMY
He cusses all day long. Momma says
he doesn't know any better. Cause
he had a rough life.

CHARLIE
We got a rough life. We know
better.

SAMMY
Didn't used to be rough. Maybe
that's what's different. Our life
used to better. Vernon's didn't.

CHARLIE
What positions did he play?

SAMMY
Vernon doesn't play ball.

CHARLIE
Not Vernon, cat brain. The Babe.

SAMMY
Outfield and pitcher.

CHARLIE
Wrong. Played first base, too.

SAMMY
Did not.

CHARLIE
Did too.

SAMMY
Did not!

CHARLIE
Did too!

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Dad died four years ago in a mine
collapse. Yeah, a mine collapse.
Those were still a thing in '69.
(MORE)

CHARLIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Mom had to move us to another
house, another side of town. It
wasn't so bad. I mean, we had each
other.

SAMMY
Can we skip rocks at the lake after
the game?

CHARLIE
Have to see.

Charlie and Sammy emerge from the tree line. Come to a
street corner. Sammy steps out-

A car screams by! Charlie grabs Sammy in time. Dust spirals
around them. Sammy coughs violently.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
You want me scrapin' you off the
pavement?

SAMMY
I saw him coming!

CHARLIE
Pig crap! Be careful, OK?

Sammy is a bit upset. Hides it behind labored breathing,
hard coughing.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Sammy had something he called
System of Moses. The rest of us
called it Cystic Fibrosis. You
wouldn't think it to look at the
kid. He never complained.

CHARLIE
You alright?

SAMMY
Gimme a break. We're gonna miss
opening pitch.

The lights change. They take off like rockets.

EXT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY - LATER

Charlie and Sammy crawl through a sloppy drainpipe under the
high fence. They clutch their mitts and wait for human
traffic to pass, then bound over the hill and into the crowd.

The stadium is huge, filled with cheering SPECTATORS. Hotdog aroma and the clap of wood against leather. Homemade signs reading "Go Redbirds!"

Sammy and Charlie squeeze through the crowd to empty seats. They sit, gloves on their hands. On the field, The Redbirds face The Blackhawks. The Redbirds are up to bat.

The PITCHER throws hard. BATTER swings. A blasting hit. The crowd cheers. Sammy and Charlie holler along.

SAMMY

Mom finds out we snuck in we're
chopped liver!

CHARLIE

She won't find out!

SAMMY

Famous last words, liver breath!

CHARLIE

Dog face!

SAMMY

Monkey butt!

A MAN turns around, expression sour.

CHARLIE

Not you, sir. Sorry.

The Man turns back. His WIFE leans back, stares at the Man's rear. Shrugs.

SAMMY

What was his middle name?

CHARLIE

(gesturing to the Man)
How should I know?

SAMMY

Not him! The Babe.

CHARLIE

That's easy: Hermon.

SAMMY

Man, you know everything.

CHARLIE

You know a lot.

SAMMY

Not as much as you. I will one day, though. One day, I'll find out something you don't know about The Babe.

CHARLIE

I'll dance like a ballerina if you do.

SAMMY

Deal.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Number four up to bat. Frank Dilrocko!

The crowd wails as DILROCKO steps to the plate. The Blackhawk Pitcher hurls the white grenade. Speedball. Dilrocko clocks it hard. The crowd roars.

Charlie turns to see a pained look on Sammy's face. Charlie feels Sammy's head and chest.

CHARLIE

You don't look good. What's the matter?

SAMMY

Nothing's the matter! I'm just hungry, yo.

CHARLIE

What do you want?

SAMMY

Nachos! Hotdog!

CHARLIE

You can't eat those. You know that. How about popcorn and soda?

SAMMY

OK.

CHARLIE

Don't move.

SAMMY

Hey, I'm a statue.

CHARLIE

And if you get lost, we'll meet-

SAMMY

Back at the drainpipe, I got it.

Charlie climbs out of his seat.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Extra butter!

CHARLIE (O.S.)

It's bad for you!

SAMMY

Will you just once not remember
every single thing?

EXT. STADIUM LAWN - DAY

A black beetle scampers across dirt-

BAM! A pristine sneaker flattens it like an anvil. VINCE
RODGERS, twelve, scrapes the gunk from his shoe, giggling.
CARTER CRAINE, also twelve, sits on his bike.

CARTER

Why do you do that?

VINCE

They're bugs. You're supposed to
squish them.

CARTER

They live out here. Why squish
them outside?

VINCE

I dunno. Guess they bug me. Get
it? Bug me?

Vince rolls at his own joke. Carter rolls his eyes.

CARTER

You're such a dink, Vince.

VINCE

You're the dink.

CARTER

Dink, dink, dink, dink, dink-

VINCE

Shut up, Carter, you doink!

CARTER
Oh, good come back, dink.

VINCE
Doink!

CARTER
Dink!

PRESTON (O.S.)
Boys...

PRESTON DALE IV, twelve, leans on his steel bike, cool and collected as he picks at his manicured nails. His wardrobe costs more than Redbird Stadium.

PRESTON (CONT'D)
...don't be goons.

CARTER
So what are we gonna do, huh,
Preston?

VINCE
Yeah. I'm running outta bugs.

CARTER
We could throw rocks at Ms. Jacob's
cat.

VINCE
Nah. She'll give us extra homework
again. I vote we skip stones at
the creek.

CARTER
Throwing rocks at water. Yay.

Preston's eyes find the concession stand. He sees Charlie in line. Preston's face twists with devilish glee.

PRESTON
(pointing)
Hey, guys...

CARTER
Well, well.

VINCE
Think this place just got
interesting again.

PRESTON
Let's go say hi.

Preston bolts off on his bike. Vince and Carter follow, pedaling close behind. The three leave a cloud of dust.

EXT. CONCESSIONS STAND - DAY

Charlie reaches the front of the line. GIRL behind the counter wears thick makeup, sports a ponytail.

GIRL
Help you?

CHARLIE
A popcorn and a soda, please.

GIRL
Three dollars.

Charlie digs in his pockets. He finds a wrinkled stick of gum, two quarters, a pocketknife, a rubber band.

CHARLIE
I don't have three dollars.

GIRL
Sorry kid. Next?

JOEY GRANT, forties, tough yet fair, with wisdom in his eyes and years under his belt. He flashes a charming smile.

JOEY
Just a small soda.

GIRL
One dollar.

He pays. Girl fills a cup. The crowd roars from the stands.

JOEY
Great game, huh?

GIRL
Sure.

Charlie stares at his pocket items. His eyes light up.

CHARLIE
What about a bet?

Girl hands Joey his soda.

GIRL
What?

CHARLIE
I make you a bet. I win, I get my
food.

GIRL
Kid, I've got a line. I don't have
time for bets.

CHARLIE
One popcorn and one soda. All you
got to loose.

Joey eyes Charlie, then Girl, intrigued. Girl shrugs.

GIRL
What's the bet?

CHARLIE
You like magic?

GIRL
Why? Gonna make yourself
disappear?

CHARLIE
Not me.

Charlie drops his items on the counter.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Got a handkerchief?

GIRL
Fresh out.

JOEY
I'm not.

Joey digs out his hanky.

CHARLIE
Thanks.

He drapes the cloth over his left hand. Holds up a quarter.
Sets the quarter in the center of handkerchief. People down
the line lean out, curious.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Ooie, newie, kablooie!

Girl rolls her eyes. Joey chuckles. Charlie whips the cloth
away. No coin.

JOEY

Wow.

GIRL

...How'd you do that?

CHARLIE

Magic.

He hands Joey his handkerchief. Gathers his pocket items.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

One popcorn and one soda. Please.

Joey eyes Girl. She sighs.

GIRL

Nice pull, kid.

EXT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY - LATER

Charlie rounds the building, snacks in hand, smiling.

Pow! The soda explodes, hit by a flying rock. Fizz drenches his shirt. He drops the popcorn in the dirt. Wipes soda from his eyes.

Preston, Vince, and Carter laugh cruelly on their bikes. Preston tosses and catches a rock.

PRESTON

Enjoy the drink, Archer? Like the new look. Poor brings out your eyes, right boys?

CHARLIE

Nice clothes, Preston. Mommy gonna stop dressing you soon?

The three of them kick off, baring down on him. Charlie stands his ground. Preston swerves at the last second, scraping his tire across dirt. Dust smacks Charlie in the face. Vince shoves him from behind. Carter socks him in the stomach. Charlie falls to his knees.

VINCE/CARTER

Poor boy, poor boy, look at the poor boy!

PRESTON

Stay on your side of the tracks, Archer. We don't have room for smelly losers here.

He grinds his sneaker on the popcorn. The three peel off, laughing. Charlie inspects the popcorn. Not a single eatable kernel.

A HAND swoops in, offering a fresh bag.

VOICE (O.S.)
You can take mine.

Charlie gazes into the green eyes of KELLY SANDS, twelve. The sun plays off her yellow hair, her manner warm, caring.

CHARLIE
Hi, Kelly. Guess you saw.

KELLY
Preston Dale has a scorpion for a heart.

CHARLIE
I know. Hard to believe we used to be friends.

KELLY
How is your new school? As big as North Side?

CHARLIE
Not really.

KELLY
How's Sammy?

CHARLIE
Kicked his oxygen tank. Eats more.

KELLY
That's good.

CHARLIE
Yeah. I better check on him.

KELLY
Don't forget your popcorn.

CHARLIE
That's OK.

KELLY
I already had one. I'm not very hungry.

CHARLIE
I can get my own, alright? I don't
need charity.

KELLY
...Sorry.

CHARLIE
Thanks, though.

He trudges off.

KELLY
(worried about him)
Bye, Charlie!

The crowd cheers as Charlie rounds the building. He finds a water fountain, washes off his face. He searches the faces in the crowd. TALL MAN holds fresh popcorn and a soda near the entrance. Charlie pushes through. Pokes him.

CHARLIE
Excuse me. You like magic?

INT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY - LATER

Charlie carries his newly acquired popcorn and soda, squeezing to his seat to find Sammy's empty. Charlie frantically looks around. Stands on his chair to look.

CHARLIE
Sammy? Sammy!

SAMMY (O.S.)
Stop hollerin'!

Sammy crawls out from under his chair with a Redbirds flag.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Someone dropped it! Free flag, yo!

CHARLIE
(relieved)
Get off the floor before you catch
a disease.

Sammy munches popcorn. Sips his soda.

MONTAGE - CHARLIE AND SAMMY HAVE FUN AT THE GAME

A Blackhawk hits the ball. A Redbird catches it. Sammy and Charlie cheer.

The Redbirds score. The crowd does the wave.

Sammy sits on Charlie's shoulders, waving his flag.

A Blackhawk hits a line drive. A runner on third makes a break for home. Tagged out!

A Redbird smacks the ball. It flies into the stadium. Charlie catches it. Hands it to an ecstatic Sammy.

END MONTAGE

INT. REDBIRD FIELD - DAY - LATER

Old flags and popcorn bags are scattered casualties of war.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Go!

Sammy and Charlie run onto the field, mitts in hand. They stop on the pitcher's mound. Rock, paper, scissors. Charlie wins. Sammy heads to home. Charlie takes pitcher's stance.

SAMMY

Show me the fancy stuff!

Charlie hurls the ball. Sammy catches it with little effort. Tosses it back.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Gimme better! Come on!

Charlie pitches. Sammy snatches it.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Bingo!

CHARLIE

You calling me a dog?

SAMMY

Call 'em like I see 'em!

CHARLIE

You wanna know what I see?

SAMMY

You see squat!

CHARLIE

Exactly!

SAMMY
Throw the ball, Cinderella!

Charlie throws. Sammy winces on the catch. His glove hits the dirt. Charlie rushes the plate.

CHARLIE
You OK?

SAMMY
A OK. You got speed, yo.

CHARLIE
Go sit on the bench.

SAMMY
No.

CHARLIE
Do what I say. Right now.

SAMMY
I said I'm fine! You and Mamma think I'm always gonna break! I can take care of myself and I don't need no girl repellent who can't throw to save his rear babying me! You got that, Charlie?

CHARLIE
Yeah. I got it.

SAMMY
Good! Now get out there and throw some good pitches this time.

Charlie runs back to the mound. Shows one finger.

JOEY (O.S.)
Fastball.

The ball crosses the field like a steam train. Sammy throws it back.

Joey leans against the dugout wall, watching. Sammy shows two fingers.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Curve.

Charlie throws.

SAMMY

Okay! The big one! Gimme the Worm Killer!

Joey's head cocks. The what? Charlie winds up. Throws:

It hits the dirt. The boys sag. Sammy scoops up the ball, throws it back.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Try again!

Charlie winds. Throws. Another dud. Sammy runs and picks it up. They meet each other.

CHARLIE

Rats.

SAMMY

Dad said it takes practice.

CHARLIE

Wish he were here. Could use some more.

Applause. Joey, clapping.

JOEY

Not bad. Not bad at all.

The boys bolt. Joey chases.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Hey! Wait a second!

EXT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Charlie and Sammy slide down the hill and into the pipe, hiding. Joey appears on the hilltop.

JOEY

I didn't mean to scare you. Don't worry, I'm no squealer! I'm not gonna turn you in. Listen, you're good. Real good. I coach summer league. We could use that arm of yours!

He pulls a form from his coat pocket. Sets it on the grass.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Just fill this out and bring it back!

(MORE)

JOEY (CONT'D)

I'll leave it right here for you!
Never let the fear of striking out
keep you from coming up to the
plate! That's what Ruth said.
Name's Joey! Joey Grant!

He marches back down the hill.

EXT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Sammy and Charlie inspect the form.

SAMMY

Did The Babe really say that?

CHARLIE

Yeah, he did.

EXT. ARCHER HOUSE - EVENING

Sammy and Charlie tow their mitts down the cracked, dirty sidewalk. Broken bottles and litter. A shabby neighborhood. They hop a fence and run to the front door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING - CONTINUOUS

They burst inside. Old furniture but cheery drapes. The sound of a television O.S.

SAMMY

Ma, we're back!

BETTY ARCHER, late thirties, walks in to greet them with soapy hands. Hard times have eroded away her beauty, her appearance tired, downtrodden. She wipes her hands on her yellow apron. Hugs her sons.

BETTY

(kissing them)

How are my soldiers?

CHARLIE

Come on, Ma...

BETTY

One day, you'll like it.

SAMMY

I like it now.

BETTY
Me, too. No short breath today?

SAMMY
Not too bad.

BETTY
Eat?

CHARLIE
You kidding? Went through two
popcorns.

SAMMY
No, I didn't.

CHARLIE
Trust me, you did.

BETTY
That's what I like to hear.

SAMMY
Were people at the diner nice
today, Mamma?

BETTY
Oh, yeah. Throwin' fifties and
hundreds at me.
(noticing Charlie's
clothes)
What happened to you, pal?

CHARLIE
Fell down is all.

BETTY
Well run upstairs and clean up.
Almost dinner time.

SAMMY
What are we having?

BETTY
Mac and cheese.

SAMMY
Aww, again?

CHARLIE
Hey. It's Ma's mac and cheese.

SAMMY
Good point.

They head for the stairs. Increase their speed as they pass the den.

CHARLIE
Hurry up, before-

VOICE (O.S.)
What's your rush?

They stop, caught, faces twisting with dread.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Come here. Both of you.

INT. DEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

They enter reluctantly. VERNON STILES, forties, a bear of a man holding a beer, sits glued to his TV, sunk in his chair like it were made of quicksand. He smiles maliciously.

VERNON
You two forget your manners? Can't come home without saying hello to your Pa.

CHARLIE
You're not our Pa, Vernon.

VERNON
You could still be polite.

He drinks. Belches like a fog horn.

VERNON (CONT'D)
Where the hell you two been? Look like you got dragged behind a couple o' wild steers.

CHARLIE
Just playing ball. Gets us dirty, sliding for bases, you know?

VERNON
No, I wouldn't know. And I'll be damned if I gotta eat looking at your filthy faces. Get up there and get cleaned up. Boys should know how to care for their dispositions.

CHARLIE
You're one to jabber about it.

VERNON
The hell does that mean?

SAMMY
Momma says no bad language.

VERNON
Yeah. Like she could do anything
about it. Real uptight, aren't
you, Sammy boy?

He holds out his beer.

VERNON (CONT'D)
Why don't you try a bit of this.
Calm you down some.

Charlie shoves it away.

CHARLIE
He can't have that and you know it.

VERNON
Oh, you're a big man now, huh,
Chuck?

CHARLIE
Charlie.

VERNON
Sure. You wanna be a big man?
Let's see what a big man *Charlie*
is, shall we?

He snatches Sammy's hat. Dangles it out of reach.

VERNON (CONT'D)
Let's see the big man get the sicky
his hat, huh?

SAMMY
That's mine!

CHARLIE
Give it back, Vernon.

Vernon moves to hand it over, only to jerk it away again and
again. Betty speeds to the doorway.

BETTY
Vernon, stop it.

VERNON

Why? It's two against one. They got good odds.

BETTY

Vernon, I told you-

VERNON

Damn it, girl! Shut your mouth!

Betty recoils like a beaten dog. Vernon drops the hat. Stomps on it.

VERNON (CONT'D)

So much for the big man, huh?

Sammy grabs his defiled hat and runs. Charlie's eyes burn.

CHARLIE

You bully.

BETTY

Charlie...don't.

VERNON

I can handle this, Betty. Sticks and stones, big man. And remember, somethin' else breaks bones around here. Now get or you'll regret it.

Charlie sulks past Betty as Vernon eyeballs her hard.

VERNON (CONT'D)

Bring me my dinner before I lose my appetite.

INT. SAMMY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie enters to see Sammy in bed, his little body shaking with sobs. Charlie passes an outdated oxygen tank. Sits on the bed.

CHARLIE

What were his hobbies? Come on. It's an easy one.

SAMMY

Golf, fishing, and bowling.

CHARLIE

You got it.

SAMMY

Mom says he's only mean when he drinks.

CHARLIE

Then his heart pumps booze instead of blood.

SAMMY

He's scary.

CHARLIE

You're my brother. Bad stuff can't happen when I'm around. I won't let it.

SAMMY

Thanks, bro.

Charlie gives Sammy his hat. Sammy grins.

CHARLIE

Looks better on you, anyway.

SAMMY

Are you gonna join that summer league?

Charlie pulls the form from his pocket.

CHARLIE

Gonna try.

SAMMY

It's hard to beat a person who never gives up. He said that, too, right?

CHARLIE

Yeah, he did.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

FATHER STEVEN faces the packed pews, Christ hanging behind him. He leans his palms on the podium.

FATHER STEVEN

Hard times are not uncommon in this world. Certain events in our lives can challenge us. And our beliefs. The Bible tells us that when Job was tested by God, Job became filled with anger.

(MORE)

FATHER STEVEN (CONT'D)

He felt hate and fear. Like all of us do. But in spite of his feelings he never wavered. Not when his family, his home, his livestock were taken from him. Not when he became afflicted with disease...

Betty sits with Charlie and Sammy.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Mom loved the church. She said it was the only place she felt like she belonged, but I knew it was because she missed when we came with Dad. Sammy and I always went with her. We missed Dad, too, and we loved Jesus and all, sure, but the best part for us was getting away from Vernon. And sneaking a little candy here and there.

Charlie passes Sammy a chocolate. Betty sees, casts a scolding glance, but it turns to easily into a smile. Charlie and Sammy shrug in unison.

FATHER STEVEN

Faith guides us. It is the light in our dark and troubling world. No matter what hardship we face or high water that comes, as long as our faith is solid and strong? Then the tallest mountain becomes an ant hill. Thorns turn to cotton and rain showers become rainbows. Thank you for coming. Enjoy your day.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY - LATER

Father Steven shakes hands, says hellos at the door. Betty takes his hand.

FATHER STEVEN

Miss Archer. How are we today?

BETTY

Hi, Father Steven. We're alright. Aren't we, fellas?

SAMMY/CHARLIE

Sure.

FATHER STEVEN

Charlie. Sammy, how're we feeling?

SAMMY

Stiff. Pews need pads.

FATHER STEVEN

Yes, we're working on that.

(to Betty)

So what's the plan for today?

SAMMY

Charlie's tryin' out for baseball.

FATHER STEVEN

Oh? Terrific. I'll send a prayer
your way.

CHARLIE

Couldn't send The Babe with 'em,
could you?

FATHER STEVEN

You'll be great. Have faith.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Fifty kids in dirty clothes throwing balls and swinging bats.
Joey wanders the crowd, looking over the potential players.

Charlie in the stands, glove in hand. Nervous. Sammy sits
next to him, Charlie's hat too big on his head.

SAMMY

Don't pee yourself, yo.

CHARLIE

Shut up.

SAMMY

Wish I could try out.

CHARLIE

You'll have your turn someday.

SAMMY

Be nice when my System of Moses is
gone.

CHARLIE

Yeah.

SAMMY

Remember what Father Steven said.
Have faith!

CHARLIE

Faith doesn't have to pitch.

SAMMY

You're good at magic.

CHARLIE

So?

SAMMY

So go show'em some!

Charlie smiles. Makes his way down.

CHARLIE

Stay where I can see you.

Sammy mimes being a statue. Charlie laughs. Hits the field.

JOEY

Hey, Charlie! How's tricks, kiddo?

CHARLIE

OK I guess.

JOEY

Happy you signed up.

CHARLIE

Wasn't doing much else.

JOEY

Grab a ball.

Charlie takes one out of the bucket as Joey cups his mouth:

JOEY (CONT'D)

All right, guys! Fifteen minutes
'till tryouts, so practice good!

Charlie feels the baseball. Pounds it in his glove.

DAN CHENEY, eleven, appears out of nowhere, wide-eyed and ultra-optimistic with pressed clothes and a fearless smile. Thick glasses on his long nose.

CHENEY

Hiya!

CHARLIE

...Hi.

CHENEY

Good luck out there! Be sure to do good! Hope you make it.

CHARLIE

...You got a problem?

CHENEY

Sorry?

CHARLIE

You trying to shake me up or something? Cause it's not gonna work. I know what psychology is, OK?

CHENEY

No, I really mean good luck. Honest.

CHARLIE

You want a fist in the mouth?

CHENEY

I just-

KYLE (O.S.)

Whoa, whoa, whoa! Easy!

KYLE PATTERSON, twelve, causal with an authoritative undercurrent, knives between them.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Calm down, okay? Put an egg in your shoe and beat it, Cheney.

CHENEY

I was only-

KYLE

Scram!

CHENEY

(wandering off)
Touchy character...

KYLE

You gotta work on that personal space thing, Danny!
(to Charlie)
Sorry about that.

CHARLIE
What's his deal?

KYLE
His name's Dan Cheney. His parents raised him to be real polite. You know, like telling the mailman what a good job he does and stuff? He can't help it. Honest.

CHARLIE
You mean he really meant that?

KYLE
Nuts, huh?

CHARLIE
Kid should come with a warning label.

KYLE
No joke, gun smoke. Kyle.

CHARLIE
Charlie.

KYLE
First time in league, right?

CHARLIE
Yeah. You played before?

KYLE
Last couple summers. Supposed to be stiff competition this year, but I know most of these guys. They're not all bad. Usually. What say I show you around?

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - LATER

Boys throw balls. Run and catch them. Kyle leads Charlie through the fray.

KYLE
Okay here we go so try and keep up. See the kid in the blue shoes with the way too intense look on his face?

CALVIN "HOMER" WILLIS, eleven, is poised on the grass, eyes permanently aimed toward the sky.

KYLE (CONT'D)
That's Calvin Willis. Plays center
field. We call him Homer.

CHARLIE
Why's that?

KYLE
The dude's a homing pigeon for
baseballs. One flies his way,
he'll grab it like nothin'. End of
story.

A PLAYER cracks a ball with a bat. It soars across the sky.
Homer locks in, catapults into the air like a missile,
snatches it.

ROB "ROLLO" MINOLO, twelve, stretches his hamstrings on the
dirt. Short but confident, he runs in place.

KYLE (CONT'D)
(pointing)
Rob Minolo, Rollo for short. He
played right field last year.
Fastest kid I've ever seen.

CHARLIE
How fast?

Kyle picks up a bat. Takes Charlie's ball.

KYLE
Yo, Rollo!

Rollo sees. Nods.

KYLE (CONT'D)
(to Charlie)
Keep your eye on the ball.

Charlie nods. Rollo readies himself. Kyle tosses the ball.
Hits it. It jets into the sky, heading for the outfield...

...and lands in Rollo's hand. Charlie double takes. Only a
cloud of dust lingers where Rollo used to be.

CHARLIE
Wait a minute...

KYLE
Told ya.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - LATER

KYLE
Cheney you know...

CHENEY
(catching a ball, then, to
the Thrower)
Great throw! Good for you!

THROWER rolls his eyes.

KYLE
...Whacks, however, you don't.

BUSTER "WHACKS" FIONELLI, thirteen, runs a silver comb
through his slick hair, tall, dark, and jazzy.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Buster Fionelli. Know why we call
him Whacks?

CHARLIE
Cause he's a good hitter?

KYLE
Cause his dad's in the mob.

CHARLIE
What? Come on- Wait. Fionelli?

Kyle nods.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
You're kidding me, right?

KYLE
Let me put it this way. Last year
Whacks was fighting hard to play
third base but this kid named Jimmy
Green got it instead. But right
before the season started, Whacks
got third after all.

CHARLIE
What happened to Jimmy?

KYLE
Oh, he moved to Kentucky.

Kyle gives Charlie a look. Whacks grins at them, swinging a
bat. Charlie and Kyle nervously smile back.

SQUEAKER (O.S.)
Hey! Patterson! Patterson, hey!

KYLE
(with a groan)
Here he comes...

CHARLIE
Who?

TIM "SQUEAKER" CARLSON, nine, runs up on stubby legs. Wide-eyed and bursting with energy, mitt bigger than his head.

SQUEAKER
(high, squeaky voice)
Hey Patterson! Kyle Patterson.
Hey Kyle! Hey-

KYLE
Spit it out, Squeaker! What do you want?

SQUEAKER
We're gonna throw the ball around right? Right? Cause I need practice. You need the practice, too, right? We both need practice-

KYLE
(trying to get a word in)
Okay. Yeah. Yeah! In a minute.
In a minute!

SQUEAKER
Awesome! Cool. I'll be over there, okay? Over there. Come see me over there, all right? Right there!
(to Charlie)
Hey nice to meet you okay bye!

He takes off with whirlwind speed.

CHARLIE
Who the heck was that?

KYLE
Tim Carlson. You can probably guess why we call him Squeaker.

CHARLIE
Is his dad in the mob?

KYLE

Plays short stop. Hey, I never put that together before.

CHARLIE

Like a bicycle horn on too much soda.

KYLE

You'll get used to it. Not his fault, really. His voice is just changing.

CHARLIE

Well he's ahead of the curve.

KYLE

Like my pop always says: when nature happens, it happens.

JOEY

Bring it in boys! Time to shine!

MONTAGE - TRYOUTS

A KID throws a curve from the pitching mound. Strike!

A PLAYER slides to home base. Safe!

Whacks knocks the ball high and wide. Runs to first.

Homer jumps high, makes an impossible catch. Joey notes it on a clipboard.

Kyle bunts, takes off like Speedy Gonzales.

A BOY on second tags the RUNNER. Out!

Cheney takes a ball to his catcher's mask. Pong!

Squeaker scoops up a grounder, hurls it to second.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Charlie takes the mound. Cheney squats, mask over his face. The boys watch. Sammy shows his thumbs from the stands. Joey holds his clipboard.

JOEY

Alright, Charlie. Show me a fastball.

Charlie takes stance. Throws it right in the glove. The boys murmur, impressed.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Good! Now a curve!

Charlie hurls it. Kyle nudges Rollo - wow. Cheney waves - nice job! Whacks shakes his head at Cheney.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Anything else you can show me?

Charlie's eyes drift to Sammy, who shows him five fingers. Charlie winds up. The pitch flies by Cheney, hits the dirt.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Keep that one in your pocket, bud.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - LATER

The boys sit. Joey paces, making his last notes. Charlie's eye catches DEXTER HARRISON, eleven, nose is buried in a Batman comic. A slingshot protrudes from his back pocket.

CHARLIE

Who's that?

KYLE

Oh, him? That's Dex Harrison.
Quiet. Reads a lot.

CHARLIE

No kidding.

KYLE

Played with him a couple summers back. Can't take the field without a comic book in his back pocket.

ROLLO

I heard he's got a thousand of those things in his basement.

HOMER

That's a load of bunk.

ROLLO

It's true. Bobby Larson had dinner at his house last week. He said they were stacked like bricks. Dex's parents built these walkways just to get to the washing machine.

HOMER
I'll believe that when I see it.

JOEY
Okay. Here's this year's team.
Make sure to listen for your name.
Robert Minolo. Kyle Patterson.
Buster Fionelli...

Whacks grins. The boys don't.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Tim Carlson. Daniel Cheney.
Charlie Archer...

Kyle pats him on the back. Sammy waves. Charlie waves back.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Calvin Willis. Dexter Harrison...

Dex keeps his eyes in his comic.

JOEY (CONT'D)
And, as always, our trusty left
fielder - Joe.

JOE, fourteen, waves from the back. He's tall, lanky,
strangely ominous. Joey reads more names.

CHARLIE
Who's Joe?

KYLE
Nice guy. Good player.

CHARLIE
What's his last name?

KYLE
Oh, we don't know. We're not even
sure Joe is his real name.

CHARLIE
Then why do you call him that?

KYLE
There's always at least one Joe on
every team.

JOEY
Congratulations to everyone who
made it this year.
(MORE)

JOEY (CONT'D)

For those who didn't, thanks for trying out and it's never too late to start working toward next year. The Cross Towners will meet here for their first practice tomorrow. 4 pm on the money. Thanks, guys. Get home safe.

The not-so-lucky disband.

KYLE

Congrats, bud.

CHARLIE

Thanks.

KYLE

You gotta be home yet?

CHARLIE

Don't think so. Why?

KYLE

Team always goes to Momo's for pizza afterwards. Feel like tagging along?

CHARLIE

Can my brother come?

KYLE

Don't see why not.

Cheney trots up with a beaming smile.

CHENEY

Boy, what a great day, huh, guys?

KYLE

Yeah, real nice, Cheney.

CHENEY

We're on the team. You pitch, I catch. Cool, right?

CHARLIE

Yeah, cool.

KYLE

Wait a minute....
(pointing to Cheney)
You're catcher?

CHENEY

Right. I mean I think so. Isn't it exciting?

KYLE

You a catcher. You, who can't trash talk anyone to save his life?

CHENEY

Why would I say trashy things to someone I don't know?

Kyle and Charlie and dumbfounded. He saunters off.

CHENEY (CONT'D)

See you at Momo's!

KYLE

Gonna be an interesting season.

The team strolls off as a group. Kyle notices Charlie lagging.

KYLE (CONT'D)

You coming?

CHARLIE

Yeah. In a sec.

Kyle nods, joins the team. Charlie walks to Joey.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Mr. Grant?

JOEY

Mr. Archer. What can I do for you?

CHARLIE

Thanks for putting me on the team.

JOEY

Shouldn't be a surprise. You were the best thrower out there.

CHARLIE

Thanks. It's just... I have one condition before I play.

JOEY

A condition.

CHARLIE

Yeah. I'll do what I can for the team. As long as my brother Sammy's our bat boy.

Joey sees Sammy in the stands.

JOEY

Why didn't he try out himself?

CHARLIE

He's sick.

JOEY

Oh. What's ailing him?

CHARLIE

He's got no lungs. Can't digest much.

JOEY

I'm sorry to hear that.

CHARLIE

Don't worry. Few words with the kid and you'd forget all about it. Acts like he's made out of stone, not glass. He loves the game as much as I do, even more. He'd do a great job, money back promise.

JOEY

Well, story is I need your arm on the team. And, point of fact, couldn't hurt to have someone looking after our sluggers' assets. You got a deal, pitch.

They shake.

CHARLIE

Thanks, Mr. Grant. You won't regret it.

JOEY

Enough with the mister crap. Call me coach.

CHARLIE

Coach.

JOEY

You two OK getting home?

CHARLIE
Good as gold.

Joey walks off. Sammy descends the stands.

SAMMY
Told you you'd pull it off!

CHARLIE
Pulled off a better one. You're on
the team. Carrying bats.

SAMMY
Get out.

CHARLIE
It's the truth, Baby Ruth.

SAMMY
You're awesome, yo.

CHARLIE
Finally, you see it.

SAMMY
Thanks, Charlie.

CHARLIE
Just don't brain yourself with a
bat. I'd-

SAMMY
Never hear the end of it, yeah,
yeah.

EXT. MOMO'S PIZZERIA - DAY - LATER

The team sits on the sidewalk like bumps on a log, scarfing
down pizza slices.

CHENEY
This food certainly is tasty and
marvelous.

ROLLO
Why can't you talk normal, Cheney?

HOMER
Like you're normal.

ROLLO
Eat it, Homer.

HOMER
I will, thanks.

WHACKS
Anybody see Rita Noons this summer?

ROLLO
You got a slice in your hand and
you're thinking about some girl?

WHACKS
She ain't a girl no more. She's
all woman.

KYLE
Too bad chicks don't date guys who
say "ain't."

Whacks makes like he'll hit Kyle.

KYLE (CONT'D)
(unafraid)
Do somethin'.

Dex reads his comic. Sammy nibbles. Charlie smiles at his
brother, happy to see him eating.

KYLE (CONT'D)
(to Charlie)
You gonna eat?

CHARLIE
I'm not hungry.

KYLE
Look, if you're short on dough-

CHARLIE
Said I'm not hungry.

KYLE
Okay, man.

CHARLIE
Thanks, though. For the offer.

KYLE
Hey. No worries.

Squeaker's eyes go wide. He taps Rollo like a woodpecker.

ROLLO
What, Squeaker? Jeeze.

Squeaker points. All heads turn to Joe, licking his fingers.

HOMER

Holy cats. Is he a kid or a vacuum cleaner?

SQUEAKER

Hey Joe! How fast did you eat that? Huh? Come on, how fast?

Joe shrugs.

HOMER

Didn't know he could do that.

WHACKS

It ain't nothin'.

ROLLO

Yeah? Let's see you do it.

WHACKS

I'm already half done. Anybody wanna give up their slice for visual purposes?

HOMER

Let's see you do it, Rollo.

SQUEAKER

Yeah, let's see you do it, Rollo. Come on, let's see!

ROLLO

Nah, I can't do that. I can, however, name all fifty state capitals.

CHENEY

Ooo! So can I! Olympia, Tallahassee, Des Moines, Raleigh-

KYLE

Stop, Cheney. I'm begging you.

HOMER

I can burp the alphabet. Wanna hear?

ROLLO

Um, no.

SAMMY

I can spell xylophone.

CHENEY
We can all spell xylophone.

SAMMY
Yeah, but I'm eight.

CHENEY
Fair enough.

KYLE
What about you, Dex?

DEX
You kidding? I don't even know
what a xylophone is.

SQUEAKER
I can do dog barks. Any breed.
Name one.

HOMER
Great Dane.

Squeaker barks.

HOMER (CONT'D)
Say, that's pretty good.

KYLE
How would you know?

HOMER
My uncle's got one.
(to Squeaker)
Poodle. One of the small ones.

Squeaker barks.

CHENEY
And just what talent does Whacks
procure?

SQUEAKER
Yeah! What Cheney said!

WHACKS
I can sing like Dean Martin.

ROLLO
Bull squat!

WHACKS
Can too. Chicks love it.

KYLE

Sure, Whacks, you're a regular
Romeo. Just ask Rita Noons.

They all laugh.

WHACKS

Oh yeah? Well, what can he do?

They stare at Charlie.

CHARLIE

You wanna see what I can do?

They nod in unison. Charlie walks inside Momo's.

ROLLO

The heck is he going?

Squeaker and Sammy walk to the window. Press their noses
against the glass.

CHENEY

What's he doing?

SQUEAKER

He's at the front counter. He's
saying something. Hey, he's saying
something!

HOMER

What's he saying?

SQUEAKER

Hang on. I'll tell ya right after
I learn to read lips!

Homer goes to the window. Presses his face between Sammy's
and Squeaker's.

KYLE

Well? End the suspense, you
goobers!

HOMER

The cashier's leaving.

SAMMY

He's coming back!

HOMER

There's somebody with him.

Homer gasps. Even Dex looks up.

WHACKS

What?

HOMER

It's Momo. The cashier brought Momo to the front and now he's talking to Charlie!

CHENEY

What?

HOMER

Get up here!

They all race to the window, faces to the glass.

ROLLO

They're talking. Can anyone see what they're saying?

KYLE

Holy crap stick...

DEX

Something's wrong. I'm telling you guys.

WHACKS

We should run. We should beat it now before they corner us.

HOMER

Easy, Whacks. It's not like we're selling cigarettes out here.

WHACKS

He's talking to Momo! And we don't know what about!

CHENEY

There could be a reasonable explanation.

SAMMY

Charlie knows what he's doing!

WHACKS

He's gonna piss Momo off is what he's gonna do!

ROLLO

What's that?

HOMER
What's what?

KYLE
Charlie's got something in his
hand. He's showing it to Momo.

DEX
Momo doesn't look happy, boys.

KYLE
Holy crap stick!

WHACKS
We're dead as doornails.

SAMMY
Charlie's coming out!

The boys scatter, reassemble themselves "casually." They lean, stand, whistle. The door opens. The team's collective jaw drops. Charlie stands in front of them, a gigantic, fresh-made pizza in hand.

CHARLIE
You gents still hungry?

Squeaker barks in surprise.

KYLE
You got a free pizza out of Momo?

CHARLIE
Yep.

ROLLO
For free?

HOMER
How the hell did you do that?

CHARLIE
Made him a bet.

CHENEY
What kind of bet?

CHARLIE
The kind he lost.

ROLLO
Wait. You mean...it's free? As in
no charge?

CHARLIE
Yeah. Go ahead.

Dex takes a slice. Then Homer. Soon, they're all munching together.

SAMMY
(to Charlie)
I told them you knew what you were doing.

CHARLIE
(with a wink)
Ooie, newie, kablooie.

Sammy laughs.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Come on. Let's give Momo his plate back.

EXT. PARK - DAY - LATER

The sun bleaches the sky with late afternoon light as the team saunters onward. Sammy kicks rocks across the grass. Charlie and Rollo mutter about batting averages.

WHACKS
Hey! Hey, Chuck!

Rollo nudges a "later" to Charlie, runs on.

WHACKS (CONT'D)
You know, that was some trick you pulled back there.

CHARLIE
Thanks.

WHACKS
No, really man. Ain't nobody gets a free pie off Momo and lives to talk about it, you know? You gotta tell me how you did it.

CHARLIE
Trade secret, Whacks.

WHACKS
Awww, come on, Chuck!

CHARLIE
Charlie.

WHACKS

Charlie, sorry. Come on, I'm practically drooling here.

Sammy shrugs. Charlie nods.

CHARLIE

Card trick.

WHACKS

A card trick? That's it? What'd you do? Make him find the queen?

CHARLIE

He picked a card. I told him what he had. That's it.

WHACKS

That's it? You're telling me you can read people's minds and that's it?

Whacks' steel comb pokes out of his pocket. Sammy eyes it.

SAMMY

Can I see your comb?

WHACKS

Sorry, little guy. My grandpa Gianni brought it all the way from Italy. No one uses it but me.

CHARLIE

I didn't say I could read minds. I said it was a trick.

WHACKS

Well, what kind, for cryin' out loud?

Charlie pulls a deck of cards.

CHARLIE

Shuffle.

Whacks does it. Hands them back. Charlie spreads them out.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Pick.

Whacks does.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Memorize it. Stick it on the
bottom of the deck.

The card slides under the rest. Charlie shoves the cards
back in the box. Holds it near his head. Squeezes his eyes
shut and concentrates. Whacks shakes his head as the others
watch - gimme a break.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Ooie, newie, kablooie!

WHACKS
You're telling me those bull words
helped you figure out-

CHARLIE
Five of spades.

WHACKS
...OK, how the hell did you do
that?

Sammy tugs on Charlie.

SAMMY
He curses like Vernon.

CHARLIE
(to Sammy)
Shhh.
(to Whacks)
I told you. It's a trick.

He tosses the box at Whacks. Whacks inspects it. A hole is
cut in the corner, showing the suit and number of the bottom
card - five of spades.

WHACKS
Say, that's a pretty good scam. I
can use this gig. Make some quick
cash, right?

CHARLIE
I don't scam people.

WHACKS
Sure you do. Hell, you scammed the
pants off Momo back there.

SAMMY
You shouldn't curse.

WHACKS

Everybody curses, shrimp.

SAMMY

I'm not a shrimp!

WHACKS

Well, you ain't exactly a sky scraper.

CHARLIE

You got it all wrong, Whacks. I didn't scam Momo. I made him a fair bet.

WHACKS

You're a hustler scam artist and it's damn cool.

SAMMY

You're cursing again.

WHACKS

Shut up, shrimp cocktail!

CHARLIE

First, stop yelling at my brother. Second, I wasn't hustling, I was trying to feed Sammy. I'm a survivor, not a crook - which is more than I can say for your family, pal.

Whacks decks him. The two tumble into the grass, locked in battle. Joe wrangles Whacks and Homer holds back Charlie.

KYLE

Break it up!

WHACKS

Rags here insulted my family!

CHARLIE

Then don't be callin' me a thief!

KYLE

Forget it! Now! You guys act like this at a game and we're done before the season starts! So cut it! We're a team, here!

Charlie dusts off. Whacks straightens himself. Reaches in his pocket. It's empty.

WHACKS

My comb. Where's my comb?

SQUEAKER

It isn't there. See? Look, you're pocket's empty. Your comb's gone. See, look, it vamoosed-

WHACKS

I can see that, Squeaks! I ain't blind!

ROLLO

I don't see anything.

DEX

Just grass over here.

WHACKS

(checking every pocket)
Where is it? Anybody see-

SQUEAKER (O.S.)

Uh oh.

They all turn to see Squeaker staring down a storm drain.

SQUEAKER (CONT'D)

Think I know where it went...

INT. STORM DRAIN - DAY - LATER

The comb, on mud-stained bubble gum wrappers. Fingers edge down, grasping...

EXT. STREET - DAY

Whacks lies on the concrete, arm down the drain. His muscles strain. He withdraws his arm. No good.

WHACKS

I can't reach it.

ROLLO

Why don't you just buy a new comb?

WHACKS

I don't want a new comb. My grandfather gave me that comb a week before he died and I'm not gonna let some slimy sewer rat run off with it!

DEX
Anybody got an idea?

INT. STORM DRAIN - DAY - LATER

Small, stubby fingers trail down towards the comb.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The team holds Squeaker's feet as he worms into the drain.

HOMER
See it?

SQUEAKER
(voice echoing in the
sewer)
I got it! Hey, I think I got it!

They all sigh with relief.

SQUEAKER (CONT'D)
Nope. Something else.

They groan.

KYLE
Are you at least close?

SQUEAKER
I think it's too far!

They pull Squeaker out. They recoil. He's covered in muck from the shoulders down. He coughs out dust.

HOMER
Um. Good try, Squeaker.

SQUEAKER
That was an evil place.

CHENEY
What do we do now?

KYLE
Who's got a stick of gum?

The team stares.

KYLE (CONT'D)
 Nobody has gum? We're kids. Who
 play baseball. And we have zero
 gum.

The team shrugs. Kyle runs a hand down his face.

KYLE (CONT'D)
 I suppose a magnet is out of the
 question, then.

WHACKS
 We need to think of something!

HOMER
 Like what? Squeaker couldn't get
 it. Who else is there?

SAMMY
 Me.

EXT. STREET - DAY - LATER

Charlie, Rollo, Kyle, Joe, and Dex hold Sammy's legs as he
 slides headfirst in the drain.

INT. STORM DRAIN - DAY

Sammy's fingers swim through trash. Close in on the comb.
 Grasp it!

EXT. STREET - DAY

Squeaker tries to clean himself off, to little avail.

SAMMY
 Bingo!

CHARLIE
 Got it?

SAMMY
 Pull me out! This place smells
 like gym class, yo!

They pull him out. He walks to Whacks, dirt on his face.
 The team watches Sammy give Whacks back his comb. Relief
 washes over Whacks as he grips his possession.

WHACKS
 Why'd you do that, huh?

SAMMY
I lost my hat one time. It was
hell.

WHACKS
Sammy, right?

SAMMY
Shrimp works.

WHACKS
Thanks. Don't know how yet, but
I'll pay you back someday.
Promise.

They shake. Whacks runs his crusty comb through his hair.

WHACKS (CONT'D)
Alright. We gonna stand around all
day, or what?

The team stares in disgust. Cheney looks like he may vomit.
Squeaker sneezes like a bike horn.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - NEXT DAY

Green soldiers on the carpet. Charlie and Sammy place them
like chess pieces. Sammy runs four down with a tank.

SAMMY
Beware men! We're in the fight of
our lives!

Charlie aims bazooka man at the tank. Makes a firing noise.
Sammy acts as if he's hit, spasms dramatically. Charlie
laughs. Betty walks in, work apron around her neck. She
carefully steps over the little war. Digs in the couch.

BETTY
You boys seen my keys?

CHARLIE
No.

SAMMY
Nope.

Charlie sees the bruise on his mother's arm.

CHARLIE
What happened, mom?

Betty stares at her wound. Searches under the couch.

BETTY

I ran into another waitress at
work. Nearly knocked her over.
(frustrated)
Damn it.

SAMMY

Mamma...

BETTY

I mean darn it.

She rushes to the kitchen. Sammy and Charlie continue their
fake bombs and bullets. Clamoring O.S.

BETTY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Charlie, ask Vernon if he's seen my
keys!

CHARLIE

Did you check your purse?

BETTY (O.S.)

Yes, I did.

CHARLIE

Maybe you left them in the car.

BETTY (O.S.)

No, I remember bringing them in!

Rattling, banging O.S.

BETTY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Damn it! If I'm late, Benny'll
chew my rear off. Ask Vernon if he
remembers where they are.

CHARLIE

Maybe you should check your purse
again.

Betty pops out.

BETTY

I've checked my purse three times.
Charlie...ask him. Now.

Betty flashes up the stairs. Charlie sighs.

SAMMY

Wanna take the tank?

INT. DEN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

A war movie on TV. Machine guns and screaming. Vernon is a secret in the shadows, obscured by the low light. Charlie appears in the doorway.

VERNON

Well, well. The big man himself.
What do you want?

CHARLIE

Seen Ma's keys?

VERNON

That girl. She should keep 'em
latched around her neck. Lose her
limbs if they weren't screwed on.

CHARLIE

You seen 'em or what?

VERNON

Nope. Now beat it. I got better
things to look at than your ugly
face.

Charlie backs out like he were facing a wild tiger. Vernon hikes the volume, the screams intensifying.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Charlie exhales. Betty races down the stairs. She eyes the clock on the mantle.

BETTY

Oh, God, I'm late.

Sammy crawls out from under the couch with a wad of metal.

SAMMY

Found them!

BETTY

(hugging him)
Thanks, soldier.

She pockets her keys. Snatches up her purse.

BETTY (CONT'D)

I'm pulling a late shift, remember.
There's stuff for sandwiches in the
fridge. I'll be home late. In bed
by nine. Don't bother Vernon.

(MORE)

BETTY (CONT'D)

(to Sammy)

And try not to smell like garbage
when I get home this time, okay?

SAMMY

No promises!

CHARLIE

When is Vernon gonna get a job?

BETTY

Soon, honey. It's tough out there,
you know. Luckily he's still got
some unemployment comin' in.

She straightens in front of a mirror. Races back to her
sons, kisses them.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Be good. Love you both!

She races to the door, swings it wide to see Joey, fist high,
ready to knock. They shout in surprise.

JOEY

Oh, sorry! I was just about to-

BETTY

It's okay, really... I mean, no
harm done.

JOEY

I hope not.

They take each other in, distracted by each other's honest
face and warm eyes. An instant connection.

BETTY

What can I do for you?

JOEY

Oh, right. I'm Joey Grant. I
coach The Cross Towners.

BETTY

Nice to put a face with the name.

CHARLIE

Hey, Mr. G.

SAMMY

Yo, coach!

JOEY
Hey, boys, how are ya?

SAMMY
Status quo.

BETTY
I'm sorry, Mr. Grant-

JOEY
Joey, please.

BETTY
Joey. Right. I'm sorry, I'd love to chat but I'm unbelievably late for work-

JOEY
No problem. I just came by to drop these off for the guys.

Uniforms with matching caps, "Cross Towners" across the backs in bold lettering. They almost sparkle under the lights.

SAMMY
Wow.

CHARLIE
Look at those...

They handle them like they were made of diamonds.

JOEY
First game is Saturday. I need you two at the stadium Friday for practice.
(to Betty)
That OK?

BETTY
Sure, sure. Rolling in dirt is the high point of their lives.

Sammy sticks his tongue out. Betty retaliates. Joey laughs.

BETTY (CONT'D)
So I gotta book it or I'm done for.
Bye, boys.

CHARLIE/SAMMY
Bye, mom.

BETTY
Nice meeting you, Joey.

JOEY
Pleasure's mine, Miss Archer.

BETTY
Betty.

JOEY
Sure thing.

They share a smile, locked in one another's stare. Betty stumbles on her way out the door.

BETTY
Whoops. Pesky doorjamb.

JOEY
Yeah, those things are tricky.

She speeds off. Sammy and Charlie giggle.

JOEY (CONT'D)
See you boys tomorrow, huh?

CHARLIE
With bells on, coach.

Joey waves, takes off. Charlie and Sammy check out their uniforms. Sammy is number 9. Charlie is 3.

SAMMY
Charlie, look. That's The Babe's number, yo.

CHARLIE
Yeah. It is.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - GAME DAY

Charlie on the mound, uniform crisp in front of the empty stands. Sammy squats at home, in uniform, glove open. Charlie pulls his arm back, lets it loose. It rockets like a jet into Sammy's glove, so hard dust bursts into the air.

SAMMY
Way to throw!

CHARLIE
Felt shaky.

SAMMY
You kiddin'? It was great!

Sammy tosses it back. Makes the worm killer sign. Charlie throws. It goes wild.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

That was shaky.

CHARLIE

I'm nervous, Sam.

SAMMY

Don't know why. You throw like The Babe.

CHARLIE

Nobody throws like The Babe.
Ready?

Charlie hurls another worm killer. It whizzes by Sammy, pings off the cage. Sammy grabs the ball, runs up.

SAMMY

That wasn't so good, either.

CHARLIE

No bull.

SAMMY

Pretend it's a trick.

CHARLIE

Huh?

SAMMY

You know, like your magic tricks.
Never get nervous about those.

CHARLIE

Cause I don't do magic tricks in
front of a hundred people.

SAMMY

Sure you do. Just not all of 'em
are looking.

CHARLIE

You're right there. Sure you feel
up to this?

SAMMY

You ask me again and I'll pop you
one.

CHARLIE

That good, huh?

SAMMY

I got lungs like an eight year old
today. And I got faith.

Charlie laughs, oblivious to the three bicycles rolling up
behind them. The front tires align like sharks homing in on
prey...

Vince grins at Carter, a sinister glint in his eye.
Preston's glare is locked on Charlie and Sammy. All three
wear City Slicker jerseys.

VINCE

Looky what we got here.

CARTER

Guess someone else wanted to get
some throws in, huh, Preston?

PRESTON

Come on.

They pedal off at high speed. Sammy sees the dust.

SAMMY

Charlie!

CHARLIE

Let's get out of here.

Preston is faster, cutting them off, the dust cloud
assaulting Sammy and Charlie like mustard gas. Sammy coughs.

CARTER

Don't go yet, boys.

VINCE

Yeah. You're gonna loose your
practice time.

CHARLIE

Don't you two have puppies to drown
or something?

SAMMY

Yeah! Or something!

VICE

Why? You wanna be the puppy?

CHARLIE

You're wearing jerseys...

CARTER

So are you. If you can call those
rags jerseys.

SAMMY

Laugh it up, scuzzball!

Charlie puts a hand up - don't make it worse.

CHARLIE

Just let us go, Preston.

The three circle them, creating a ring of menace.

PRESTON

How's the new school, Archer?
Looks interesting from the outside.

VINCE

Looks like a shack.

CARTER

Smells like one, too.

CHARLIE

A step up from yours, I'm sure.

Preston skids to a stop. Dust flies. Sammy hacks.

A creeping smile crawls across Preston's face...

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Don't.

Preston pushes off, circling fast, more and more dust in the
air. Sammy's coughs get worse. Vince and Carter follow suit
and the three trap Charlie and Sammy, who try to escape, but
everywhere they turn a bike appears. Carter skids his tires,
throwing a huge cloud in the air.

SAMMY

(coughing violently)
Stop it!

CARTER

Awww, little baby got a bad cough?

VINCE

All out of medicine. Sorry.

CHARLIE

Knock it off! I mean it!

PRESTON

What's the matter, Archer? Can't
take a little dust?

CHARLIE

He can't breathe! Stop, or I'll-

CARTER

You'll what?

Carter punches Charlie. Charlie hits the ground. A tire barely misses his fingers. Sammy doubles over, unable to catch his breath. Charlie struggles to get up, only to have Preston knock him back down.

SAMMY

(choking now)

Stop! Stop it!

VINCE/CARTER

(sing song)

Sick boy, sick boy, look at the
sick boy!

Preston swerves away. Aims his front tire at Charlie. Bares down on him, ready to run him over-

POW! Vince's tire explodes. He catapults over his handlebars and into the dirt. Carter and Preston skid to a stop. The dust dissipates. Carter runs to a dazed Vince. Charlie rushes to Sammy, who's coughing subsides.

CHARLIE

You all right? You okay?

Sammy nods, spits dust. Vince yells out, leg bashed up.

CARTER

What happened?

VINCE

My tire. It just-

Vince's eyes go wide. Carter and Preston turn.

The Cross Towners stand in uniform, Kyle out front like a General leading troops. Homer's eyes are picks. Rollo's face is granite. Squeaker is ready for anything. Whacks' silver comb glints in his pocket like a sidearm as Dex twirls his slingshot.

DEX

(deadpan)

Whoops.

Carter and Preston hold an angry Vince back. The Cross Towners glare, unafraid and battle-hardened.

KYLE
(a dare)
Do somethin'.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey!

All eyes turn as SIMON WEAVER, forties, stalks up like a grizzly bear, his City Slickers jersey immaculate. Sharp eyes, menacing.

SIMON
What the hell's all this?

VINCE
Those punks wrecked my bike, coach!

CARTER
They almost killed him!

ROLLO
What a crock!

SIMON
(savagely)
Knock it off!

Everyone flinches. Simon glares at the Towners like he could eat them for lunch. The group is frozen. Sammy and Charlie exchange glances.

KYLE
(bravely)
We were defending our own, Coach.
They were beating on Charlie and
Sammy.

PRESTON
We barely touched them-

SIMON
Quiet down, Dale. Pushups. All
three of you.

CARTER
How many?

SIMON
I'll let you know.

The Slickers drop, start their exercise.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Count off!

They do, numbering each lift in the dirt. Simon approaches Charlie and Sammy like a viper.

SIMON (CONT'D)
So you're the newbies.

CHARLIE
Yes, sir.

SAMMY
Yes...sir.

SIMON
I'm Coach Weaver.
(to Charlie)
I hear you've got a good arm.

CHARLIE
Thanks.

SIMON
I said I heard. It's yet to be proven.

His smile unsettles the team.

Joey arrives, gym bag over his shoulder, jersey on.

JOEY
Simon?

SIMON
Hiya Joey.

They shake hands. Joey looks the man in the eye, but is happy to get his hand back.

JOEY
Everything alright here?

SIMON
Just meeting your team. Seems they had a small run in with my boys.

Joey sees them, tiring from the endless pushups.

JOEY
(to the Towners)
You boys okay?

They nod.

JOEY (CONT'D)
(the Slickers)
They've had enough, don't you
think?

SIMON
You coach your boys, I'll coach
mine.

JOEY
See you on the field.

SIMON
You too.

Joey and the Towners leave.

SAMMY
(to Charlie)
Vernon would buy that guy beer.

Simon strolls to Preston, Vince and Carter, who still count
despite the pain.

SIMON
You three done causing trouble?

PRESTON/VINCE/CARTER
Yes, sir.

SIMON
Then quit wasting my time and get
up.

They stop, relieved. Get to their feet, sore.

SIMON (CONT'D)
I don't want to see any of you
starting shit off the field.
You've got a beef, save it for the
game. When it comes to the game,
no prisoners. Understood?

They nod.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Don't worry, fellas. Wimps like
that never last.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - LATER

Cross Towners and City Slickers flags wave beside each other. BARKERS sell popcorn and soda up and down the rails. Its 5-1 on the weathered scoreboard, City Slickers leading.

Preston on the mound. Cheney adjusts his glasses, grips his bat. CATCHER makes the sign. Preston throws. Cheney swings.

UMPIRE
Strike three!

Slicker fans cheer. Preston grins.

INT. SLICKERS DUGOUT - DAY

Simon hoops and hollers with his team.

SIMON
No prisoners!

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

The Towners are already tired.

JOEY
This pitcher's good. He's got good movement on the ball and he varies his speeds. Wait for him. Don't swing early on the offspeed.

Cheney slumps onto the bench. Wipes his brow.

CHENEY
My, it's hot.

KYLE
You swung too fast. You were way out in front!

CHENEY
I'm inclined to agree.

JOEY
Kyle, you're up.

Kyle walks to Sammy, who's waiting with three bats.

SAMMY
Chose wisely, yo.

Kyle picks. Feels the weight.

KYLE
Thanks, shrimp.

SAMMY
Drive one into his face.

Kyle ducks through the box's rickety opening...

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...and onto the green, greeted by cheers and jeers. The Umpire moves back, gives him room. The Towners watch Kyle wring the grip. Level his eyes at Preston, who grins like the devil.

Kelly sits in the stands, sharing popcorn with DR. ARTHUR SANDS, her elegant father.

KELLY
That pitcher's mean.

DR. SANDS
Good is what he is.

KELLY
He doesn't give anybody a chance.

DR. SANDS
This is baseball, honey. You can't give people chances or you'll loose.

KELLY
He's meaner than that.

Preston takes stance. Kyle readies himself. Charlie watches through the chain link wall.

CHARLIE
Swing low. Stay back, Kyle...

Preston pitches. Kyle swings as the ball sails right by.

UMPIRE
Strike one!

Vince and Carter hoot from the Slickers dugout.

CARTER
Keep dealing, Preston! Cut him up!

VINCE
Give him a chair!

Catcher throws it back. Kyle shakes the strike off.

JOEY
Wait for it, Kyle! Let him come to
you!

Kyle readies. Preston kicks his leg up, follows through and
Kyle swings hard. Whap! In the glove.

UMPIRE
Strike two!

CHARLIE
You can do it, Kyle! Crush it!

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

Joe chews gum. Shares a heated look with Simon across the
way. Whacks and Rollo watch the action.

WHACKS
Wait for the offspeed, stay back!

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Preston grinds the ball. Umpire crouches. Catcher gives the
sign. Preston throws. Kyle waits. Swings. Crack! The
ball flies into left field. The Towners cheer.

JOEY
Go, Kyle! Go, go!

Kyle takes off, cleats pounding the ground. LEFT FIELD
scoops up the ball, socks it to SECOND BASE just as Kyle
scrapes first.

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

CHENEY
Hooray!

The team stares at him.

CHENEY
What?

HOMER
Hooray?

JOEY
Charlie. Up to bat.

Charlie takes a breath. Sammy is waiting. Charlie chooses his bat. The two share a glance...

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie walks onto the plate.

KELLY
There's Charlie, dad.

DR. SANDS
So that's him, huh?

KELLY
Come on, Charlie...

Preston scowls like a wolverine.

INT. SLICKERS DUGOUT - DAY

Vince and Carter laugh behind their fence.

CARTER
Poor boy's dead meat.

SIMON
Make it hurt, Preston!

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Charlie readies. Preston winds up, hurls it hard. Right past Charlie.

UMPIRE
Strike one!

Sammy presses to the fence.

SAMMY
Show 'em a trick, Charlie!

KYLE
Come on, Charlie! Make me run!

Charlie's vision blurs in the heat. He takes a shaky stance. Preston throws a curve into the cage as Charlie swings at blank air.

UMPIRE
Strike two!

KELLY
He's pitching different.

DR. SANDS
He knows how to shake up his
batters. Pitcher knows Charlie
real well.

KELLY
Yeah. Too well.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Charlie sweats. Preston is cool, collected. Joey and the Towners watch in agonizing anticipation. Preston throws curvy. Charlie swings with all he's got-

Whap!

UMPIRE
Strike three!

Kyle drops his head. The team wilts.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
And The City Slickers take it home!

JOEY
That's okay, Charlie! We'll get
'em next time!

The crowd cheers as The City Slickers rush the field. Preston and Simon share a smug grin. Charlie drops to his knees. Sammy walks onto the field, over to Charlie.

SAMMY
Nice try.

Charlie can only shake his head. Kyle appears beside him.

KYLE
First game. Doesn't always go like
you plan it.

CHARLIE
Yeah, it didn't.

They walk away from the plate, The City Slickers screaming with victory behind them. Simon gives Joey a catty wave.

EXT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY - LATER

The crowd filters out. The team disperses. Cheney walks with Sammy and Charlie.

CHENEY

Next week we play The Bluejays.
Supposed to be pretty good. I
heard they all wear the same socks
every game for luck.

CHARLIE

Great. Maybe the smell will
distract them.

CHENEY

Well, I better get home. Mom
promised to make meatloaf.
Wonderful stuff. You guys have a
terrific night. Ta ta!

He takes off with a spring in his step.

CHARLIE

That kid will make a great guidance
councilor some day.

SAMMY

Don't feel bad. Happens to
everybody. The Babe struck out
almost two thousand times.

CHARLIE

Sure you don't know everything
about The Babe?

Kelly runs up.

KELLY

Hi fellas.

CHARLIE/SAMMY

Hey.

KELLY

Tough day, huh?

CHARLIE

Could've gone worse.

SAMMY

But not by much.

Charlie socks him in the shoulder.

KELLY
I liked your pitches.

CHARLIE
They weren't good enough.

KELLY
I thought they were.

Charlie stares at Sammy. What's with this girl? Sammy gives him a look back. She likes ya, you dolt.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Everybody has bad days, you know.
My dad once told me about a time he
was doing surgery on someone -

CHARLIE
Sammy, go on ahead.

SAMMY
What for?

CHARLIE
Go.

SAMMY
Oh, okay.

Sammy hauls his bag away from them.

CHARLIE
I'm fine, Kelly. OK?

KELLY
I know.

CHARLIE
Nah, you don't, or you'd just leave
me alone.

KELLY
I just wanted to-

CHARLIE
I know you feel bad for us. And I
know you're nice. But my brother
and me, we're fine. OK?

Kelly kicks the dirt.

KELLY
OK. Sorry.

Charlie moves on.

KELLY (CONT'D)
You're still my friend, Charlie. I
hope it's okay that I'm still
yours.

CHARLIE
(calling back over his
shoulder)
It is!

SAMMY
What did she say?

CHARLIE
Let's go home.

Kelly watches them go, feeling small.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - ONE WEEK LATER

Towners versus Bluejays. Bluejays up to bat and winning 2-0.
Fans fill the seats. BATTER chooses his weapon, walks to the
plate. Cheney raises his mask. Offers his hand.

CHENEY
Good luck out there!

BATTER
What's that supposed to mean?

CHENEY
I mean good luck, that's all.

Batter tosses his bat in anger and rushes Cheney.

BATTER
I'll make you spit your teeth, wise
ass!

Cheney recoils, screaming like a girl. Umpire corrals
Batter.

UMPIRE
You're out of here!

Batter pouts. Walks away.

CHENEY
Jeeze. Touchy batter.

Charlie can't help laughing on the mound. Kyle cocks his head on second base.

KYLE

Guess Cheney's good at trash talk after all.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - LATER

Rollo at bat. He stretches his legs, hamstrings, back. Bluejays look at each other, annoyed. The Towners chuckle. Rollo touches his toes.

CATCHER

Come on! I've had three birthdays already!

Rollo grips his bat. PITCHER coils, lets loose. Rollo blasts the ball. Takes off in a dust cloud. LEFT FIELD snatches the ball. Pulls his arm back, ready to throw...

Rollo is already back at home. A trail of dust hangs in the air, spanning the three bases. Bluejays face each other in shock. Left Field drops the ball, jaw on the ground.

JOEY

(smiling)

Fast kid...

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

Whacks approaches Sammy, combing his hair.

WHACKS

Watch this for me, huh, shrimp?

SAMMY

Like it was mine, yo.

Whacks ruffles his hair, takes his bat.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Catcher sees Whacks coming. He backs up nervously. Pitcher lets it go. Whacks sends it rolling in the grass. He takes off, The Towners cheering him on. The crowd roars.

Whacks rounds first base. CENTER FIELD grabs it as Whacks flies over second. Center Field tosses it to THIRD BASE.

Whacks turns on his toes and heads back to second. Third Base tosses to SECOND BASE. Whacks sees, heads back to third. Second tosses it back, the two of them trapping Whacks.

Whacks dashes back to third. Third Base catches the ball, holds it out, ready to tag.

WHACKS
I'm a Fionelli.

Third Base drops the ball.

THIRD BASE
Sorry. My mistake.

WHACKS
Forget about it.

He sidesteps, motors all the way home. The Towners cheer like crazy.

JOEY
That's one way to do it.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - LATER

Charlie on the mound. BATTER TWO takes the plate. Cheney gives the sign. Curve. Charlie lets it go. Wiff.

UMPIRE
Strike one!

The crowd cheers. Cheney gives the sign. Slider. Charlie rears, throws it. Batter Two twirls, ball swishing past.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)
Strike two!

Cheney shows fingers. Fast ball. It explodes from Charlie's hand like a bomb, flying on wings of fire. Whap!

UMPIRE (CONT'D)
Strike three! You're outta there!

4-3, Towners. The Towners nearly shake the cage loose with celebration. Dr. Sand and Kelly applaud in the stands.

DR. SANDS
That boy's one of the best pitchers
I've ever seen.

Kelly waves. Charlie waves back.

MONTAGE - CROSS TOWNERS RISE IN THE RANKS

The City Slickers crush The Tomahawks. Celebrate by tossing hats.

Preston in the dugout, grinning like a goblin as Simon paces with shark eyes.

The Cross Towners lose to The Knights. Sammy and Charlie sit together, disappointed.

Joey gathers his team. Gives pointers to each player.

Charlie pitches like a pro. They beat The Two Rivers. Joe hoists Charlie high, Charlie may throw up.

Vince tags out a RUNNER from Two Rivers. Carter and Preston go wild, winning the game.

Kelly watches in the stands. Her affection for Charlie grows.

Whacks and Rollo on the field during The Falcon game, arguing over how to swing the bat. Fast? No, smooth!

Season roster board. It begins with twenty teams, narrows thinner and thinner until only two remain: Cross Towners and City Slickers.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sammy nibbles cookies at the table as Charlie washes dishes.

SAMMY

Can we skip rocks at the lake today?

CHARLIE

Maybe later. Whacks and I are gonna practice for the game.

SAMMY

How many times did The Babe make the playoffs?

CHARLIE

A lot.

SAMMY

Think we'll win?

CHARLIE

Good a chance as any.

SAMMY

Do we get to go to Disney Land if
we win?

Charlie chuckles. Agitated voices rise O.S.

BETTY (O.S.)

...sit around all day doing
nothing, Vernon. It's getting old.

VERNON (O.S.)

Watch your tone, girl. You know I
hate disrespect.

BETTY (O.S.)

Disrespect? You wanna talk about
disrespect?

The boys share worried looks.

CHARLIE

Stay here.

He steps out. Sammy drops his cookie.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Charlie enters to see Betty's arms crossed, muscles tight.

BETTY

You don't respect anyone, Vernon.
You don't respect me, you don't
respect the boys. Hell, you don't
even respect yourself!

VERNON

Quiet down. Right now. I won't
tell you again.

BETTY

...No.

VERNON

What?

BETTY

I said no, Vernon. No, I won't
quiet down. I've had all I can
take. With your language, your
attitude, your treatment of my
sons.

(rubbing her bruises)

(MORE)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Your treatment of *me*. So you just
get out. Get out of my house!

Vernon glowers. Betty is afraid but unflinching. Charlie watches, fear coursing through his body.

Pow! He backhands her. She falls to her knees.

CHARLIE

Ma!

Vernon is all over her, gripping her with meaty hands.

VERNON

I don't take trash talk from some
two-bit waitress! You hear me,
girl?

CHARLIE

Leave her alone!

Vernon shoves him to the carpet.

VERNON

Sit down, pissant!

BETTY

Don't you touch him, Vernon!

VERNON

Shut up!

His savagery freezes her.

VERNON (CONT'D)

Big man Charlie. Nothin' but a
momma's boy. What's the matter?
Momma's boy can't take a little-

Sammy stands in the doorway.

VERNON (CONT'D)

What are you looking at, sicky?

SAMMY

This isn't your house.

VERNON

Says who?

SAMMY

Says The Babe.

CHARLIE

Sammy...

VERNON

(laughing)

The Babe?

SAMMY

Yeah. He'd hit you with his bat.
Hard.

VERNON

Hit me with his bat, huh?

SAMMY

Until you were broken.

VERNON

Well, what say we go fetch a bat
and see who gets hit.

Vernon grabs Sammy's hand. Betty's face is a twisted mask of horror. She shoots to her feet.

BETTY

Don't you touch him!

Vernon shoves her into the wall. She screams, her knee twisting. Charlie socks Vernon over and over. Vernon tosses him aside like loose change. He drags Sammy toward the stairs.

VERNON

Somebody needs to teach this imp
some respect, Betty. Hard job, but
someone's gotta do it, right?

Betty clutches her knee, unable to stand. Charlie helplessly watches Vernon carry away his brother.

CHARLIE

Got a bet for you!

Vernon stops in his tracks.

VERNON

What?

CHARLIE

I said I got a bet for you.

VERNON

A bet.

CHARLIE

That's right. I win, you leave.
And never come back.

VERNON

And If I win?

CHARLIE

Then you leave Sammy alone. And I
go upstairs with you.

BETTY

Charlie, no!

VERNON

Now, now, Betty. Your boy's
fighting for you. Showin' some
spunk! Be a good girl and let him.
Maybe he is a big man after all.
You wanna play? Let's play, Chuck.
Name your bet.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - LATER

Charlie and Vernon at the table. Betty in a chair in the
corner, knee swollen black, Sammy on her lap. Two large
glasses in front of Charlie, full of water. In front of
Vernon, a tiny glass.

CHARLIE

Here's the juice. I bet you that I
can drink both these glasses of
water before you finish yours.

Vernon stares at his glass.

VERNON

You serious, Chuck?

CHARLIE

I'm serious. There are rules,
though. We can't touch each
other's glasses. I get to drink
one whole glass first. And you
can't touch your glass until I'm
done drinking and set mine back on
the table.

BETTY

Charlie, this isn't a good idea-

VERNON
Close your mouth, girl. Or I'll
close it for you.

Vernon looks at Charlie. Chuckles.

VERNON (CONT'D)
I'm in. If only to see you cry
like a baby when we're done with
this stupid kid game.

Charlie starts drinking. Vernon and Betty watch. Sammy is
enthralled. Charlie finishes the glass.

He turns it upside down and places it over Vernon's, trapping
it. Sammy laughs as Vernon's face drops.

CHARLIE
You can't touch my glass, remember?

Charlie picks up his second glass, calmly starts to drink.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Better drink your water before I
win.

Vernon swipes his arm across the table, driving every glass
into a thousand pieces as they SMASH the wall. He jerks
Charlie out of his seat. Betty hobbles after them.

BETTY
Charlie! No!

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Vernon hauls him toward the stairs. Betty can't keep up.
Sammy is in tears.

BETTY
Vernon, don't you do this!

SAMMY
Charlie won! You're a liar!

VERNON
I'm a liar? This brat had the
thing fixed from the get go! Damn
con artist! And now he's gonna
find out what con artists get!

Betty grabs up the phone.

BETTY
I'm calling the police! You hear
me, Vernon? I'll-

Her voice trails off. Vernon turns, curious.

Whacks is slack-jawed in the doorway, mitt in hand.

WHACKS
...Charlie, I found my mitt so I
won't need your extra.

CHARLIE
Whacks. Get out of here-

VERNON
Hush up, mamma's boy.
(to Whacks)
Just a domestic problem, kid.
Doesn't concern you. So why don't
you take your friend Charlie's
advice and go for a hike, huh?

Whacks sees Betty's leg. Sammy's tears. Charlie's fear. He
tucks his mitt under his arm.

WHACKS
Problem, huh? All right.
(calling out the door)
Hey, pop! Some mook in here's got
a problem!

ANGELO FIONELLI saunters through the door, stands beside his
son. Betty drops the phone. Angelo takes in the scene. His
eyes settle on Vernon, who releases Charlie, shaking.

ANGELO
I don't like problems...

EXT. LAKE - DAY - LATER

Liquid glass reflecting the sky. Boats for rent sit wedged
along the muddy shore. A rock skips the water, rippling the
surface.

CHARLIE
Not bad, huh?

SAMMY
Yeah? Watch this, yo.

Sammy's skips thrice, sinks.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

No fair. I threw it harder than that!

CHARLIE

You gotta whip it more. Like this.

He tosses one. It bounces across the water.

SAMMY

You stink. Will Momma be okay?

CHARLIE

Doc says she has to wear a thing on her knee for a few days.

SAMMY

Nice of Whack's pop to take her to the hospital. You think Vernon will come back?

CHARLIE

Not if Whack's pop has any say.

SAMMY

Look at all the cool boats. Where are the sails?

He walks off for a look.

CHARLIE

They're paddle boats, Sam. The bigger ones have sails. Those are huge. Heard The Babe has two. Takes 'em around the ocean, going places. He liked to do that, remember? We're going places now, too, Sam. Maybe there's somethin' to that faith talk after all. I mean the team's up for the championship. Be nice to go someplace. A real place, like how we used to. With dad. You remember? Remember Sammy? Sam?

Only a pile of rocks.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Sammy! What is this? Hide and-

A boat is missing.

Charlie follows the waves far into the lake. To an overturned boat...

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Oh, no...

...a tiny body, floating face down...

Charlie runs, kicking up sand with every step.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Sammy! *Sammy!*

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - LATER

Sammy on the bed, eyes closed. An oxygen mask covers his mouth. Machines monitor his heart, track his shallow, hoarse breathing.

Charlie stares at his brother, soaked in lake water. Betty touches Sammy's face, teary. Dr. Sands holds his clipboard.

DR. SANDS

His respiratory system was already very deteriorated. The water only made things worse.

BETTY

What happens now?

DR. SANDS

Most of his lung tissue is gone, but a decent amount is still relatively healthy. It may dry out. It may not. All we can do is wait.

BETTY

(a loving whisper)
Don't give up, soldier. Have faith...

She kisses his forehead. Charlie walks between Dr. Sands and Betty like a wet ghost.

DR. SANDS

Charlie?

Charlie stops.

DR. SANDS (CONT'D)

You're one of the best pitchers I've ever seen.

Charlie walks away. Dr. Sands sighs.

DR. SANDS (CONT'D)
(sarcastically)
Yeah. That helped.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Charlie ambles unconsciously past doctors and nurses, mind far away. Kelly rises from her chair.

KELLY
Charlie? I'm sorry about Sammy.

CHARLIE
(a whisper)
Thanks.

He moves past. She can only watch him go.

INT. SAMMY'S ROOM - DAY - LATER

Afternoon light streaks through the blinds, throwing rays of sunshine on Charlie, who kneels beside Sammy's bed. He empties his pockets, placing his pocketknife, playing cards, and a quarter on the comforter.

CHARLIE
(to God)
I don't ask for much. We don't talk much either. This is all I've got. You can have 'em. Just don't take my brother away. I'm sorry for playing tricks on people. I won't do that anymore. Promise. Just give my brother back. My faith is strong and solid. My faith is strong...

A knock O.S.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie opens the front door. Dex.

DEX
Hey, Charlie. How's our boy?

CHARLIE
Dying.

DEX

Guess you won't be playing
tomorrow. Coach said no worries.
Must be hell, huh?

CHARLIE

Hell would be a step up.

Dex nods. Charlie goes to close the door. Dex turns back.

DEX

I ever tell you why I like Batman
so much?

CHARLIE

No.

DEX

Because he's human. Superman's got
all these powers, so all he has to
do is punch the villain's lights
out with his super strength. But
Batman's just like everybody else
and he fights villains anyway.
Because he has to. He's got guts.
Nobody needs guts when they're
invulnerable, Charlie. I'll see ya.

He leaves. Charlie stares after him. Closes the door.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - GAME DAY

Sammy breathes through tubes, unconscious. Betty knits,
brace on her knee. Charlie reads a Batman comic. Betty
glances at him.

BETTY

Bring your stuff?

CHARLIE

What?

BETTY

Your uniform. Gonna have to run
home and change if you didn't bring
it. The star pitcher has to make
it to the playoffs on time.

CHARLIE

I'm not going.

BETTY

You're telling me you'd rather sit here and read than pitch?

CHARLIE

I can't. Not after what I did.

BETTY

Come here.

Charlie moves to her.

BETTY (CONT'D)

What happened to Sammy is not your fault. It's nobody's fault. Sometimes bad things just happen and then we have to figure how to deal with them. Like your dad. I miss him so much. I know you do, too. But that mountain's an ant hill now. Plus, you know Sammy wouldn't let you miss this game, right?

CHARLIE

Right.

BETTY

Damn right. He'd smack you on the arm and say "Get it together, yo!"

Charlie laughs.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Every day is a battle, Charlie. You gotta fight every step of the way or you'll lose who you are inside. You gotta fight to keep your faith.

Charlie stares at the heroic image of Batman. Then Sammy.

BETTY (CONT'D)

What do you say, kiddo? Feel like throwing a few today?

EXT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY

Packed. Spectators munching treats and waving flags.

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

The Towners face Joey. He grips his clipboard.

JOEY

We give the Slickers an inch,
they'll take a mile, so don't give
'em any room out there. Questions?

Cheney raises his hand.

CHENEY

Maybe we should forfeit.

JOEY

What?

ROLLO

As much as I hate to agree with
Cheney-

CHENEY

Thanks.

ROLLO

Welcome. It might be a good idea.

JOEY

Fellas...I know these guys are
good. Real good. But so are you.
So are we. Can you honestly stand
there and say you'd rather
surrender than go down fighting?

HOMER

Least we make it out in one piece.
Without Charlie on the mound, we're
gonna be watching a home run derby
all day.

KYLE

What are you, stupid?

ROLLO

Stupid's walking out there to get
our heads knocked off.

JOEY

You know what stupid is? Stupid's
saying your done before you start.
Before you even try. This is the
greatest game in the world. You
don't have to be 7 feet tall or
bench press 400 pounds.

(MORE)

JOEY (CONT'D)

All you have to do is play with
your heart. You've got talent, but
talent alone doesn't beat the odds.
The best team doesn't win, boys.
The team that plays the best does.
I'll be damned if we forfeit. Not
when we've got heart to spare up
our sleeves.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Not to mention a little magic.

Charlie in full uniform, mitt on his fist, cap over his eyes.

HOMER

What are you doing here?

CHARLIE

I gonna play some damn baseball.
What about you gents?

WHACKS

You don't gotta do this, man.

CHARLIE

Yes, I do.

ROLLO

Why?

CHARLIE

'Cause I got somebody to play for.
We all do. You fight the fights
that need fighting and this is one
of 'em. These suckers aren't gonna
get the best of me. And they're
not gonna get the best of us. I
won't let them.

JOE

So let's kick their rears.

Everyone stares at Joe in shock. Charlie grins.

SQUEAKER

Yeah, yeah! Let's show these punks
how to play! Let's do it!

Rollo and Homer grin.

ROLLO

Let's take these punks.

HOMER

Hell yeah!

They gather, hands in the middle.

WHACKS

For Sammy.

JOEY

You heard him. On three! One,
two, three-

THE CROSS TOWNERS

Cross Towners!

INT. SLICKERS DUGOUT - DAY

Simon and his team, Preston, Vince and Carter in front. They
watch Charlie and the Towners across the way.

CARTER

Didn't think he'd show.

PRESTON

We did it before. We'll do it
again.

SIMON

Damn right we will. Because if we
don't, we'll be loosing to a pack
of pussies who got lucky. That
what you want?

SLICKERS

No, sir.

SIMON

Is that what you want?!

SLICKERS

NO, SIR!

SIMON

No prisoners. Say it!

SLICKERS

No prisoners!

SIMON

Again!

SLICKERS

No prisoners!

SIMON

*Say it for the goddamn cheap
seats!!*

SLICKERS

NO PRISONERS!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Sammy rests under white sheets. Betty knits. Kelly sits in Charlie's chair.

KELLY

Hey, Sammy. Come back soon. I miss what a pain you are.

Betty can't help smiling.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Kyle on home, bat in his hands. Preston gives him the eye. Kyle stares right back, unafraid. Preston throws -

Whack! Kyle hits it high and far. He takes off toward first, legs pumping hard. The ball sails across the sky, falling right into Carter's glove. Out.

The Towners moan. Joey claps, keeping the spirit.

JOEY

That's OK, Kyle. Way to hit the ball!

Kyle stares at Carter. Carter laughs in his face. Kyle jogs back to the dugout.

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

Whacks runs his comb through his hair. Grabs a bat. Charlie walks to him.

CHARLIE

Never thanked your pop, you know.

WHACKS

Hey, we're teammates. Watchin' each other's backs is what we do.

Charlie nods. Whacks hands Charlie his comb. Hoists the bat over his shoulder, takes off out the cage.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Whacks takes home. The Umpire adjusts his mask. Several SLICKERS are suddenly nervous. Preston, however, is unwavering. Whacks grins, waiting. Preston lets it go.

Bam! Whacks drives it into the grass. He takes off, rounds first. FIRST BASE picks it up. Whacks makes it all the way past third, Towners fans screaming. First Base throws it to The Catcher.

Whacks redirects in the dirt, heads back to third base, which is covered by Vince. The Catcher tosses the ball to Vince. Whacks twists, runs back toward home. Vince tosses it to The Catcher. Whacks stops.

WHACKS

Hey. I'm a Fionelli.

CATCHER

My dad's a cop.

He tries to make it back to third. Vince suddenly has the ball. The two trap Whacks, keeping him locked between third and home. The crowd is roaring like mad.

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

ROLLO

How does he always get stuck?

DEX

It's his nature. I don't know!

CHENEY

The suspense is excruciating!

Rollo and Dex stare at Cheney. Charlie's brain sparks. He pulls Whack's comb from his pocket.

CHARLIE

I got an idea!

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Whacks runs back and forth, a prisoner on the dirt. Vince thrusts the ball at him. Whacks squirms backward, barely escaping being tagged.

Charlie shoves his arm through a hole in the fence, Whack's comb in his palm. He holds it high, waving his wrist until the angle's just right...

Whacks runs for home. The Catcher comes at him with the ball. Whacks skids on the ground, heaving his body back toward third. The Catcher throws to Vince. Vince holds the ball out, that evil glint in his eye.

Charlie moves the comb and the sunlight catches its silver in a brilliant flash, throwing the light across Vince's face! Vince yells out, the ball hitting the dirt.

Whacks turns. His feet slam the ground like war drums. The ball settles in the grass. Preston snatches it up. Whacks pumps his legs hard, almost there as Preston hurls the ball home. The Catcher barely snags it.

Whacks bares down on him like a steam train. The Catcher dives forward, ball in front like a hand grenade. Whacks jumps-

And sails over The Catcher like a bird in flight! The Catcher nosedives to the ground, plowing face first into the dirt and parting it like water. Whacks hits the ground, rolling across home base like a barrel.

UMPIRE

Safe!

The Towners cheer, the crowd goes wild. Whacks runs to the dugout, head high as dust shakes off his shoulders. Preston and Vince share a look of hate. The board changes. 1-0, Cross Towners.

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

The team surrounds Whacks with glee. Joey grips his shoulder.

JOEY

Nice run, kid.

Charlie runs up. Whacks points him out.

WHACKS

Gave my comb to the right guy.

CHARLIE

Watching each other's backs. It's what we do.

JOEY

Charlie, you're up.

Dread crosses Charlie's face. Whacks notices. Charlie grabs a bat. The others bats look lonely against the wall, no one there to hold them.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - LATER

Charlie takes home. Preston and Vince grin. Charlie takes a breath. Asserts himself. Preston glares at him.

PRESTON
(mouthing it)
Poor boy.

Charlie does his best to ignore it. Preston pitches. The ball careens over the grass. Charlie misses.

UMPIRE
Strike one!

Carter laughs in the outfield. Charlie grips the bat. Gets ready. Preston grinds the ball. Throws it.

Whoosh! Charlie lets it fly by, too low a swing.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)
Strike two!

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

Joey is worried, as is the team.

DEX
Don't give up, Charlie!

JOEY
Smack it home!

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Charlie wipes sweat off his face. Preston shoots a glowering stare. He pitches, the ball wailing like a bat out of hell and skimming right past Charlie as he swings so hard his bat slams the ground.

UMPIRE
Strike three! Out!

Something in Charlie falls down and hurts itself. Depression grips the team. Joey sighs. Preston smirks.

INT. SLICKERS DUGOUT - DAY

Simon smirks.

SIMON

He better have a good arm now...

MONTAGE - CROSS TOWNERS LOSING

Charlie on the mound. He pitches. BATTER THREE hits it out of the park.

Another pitch. Another hit. The score on the board - 1-3, City Slickers.

Joey walks the dugout, his spirit diminishing.

Simon hoots it up. Claps Preston on the shoulder.

Charlie pitches it wildly. BATTER FOUR walks to first.

Dex up to bat, hits the ball. Vince catches it easily. Dex trudges back to the dugout.

The board changes. 2-4, City Slickers.

END MONTAGE.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Kelly and Betty amongst the average chaos.

BETTY

Gonna exercise my knee. Watch my kid, will ya?

KELLY

Sure thing.

BETTY

I'm sure Charlie likes you.

KELLY

I like him.

BETTY

I know.

She winks. Hobbles off on crutches.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Kelly walks back in...

...to see Sammy sitting up.

SAMMY

Wouldn't have a candy bar on you,
would ya?

KELLY

You're awake! Holy wow!

Kelly runs into the hall. Returns, Betty behind her.
Betty's eyes fill with tears. Her crutches clatter to the
floor and she runs to her son, embracing him.

BETTY

Oh, honey. Are you okay? How do
you feel?

SAMMY

Hungry, yo. Where's Charlie?

KELLY

He's at the game.

SAMMY

Are they winning?

KELLY

Radio says 4-2, City Slickers.

Sammy's face darkens for a bit. Lights back up.

SAMMY

You gotta go tell him something for
me.

KELLY

Okay. What?

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

Charlie picks up a bat. The team faces him.

CHARLIE

Sorry, guys. I tried.

Joey moves forward.

JOEY

We play it the best we can. If we lose doing that, so be it. But we aren't done yet.

The team nods.

CHARLIE

Yeah.

Whacks claps him on the shoulder.

WHACKS

At least we looked good. Me in particular, right?

They laugh. Charlie also.

KYLE

Go out there and play the game like you love it. Cause I know you do.

Charlie shoulders his bat. Walks off.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Cars, PEDESTRIANS, the every day hustle and bustle. Kelly whips around the corner, running full out. Her dress thrashes behind her in the wind she creates. She bounds over a hedge, nothing can stop her.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Charlie ready to bat. Preston yawns. He pitches. Charlie misses badly.

UMPIRE

Strike one!

The team stares through the chain fence with hopeless eyes, waiting for the end to come.

Charlie brings his bat back up, not even wanting to try.

EXT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY

Kelly dashes into the crowd, darting and ducking her way through like a college linebacker.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

The ball blows past Charlie.

UMPIRE
Strike two!

Preston stretches, feeling easy, unhurried. Smug.

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

Joey drops his head.

SQUEAKER
Pretty close. We got pretty close,
you know? Pretty close...

Kelly bursts into view, breathing like engine pistons. The team stares at her in surprise. Joey walks to her.

KELLY
Where's Charlie?

JOEY
He's batting.

KELLY
Sammy's awake. I gotta tell
Charlie something-

HOMER
Sammy's awake?

KELLY
I gotta see Charlie!

JOE
You can't. He's on the plate!

Kelly bounds out of the dugout. Charlie holds his bat. Preston is winding up.

KELLY
Charlie!

Charlie can't hear over the crowd. He grips his bat, eyes filled with regret, sadness. Kelly bangs on the fence. Her mind races. No other choice...

KELLY (CONT'D)
Never let the fear of striking out
keep you from coming up to bat!

The words catch Charlie's ears. He whirls to see Kelly at the fence. She smiles widely. Charlie stares into her eyes. Kelly nods. He understands.

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

HOMER

Who said that? Abraham Lincoln?

KYLE

You're an idiot.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Charlie faces Preston with narrow eyes and a heart full of fire. Preston pulls his arm back and releases. Charlie focuses on the ball, his muscles tense and spine rigid. He waits...waits...

Crack! Charlie sends the ball off like a bullet. It speeds past Preston, past the outfield. Carter leaps into the air, glove open, as the ball soars out of reach and over the fence. Home run.

The Towners go wild. The crowd joins them. Flags wave, fans scream as Charlie rounds each base, full of pride and glory...

Vince trips him! Charlie hits the dirt hard. The Towners see it. Joey holds Whacks back.

INT. SLICKERS DUGOUT - DAY

Simon grins evilly.

SIMON

Oops...

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

The crowd boos. Charlie stands up, nose to nose with Vince, covered in dirt.

Charlie grins. He backs away, taking his time. He dances toward home, then back toward Vince. Vince's face falls as he realizes Charlie's gag - catch me if you can. Oh wait...you can't! Charlie calmly crosses home.

Vince, Preston, and Carter snarl. Carter slaps his mitt against his leg, disappointed in himself.

Joey flashes Simon a grin. Simon snarls.

JOEY

Oops.

INT. TOWNERS DUGOUT - DAY

Charlie runs into hugs and slaps on the back. Kelly runs in after him.

KELLY

He's talking.

They hug. They lock eyes. Kelly stands, kicks the dirt. Charlie shoves his hands in his pockets, shyly. They smile at each other - the truth is out. Cheney butts in.

CHENEY

What a glorious moment! Wow!

KYLE

Not to spoil it, but we still need a bag of runs if we're gonna win this thing.

CHARLIE

Don't worry. We got magic up our sleeves, yo.

MONTAGE - THE CROSS TOWNERS COME BACK

Dex hits a homer. Joe hits a homer. Preston starts sweating, feeling the burn.

Charlie strikes out a batter. Kelly cheers.

Sammy and Betty listen over the radio. Sammy calls each pitch as Charlie makes them. Nurses and Doctors gather, listening also.

Vince tags out Kyle. Simon punches the air in victory.

Preston strikes out Squeaker. Squeaker rushes him in anger. Joey takes the field, holds Squeaker back and drags him off with one arm.

Charlie strikes out batter after batter after batter.

The board changes. 6-5, Cross Towners.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
...and The Cross Towners take the
lead, 6-5. It's bottom of the
seventh, folks, and it all comes
down to this...

Sammy nibbles a candy bar. The room is crowded with
listeners.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Charlie Archer takes the mound.
His head is high, his arm keen.

SAMMY
Come on, Charlie! Show 'em the
fancy stuff, yo!

BETTY
Come on, Charlie...come on...

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Charlie on the mound. A player steps out of the Slickers'
dugout. Picks up a bat...

Preston. For the first time, he looks tired and worried.
Tries not to show it. He walks over home plate. Grips his
bat. Charlie's the one smiling now.

The team watches from the dugout as Charlie grind his ball.
Preston has the eyes of a wild animal backed into a corner.
His shoulders stiffen. The crowd wars boos against cheers -
it's the contest everyone's been waiting for.

Cheney gives the sign. Fastball. Charlie nods. Preston
grips the wood. Charlie lets it fly.

Smack! Preston sends it into the air. The Towners go on
edge, all of them ready to sprint after the ball. Kelly
squeezes her eyes shut, praying. Charlie follows the ball
with his eyes...and grins.

UMPIRE
Foul ball!

The crowd boos. The crowd cheers.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Everyone exhales. Betty and Sammy share a look. Close one.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

The Towners sigh in relief. The Slickers groan. Preston shakes it off. Wipes his face. It's getting to him. He takes his stance, shaky. Cheney gives the sign. Slider.

Charlie brings his arm back, kicks out his leg. Slides the ball across the plate as Preston shoves the bat toward it.

Into the glove.

UMPIRE

Strike two!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

They all cheer. Sammy nearly jumps out of bed. Betty has to corral her son, calm him down.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Preston glares at Charlie. He stares back at Vince and Carter.

VINCE

Let's go, Preston!

CARTER

Bury it in his face!

Simon gives Charlie hard eyes. Charlie looks to Joey, who nods encouragement. Charlie grinds the ball in his mitt. Whacks watches, every nerve on edge. Kyle rocks on his feet, energy blazing through him.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

...Archer stands tall, grips the ball hard. He eyes Dale, sizing up the next toss...

SAMMY

Curve ball...

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Cheney shows two fingers. Charlie nods. He pitches hard and to the left. The ball curves like a corkscrew. Preston heaves the bat like Thor's hammer-

UMPIRE
Strike two!

The crowd is bursting with chaotic frenzy. The Towners holler, applaud. Kelly screams in glee. Preston's frustration sweeps across his face. Vince and Carter drop their eyes. Simon is actually looking worried...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Sammy and Betty cheer. The Doctor and Nurses stare at each other in excitement.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
...The crowd loses its mind! Dale shakes it off, clearly feeling the heat. Archer is calm and collected, a human strike out machine!

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Cheney gives one finger. Fastball. Charlie shakes his head. Not that one. Cheney tries again. Slurve? No. Again. Curve again? Nope. Cheney shows his palm. I give up.

Charlie stares at Preston. Eyes the ball in his fist. His fingers close around like worms...

Simon's brow wrinkles. What is Charlie doing?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Archer doesn't like Cheney's signals. He can't settle on a pitch...

SAMMY
...Worm killer.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

The stands are wailing with atomic energy. Flags are waving back and forth with unprecedented zest. Every player is on edge. Charlie focuses. Preston waits. Kelly silently prays. Joey clasps his clipboard.

JOEY
One more, Charlie!

KELLY

One more!

ROLLO

Come on, Charlie!

Preston does his best to ignore the chant. Charlie closes his eyes, feels it surge through him. Vince and Carter are sealed to the dugout fence.

Charlie's eyes pop open, filled with intent. He and Preston wage silent battle across the grass. Charlie winds up, his arm a coiling spring. Preston's arms are rubber bands, waiting to snap...

Charlie pitches the ball. It blasts from his hand like a nuclear bomb, shooting like a hot star toward home plate. Preston targets the ball, swinging the bat like the hammer of God as the ball races toward him, everyone watching with wide eyes, the anticipation reaching an impossible high -

The Umpire slices the air with his arm.

UMPIRE

Strike three! You're out!

The crowd jumps to its feet. The Towners race together, colliding with Charlie. Joey and Kelly rush the field, smiles so wide they threaten to hurt themselves.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Sammy and Betty embrace, the room going crazy. Doctor and Nurses exchange money, slap each other on the back. Dr. Sands shares a high five with Sammy.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Wide spread celebration. Flags and popcorn fly. The Towners nearly crush Charlie with joy. He hugs them all. Kelly and Charlie embrace.

Simon approaches Preston.

SIMON

You're off the team, Preston.

PRESTON

I quit. Simon.

He shoves the bat at Simon. Walks to the Towners. Kelly and Charlie face him, suddenly worried...until he offers his hand. Charlie shakes it.

PRESTON (CONT'D)
You're a hell of a pitcher.

CHARLIE
Yeah, I am. Thanks.

Preston vanishes into the crowd. Kelly hugs him again. Charlie swipes Joey's pen. He draws a smiley face on the game ball, hands it over to her. She holds it close. Kisses his cheek.

The stadium looks as though it'll never calm down.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - LATER

Sammy holds the trophy high, held up by Betty. Charlie and Kelly sit together. Kelly slides her hand into Charlie's. He doesn't mind. He kisses her cheek.

Charlie walks to Sammy. They hold the trophy together. Dr. Sands stands back, holding a camera.

SAMMY
You did it, yo!

CHARLIE
We did it.

They pose. Dr. Sands snaps the picture.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - TWENTY FIVE YEARS LATER

The picture. Charlie and Sammy smiling, the trophy between them. It's aged, worn, in a weathered frame.

It sits on a shelf in a glass case, next to rows and rows of baseball trophies and photos.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Sammy died the following year. I miss him every day. Mom took it okay. She got a better job, married Joey. Turns out love is where you least expect it to be.

Charlie, in his thirties, stands at his case, staring at the photo.

His reflection is wiser, more mature than the boy he once was. People sit, stand, and talk during the party behind him.

Kelly, Charlie's wife, wanders the crowd, thanking people for coming. She walks to him. Kisses his cheek. The Slickers versus Towners game ball sits in the trophy case, proudly bearing its smiley face. Kelly wanders on.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I made a great career throwing balls around. Starting pitcher. Player of the year. Of course, I couldn't have done any of this without my faithful wife. She's still a nice girl.

Kelly glances back at him. Shows a warm smile. Behind Charlie, the back door is open. His CHILDREN are throwing around a ball.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

My kids are my proudest achievement. I remember the day they told me they wanted to play baseball...

He smiles, walks outside. Starts teaching them how to pitch.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

It was hell not to laugh. Figures.

Kelly stands in the doorway, watching. Charlie looks back at her. They smile. The picture of Charlie and Sammy sits in the case, there to stay.

FADE TO BLACK.