

BAT BOY

Written by

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FADE IN:

TV FOOTAGE - BOMBS BLASTING THE FIELDS OF VIETNAM. AMERICAN SOLDIERS with torn cloths and muddy faces hike through water and muck.

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

PRESIDENT 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, poses for flashing camera bulbs.

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...

More Vietnam. A black helicopter swoops low over burning grass, the wind howling with a roar...

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 with the bigger ones.

SAMMY
Charlie! Wait up!

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

CHARLIE
Stop bellyaching. I won't leave
you behind...

CHARLIE (V.O.)
That's me. Twelve years old. See
how my ears resemble the wings of a
seven forty seven? So did everyone
else.

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

SAMMY
Being left doesn't bother me.
Snakes in this field, might,
though.

CHARLIE
You like snakes.

SAMMY
Not when they got fangs in me, yo.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
That's my kid brother, Sammy. He
was eight back then. 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. Inside, Sammy was ten
feet tall.

SAMMY
Bat left or right?

Charlie shakes his head.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Come on! Left or right?

CHARLIE
Left.

SAMMY
What about pitching?

CHARLIE
Come on, 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 should I? 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
(changing the subject)
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. Mom had to move us to another house, another side of town. It wasn't so bad. 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 backs him out of the cloud.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You want me scrapin' you off

SAMMY

I saw him coming!

CHARLIE

Feed that to the pigs! Be careful.

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 okay?

SAMMY

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. A mecca of hotdog aroma and the clap of wood against leather. Some hold 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, his expression sour.

CHARLIE

Not you, sir. Sorry.

The Man turns back to the field. 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 brushes his brother off.

SAMMY

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

CHARLIE

What do you want?

SAMMY

Nachos?

CHARLIE

You can't eat nachos. You know that. How about popcorn and a coke?

Sammy nods.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
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 smashed beetle 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
Outside is where bugs live. Why
squish them outside?

VINCE
I dunno. Guess they just 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're a doink!

CARTER
Oh, good come back, dink.

VINCE
Doink!

CARTER
Dink!

PRESTON (O.S.)
Boys...

PRESTON DALE IV, twelve, their ringleader, leans on his steel bike, cool and collected as he picks 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
No, we can't. She'll give us extra
homework again. I vote we skip
stones at the creek.

CARTER
Throwing rocks at water. Yay.

Vince makes a face at Carter. Preston's eyes find the concession stand. He sees Charlie standing in line. Preston's face twists with devilish glee.

PRESTON
(pointing)
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 makes it to the front of the line. GIRL behind the
counter wears thick makeup, sports a ponytail.

GIRL
Help you?

CHARLIE
A popcorn and a coke, 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, moves forward, 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 a bet, okay?

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

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 to see.

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

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

JOEY
Wow.

GIRL
Hey. How'd you do that?

CHARLIE
Magic.

He hands Joey his handkerchief. Gathers his pocket items.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
One popcorn and one coke. Please.

Joey eyes Girl, gives her a shoulder shrug. Girl sighs.

GIRL
Nice pull, kid.

EXT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY - LATER

Charlie rounds the building, snacks in hand, smiling.

Pow! The soda explodes. Fizz drenches his shirt. He drops the popcorn in the dirt. Wipes cola from his eyes.

Preston, Vince, and Carter sit on their bikes, rolling in cruel hilarity. Preston tosses and catches a rock.

PRESTON
Enjoy the drink, Archer? Like the new poor look. 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 Charlie like sharks. Charlie stands his ground as they close in. Preston swerves at the last second, scraping his tire across the 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
losers here.

He grinds his sneaker on the popcorn, destroying it. The three peel off, laughing. Charlie starts to breath normally. Inspects the popcorn. Not a single eatable kernel. A HAND swoops in, offering a fresh bag filled to the brim.

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.

He stands, wobbly. Kelly tries to help but he pulls away.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I got it. 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
I better check on him.

KELLY
Don't forget your popcorn.

CHARLIE
That's okay.

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

CHARLIE
I can get my own, okay?

KELLY
Sorry.

CHARLIE
Thanks, though.

He trudges off.

KELLY
Bye, Charlie!

She holds her popcorn, filled with worry.

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 coke near the entrance. Charlie pushes through. Pokes him.

CHARLIE
Hey, mister. You like magic?

INT. REDBIRD STADIUM - DAY - LATER

Charlie carries the popcorn and a coke, squeezing back to his seat to find Sammy's empty. Charlie frantically looks around. He stands on his chair for a better view.

CHARLIE
Sammy? Sammy!

SAMMY (O.S.)
Stop hollerin'!

Sammy crawls out from under his chair, holding a Redbirds flag.

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

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

Sammy sits. Thinks.

SAMMY
What's the clap?

CHARLIE
I'll tell you when you're older.

Sammy munches popcorn. Sips his soda.

SAMMY
Can't you just tell me now?

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
across the turf.

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 falls on his haunches.

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 okay?

SAMMY
A okay.

CHARLIE
Go sit on the bench-

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.

SAMMY

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

Charlie runs back to the mound.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

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

Curve.

Charlie throws.

SAMMY

Strike one!

He throws it back. Shows three fingers.

JOEY

Slider.

Charlie pitches.

SAMMY

Strike two!

Four little fingers.

JOEY

Slurve.

Charlie throws. Perfect.

SAMMY

That's strike three, yo! He's
outta there! Okay! The big one!
Gimme the Worm Killer!

Joey's head cocks. The what? Charlie winds up. A
zigzagging curl straight to the glove.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Sweet as sugar!

They run to meet each other, slap a high five.

Applause. They see Joey, clapping.

JOEY
Not bad. Not bad at all.

The boys freak out and 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 the 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! 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. And the 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.

He picks it up.

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. A modest place, with 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 cheery yellow apron. Hugs her sons.

BETTY
(kissing their foreheads)
How are my little soldiers?

CHARLIE
Come on, Ma...

BETTY
One day, you'll like it.

SAMMY
I like it now.

BETTY
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 you better 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.)

Hey. What's your rush out there?

They stop, caught, faces twisting with dread.

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

Come here. Both of you.

INT. DEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

They enter very 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 damn manners?
Can't come home without saying
hello to your Pa.

CHARLIE
You're not our Pa, Vernon.

VERNON
You could still say hello.

He drinks. Belches like a fog horn.

VERNON (CONT'D)
Jesus. What you two been up to?
Look like you got dragged behind a
couple of wild steers.

CHARLIE
Just playing a little ball. Gets
us dirty, 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, giggling.

VERNON (CONT'D)

Let's see the big man get the sicky
his hat, huh?

SAMMY

That's mine!

CHARLIE

Give it back!

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

Bully.

VERNON

Sticks and stones, big man.

Charlie sulks past his unmoving mother.

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 must pump booze
instead of blood.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
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 the 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.

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
You're good at magic. So go show'em some.

Charlie smiles. Stands, makes his way down.

CHARLIE
Stay where I can see you.

Sammy mimes being a statue. Charlie laughs on his way down to the field.

JOEY
Hey, Charlie! How's tricks?

CHARLIE
Okay I guess.

JOEY
Happy you signed up.

CHARLIE
Wasn't doing much else.

JOEY
Grab a ball.

Charlie takes one out of the nearby pile as Joey blows the whistle around his neck.

JOEY (CONT'D)
All right, guys! Fifteen minutes
'till tryouts for The Cross
Townners, 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
(taken back by the severe
politeness)
...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 psych me out or
something? Cause it's not gonna
work.

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

Just scram.

Cheney wanders off.

CHENEY

What a touchy character...

KYLE

Still 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, 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. I'm Kyle.

CHARLIE

Charlie.

KYLE

First time in league, right?

CHARLIE

Yeah. You played before?

KYLE

Last couple summers. Supposed to be pretty stiff competition this year, but I know most of these guys. They're not all bad. Usually.

CHARLIE

Okay.

KYLE

Want me to show you around?

CHARLIE

Yeah, it'd be nice.

KYLE

Tubular.

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. End of story.

A PLAYER cracks a ball with a bat. It soars high across the sky. Homer locks in on it, 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

Saw him circle the bases in five
seconds once.

CHARLIE

Come on. Nobody's that fast.

Kyle chuckles. Picks up a bat. Takes Charlie's ball.

KYLE

Watch. Yo, Rollo!

Rollo nods.

KYLE (CONT'D)

(to Charlie)

Keep your eye on the ball.

Charlie nods. Rollo readies himself. Kyle tosses the ball. Hits it. The ball jets into the sky, heading for the outfield...and lands in Rollo's hand. Charlie double takes. Only a cloud of dust, lingering in the air where Rollo used to be.

CHARLIE

Wait a minute...

KYLE

Told ya.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - LATER

KYLE

Cheney you know...

The mannerly one catches a ball, face lighting up behind his glasses.

CHENEY

(to the Thrower)

What a 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
Because he's a good hitter?

KYLE
Because his dad's in the mob.

CHARLIE
Oh, quit kid- Wait. Fionelli?

Kyle nods.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
You're yanking 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. Charlie's eyes go wide. 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?

They laugh.

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 blows his whistle.

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

JOEY

Okay, Charlie. Throw a fast one.

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

JOEY (CONT'D)

Show me the slider.

Charlie winds up. Hurls it. Kyle nudges Rollo - wow.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Good! Now a curve.

Charlie pitches it. Cheney waves - nice job! Whacks shakes his head at Cheney.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Slurve!

Charlie throws. The boys grumble flattery.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Anything else you can show me?

Charlie's eyes drift to Sammy, who shows him five fingers. Charlie winds up, lets it go. The pitch flies by Cheney, hits the dirt, rolls away. The boys groan.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Keep that one in your pocket, bud.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY - LATER

The boys sit together. Joey paces, making his last notes.

Charlie's eye catches DEXTER HARRISON, eleven. Quiet and imaginative, his 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
Batman in his back pocket.

ROLLO
I heard he's got over 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

(clearing his throat)

Okay. Here's this years team. Make sure to listen for your name. First base, Robert Minolo. Second base, Kyle Patterson. Third base, Buster Fionelli...

Whacks grins. The boys don't.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Short stop, Tim Carlson. Catcher, Daniel Cheney. Pitcher, Charlie Archer...

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

JOEY (CONT'D)

Left field, Calvin Willis. Right field, Dexter Harrison...

Dex keeps his eyes in his comic.

JOEY (CONT'D)

And, as always, Joe is outfield.

JOE, fourteen, waves his thanks from the back. He's tall, lanky, strangely ominous. Charlie leans to Kyle.

CHARLIE

Who's Joe?

KYLE

Nice guy. Good player.

CHARLIE

What's his last name?

KYLE

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

CHARLIE

Then why do you call him Joe?

KYLE

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

JOEY

Congratulations to everyone who made it this year. For those who didn't, thanks for trying out and good luck next year. The Cross Towners will meet here for their first practice tomorrow. 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. Feeling 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 got catcher?

CHENEY
Right. Isn't it exciting?

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

CHENEY
Why would I say rude things to
someone I don't even know?

Kyle and Charlie and dumbfounded.

CHENEY (CONT'D)
See you at Momo's!

He saunters off.

KYLE
Gonna be an interesting season.

The team gathers, strolling off as a group. Kyle notices
Charlie lagging.

KYLE (CONT'D)
You coming?

CHARLIE
In a bit.

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

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Mr. Grant?

JOEY
Mister Archer. What can I do for
you?

CHARLIE
Thanks for putting me on the team.

JOEY
You kidding? 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 pitch for you. As long
as my brother Sammy's the bat boy.

Joey sees Sammy in the stands.

JOEY
Why didn't he try out himself?

CHARLIE
He's sick.

JOEY
What's ailing him?

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

JOEY
I'm sorry. Poor scrap.

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 the sluggers. You
got a deal, pitcher.

They shake.

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

JOEY
Aww, enough of this mister stuff.
Call me coach.

CHARLIE
Coach.

JOEY
You two okay getting home?

CHARLIE
We know the way, believe me.

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
You're awesome, yo.

CHARLIE
Finally, you see it.

SAMMY
Thanks, Charlie.

CHARLIE
Just don't brain yourself with a bat.

EXT. MOMO'S PIZZERIA - DAY - LATER

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

CHENEY
This food certainly is 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 won'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 slowly. 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

(recoiling)

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 vaccum
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. Anyone 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

Good point.

KYLE

What about you, Dex?

DEX

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

SQUEAKER

I can do dog barks.

HOMER

Great Dane.

Squeaker barks.

HOMER (CONT'D)

Say, that's pretty good.

KYLE

How would you know?

HOMER

My uncle's got one.

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 cripes...

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

This could be a reasonable problem-

SAMMY

Charlie knows what he's doing!

WHACKS

I beg to differ.

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 cripes!

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

Holy cripes!

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

One he lost.

ROLLO

Wait. You mean...it's free?

CHARLIE

Yeah. Go ahead.

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

KYLE

Don't think any of us can do that.

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? 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

(shocked)

Okay, 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 pretty good. 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.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I made him a fair bet. I wasn't trying to hustle, I was trying to feed my brother. 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

(pointing)

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!

He pats himself down as the team searches the street.

ROLLO

I don't see anything.

DEX

Just grass over here.

Whacks checks every pocket, every fold in his clothes...

WHACKS

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 muck-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 halfway into the drain.

HOMER

See it?

SQUEAKER

(voice echoing in the
sewer)

I got it! Hey, I think I got it!

Whacks grins. 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
(sour face)
That was an evil place.

CHENEY
What do we do now?

KYLE
Hey! Who's got a stick of gum?

The team stares.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Nobody has any 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 soldiers down with a tank.

SAMMY

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

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 sadly 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 didn't hook 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. He holds a wad of
metal.

SAMMY
Found them!

Betty hugs him.

BETTY
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.
(to Sammy)
And try to not smell like garbage
when I get home this time, okay?

SAMMY
No promises!

BETTY
Remember, Vernon likes his privacy,
so-

SAMMY/CHARLIE
It's better to leave him alone.

BETTY
You got it.

CHARLIE
He gonna get a job soon?

BETTY
Soon, honey. It's tough out there,
you know.

She straightens in front of a mirror.

CHARLIE
(under his breath)
Too bad he's always in here.

Betty races back to her sons, kisses them.

BETTY
Be good. Love you both!

She races to the door and swings it wide just in time 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
Well. Good to know.

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

Make it Joey.

BETTY

Joey. Right. I'm sorry, 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, yo.

CHARLIE

Look at those...

They handle them like they were made of diamonds.

JOEY

First game is Saturday. I need you both at the stadium Friday for practice.

(to Betty)

That okay?

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
Make it Betty.

JOEY
Okay.

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

BETTY
Whoops. Didn't even see that doorjamb.

JOEY
Yeah, those 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. Sammy catches.

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 it. It whizzes by Sammy, pings off the cage. Sammy picks up the ball, runs to his brother.

SAMMY

That wasn't so good, either.

CHARLIE

No bull.

SAMMY

Pretend it's a trick.

CHARLIE

Huh?

SAMMY

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

CHARLIE

Cause I don't pull 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.

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

Looks like someone else wanted to get some early 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 nice 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.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Stop, Preston!

The ringleader increases his speed, 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 on the field?

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'.

PRESTON
Save it for the game, Vince.

Vince relaxes. The three pick up their bikes.

CARTER
(to Charlie)
You got lucky.

CHARLIE
Nah, man. You did.

SAMMY
What he said, sucker!

Preston glares at Charlie.

PRESTON
I'll see you.

KYLE
And we'll see you. Asshole.

Preston pedals after his cohorts. They vanish in the dust.

ROLLO
You guys all right?

CHARLIE
Thanks for saving the day.

WHACKS
Ain't saved yet. We gotta play those punks.

KYLE
Don't worry. We'll give 'em a good run.

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. DUGOUT - DAY

The Towners are already tired.

JOEY
This pitcher's good. Wait for him.
Don't swing early, or you'll be out
before you know it.

Cheney slumps onto the bench. Wipes his brow.

CHENEY
My, it's hot.

KYLE
You swung too fast.

CHENEY
You're in an adequate position to
make your point.

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. Wait for it, Kyle...

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

UMPIRE
Strike one!

Vince and Carter hoot from the Slickers dugout.

CARTER
Dish it out, Preston!

VINCE
Send him crying home to momma!

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! Smack it
home!

INT. DUGOUT - DAY

Joe chews gum. Whacks and Rollo watch the action.

WHACKS
Slow. I'll swing slow.

ROLLO
Like you ever do anything slow.

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. DUGOUT - DAY

CHENEY
Hooray!

The team stares at him.

CHENEY (CONT'D)
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. Vince and Carter laugh behind their fence.

CARTER
Poor boy's dead meat.

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.

INT. DUGOUT - DAY

Dex reads Batman. Squeaker and Homer watch the game.

HOMER

He's not gonna make it.

SQUEAKER

Sure he will, sure. He'll make it.
He'll make it good. Let's go,
Charlie!

Homer winces at Squeaker's voice.

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 flashes 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.

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. Okay?

SAMMY
What for?

CHARLIE
Go.

SAMMY
Oh, okay.

Sammy hauls his bag away from them.

CHARLIE
I'm fine, Kelly. Okay?

KELLY
I know.

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

KELLY
I just wanted to-

CHARLIE
I don't want your pity. My brother
and me, we're fine. Okay?

Kelly kicks the dirt.

KELLY
Okay.

Charlie moves on.

KELLY (CONT'D)
I didn't mean to pity you. I
only... You're still my friend,
Charlie. I hope it's okay that
I'm still yours.

Charlie keeps walking.

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. 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
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.
- 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 dries his hands.

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 is malice in human form.

VERNON
You 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)
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! Vernon backhands Betty. She falls to her knees.

CHARLIE

Ma!

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

VERNON

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

CHARLIE

Leave her alone!

Vernon shoves him to the carpet.

VERNON

Sit down, poor boy!

BETTY

Charlie! 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's glare smolders.

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.

It humors Vernon just enough to give him pause.

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. Be a good girl and let him, huh? Maybe he is a big man after all. You wanna play? Let's play, Chuck. Name your bet, smartass.

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 miniscule 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. Shrugs.

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 directly over Vernon's, trapping it. Sammy laughs as Vernon's face drops. He shifts to move Charlie's glass.

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 do this!

SAMMY

Charlie won! You're a liar!

VERNON

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

Betty grabs up the phone.

BETTY

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

Her voice trails off. Vernon turns, curious.

Whacks is in the doorway, mitt in hand.

WHACKS

What's going on?

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 walks 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

(to Vernon, like a snake)

I don't like problems.

Whacks and Charlie share a smile.

EXT. LAKE - DAY - LATER

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

CHARLIE

Not too 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 coach 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. Know that? Team's up for the championship. Be nice to go someplace. Like how we used to be. 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 it
wait.

BETTY

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

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.

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.

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)

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...

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, but all he has to do is punch the villain's lights out with his super strength.

(MORE)

DEX (CONT'D)

Batman's just like everybody else,
but he fights villains anyway.
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 can't go, mom.

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.
Stop playing violin for yourself
and go do something. You know
Sammy wouldn't let you sit out of a
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.

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. DUGOUT - DAY

The Towners face Joey. He grips his clipboard, whistle around his neck.

JOEY

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

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

Boys...I know these guys are 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.

KYLE

What are you, stupid?

ROLLO

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

KYLE

Stupid's saying your done before
you start. Stupid's going home
when you got a pot load of magic up
your sleeve to show.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Got that right.

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 it's hard to beat a person
who never gives up.

HOMER

Who said that? Mother Theresa?

Dex shakes his head, ashamed.

JOEY
Babe Ruth said it. And I agree
with every word.

KYLE
Me, too.

Charlie and Kyle smile.

CHARLIE
You fight the fights that need
fighting, boys. 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 asses.

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 the suckers.

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!

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Preston and Carter watch the cheering. See Charlie.

CARTER
Didn't think he'd show.

PRESTON

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

They share twisted smiles. Carter walks on the field. Preston winks at Vince, who stands on third. Vince chuckles.

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 real 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 okay, Kyle. Way to hit the ball!

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

INT. 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. Watch each other's backs. It's 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

Yeah? My dad's a cop.

WHACKS

Aww, cripes.

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. 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. DUGOUT - DAY

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

JOEY

Nice run, Buster.

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. They 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. 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.

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.

-- 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.

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! Feel okay?

SAMMY
Little tired.

Kelly laughs. She 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 two to four, City Slickers.

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

SAMMY
You gotta go tell him something for me. It'll help.

KELLY
Okay. What?

INT. DUGOUT - DAY

Charlie picks up a bat. The team faces him.

CHARLIE
Sorry, guys. I tried.

Joey moves forward.

JOEY
Win or lose, doesn't matter. What matters is we play the game.

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. 'Tsall there is to it.

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. DUGOUT - DAY

Joey addresses his boys.

JOEY
Look how far we made it. That's
what's important.

SQUEAKER
...Yeah.

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, runs against the cage. 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)
(from the bottom of her
soul)
Never let the fear of striking
out keep you from coming up to bat!

The words catch Charlie's ears. Sting him hard and true. He whirls to see Kelly at the fence. She smiles widely. Charlie stares into her eyes, Sammy's and her words echoing in his brain. Kelly nods. He understands...and smiles.

INT. DUGOUT - DAY

Homer leans over to Rollo.

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. 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.

INT. DUGOUT - DAY

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

CHARLIE
Is he okay?

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 terrific moment! Wow!

KYLE

Not to spoil it, but we still a bag of runs if we're gonna make it through this game.

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.

-- 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, six to five. It's bottom of the ninth, folks, and it all comes down to this...

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

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

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 one!

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!

Charlie fists the ball. 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 fingers. The curve. 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.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

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

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

...The crowd looses 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 fingers. 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...

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

One more!

The fans take the cue.

FANS

One more! One more!

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.

Preston appears. Kelly and Charlie face him, suddenly worried...until he offers his hand forward. Charlie shakes it.

PRESTON

You're a hell of a pitcher.

CHARLIE

Yeah, I am.

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. Turn out love is where you least expect it to be.

Charlie, in his thirties, stands at his case, staring in 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 of throwing balls around. Starting pitcher. Player of the year. Of course, I couldn't have done any of this without my loving wife.

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.)
I tried so hard not to laugh.
Figures.

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

FADE TO BLACK.