OUR MAN IN MIAMI

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INT. MOTEL ROOM, ADMIRALTY INN – NIGHT (SEPT. 1995)

LIVÁN HERNÁNDEZ (Afro-Cuban, 20) frantically rummages through his duffle. Stops. Pulls out... a PEN labeled "Tokyo Hilton".

He carefully takes it apart. Sweating. Clock reads: 2:34AM.

Tightly rolled around the ink stem, a tiny piece of paper. He unrolls it. Scribbled inside, the initials "J.C." with a phone number, followed by the code: **007*.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN on a green interstate sign:

WELCOME to MILLINGTON
The Best Kept Secret in Tennessee

Upbeat, cheesy-synth music intros a smooth motivational voice:

TONY ROBBINS (O.S.)
Alllright, welcome back! And congratulations – you're setting yourself up for success!

We PAN to a lone 80s-era DODGE CONVERSION MINIVAN. Beige. Conspicuously parked at the edge of a Walmart parking lot.

TONY ROBBINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You know, we humans have an amazing power to create conscious change...

INT. MINIVAN – CONTINUOUS

It's dark. We hear CRUNCHING, MUNCHING...

Our eyes adjust on a WALKMAN playing the SELF-HELP CASSETTE. Clipped to a MAN's waist. Doritos crumbs rain down.

TONY ROBBINS (O.S.)
When upset or disturbed enough, people can transform their lives...

The man leans into slits of moonlight. Face concealed behind CHEAP FOLDING BINOCULARS – spying through half-drawn blinds...

BINOCULARS POV: Across the interstate, THE ADMIRALTY INN. Everything is peaceful and wet – a glowing sign offers free HBO. An occasional truck streaks by.

TONY ROBBINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Visualizing is key. And remember our breathing exercises. Focus.

Suddenly, the man begins exhaling sharply: "*hee-hee-hee-ho*".

TONY ROBBINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Visualize what you want as if it's already achieved...

Again: "*hee-hee-hee-ho*".

TONY ROBBINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
See it. Feel it —

As if on cue, he feels a vibration — his BEEPER! A phone number illuminates the tiny display, followed by: ✱007.

EXT. MINIVAN, WALMART PARKING LOT — CONTINUOUS

Suddenly the van's door swings open. As he jumps out we —

FREEZE on JOE CUBAS. 30s. A husky Cuban American. Goatee powdered with Doritos dust. His expression — the kind you'd expect from a grown man about to hit pay dirt (giddy).

RESUME ACTION as he turns to SOMEONE offscreen.

JOE
I'm bringing him in. Cover me.

Joe activates his CASIO. BEEP! Makes for the roadside bushes.

ALLEYWAY, BEHIND THE ADMIRALTY

A DUFFLE BAG plops to the ground. Following from the window above — Liván.

ROADSIDE BUSHES

Joe spots Liván emerge from the alleyway, like a hostage sneaking away from his captors in the dead of night.

ADMIRALTY PARKING LOT

Liván looks lost, scanning the horizon until... Joe. Waving from across the interstate. Liván starts toward him.

ROADSIDE BUSHES

Joe's eyes are fixed on Liván. "*Hee-hee-hee-ho*". Exhaling. "*Hee-hee-hee-ho*". Manifesting. Hyper-focused as Liván inches closer to the interstate. All noises fade away, replaced by:

Cheering crowds echoing in Joe's head... then, the charismatic voice of a sportscasting legend —

BOB COSTAS' VOICE
A historic moment! Good evening, everyone. I'm Bob Costas. At just 20 years old, from Villa Clara, Cuba, pitcher Liván Hernández makes his escape. But the real hero tonight is the guy who made it all happen...

Joe beams.

BOB COSTAS' VOICE (CONT'D)
A Miami construction contractor merely a year ago, now on the cusp of fame and fortune.
(then)
Hernández on the curb now. Emotions running high.

JOE
(under his breath)
All you gotta do is cross the street and we're home free.

Liván starts across, adrenaline surging —

BOB COSTAS' VOICE
This is it, the night when dreams come true...

Liván picks up the pace, teary-eyed, distraught —

So distraught, he stumbles directly into — THE BRIGHT HEADLIGHTS OF AN ONCOMING TRUCK!

Joe's eyes widen as... ***THUMPPPPP!***

BOB COSTAS' VOICE (CONT'D)
WHOOOOAAHHHH!

A baseball cleat tumbles into view.

SMASH TO BLACK.

TWO YEARS EARLIER...

Rome has the Colosseum. London has the Houses of Parliament. The Bronx has The House That Ruth Built... The original baseball cathedral:

YANKEE STADIUM — DAY

Empty. Covered in a blanket of snow. The majestic baseball diamond and grandstands seemingly frozen in time.

WORKERS sweep the snow off monuments — a marbled pantheon of legends — Ruth and Gehrig, Mantle and DiMaggio.

Inside, a JANITOR buffs the floor of the Yankees Museum — pinstripe jerseys and team relics on display behind glass.

OVER the WHIRRING of the floor polisher, we make out YELLING coming from down the hall...

Some sort of maniac behind a set of CLOSED DOORS inscribed, "THE BOSS". The tirade climaxes with a THUD. CRASH. SMASH.

RECEPTION, OFFICE OF GEORGE M. STEINBRENNER

As the door opens, the SECRETARY gazes up at the terror-stricken FACES exiting, tails between their legs:

BILL LIVESEY. 50s. Yankees scouting director. Old guard.

GORDON BLAKELEY. 40s. International scouting director. That perpetual tan is from watching thousands of games.

RUDY SANTÍN. 30s. Cuban American. Scrappy new scouting director for Latin America. We FREEZE as a book-sized PROJECTILE hurtles out of The Boss's office toward the back of his head.

RESUME ACTION as it whizzes past his ear and...

SMASH! Bullseye into a MURAL of the Yankees team logo.

We catch a glimpse of STEINBRENNER in his doorway. 60s. Red-faced. Silver-haired. Gives out heart attacks for a living. As his automatic door begins to close:

STEINBRENNER
(to Rudy)
You wanna kiss my ass? Bring me the goddamn winning Cubans you promised. Not a box of fucking cigars!

The door SHUTS.

STADIUM CORRIDOR — MOMENTS LATER

Bent cigars poke out of the splintered box of *Cohibas* — like a smashed *piñata* in Rudy's hands.

He heads back to the scouting offices with Gordon and Bill.

GORDON BLAKELEY
What did I say? Months ago. What'd I tell you?

RUDY
You said, be direct. ‘Just tell him what you think. No one knows this Cuba stuff better than you’.

GORDON BLAKELEY
I *said*, don’t make the old man any promises you can’t keep.

RUDY
I made a projection, Gordon. A projection! We’re scouts, we make projections.

GORDON BLAKELEY
A tidal wave of Cuban all-stars defecting to the U.S.?

RUDY
I stand by that.

GORDON BLAKELEY
Oh, c’mon, Rudy! There’s been one defection in thirty years. One. And he just signed with the Cardinals.

RUDY
Not my fault. ...Bill? Back me up here, man. How the fuck can I sign Cuban players if the MLB starts throwing them into a draft now?

BILL LIVESEY
Rudy—

RUDY
It’s a fucking lottery!

BILL LIVESEY
Rudy. If you can’t sign ‘em, none of it fucking matters to Steinbrenner. <u>You</u> don’t matter.

Rudy lets that sink in.

BILL LIVESEY (CONT'D)
I’m sorry. That’s what it is.

GORDON BLAKELEY
Promises. Promises’ll fuck you.
(reaches for a bent cigar)
How’d you get these anyway? I mean, you can’t in the States.

Rudy stops. Looks down at the broken box of cigars. His eyes widen. A flicker of an idea as bells ring out... *No*, ACTUAL DOOR CHIMES, as we

CUT TO:

A LARGE DOOR OPENS ON

JOE CUBAS. Contractor. On the outside: Oakleys, khakis, sweat-stained "CARLES CONSTRUCTION" polo. On the inside: miserable.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(in Spanish)
Come in. I'll tell them you're here.

REVERSE TO REVEAL — a Guatemalan maid. He follows her into

AN EXTREMELY '90S MIAMI MANSION

Joe's American dream. Bright. Modern. Over the top. It's Reaganomics on steroids. <u>His imagination takes over</u>...

JOE'S POV: Framed family photos on a credenza, BUT <u>the beaming faces are Joe and his family</u>: In front of a Learjet. On vacations. At parties. Posing with President Bush. Gloria Estefan. The cast of MIAMI VICE: *"Joe, thanks for having us!"*.

SCARFACE plays on the giant projection TV.

AL PACINO (AS TONY MONTANA)
...In this country you make the money first, then when you get the money, you get the power...

Joe sees himself on the sofa, feet up. Embroidered silk PJs. Bowl of Doritos. Just as he's about to take a bite—

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Excuse me... Hello??

SNAP BACK TO REALITY. Joe spins around to see a PREPPY ASSHOLE. Casual-chic Armani. Hands-free headset. Cigar.

PREPPY ASSHOLE
You the cable guy?

Off Joe, feeling even smaller, when—

Running down the stairs in their school uniforms: OLIVIA (8) and CECI (6) with two of their better-off CLASSMATES.

OLIVIA
(to Joe)
Dad! Where's *mami*?

JOE
Working. Cecilia, where are your shoes? Olivia, help your sister. Come on, *mama*, we gotta go!

PREPPY ASSHOLE
Mr. Cubas! Joe Cubas?
(goes in for a do-over)
Marty. Pat and Sandy's dad. Obviously. Sorry, didn't mean to—

JOE
It's the uniform, I get it. You've got an amazing place. My girls go on about it all the time.

MARTY
They sure love the pool.

As he opens the front door, Joe clocks Marty's cigar.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Smoke bother you?

JOE
No, but... Hmm. For the man who has everything, I would've expected...

MARTY
Cohibas? Cuban cigars aren't—

JOE
What, legal? Don't wanna get in trouble, Marty? Girls, let's go!

Joe extends his arm past Marty's '93 ruby-red BMW, to his shit-beige minivan. He hits the clicker: the door slides open.

JOE (CONT'D)
C'mon, you tellin' me you never bend any rules on Wall Street?

Marty breaks a devilish grin. Puffs on the cigar.

JOE (CONT'D)
Anyway, I get a few boxes in through Mexico once in a while.

MARTY
Bonafide Cubans?

JOE
They're not cheap, but I can put you on the waitlist.

MARTY
How long's the list?

A curl of the lip, Joe knows he's hooked him.

I/E. CUBAS MINIVAN (DRIVING), MIAMI STREETS – DAY

Joe watches the mansion disappear in his rearview as "Barney & Friends" plays through the speakers. Ceci looks sad.

OLIVIA
One day we'll get our own pool. Then we can invite Pat and Sandy over.

CECI
They're so lucky.

Joe overhears, crestfallen. His surroundings begin to darken, shift. Sounds DROWNED OUT by...

SONG VOCALS (PRE-LAP)
BEEP BEEP! AHH... BEEP BEEP!

DISCO HIT *"BANG! BANG!"* by The Joe Cuba Sextet PLAYS LOUDLY.

PULL BACK FROM Joe, now in a ridiculous 1970s ruffle tux and Burger King crown. He throws an uneasy glance to the "prom queen" beside him – his glammed-up wife, MARIA (30s). We are:

INT. LA SALLE HIGH SCHOOL GYM – NIGHT

A banner reads: "WELCOME BACK CLASS OF '77". A crowd of tipsy ALUMNI watch the stage. Beside Joe and Maria, a perky FEMALE EMCEE boogies to the song until it fades.

EMCEE
Okay! Maria... Let's finally set the record straight about this song.

Maria laughs, reaches for Joe's hand.

MARIA
A bunch of us were dancing–

EMCEE
10th grade?

MARIA
Junior prom. So I'm dancing, minding my business... and *this* little hustler shimmies up to me and goes, *'You know, this is my uncle's band.'*

Everyone laughs.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Right?! I'm like, bro, 'Your uncle is NOT Joe Cuba!'.

JOE
I fudged the facts a little to impress her!

Maria rolls her eyes and kisses him adoringly.

EMCEE
Our "Best Couple" endures!

The crowd cheers.

EMCEE (CONT'D)
Alright! We got one more. A surprise guest, fresh off the plane. A big shot for the New York Yankees...

Joe does a double take.

EMCEE (CONT'D)
La Salle's baseball MVP of '77... Make some noise for <u>RUDY SANTÍN</u>!

The crowd erupts as Rudy comes out. He kisses Maria. Hugs Joe.

JOE
Holy shit! You made it!

Up on the big screen, a yearbook photo of Rudy and Joe in their high school baseball uniforms. Pitcher and catcher.

EXT. LA SALLE WATERFRONT CAMPUS – LATER

Joe holds a clear acrylic cigar tube. Inside, the lone unscathed survivor of Steinbrenner's wrath.

JOE
What an animal, bro. Who destroys a brand new box of *Cohibas*?

RUDY
Yeah... been a rough week.

JOE
Well, I'm not getting you another box for him. Fuck that guy.

Joe takes the cigar out of the tube...

JOE (CONT'D)
But I'd still trade places with you.

Glides it under his nose. Eyes roll back.

RUDY
Mr. Carles still busting your balls?

JOE
Never work for your in-laws, bro.

Joe puts the cigar in his mouth.

RUDY
Wait, no, no—

Rudy grabs it. Places it back in the tube.

RUDY (CONT'D)
You know those dollar bills behind the counter at the laundromat or deli or wherever?

JOE
The ones in the little frame?

Rudy nods. Holds up the cigar tube.

RUDY
<u>This</u> is our framed dollar bill.

JOE
(laughs)
Oh, we starting a cigar business? Take it from me, the black market's a desperate man's side-hustle.

RUDY
Same idea. Different venture.

JOE
If it pays bigger dividends...

RUDY
Bro, it's Major League Baseball.

Joe stops. Looks at Rudy.

— A SERIES OF FLASHBACKS —

AIRPORT TERMINAL

PLAYERS in TEAM CUBA tracksuits line up to board a plane.

RUDY (V.O.)
Cuban team was on a layover in Tampa when it happened...

They're accompanied by COACHES and CUBAN SECURITY AGENTS.

RUDY (V.O.)
Castro keeps them on such a tight leash... but one finally broke free.

Focus on *that* one — RENÉ AROCHA (28). Shifty eyes. Sweating.

AIRPLANE — CONTINUOUS

Players take their seats. Suddenly, Cuban security agents come tearing through the aisles.

The players notice an <u>empty seat</u>. Turn to each other, baffled.

RUDY (V.O.)
Castro went ballistic. He knew exactly what was coming...

NEWS FOOTAGE: CUBAN DICTATOR FIDEL CASTRO REMARKS IN SPANISH

CASTRO
He's a traitor to the revolution. Betrayed his country, his team, everyone. A sell out, like a Judas.

NEWS FOOTAGE: MIAMI PRESS CONFERENCE

CAMERA FLASHES. Arocha sits with community leaders.

RUDY (V.O.)
Sure enough, a couple days later, he turns up in Miami.

A SPOKESPERSON fields a flurry of questions.

REPORTER (O.S.)
Does he fear for his family's safety back in Cuba?

RUDY (V.O.)
Arocha gets full political asylum. Instant <u>U.S. residency</u>.

INT. LA CARRETA DINER, MIAMI (LITTLE HAVANA)

Joe and Rudy at a booth eating *medianoche* sandwiches.

RUDY
Every team wanted him. Steinbrenner authorized up to two million.

JOE
A bidding war.

RUDY
Last week, Arocha made his MLB debut, pitching for the Cardinals. Blew out six Pirate hitters as easily as birthday candles.

JOE
Rags to riches. The American dream.

Rudy looks at Joe, shakes his head 'no'.

RUDY
(doing Tony Montana)
'You know what Capitalism is?'

Joe sits up, realizing...

JOE
'Getting fucked.'

"Scarface". His favorite movie.

RUDY
There was no bidding war. The Cardinals got him in a lottery. Bargain basement... $15k.

JOE
When Steinbrenner would've paid two million?!

RUDY
The League came up with some crap about Arocha now being a U.S. resident, and blah, blah, under MLB rules he's subject to a draft.

JOE
So Cubans can't be free agents?

Rudy tilts his head, cracks a mischievous grin.

Joe puts his sandwich down.

JOE (CONT'D)
Rudy, Rudy, Rudy. You figured out a way around the MLB rulebook.

Rudy places the cigar tube on the table. Boom.

JOE (CONT'D)
(realizing)
So you bring the players in through a third country...

RUDY
Exactly. They get their residency someplace else... Mexico, wherever.

JOE
Like money laundering, but with baseball players.

RUDY
Bro, it's a loophole so fucking big, you can fit the entire Team Cuba dugout. Poof! No more lottery.

JOE
And rich assholes like Steinbrenner will spend whatever it takes to get what they can't have.

RUDY
That's the idea. <u>But there is one MLB rule I can't get around</u>. As a team employee, I can't negotiate with players. And I sure as shit can't help them defect.

He points a plantain chip at Joe.

RUDY (CONT'D)
There needs to be an <u>agent</u>.

JOE
A sports agent... I'd be a... Are you busting my balls right now??

RUDY
Bro, you negotiate contracts with plumbers and roofers. You can do this white collar shit in your sleep.

JOE
I *knew* you didn't fly down here for some fucking reunion! So, what's the commission? How much we talkin'?

RUDY
I don't know, you greedy *'chazzer'*. What's five percent of millions?

JOE
Okay, okay. So, *I'd* contact the players, organize the defections...

RUDY
Then gently nudge them my way. We make it so the Yankees get first dibs on all the players you rep.

JOE
Who else knows about this?

RUDY
Nobody. But Joe, if we do this—

JOE
Oh, we're doing it!

RUDY
I can't have your crazy cousin involved.

JOE
Iggy's all talk.

RUDY
He got caught landing a plane full of coke on a secret airstrip in Venezuela...

JOE
I'll keep him out of this one.

RUDY
Gotta keep it profesh. Don't wanna push the envelope too far.

A WAITRESS approaches...

JOE
Too far?? Bro. We're about to declare war on Fidel Castro.

She rolls her eyes and takes Joe's plate — revealing the food-stained placemat underneath...

PUSH IN on the large graphic in the center: THE ISLAND OF CUBA. It fills the screen as we

CUT TO:

A pair of SHIFTY BLUE EYES under the brim of a PANAMA HAT. They scan the area, then tuck back behind a Hemingway novel.

WAITER'S VOICE
Your drink, *señor*.

A *mojito* lands on a small table. We are:

EXT. HOSTAL VALENCIA COURTYARD, OLD HAVANA, CUBA – DAY

"Shifty eyes" lowers the book in a huff... FREEZE on TOM CRONIN (50s): *turista Americano.* Hawaiian shirt. Waspy Boston accent. RESUME ACTION as he turns to the WAITER (20s) –

TOM
Psst! I didn't order that.

The waiter winks. Leaves the drink.

Tom sighs. Checks his watch. Whoever he's waiting for isn't coming. A nearby couple grabs his attention:

A flashy WEST AFRICAN BUSINESSMAN (to be seen again) romancing a local PROSTITUTE. The man shoots Tom a smirk.

Tom nods. On the table, the sweaty *mojito*. He takes a drink.

As he sets the glass down, something catches his eye...

On the drink napkin – a handwritten note, encircled by the water ring from his glass: "CALLE SAN PEDRO & SOL, 4PM".

EXT. STREET CORNER – LATER

4:07 on Tom's watch. He scans his surroundings...

Old Havana of romantic lore. A charming plaza. Pastel-hued buildings. Cobblestone streets. Sparse crowd of tourists. Out of nowhere, a faded Soviet-made Muscovy pulls up at his feet.

Tom looks in. His eyes narrow. Sitting behind the wheel –

TOM
You?! The waiter from–

OSMANY
(in a thick accent)
Osmany Lorenzo. Ramón sent me.

In the back seat, an AFRO-CUBAN MAN (30) intimidates.

OSMANY (CONT'D)
Orlando's a friend. Get in!

Tom bites his lip and slides into the front seat.

CUT TO:

RESIDENTIAL MAILBOX, MIAMI – DAY

Maria's red lacquered nails pull out an assortment of mail.

She starts back to her modest, blue-collar home — leafing through bills, junk mail. One envelope stops her cold:

A tricolor logo with a batter: “MLB PLAYERS ASSOC.” Addressed to: “PREMIER SPORTS COUNCIL, INC., ATTN: PRESIDENT JOE CUBAS”.

Maria *rips it open*. Scans the letter intently. She fumes.

INT. CUBAS HOUSE — MOMENTS LATER

Clutching the letter, in a thick Miami accent:

MARIA
What the fuck is Premier Sports Council, Inc.?

JOE
Babe, don’t be mad.

MARIA
(dripping with sarcasm)
Mad? *No, no, no, mi amor,* congratulations, Mr. President... of your own sports agency!

Joe grabs the letter.

JOE
It’s nothing shady.

MARIA
(suspicious)
You, a sports agent...

Joe shrugs, grins.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Then I guess you can finally quit working for my dad.

JOE
You can’t stand it there either.

She picks up the phone. Dials.

JOE (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

MARIA
(into phone)
Papi...

Joe goes pale.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Joe’s got some big news. Here...

She hands him the phone.

BERNIE (O.C.)
¿Álo?

JOE
Uh, hey Bernie... Call you back!

Click! Joe exhales.

Maria breaks a little smile.

JOE (CONT'D)
That’s <u>not</u> funny, *chica*.

MARIA
And you’re <u>not</u> a sports agent, *chico*.

JOE
You used to believe in me...

MARIA
Believing *in* you and believing you are two different things, *papo*.

JOE
So we’re just supposed to work for your dad the rest our lives?

MARIA
It’s stable.

JOE
It’s suffocating.

MARIA
Ay por favor. You’re still dreaming of... of “Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous.”

JOE
So now dreaming is a crime.

MARIA
You’re looking for the American dream and don’t even realize you’re standing in it.

JOE
Oh, come on, Mari! We deserve more than this. I'm better than this.

MARIA
I'm telling you right now, I can't handle another one of your Joe Cubas Plans, or whatever get-rich-quick—

JOE
It's not a—

MARIA
No way, *mi vida*. I can't. Not again. Lying to my dad, covering up for you and that idiot cousin of yours—

JOE
Iggy's not even part of this.
(holds up the letter)
This is <u>real</u>! It's the MLB! Working with the Yankees. With Rudy.

She stops.

MARIA
You'd be working for the Yankees?

JOE
With them. Recruiting players.

MARIA
And how much will this cost us?

JOE
Almost nothing.

(Not true)

JOE (CONT'D)
...But the commissions are huge.

(Maybe)

JOE (CONT'D)
...And it's totally legit.

(Sort of)

JOE (CONT'D)
...Just gotta take a few trips here and there. Yankees cover most of it.

(Not quite)

MARIA
Okay, what's the catch?

JOE
Nothing. We just can't be blabbing about it. This city's full of spies.

MARIA
Don't be such a drama queen. It's the MLB not the CIA.

JOE
They're Cuban players, Mari. From Cuba.

Maria's face falls.

MARIA
Are you fucking kidding me, bro?

JOE
I'm gonna change the game.

MARIA
You're gonna end up rotting in a Cuban prison! Or worse.

JOE
I'm not going to Cuba. Rudy and I found a way around all that.

MARIA
And what makes you think the players would leave their families behind?

JOE
We're talking millions of dollars... It'll change their lives. And ours. We just gotta keep a lid on it. All it takes is one greedy opportunist to ruin everything.

CUT TO:

I/E. OSMANY'S MUSCOVY (DRIVING), HAVANA STREETS — DAY

The car emerges out of a sooty exhaust cloud, passing a 50's American roadster and an ox-drawn carriage. Way beyond the tourist zone. Out the window, the faded, decaying grandeur of Post-Soviet Cuba. Undernourished Cubans queue up for rations.

Tom lights a cigarette, unfazed.

Osmany turns onto a side street... Veers into an alleyway...

Zips through an abandoned underpass leading to a labyrinth of

I/E. DILAPIDATED RUINS

The Muscovy coasts to a stop in a covered area. Through the partially crumbled structure, we reveal the city beyond.

The three men get out of the car. Tom scopes the area.

TOM
So, uh... where’s Ramón?

OSMANY
Ramón? Ramón’s in prison.

Osmany opens the trunk. Empty. Just an old car jack and dirty rag. Then, he pops open a hidden compartment.

Stowed in the cavity: minibar beverages, Marlboros, hotel soap bars, toilet paper, and a few new Barbie dolls.

Osmany tosses Tom a mini bottle —

OSMANY (CONT'D)
On the house. With purchase.

He then pulls out an unassuming BRIEFCASE. Runs his hand over the lid before popping it open to reveal... *Weapons? Drugs??*

A PHOTO ALBUM. He hands it to Tom.

Tom flips through pages of Polaroids. A blackmarket catalog of pre-revolutionary treasures. Furniture. Art. Museum pieces.

OSMANY (CONT'D)
These two are Picassos...

TOM
I might have a buyer in Asia.

Tom stops on a page of ultra-rare BASEBALL CARDS. The old-timey illustrated ones that sell at fancy auction houses.

Tom dons a jeweler’s monocle. Examines Babe Ruth, Nap Lajoie.

ORLANDO
You like *beisbol*?

TOM
I’ll like anything if the price is right.

Tom reaches for his wallet. Offers two twenties.

TOM (CONT'D)
You guys big baseball fans?

Osmany takes the money and turns to Orlando. They laugh.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON A PITCHERS MOUND. The ROAR of a crowd. Through a wisp of orange dust, a PAIR OF CLEATS step onto the plate.

The PITCHER wears his pant legs short, his socks high. We don't see his face. On his pinstripe jersey, a large blue "H" and "26". These aren't Yankee pinstripes. We are:

I/E. EL LATINO STADIUM, HAVANA – DAY (CONTINUOUS)

55,000 seats packed with everyday Cubans. No advertisements. Just a giant mural of Castro and his triumphant players. Gods.

Tom is in awe. He takes a seat beside Osmany.

The FRESH DIVERSE FACES of the *Habana Industriales* pass the BALL from: CATCHER to... FIRST BASEMAN to... SECOND BASEMAN to... SHORT STOP to... THIRD BASEMAN, who throws it across the diamond, where it's suddenly swallowed by a GLOVE mid-air.

A GROWING RHYTHMIC CHANT: *¡DU-QUE! ¡DU-QUE!* The glove lowers –

FREEZE on ORLANDO '*EL DUQUE*' HERNÁNDEZ. Yes, *THAT* Orlando. Navy blue cap curled hard over his large, intense eyes.

RUDY (PRE-LAP)
The top pitcher on the Cuban national team – the crown jewel... Orlando Hernández. They call him *El Duque*. You get *this* guy to defect, and I can get you six.

RESUME ACTION as *El Duque* jerks his knee chin-high and delivers a fastball strike into the catcher's mitt – POP!

CLOSE ON JOE'S FACE

JOE
SIX MILLION DOLLARS?!

INTERCUT: RUDY'S OFFICE

On the phone with Joe, overlooking the empty Yankee stadium.

RUDY
...Maybe seven. Problem is, Gordon swears he's so loyal to Castro, he'd rather starve than play in the U.S.

INSERT — POST-IT NOTE

Joe scribbles “$8 MILLION”.

He slaps it on a 1994 TEAM CUBA BASEBALL CARD of *El Duque*. Pins the card up on a cork board filled with other CUBAN PLAYERS (all with their own post-it price tags).

INT. RUDY’S OFFICE, YANKEE STADIUM

RUDY
Just faxed you Team Cuba’s travel schedule. Talk later!

INT. JOE’S “WAR ROOM”

Joe’s elated. As he rips out the fax, Maria enters with a basket of laundry. Joe’s “war room” is also his GARAGE.

He pulls her close. Kisses her on the lips.

JOE
I’ll do those, babe!

Maria smiles, grabs his face with her hands, kisses him hard and long. Joe pulls away to catch his breath.

JOE (CONT'D)
Where are the kids?

MARIA
At Gina’s... ‘til 4.

She kisses him again with such passion, Joe drops the fax. They undo each other’s clothes, going at it. The BEATING DRUM of the DRYER swells into a sharp, rapturous melody...

CUBAN MUSIC, BLARING from Osmany’s Muscovy. An improv boombox parked within earshot of

EXT. TOURIST BEACH, CUBA — LATE AFTERNOON

Sparsely crowded. Shirtless PLAYERS and their FAMILIES relax postgame. Tom, Orlando, Osmany bond over a game of dominoes.

ORLANDO
So, do you know Luís Tiant?

TOM
Boston’s a pretty big city.

OSMANY
Tiant played for the Red Sox.

TOM
Oh, oh, *Tee-ant*! *Lou-ie* Tiant. The pitcher.

ORLANDO
Cuban! Pitched 1975 World Series.

TOM
Right, yeah. My kid Jimmy's more the die-hard baseball fan.

ORLANDO
The baseball cards for your boy?

TOM
Uh, yeah... sure.

Orlando glances at his wife NORITA (Afro-Cuban, 28), building sandcastles by the water with their daughters STEFFI (5) and YAHU (7). He waves at them. Yahu calls him over.

ORLANDO
Con permiso...

He excuses himself. Full-on dad mode.

TOM
Family. A blessing and a curse. You got kids?

OSMANY
Oh, definitely... somewhere.

They laugh as TWO POLICEMEN appear out of nowhere. A tense beat as one officer harasses Osmany in Spanish. The other flips over the domino table. Everyone stops, turns.

POLICEMAN #1
Party's over. You know this beach is reserved for tourists.

Tom reaches for his weapon: his wallet. The two officers back off, spotting something more powerful than Tom's money. Walking toward them, Cuba's Michael Jordan. Yahu in his arms.

POLICEMAN #2
El Duque...

ORLANDO
Que pasa, compañeros?

The officers suddenly recognize the rest of Cuba's national "dream team". They trip over themselves apologizing, asking for autographs. The all-stars indulge them.

Tom watches the players wield their influence. As the WARM GLOW of the setting SUN flares brighter we

CUT TO:

INSERT – MICROWAVE OVEN

An "ACT II" POPCORN bag inflates like a balloon, and... DING!

INT. JOE'S LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

Olivia and Ceci jump onto the sofa. Maria joins with popcorn. Joe hits the lights. As he nestles in with them, we begin to hear a distinctive, energetic guitar riff coming from the TV.

MARIA
What're we watching?

The song becomes recognizable: "*EYE OF THE TIGER*" by Survivor.

OLIVIA
Nooooo, *papi*...

CECI
What about Mrs. Doubtfire?

On-screen: two boxing gloves emerge. One brandishes the USSR's hammer and sickle. The other, the USA's stars and stripes...

OLIVIA
I don't wanna watch a boxing movie!

JOE
It's not about boxing. It's about individualism. Man vs the system.

MARIA
Joe, it's your last night...

JOE
And the perfect send off! Rocky takes on the Commies! C'mon, don't you guys wanna see Rocky win the Cold War?

OLIVIA/CECI
No.

JOE
You're gonna love it!

The gloves charge toward each other, colliding in a BANG!

LATER

Quiet. Everyone's passed out. Except Joe. On screen: a melodramatic scene — ADRIAN CONFRONTS ROCKY ABOUT LEAVING HOME TO FIGHT DRAGO.

ADRIAN
Even if you win, what have you won? Apollo's still gone. Why can't you change your thinking?

ROCKY
'Cause I'm a fighter!

TV flickers on Joe's face, rapt.

ROCKY (CONT'D)
That's the way I'm made, Adrian. That's what you married...

Joe turns to Maria, dozing beside him.

ROCKY (CONT'D)
We can't change what we are.

ADRIAN
YOU CAN'T WIN!

Rocky looks at her. Knows what he must do. So does Joe.

On TV, rising percussive music... "*BURNING HEART*" by Survivor launches a "Rocky IV" montage. The song SWELLS as we CUT TO:

AN AMERICAN AIRLINES JET OVER THE HORIZON

The very-80s inspirational rock anthem CONTINUES as Joe sets off on his global mission to turn Cuban players into Yankees.

SURVIVOR (O.S.)
TWO WORLDS COLLIDE, RIVAL NATIONS /
IT'S A PRIMITIVE CLASH, VENTING
YEARS OF FRUSTRATIONS...

CARACAS, VENEZUELA

SONG CONTINUES over Joe — cloak and dagger — tailing the CUBAN PLAYERS. Avoiding their HANDLERS. He lurks around every corner: The hotel pool. The breakfast buffet. Practice. Games.

INT. LOCAL EATERY

Orlando, his brother Liván (we recognize him from the opening) and shortstop GERMÁN MESA (Afro-Cuban, 27) at a table. [Note: Italicized dialogue to be spoken in Spanish.]

GERMÁN
Don't look, but there's this guy at the table in the back...

Orlando and Liván immediately turn.

LIVÁN
Ese gordo? [*That big guy?*]

Joe throws them a manly nod. Orlando looks uneasy.

ORLANDO
He was at the game too...

CUTAWAY (EARLIER): Off Orlando's pitch, a BATTER hits an easy pop-up to center. Orlando watches the heads of the people in the stands tilt up to follow the fly ball. One head isn't moving. It's staring right at him. It's Joe.

LIVÁN
What's he want?

Orlando gets up.

ORLANDO
Stay here.

Liván and Germán watch him beeline to Joe's table.

We can't hear Orlando's exchange with Joe, but it's abrupt. Joe covertly slips a note into his hand, and ducks out.

Orlando scans it. A brief glimpse of concern as he returns.

GERMÁN
What the hell was that?

ORLANDO
Nothing. Just a fucking pervert...

Orlando drops the CRUMPLED NOTE on the table. An address.

GERMÁN
(amused)
Seriously?! So, what's the going rate for three Cuban stallions?

ORLANDO
Stay away from that guy. Let's go.

As they leave, Liván discreetly pockets the crumpled note.

CUT TO:

LIVÁN TAPS ON A HOTEL ROOM DOOR.

He looks back, making sure he wasn't followed. The door opens, revealing Joe. He pulls it open further so Liván can come in.

INT. JOE'S HOTEL ROOM, CARACAS – NIGHT

Liván looks uneasy.

JOE
Relax. Here, sit.

The 19-year old sits on the bed's edge. Joe hands him a beer.

LIVÁN
Got anything stronger?

JOE
I'll get you whatever you want.

Liván can't meet his eyes. Shaking.

JOE (CONT'D)
It's okay to be nervous.

LIVÁN
I really, really need the money.

JOE
You're worth it.

LIVÁN
U.S. dollars. Up front. Show me the cash, before I change my mind.

JOE
Uh??

LIVÁN
You can watch from over there. But no touching.

Wait, what? As Liván starts to unbutton, Joe's eyes widen.

JOE
Whoa, whoa, no-no – STOP!

Liván freezes.

JOE (CONT'D)
I'm... I'm an agent.

LIVÁN
CIA?!

JOE
No, no, a <u>sports</u> agent. From Miami. I'm Joe. Joe Cubas. I'm here to sign you guys to the major leagues.

Liván leaps up.

LIVÁN
Are you crazy?!

Not the reaction Joe expected.

JOE
Your brother didn't tell you?

LIVÁN
Orlando... betray his country? My brother's no sell out.

JOE
You realize if you went to the States right now, you'd be the best amateur player in the country.

LIVÁN
I'd be a traitor.

JOE
You'd be rich!

Liván sets down the beer.

LIVÁN
I can't be here.

He makes for the door.

JOE
1.5 million dollars!

Liván stops. Hesitates.

JOE (CONT'D)
That's what the best amateur player just made with the Yankees. 1.5 million. And I can get you more.

LIVÁN
You're crazy.

JOE
And you're worth a lot more than five pesos a week, brother. Your country's betrayed <u>you</u>.

Liván walks out the door. It slowly closes on Joe's face.

CARACAS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, VENEZUELA

Joe, at a payphone.

JOE
Rudy, he was shitting a brick.

RUDY (O.S.)
Just get one of 'em to trust you. One. First player defects, the rest will follow. Like dominoes.

Joe watches Team Cuba board the plane. The SONG RETURNS...

SURVIVOR (O.S.)
IN THE WARRIOR'S CODE, THERE'S NO SURRENDER...

Joe girds his loins.

SURVIVOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
THOUGH HIS BODY SAYS STOP, HIS SPIRIT CRIES, NEVER...

INTERNATIONAL CUP, ITALY — DAY

Cuban power-hitter OMAR LINARES (28) hits a three-run homer. The crowd goes wild.

AUTOGRAPH ALLEY — AFTER THE GAME

Cuban players sign autographs for eager FANS. *El Duque* glances over at his teammates. He narrows his gaze at what he sees:

Linares and righty ROLANDO ARROJO (29) are signing a ball for JOE, who's elbowed his way in front of YOUNG FANS.

FANCY RESTAURANT — LATER

Linares devours a big juicy steak as a SERVER pours Arrojo more wine. Across the table: Joe, shooting his shot.

JOE
You're number one in the world. Olympic gold medalists. So, you're probably thinking, 'why the fuck did this guy travel all this way just to tell us what we already know?'

ARROJO
Really, I'm just savoring my first steak in four years...

LINARES
It's first-rate, Gordo.

JOE
Guys, I'll be honest – there's no question you'd be major league caliber in the U.S. And I have a plan that can make that happen...

Linares stops cold.

LINARES
I knew it!

JOE
Listening isn't a crime...

Linares storms off.

ARROJO
Neither is eating. Go on.

MUSIC RISES AS WE REVOLVE AROUND JOE IN A CONTINUOUS MONTAGE. HIS CLOTHING AND SETTINGS CHANGE, DAY TO DAY, TRIP TO TRIP, AS HE PITCHES PLAYER AFTER PLAYER...

JOE
– I can guarantee you asylum –

AFTER PLAYER (VALDO FERNÁNDEZ)

JOE (CONT'D)
– either Costa Rica or Venezuela –

AFTER PLAYER (LARRY RODRÍGUEZ)...

JOE (CONT'D)
– free agency with the MLB –

AFTER PLAYER (VLADIMIR NUÑEZ)...

JOE (CONT'D)
– I can negotiate with the Yankees –

AFTER PLAYER (ARROJO again)...

JOE (CONT'D)
– and make you a millionaire –

Arrojo still doesn't look convinced.

ARROJO
I don't know... I don't think I can leave my family behind.

Joe nods. Then, shifts his strategy —

JOE
Rolo, did I see you squinting out on the mound?

SUNGLASS HUT

Arrojo tries on a pair of Oakleys. Admires himself in a mirror. Joe hands the SALESLADY his credit card. Behind her, out the window... A WHITE-HAIRED MAN watches them intently.

HOTEL POOL, ARGENTINA

Liván relaxes on a sun lounger. One seat over, "reading" the paper... Joe. He makes sure they're alone, and turns to Liván.

Overlooking the pool... a dark hotel WINDOW. WE HEAR the rapid clicking of PHOTOS being taken.

LONG-LENS CAMERA POV: Joe, shaking Liván's hand by the pool... *CLICK.* Buying him a drink... *CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.*

CLOTHING BOUTIQUE, ARGENTINA — LATER

Joe holds a neon windbreaker up to Liván. The STORE CLERK swipes his credit card through the machine.

HOTEL BAR, NICARAGUA

The SERVER hands out drinks to a GROUP OF PLAYERS, then points across the bar to Joe. He raises his glass. The server takes Joe's card, SWIPES it through the machine.

INSERT — JOE'S CREDIT CARDS BEING SWIPED OVER AND OVER: $75... $168... $278... $525...

INT. CUBAS HOUSE, MIAMI — NIGHT

Maria sifts through a pile of PAST DUE BILLS. Sighs.

CUT TO:

INT. JOE'S HOTEL ROOM, PUERTO RICO — NIGHT

Scattered pizza boxes. Beer bottles.

JOE
Guys, I'm gonna need a decision...

Liván, Arrojo, and Valdo look at each other.

ARROJO
Doesn't feel right... not without my family. Sorry, Gordo.

VALDO
I'm not ready either.

All eyes on Liván. He shifts nervously...

INT. RUDY'S OFFICE, YANKEE STADIUM – NEXT MORNING

RUDY
(into phone)
So did you get 'em?

INTERCUT: JOE'S HOTEL ROOM

Nervously noshing on room service, phone pinned to shoulder –

JOE
Mmhm... coming together.

RUDY
What's that mean?

JOE
We're close.

RUDY
Close?

JOE
Super close.

RUDY
You didn't get 'em.

JOE
Don't get your panties in a twist. It's happening, just ironing out some wrinkles –

RUDY
Wrinkles?

JOE
Details.

RUDY
You mean commitments?

JOE
Semantics.

RUDY
You didn't get 'em. Jesus Christ, Joe, it's been months!

Rudy sees Steinbrenner and Gordon coming down the hall.

RUDY (CONT'D)
My head's on the chopping block.

JOE
Rudy, relax. They'll defect on the next trip. I'll get 'em in Tokyo. Trust me.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR, BOSTON LOGAN AIRPORT

Tom eats alone. Scribbles into a KOVELS' ANTIQUES PRICE GUIDE.

BARTENDER
Anything else?

TOM
Just the check.

ON TV: ESPN Wednesday Night Baseball (Red Sox vs Indians).

SPORTSCASTER
...joining me now, Red Sox Hall of Famer, better known as '*El Tiante*'.

Tom glances up to see retired pitcher LUÍS TIANT (Afro-Cuban, 50s). Iconic horseshoe-shaped mustache graying. Kind eyes.

LUÍS TIANT
(broken English)
Sank you. My pleasure to be here.

SPORTSCASTER
Louie, you've spent decades exiled from your home country...

Bartender brings the check. Tom's glued to the TV.

SPORTSCASTER (CONT'D)
When you left Havana 34 years ago, Fidel Castro issued a warning to Cuban athletes: 'If you go to the U.S. to play, you can't come back.'

LUÍS TIANT
Is true... Was really hard time for me... I no see my family again.

SPORTSCASTER
You certainly made them proud. From Cuban underdog to Boston superstar.

Then, as if speaking directly to Tom:

LUÍS TIANT
And you know, lotsa great players in Cuba right now would love to be superstars here too.

BARTENDER
More Tiants at Fenway... Maybe they can help break the curse, huh?

Hold on Tom, connecting the dots. A calculating grin emerges.

CUT TO:

INT. SMOKY ROOM, SOMEWHERE IN CUBA

On a tabletop, SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS of JOE soliciting players. CUBAN OFFICIALS (we don't see their faces) review the images.

FEMALE VOICE
Surname Cubas. José Ignacio. Construction contractor from Miami. Parents were born in Havana.

MORE SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS: JOE IN HIS DRIVEWAY... ON HIS CELL PHONE... MARIA AT WORK... WITH OLIVIA AND CECI AT SCHOOL...

FEMALE VOICE (CONT'D)
Married with two daughters.

A SENIOR OFFICIAL studies Joe in Oakleys, orange headphones.

SENIOR OFFICIAL'S VOICE
Looks like an idiot. He a problem?

FEMALE VOICE
Not sure. Wasn't on our radar.

SPORTS MINISTER'S VOICE
Our players are loyal patriots. Men with families. With lots to lose.

SENIOR OFFICIAL'S VOICE
All the same, we don't need them getting ideas. Keep an eye on him.

He studies a photo of Maria and the girls.

CUT TO:

INT. CUBAS MINIVAN (DRIVING)

Maria maneuvers through gridlock. Olivia and Ceci in the back, looking for...

OLIVIA
There he is!

EXT. ARRIVALS, MIAMI INT'L AIRPORT

Joe, curbside. Headphones around his neck. Luggage by his side. He brightens as Maria and the girls pull up.

INT. CUBAS MINIVAN

Joe pecks Maria on the lips. Her eyes are tense. He turns to the back seat, full of stoic cheer —

JOE
Who wants Happy Meals?

OLIVIA/CECI
Meeeee!

Maria shoots Joe an unhappy look.

JOE (PRE-LAP)
I know you're upset...

INT. MCDONALD'S — LATER

Joe and Maria at a four-top. Half-eaten happy meals.

JOE
...I'm upset too. You think I like all this traveling?

MARIA
Joe, you told me — fucking promised — the Yankees would cover expenses.

She KNOCKS on the glass to an outdoor PlayPlace. Mouths: "*GET. DOWN*". Ceci and Olivia jump down, giggling.

JOE
When they defect, I cash in.

MARIA
Lemme guess, one more trip?

JOE
Tokyo.

Maria sighs.

MARIA
Bro, they're playing you! And sucking us dry.

JOE
They're not playing me.

MARIA
Always defecting on the next trip?

JOE
They're not playing me. Personal relationships take time.

She looks at him.

MARIA
Are you playing me, Joe?

JOE
Huh? No! Of course not.

MARIA
Yo que se... Maybe you're having some sorta midlife freakout—

JOE
But I've always been like this...

She KNOCKS on the glass. Mouths: "*DOWN!*".

MARIA
We barely talk. You're here one week, gone the next. Who pays all your credit card bills? I do. Who takes care of the house? I do.

JOE
Look, baby...

MARIA
Baby, *nada*. And what about me? The girls? You know how all this looks?

JOE
To who?

MARIA
People.

JOE
What people?

Dawning realization...

JOE (CONT'D)
Your dad... You told your dad?!

MARIA
He kept asking where you were. What you were up to. What the fuck was I supposed to do, Joe? I needed help with the girl's tuition!

Joe throws his arms up.

MARIA (CONT'D)
You're the one who insisted on private school!

JOE
Maria, I am on the verge of something big here. This. Close.

MARIA
How close?

JOE
Just need a few thousand to cover the Tokyo trip.

MARIA
JOE! We're broke. Flat. Broke.

JOE
It'll be life changing!

MARIA
I don't want life changing! I don't need life changing. I'm happy with what we have.

JOE
Well, dammit... I'm not!

Maria stares at him. Silent.

JOE (CONT'D)
...I'm sorry.

MARIA
(fighting back tears)
You're gonna get everything you want and lose everything that matters.
(takes his hand)
You're my ride or die – you know that. You're more than enough. Please, Joe... I love you, but I can't live like this. I can't.

JOE
Okay... okay.

MARIA
Promise me. No more trips. No more side hustles. Call my dad and go back to work, full time.

Joe finds a smile for her somewhere.

JOE
I promise.

Maria exhales. Puts her arm around him, kisses him on the cheek. Her eyes spot Olivia and Ceci playing happily. Joe gazes down at his pager. His mind elsewhere.

CUT TO:

INSERT – OFFICE PHONE (RINGING)

Bill Livesey hits “SPEAKER PHONE”. We are:

INT. SCOUTING ROOM, YANKEE STADIUM – DAY

Bill, Gordon, Rudy, and Yankees General Manager GENE MICHAEL sit around a table. Everyone’s on edge.

BILL LIVESEY
One sec, Joe. The Boss just left...

A coffee-splattered PORTABLE WHITEBOARD is lifted back up by TWO STAFFERS. Gene sternly reviews a folder in front of him.

RUDY
I think we’re ready. You there, Joe?

INTERCUT

CLOSE ON JOE’S FACE, gripping a cordless phone.

JOE
I’m here. Thanks for meeting.

RUDY
We appreciate the inside track. Really exciting stuff, Joe.

As if Rudy and Joe haven’t been colluding this whole time.

GENE MICHAEL
Joe, this is general manager Gene Michael. Are you seriously asking us for $16,000?

STILL TIGHT ON JOE. He clears his throat. Code-switches to <u>American business executive</u>.

JOE
Before you get hung up on the 16k, Gene, let me explain what that tiny sum represents to your ball club.

GENE MICHAEL
It *represents* a violation of MLBPA rules. Joe, the New York Yankees can't subsidize your sports agency.

JOE (O.S.)
Whoa, whoa, Gene! I don't think you realize how close I am to signing a roster of Cuban all-stars.

GORDON BLAKELEY
How close exactly?..

REVEAL JOE: **INT. CONSTRUCTION TRAILER, MIAMI – CONT'D**

Pacing. Sweating in his CARLES CONSTRUCTION polo, untucked over his boxers. Ribbons flutter from an oscillating fan.

JOE
Super close. A few weeks. In Tokyo.

GORDON BLAKELEY
What players?

JOE
Right. Well. So, for safety reasons, I can't name names.

GORDON BLAKELEY
Is *El Dookay* one of them?

JOE
(winces)
Yyyes... we've spoken. I'm looking at <u>multiple defections in Tokyo</u>.

A KNOCK on Joe's door. He ignores it.

JOE (CONT'D)
Guys, all I'm asking for... Call it an advance, an initial downpayment, whatever. But my legal team assures me, it's not an MLBPA violation.

(Legal team?)

JOE (CONT'D)
C’mon, how serious are the Yankees?

GENE MICHAEL
Joe, if Steinbrenner wasn’t serious, we wouldn’t be talking.

A CONSTRUCTION WORKER pokes his head into the window. Joe SHUTS the blinds.

JOE
Gene, these guys are risking their lives. Work with me here...

GENE MICHAEL
Here’s what I’ll do. I’ll send Gordon and Rudy to Japan for the defections. If that doesn’t show commitment, I don’t know what does. But no can do on the 16k, amigo.

JOE
Alright, Gene. Gotta go.

A sense of impending doom as Joe puts the phone down. He *needs* the money. Panic mounts. He can’t breathe, suffocating in more ways than one. The room spins. He reaches for the door when...

JOE COLLAPSES TO THE FLOOR. BLACKOUT.

JOE’S POV: Shadows recede, replaced by blurry, towering faces. Suddenly, a tiny, sparkling figure hovers before him. Otherworldly.

A moment of transcendence washes over him as the ethereal figure comes into sharp focus: a small gold pendant of Christ the Redeemer... swaying from the neck of a concerned WORKER.

Glints of sunlight dance in Joe’s eyes. It all makes sense.

CUT TO:

GLINTING HARD IN THE SUN, A CHROME HOOD ORNAMENT OF CHRIST THE REDEEMER — on the bow of a fire-orange Cadillac lowrider.

On the dash: a San Lazáro holy figure beside a photo of a BUSTY BLONDE MOM with FOUR KIDS. The CAR PHONE RINGS.

The driver picks up... FREEZE as his gold chain catches the light, glinting off the nameplate: “IGGY”. RESUME ACTION on Joe’s infamous cousin:

IGGY
Chill cuz, I’m here.

EXT. BARNETT BANK – DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Iggy swerves into a handicap spot.

Joe holds his breath. Time slows as we cut to what he sees:

Loafers striding toward us... white jeans, garish Versace shirt, and a toothy grin. *Rico Suave*. Flamboyant and suspect. A recipe for disaster.

By Iggy's side, refusing to take his hand, IGGY JR., a pint-sized walking tornado. He's holding a vinyl deposit bag.

Iggy gives Joe a one-arm hug and hands him a small styrofoam cup with a half-dozen thimble-sized plastic cups on top.

IGGY
(excitedly)
Stopped for some *cafécito*!

JOE
What's that smell?

IGGY
Drakkar Noir. *Te gusta?*

Joe forces a smile.

JOE
(to Iggy Jr.)
What's up, partner?

The little shit kicks Joe in the shin. Joe winces.

IGGY
Ey, ey! Behave, or no Nintendo.

INT. BARNETT BANK – CONTINUOUS

Iggy makes a big entrance, points at the bank tellers...

IGGY
(life of the party)
Who wants *cafécito?!*

Literally, everybody. Joe shifts uncomfortably.

IGGY (CONT'D)
Where's Manny?

MANNY (30s) pops up from behind his cubicle.

IGGY (CONT'D)
Manolin!

MANNY
(big hug)
Sup, bro!

IGGY
Mano, this is my big cousin Joe I was telling you about...

They shake. Joe looks anxious — *exactly how much did Iggy say?*

CUT TO:

INSERT — BANK TRANSFER SLIP

Iggy writes out "To: Joe Cubas", "Amount: "$16,000.00".

IGGY (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)
We're about to shake up the MLB forever.

INT. MANNY'S CUBICLE — CONTINUOUS

Iggy hands Manny the slip.

MANNY
Really?

Joe glares at Iggy — *Wtf, zip it*!

IGGY
Joe, relax! Jesus...
(to Manny)
He's a little paranoid. We're flying to Japan next week to sign a bunch of Cuban players. Cuz thinks Fidel's gonna come after him.

Manny chuckles. Joe pivots.

JOE
So, Manny, how long will it take for the funds to clear?

MANNY
I'll process it right away. Sit tight. Lemme talk to my manager.

IGGY
Oye? Can you also convert these?

Iggy unzips the deposit bag. Fat bundles of Venezuelan cash.

MANNY
'Course.

Manny exits with the bag. Iggy turns to Joe, to explain —

JOE
Don't. I don't even wanna know.

IGGY
It's the rest of my inheritance, alright? You know I've been clean since I met Teresa.

JOE
Anyway. Just keep Manny and anybody else out of our business, okay? Why you gotta be so loose-lipped?

IGGY
Why you gotta be so judgy? Manny's solid. We go way back.

JOE
That's supposed to make me feel better? And why the fuck would you tell him you're coming to Japan?

IGGY
OF COURSE I'm going. I'm your fucking partner, Joe! Right down the middle this time. 'Course I'm fucking going.

A LOUD CLATTER as Iggy Jr. snaps bank pens from their chains. Joe sighs.

INT. CUBAS KITCHEN — THAT EVENING

Olivia and Ceci help set the table. The PHONE RINGS. Maria eyeballs the caller ID.

MARIA
Iggy.

JOE
I'll call him later.

The answering machine picks up. After the beep:

IGGY (O.C.)
Cuz! Call me back lickety-split. Teresa's super pissed about the trip. I don't know what to—

Joe grabs the phone in a panic.

JOE
What's up?! ...No-no, we're about to eat. What happened?

Maria looks at Joe. He rolls his eyes at the phone.

JOE (CONT'D)
Sorry, babe. Just be a sec. Right, Iggs?

INTERCUT: INT. IGGY'S HOUSE

IGGY
Shit. Maria's there?

Joe moves into the living room.

JOE
Of course!

IGGY
I called your mobile.

JOE
(confidential)
You called my landline, you idiot.

Iggy's wife, TERESA (30) is on his heels.

TERESA
Is that Joe? Lemme talk to him—
(into phone)
Joe, what's this about, that I can't go to Japan?

JOE
Well—

TERESA
You know Japan's been like my dream destination since I was little.

JOE
I don't—

TERESA
I literally always talk about it.

Iggy Jr. chases his BROTHER with a stick, screaming. The house is a mess.

TERESA (CONT'D)
I'M ON THE PHONE!

JOE
I know it sounds like fun, Teresa, but it’s not a vacation.

TERESA
(bluntly)
I hear your wife doesn’t know...

JOE
(gulp)
I’ll tell her when the time’s right.

TERESA
Or, I can tell her right now...

Joe looks back and sees — Maria, watching from the doorway, eyebrow raised. *Did she hear him?* He smiles nervously.

JOE
(into phone)
No no. Let’s not... Look, you make a good point, fine.

TERESA
So, I can come?

JOE
(reluctantly)
Yes.

TERESA
Muah! Love you, boo!

She ends the call and tosses the phone to Iggy.

TERESA (CONT'D)
That’s how you do it.

Maria stares at Joe. He hangs up. Smiles at her assuringly.

MARIA
What aren’t you telling me? What’s not a vacation?

Joe thinks fast... *How to play this?* He feigns exasperation.

JOE
Oh, Iggy and Teresa. They’re buying a timeshare in Bimini and wanna do a trial stay before fully committing.

MARIA
Like spend the night?

JOE
Like spend a week. I know what you're gonna say, but I promised Teresa I'd ask. She really wants us to go with them. Just our two families.

Laying on the bullshit —

JOE (CONT'D)
Apparently, there's even a loft for the kids to share.
(to Olivia and Ceci)
Yeah? A little vacation with your *primitos* [little cousins]?

Olivia and Ceci shake their heads convincingly: "fuck no".

MARIA
Babe, trapped in a house on a tiny island with those people for a week... *no-no-no, mí amor*, forget it! That's no vacation.

JOE
But babe, they're <u>family</u>.

MARIA
<u>Your</u> family. You go.

He sighs and seals the deal with...

JOE
I can't believe you're making me go without you!

CUT TO:

TOKYO DOME, JAPAN

It's as if a spaceship landed mid-city and was turned into a state-of-the-art baseball stadium.

Under an impressive retractable dome, towering electronic billboards scream: KIRIN, SONY, ASAHI, PANASONIC...

The field is a beehive of activity, but not from a game. Various stations have been set up for training.

POV — BINOCULARS SCAN THE FIELD

The SCOPE MOVES PAST Japanese and Cuban players conducting drills. A coach hits a fungo. Germán chases a fly ball. Orlando and Arrojo work on their fastballs.

The SCOPE FINDS Liván, flush with exertion. He heads to the dugout. SCOPE SWISH PANS ahead of him to... an AUTOGRAPH ZONE:

STADIUM SECURITY GUARDS, JAPANESE FANS, and... the white-haired man. On the lookout. No sign of Joe.

JOE SMIRKS BEHIND THE BINOCULARS.

His SCOPE PANS back to Liván, now wiping his face with a towel, when something in the AUTOGRAPH ZONE catches his eye...

A busty blonde, surrounded by shorter Japanese fans. Liván strides right up to her.

TERESA
Hey handsome.

LIVÁN
Where you from gorgeous?

TERESA
Caracas. Came here just for you.

She hands him an AUTOGRAPH BOOK and a PEN from the Tokyo Hilton (we recognize it from the opening).

LIVÁN
Oh, yeah?

He bites his lip. Opens the book... Taped inside, a SMALL PHOTO OF JOE CUBAS. Liván goes pale. His eyes sweep the area.

LIVÁN (CONT'D)
Where is he?

TERESA
Close. Yankees are here too. Just be cool, and make it out to Ignacito...

Liván forces a poker face and inscribes the book.

TERESA (CONT'D)
Keep the pen. Everything you need to know is rolled up inside.

INT. KARAOKE LOUNGE, TOKYO – THAT EVENING

Iggy drops a MANILA ENVELOPE in front of Joe.

IGGY
Boom! This gets him into Venezuela.

They're at a small table drinking sake. In the background, a WOMAN SINGS onstage. Joe reviews the documents.

IGGY (CONT'D)
With that letter of authorization, homie won’t even need a passport.

JOE
This real?

IGGY
Bonafide, straight from the Embassy. Quicker to come by than fake ones.

JOE
How much?

IGGY
Chump change. I got the hook up.

A WAITRESS pours them more sake. Joe raises his glass.

JOE
To corruptible chumps!

IGGY
Kanpai!

CLINK!

Joe sets his drink down. His pager goes off.

JOE
Ok, time to introduce the Yankees to their new rookie pitcher.

Joe gets up. So does Iggy.

JOE (CONT'D)
Bro, we're already standing on thin ice. More people just increases the chances of falling through.

Iggy sighs. Sits back down.

JOE (CONT'D)
Besides, she’s having a blast...

SINGING her lungs out as lyrics flash across a screen:

TERESA
(into a mic)
...THEN A LITTLE VOICE INSIDE YOU WHISPERS: ‘KID, DON’T SELL YOUR DREAMS SO SOON!’

She points, smiles at Iggy as the entire bar joins in:

ALL
EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, EVERYWHERE YOU GO. THERE'S A HEART, THERE'S A HEART. A HAND TO HOLD ONTO...

Iggy watches adoringly as Teresa charms the crowd with the "FULL HOUSE" theme song.

INT. TEAM CUBA DORM ROOM, TOKYO – LATER

Liván paces back and forth.

LIVÁN
How do we know Gordo's not full of shit?

ARROJO
Liv, dude, the Yankees flew halfway around the world to be here. They're interested.

LIVÁN
If I split for the United States and step onto that field...

ARROJO
Yeah?

LIVÁN
It'll be all over TV, everywhere. It sends a message.

ARROJO
"I'm free and thriving" is not a terrible message.

LIVÁN
You know EXACTLY the kind of hell that'll rain down on me.

ARROJO
What's the ministry gonna do? You're young. No wife. No kids like the rest of us. They have no leverage.

LIVÁN
My brother is literally the face of Cuban Revolutionary baseball.

ARROJO
And what? They're gonna ban El Duque from the game, to get back at you?

Liván looks at his friend. That's exactly what worries him.

ARROJO (CONT'D)
Orlando’s untouchable. No one’s more committed to this team. Plus, he’s Fidel’s favorite.

LIVÁN
He’d never forgive me.

ARROJO
Listen. Life boils down to a series of choices. Choices you don’t wanna be making when you’re pushing thirty with a kid waiting for you at home.

Desperate lament in Arrojo’s voice.

ARROJO (CONT'D)
It’ll tear you in half, believe me.

INT. TOKYO BAR — THAT NIGHT

Joe, Rudy, and Gordon drink Sapporos at a high top.

JOE
I hear what you’re saying, Gordon, I do. But I’ll let you in on a little secret... You ready?

GORDON BLAKELEY
Sure.

JOE
Here it is... Liván’s got more natural ability than his brother.

Joe’s pivoting is pathetically evident.

GORDON BLAKELEY
You don’t have *El Dookay*.

JOE
Tonight, I’ve got Liván.

GORDON BLAKELEY
Jesus Christ.

JOE
Rudy’ll tell you. Curveballs like fucking daggers. Hard. Unexpected.

GORDON BLAKELEY
I’ve read the reports. Enormous potential... But you promised *El Dookay*. And Liván is not *El Dookay*.

JOE
And yet *El Duque* would love to have Liván's fastball.

Gordon rolls his eyes, turning to Rudy.

GORDON BLAKELEY
You're not pissed about this?

RUDY
I dunno, Gordon, I see a big opportunity here. We sign Liván, and Orlando's right behind him...

JOE
Like dominoes. One after the other.

BARTENDERS
IRASSHAIMASE! [いらっしゃいませ]

The customary, spirited welcome every time a patron enters the bar. Standing in the doorway... Liván. Nervous energy.

JOE
(rushes over)
Liván! How ya doing, brother? This is Rudy Santín and Gordon Blakeley with the Yankees.

LIVÁN
(shakes their hands)
Hello... My English is no bery good.

GORDON BLAKELEY
My *Español* also... *muy muy poquito.*

BARTENDERS (O.C.)
IRASSHAIMASE! [いらっしゃいませ]

JOE
(to Liván)
What can I get yo—

JOE FREEZES. A HAND LANDS ON LIVÁN'S SHOULDER. HE TURNS AROUND... IT'S ORLANDO. He stares at Liván sternly.

ORLANDO
¿Todo bien? [All good?]

Gordon and Rudy are stunned. The crown jewel, within reach. They look at Joe, slack-jawed. He recovers smoothly —

JOE
Sí, sí, todo bien!

GORDON BLAKELEY
Todo muy bien!

ORLANDO
Mister Gordon, right? *Los Yanquis*?

GORDON BLAKELEY
Y-yes... You remember?
(aside to Joe and Rudy)
We met after a game once...
(then)
Still a big fan. *Muy muy grande*.

ORLANDO
Thank you. Me for you too.

JOE
That's... that's fantastic! *It's why we're all here.*

Orlando ignores Joe, steps closer to Gordon.

ORLANDO
My brother, he is still young... *impresionable*. You understand?

GORDON BLAKELEY
Uh, yeah, of course.

ORLANDO
(to Joe)
Translate this: I know that money is the prettiest word in the world, but you know...

BARTENDERS (O.C.)
IRASSHAIMASE! [いらっしゃいませ]

Orlando's mood suddenly darkens. He glares at Joe. And, *in a fit of angry shouting*...

ORLANDO
IF I WENT TO THE UNITED STATES I'D JUST BE ONE MORE NEGRO... ONE MORE NEGRO FOR THEM TO SIC THE DOGS ON!

The entire bar stops. Stares.

ORLANDO (CONT'D)
WE ARE NOT FOR SALE!

He grabs Liván and storms out.

Joe's jaw tightens. Gordon turns to Rudy.

GORDON BLAKELEY
Multiple defections, my ass!

CUT TO:

INT. JOE'S ROOM, TOKYO HILTON — NEXT DAY

On his mobile phone, pacing —

JOE
Rudy, the guy's a fucking Communist. A true believer.

INTERCUT: PAYPHONE, TOKYO INT'L AIRPORT

RUDY
Gene's pissed. Doesn't look good.

JOE
The fuck does that mean?

RUDY
It means they've lost confidence in you. It means we're going home.

JOE
That's bullshit. I had Liván, Rudy!

RUDY
Yeah, well, now they're making me meet some white dude... Apparently, he's friendly with the players.
(reading)
Tom Cronin. Ever heard of this guy?

Off Joe's look...

CUTAWAY (TWO WEEKS AGO): Joe at his answering machine... BEEP!

TOM (O.S.)
Mr. Cubas! Tom Cronin. Been tryin' to reach you. Heard you're eager to sign Cubans to the majors. Well, I happen to know a few personally. Gimme a ca—

Joe frowns. Hits 'ERASE'.

END CUTAWAY.

JOE
Rudy, that guy’s a total wildcard. Probably trying to horn in on our idea. He could even be INS. Or CIA. Maybe even on Castro’s payroll...

There’s a CLICK on the line.

JOE (CONT'D)
Call waiting. One sec.

RUDY
Joe, I gotta run—

JOE
No, no. Hold on. One sec!

He clicks the phone.

JOE (CONT'D)
This is Joe.

INTERCUT: INT. CUBAS HOUSE, MIAMI

MARIA
Mí amor!

JOE
(sweetens his voice)
Heyyy baby, hey. Service is so patchy on the island...

MARIA
We miss you.

JOE
I miss you too sugar. Hang on a sec—

He clicks the phone once. His voice changes back.

JOE (CONT'D)
Dude, just tell those assholes I wouldn’t be in Japan if I didn’t think I could get the players.

Silence.

JOE (CONT'D)
Rudy??

MARIA
Still me, Joe.

Fuck.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Don’t bother coming home.

Click.

CUT TO:

INT. SPARE ROOM, IGGY’S HOUSE, MIAMI – NIGHT

Iggy prepares the futon. Teresa brings Joe a fresh towel.

LATER THAT NIGHT

Joe can’t sleep. He clicks on a small TV – the burst of light illuminates the room. A distinct British voice exudes luxury:

HOST ROBIN LEACH (O.C.)
Television’s unchallenged authority on wealth, prestige, and success... Get ready for another dazzling “Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous”!

ON TV: the good life: yachts, helicopters, gilded estates...

Joe groans, turns it off. Confined to darkness. Alone. Broke.

His eyes adjust. Through the darkness, he sees an awkward family portrait of Iggy, Teresa, and the kids. Real, genuine happiness glaring back at him, almost mockingly.

A pile of old books draws Joe’s focus. He reaches for one.

The splashy cover reads: “**UNLIMITED POWER! The Way to Peak Personal Achievement**”. But this is no book. It’s a clamshell.

Inside, a set of audio cassette tapes. Joe’s eyes narrow. He reaches for his Walkman. Pops in a tape. Hits ‘PLAY’.

TONY ROBBINS’ VOICE
Are you disturbed? Upset? Angry? There’s power in that. See, being disturbed is like having an explosive fuel – like fire. With enough fuel, enough combustion, you can blow everything up... OR, if channeled, you can use it to drive a rocket into space. Into the stars. Into your dreams! With these tapes, I’ll show you how...

The words hit Joe like a shot of adrenaline.

CUT TO:

WE SOAR over the glittering blue expanse of Biscayne Bay, racing toward an upscale hotel. The Miami skyline just beyond.

EXT. GROVE ISLE HOTEL, MIAMI - DAY

At an outdoor table with his back to the bay, mafia-style: Joe. Shades on. Restlessly at attention, shadowing him: Iggy.

JOE
Put your sunglasses back on! And don’t smile, intimidate.

IGGY
I still don’t understand what we get out of this.

JOE
Just look menacing and follow my lead. I’ll do the talking.

IGGY
Bro, I’m funding this thing. I can have opinions too.

JOE
When you get excited, you talk too much. When you talk too much, you say too much. It’s bad for business.

Tom enters the patio. The Panama hat is unmistakable.

JOE (CONT'D)
(without moving his lips)
Gotta suss this guy out.

Joe waves Tom over.

TOM
Joe?

JOE
Tom! Thanks for coming down.

They shake, sit. A stoic Iggy “stands guard”.

JOE (CONT'D)
(studies Tom)
You wearing a wire?

TOM
A what?

JOE
Who you working for, Tom?

TOM
Uh... myself. I’m retired.

JOE
From what?

TOM
Real estate.

JOE
Nice. Married?

TOM
Didn’t work out.

JOE
Kids?

TOM
One. Didn’t work out either. What does any of that have to do with—

JOE
I like to know who I’m dealing with.

Tom glances at Iggy.

JOE (CONT'D)
So, you’re in Cuba a lot, huh?

TOM
All the time. It’s magical. You been?

JOE
No.

TOM
The people are so welcoming.

JOE
I bet.
(pause, then:)
Are you a Communist, Tom?

Tom bursts out laughing. Joe’s dead serious.

TOM
No. I’m a Capitalist pig, like you.

JOE
Actually, I’m trying to help my people, Tom. That’s why I’m here.

TOM
Right... Then let's talk players.

JOE
Alright. Who can you get?

TOM
Who do ya want? I have personal connections with most of 'em.

Joe baits him.

JOE
Orlando Hernández?

TOM
Dookay. Sure. For the right price.

Joe chuckles.

JOE
C'mon Tom, that bullshit works on Gordon and Bill — Steinbrenner's desperate...

TOM
Not sure what you mean.

JOE
I mean, *El Duque* will never defect. Not in a million years. For any price. He's a die hard. A true believer. See, I've actually put in the work, spent months on the road building relationships—

TOM
Those guys don't trust you at all.

JOE
Bullshit.

TOM
I've heard the stories... *Gordo*. Isn't that what they call you?

Joe doesn't move.

TOM (CONT'D)
Heart's racing a little now, huh?
(leans in)
All that wining and dining, and you still can't close the deal. They think you're shady, Joe.

JOE
That’s ridiculous.

TOM
You don’t know these guys like I do.

JOE
Here’s what I know, Tom. I’m the only guy with a real plan to get them out of that hell hole and into the MLB as free agents.

TOM
You got a plan, but no players—

IGGY
(blurts out)
Actually, we got one lined up.

Joe eyeballs Iggy.

TOM
Who?

JOE
Iggs, grab us a round of Cuba Libres.

Iggy hesitates, then makes toward the bar.

JOE (CONT'D)
Every dog has his day, Tom. That’s what I believe... But only in America.
(leans back)
Eventually — very soon — every Cuban player who wants a better life will have to trust me. Because <u>without</u> me, they’re not worth a dime to Major League Baseball. But <u>with</u> me, they’re worth millions. The sooner they understand that, the better for everybody. If you can get ‘em there, I can offer a finder’s fee.

TOM
Half. Of all commissions, for each player I bring you. Starting with *Dookay*.

JOE
A third.

TOM
That killer instinct only got you half way... To here. To me. I want half. Fifty fifty. Partners.

Joe looks over at Iggy at the bar. Then —

JOE
You got two weeks. That's when Team Cuba travels to Millington, Tennessee. I got my first player lined up for then and I'm not taking any chances. It's gonna go off without a hitch.

SMASH CUT TO:

PAVEMENT.

A baseball cleat tumbles into view.

We're back at the shot that ended the opening sequence. Now...

A HAND reaches down and picks up the cleat. LIVÁN'S hand.

He staggers across the interstate towards Joe, picking up his scattered possessions. Joe embraces him, processing the close call.

JOE
You okay? *You alright?*

He pats down his meal ticket as Iggy runs up.

IGGY
Fuck that was close. All good?

LIVÁN
Yeah, I'm fine.

JOE'S MINIVAN, WALMART PARKING LOT — CONTINUOUS

Liván plops into a captain's seat in the back. Joe climbs in, closes the door. A collective sigh. Quiet. Then...

Joe's CASIO goes off, beeping wildly. He turns to Iggy.

JOE
If Tommy Bahama isn't back in five—

The van door BURSTS OPEN: It's Tom. With Orlando.

TOM
Well, here's your true believer.

Joe is stunned. The Hernández brothers lock eyes, on edge.

ORLANDO
Liván, what're you doing here?

LIVÁN
I just defected.

JOE
(moves between them)
He's coming back to Miami with me.

Surprisingly, Orlando nods approvingly. Extends his hand.

ORLANDO
About that outburst in Japan...

CUTAWAY (FLASHBACK): INT. TOKYO BAR

BARTENDERS (O.C.)
IRASSHAIMASE! [いらっしゃいませ]

ORLANDO'S POV (which we didn't see earlier): TEAM COACH VALDÉS (40s) walks in.

ORLANDO (V.O.)
One of our coaches saw us. Couldn't risk him thinking we might defect.
(to Liván)
...Valdés.

LIVÁN
Why didn't you tell me...

ORLANDO
I'm sorry.

JOE
Well, it was very convincing.

TOM
Let's talk.

Everyone climbs into the van. Joe pulls the door shut.

TIME CUT:

The van door swings open.

ORLANDO
You out of your mind? I can't leave right now, today...

Orlando steps out. Dawn is breaking.

JOE
Eh... Tom, what the fuck is this?

TOM
Dookay, hermano... We talked about this... It's millions of dollars!

ORLANDO
I have kids!

JOE
And you'll be able to do more for them on the outside! But for my plan to work, I first need to get you residency in another country.

ORLANDO
Where?

JOE
Venezuela or Costa Rica. I've got contacts in the government.

Orlando chuckles.

ORLANDO
You? <u>You</u> have contacts? Fidel Castro makes one phone call and I'll be in handcuffs, back to Havana within 24 hours.

JOE
They can't deport you.

ORLANDO
I have no papers!

Iggy can't contain himself —

IGGY
Here! Look. Everything you need...

He opens a briefcase like a manic street vendor. Joe winces.

IGGY (CONT'D)
Passports, visas... Got it all right here. Just need your thumbprint and you're good to go.

Orlando's face drops.

ORLANDO
This's crazy. My family will be stuck in Cuba.

TOM
We can smuggle them out by boat.

Orlando lights a cigarette, pacing.

ORLANDO
That's not safe. This whole thing... I don't do shit like this, man.

He steps away. Liván goes to him. Joe shoots Tom a dirty look.

TOM
Just give him some space to think.

The sun is now cresting over the horizon. Pressure mounting. Joe turns to Iggy.

JOE
Change of plan. We're leaving.

IGGY
What? Now?!

TOM
Whoa, whoa, Joe... We had a deal.

JOE
Sorry, Tom. Bird in the hand.
Liván, we gotta go.

IGGY
Joe, don't be an asshole.

JOE
I said, we're leaving!
(to Tom)
Either he's in, or he's in the way.

ORLANDO
I need some time— It's my family...

JOE
Family will always be there. This opportunity won't — let's go.

ORLANDO
No. There's more to life than money.

Joe shoots Tom a death stare. *I told you so.*

TOM
Joe, I can get other players.

JOE
We're done here.

As Iggy starts the engine, he sees:

EXT. ADMIRALTY INN PARKING LOT

The white-haired man and two other Cuban handlers in their boxers running directly at them.

IGGY
Joe!

Joe turns, reacts with horror at the men approaching. Tom jumps into the van. Liván is pleading with Orlando.

LIVÁN
You told me... when we were kids, remember? You dreamed of playing the World Series, like Tiant. C'mon!

The handlers are getting closer... Orlando embraces Liván.

ORLANDO
Make us proud.

Joe pulls Liván into the van.

JOE
Iggs, GO! GO!

The van peels away from Orlando, leaving him stranded in the parking lot as the handlers arrive.

CUT TO:

INT. RUDY'S OFFICE, YANKEE STADIUM — LATER THAT MORNING

PHONE RINGS. AND RINGS. Rudy picks up. Depleted. Dejected.

JOE (O.S.)
My man!

RUDY
Dude, now's not a good time...

INTERCUT: I/E. MINIVAN (DRIVING) — CONTINUOUS

Joe is energized, elated.

JOE
Oh, I beg to differ, baby – it's Miller Time! Guess where I am?!

RUDY
Joe...

JOE
Just guess!

RUDY
Joe.

JOE
On my way to Miami, bitch! With your new relief pitcher...
(announcer voice)
Liváááán Hernáááández!

RUDY
JOE!

JOE
WHAT?!

RUDY
You're too late.

JOE
What're you talking about?

RUDY
Steinbrenner had a meltdown after the game last night. He cleaned house. It's all over the news. Fifty-four front office employees, fired. Gene. Bill. Me. All of us.

JOE
Wh-what does that mean?

RUDY
It means I'm out. To sign Liván, you'll have to deal with Gordon. Somehow, he managed to stay on.

Joe's expression hardens.

JOE
Fuck Gordon. And fuck Steinbrenner.

Out the window, he sees an old roadside billboard for Pan Am Airlines. The slogan reads: "<u>THE WORLD IS YOURS</u>". Joe drinks it in...

BEGIN TIME MONTAGE SET TO "*PUSH IT TO THE LIMIT*" FROM SCARFACE

EXT. MOTEL, MEXICO – NIGHT

Iggy leads Valdo Fernández to a rental car. He throws open the back door and they jump in. Joe's behind the wheel.

VALDO
Go! Go!

They speed off.

NBC NEWS (ARCHIVAL)

TOM BROKAW
A second Cuban ballplayer is missing today. This, after a Cuban pitcher defected last week. Officials at the State Department had no comment...

EXT. RICKETY BALLPARK, COSTA RICA – DAY

Liván winds up his fastball. Behind home plate, a firing squad of big league SCOUTS aim their radar guns: 98, 97, 98, 97, 97.

INSERT – NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

"Major League Bidding War for Cuban defectors"

INT. TEXAS RANGERS BALLPARK, ARLINGTON – DAY

Flashing on the megaboard: "THE TEXAS RANGERS WELCOME VALDO FERNÁNDEZ AND LIVÁN HERNÁNDEZ". Joe, Liván, and Valdo step onto the empty field, greeted by an eager welcome committee.

INT. MEN'S CLOTHING STORE

Joe gets fitted for a new suit.

EXT. FENWAY PARK, BOSTON – DAY

Joe, Liván, and Valdo arrive in a stretch limousine, greeted by media outlets and the Red Sox welcome committee.

INT. HUIZENGA'S LEARJET (FLORIDA MARLINS OWNER)

A Cuban-style roasted pig with a Marlins baseball in its mouth, surrounded by hors d'oeuvres. Joe, Liván, and Valdo clink glasses with the Florida Marlins welcome committee.

EXT. FORT LAUDERDALE EXECUTIVE AIRPORT, DAY

Joe steps off the jet, smiles. A red carpet stretches across the tarmac under a banner: "BIENVENIDO VALDO Y LIVÁN".

INT. PLAZA NACO HOTEL, SANTO DOMINGO – DAY

We follow Joe down a long hallway. As time elapses, he moves between rooms, meeting with competing MLB TEAMS and INCITING A BIDDING WAR over Liván.

VARIOUS SCOUTS look stunned as Joe keeps returning with higher counters. One by one, each scout is priced out. Except for two: GORDON for the YANKEES vs. a YOUNG SCOUT for the MARLINS.

Joe receives a final bid from the Marlins.

Then, a final bid from Gordon. It's higher. In slo-mo, Joe mouths: "*thank you*". Then, a curl of the lip.

INSERT – NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

"Surprise! Marlins Sign Liván for $7 Million"

INT. STEINBRENNER'S OFFICE

Steinbrenner erupts angrily into the phone at Gordon.

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE, MIAMI

Joe's new sidekick, PR man RENÉ GUIM, rallies the media as Joe and Liván take questions.

INT. SMOKY ROOM, SOMEWHERE IN CUBA

Cuban officials furiously pore over newspaper headlines:

INSERT – NEWSPAPER/MAGAZINE HEADLINES

"Another! Fernández to San Fransisco Giants for $5 Million"

"Cuban Defections Fuel Speculation of More to Come"

INT. BARNETT BANK – DAY

Manny and the BANK PRESIDENT greet Joe – now with slicked-back hair, suit, and GOLD ROLEX. Full-blown Cuban Jerry Maguire.

EXT. PREMIER SPORTS COUNCIL, INC., MIAMI

Joe exits his fancy new offices, flanked by Iggy, René, and a BODYGUARD (echoing the iconic shot in "Scarface").

EXT. MARTY'S MIAMI MANSION – DAY

Joe, phone to his ear, pulls up in his convertible Ferrari. Marty's impressed. The flashy sports car has little room for Olivia and Ceci, who cram into the passenger seat together.

EXT. CUBAS HOUSEHOLD

Joe rolls up, still on a call. He waves goodbye to his girls. Then, drives away, wiping frame to reveal: Maria at the door.

EXT. HOTEL, MIAMI BEACH (JOE'S TEMPORARY DIGS)

Joe tosses his keys to a VALET, phone still up to his ear.

EXT. COFFEE WINDOW, MIAMI

Iggy trades an envelope of CASH for two Costa Rican PASSPORTS.

INT. HOTEL SUITE (JOE'S TEMPORARY DIGS)

A game is on TV. Joe argues on the phone with MARIA...

I/E. CUBAS HOUSEHOLD

She's upset. Out the window, a loud excavator digs for a pool.

EXT. MOTEL, SOUTH AMERICA — MORNING

Iggy, doing Joe's grunt work. Helping players Vladimir Núñez and Larry Rodríguez out a window. Cuban handlers give chase.

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE, MIAMI

Iggy sulks off to the side as Joe basks in the limelight.

INT. BURGER KING

Liván vents to Iggy about Joe over lunch.

INT. PREMIER SPORTS COUNCIL, INC. — NIGHT

A framed article reads: "Joe Cubas, Sports Agent 007". Under the dim glow of a desk lamp, Iggy pores over financial records with rising suspicion.

INT. BARNETT BANK — DAY

MANNY shares his computer screen with Iggy. Iggy seethes.

END MONTAGE.

INSERT — VIEWFINDER, LOCAL NEWS CAMERA

Joe in a sit-down interview. Polished and professional.

TV REPORTER (O.C.)
Rumor is you'll need a Greyhound bus for all the players you're expected to pick up at the Atlanta Olympics.

JOE
(coy)
My plans are to help every player that is willing to defect.

TV REPORTER (O.C.)
But your success hasn't come easily—

JOE
It hasn't been easy, but I always believed in myself. Even when no one else did. Not my wife, not my famil—

A DISTRACTING COMMOTION OFF CAMERA... We are:

INT. JOE'S OFFICE, PREMIER SPORTS COUNCIL, INC. — DAY

Iggy barges in, startling the LOCAL TV CREW. Joe sighs. *Fuck*.

IGGY
You lying sack of shit!

He pushes René aside and marches up to Joe, mid-interview.

IGGY (CONT'D)
You didn't think I'd find out?!

JOE
(to reporter)
Obviously, a huge misunderstanding.

RENÉ
Iggy, let us wrap up here first—

IGGY
Fuck you, René.
(to reporter)
Wanna hear how it feels to be stabbed in the back by family?

RENÉ
Let's take a little break...

He ushers the news crew out. Iggy glares at Joe.

IGGY
Where the fuck do you get off shorting me my half?

JOE
What?

IGGY
I know you're snagging a bigger slice from the players, Joe!

JOE
You're talking nonsense.

IGGY
Liván says you took 25% commission. Every other sports agent takes 5.

JOE
And where the fuck was every other agent when I was risking everything for these guys? I'll tell you. They weren't interested. That little ingrate made 5 dollars a month in Cuba, but now I'm taking too much?! Iggs, those are reimbursements for client expenses, not commissions. I took on a lot of costs to help them—

IGGY
Can you even see through your own bullshit? I paid for most of that! Teresa's right, the only reason you're sitting pretty for the cameras is because I made it happen.

JOE
Oh, really? For your information, when you asked to work with me, everybody warned me.

IGGY
Hold up a fucking minute. I asked you? When the fuck did I ask you anything? You came to me for 16k!

JOE
Which I repaid, in full—

IGGY
We even let you crash at our place after Maria dumped your fat ass—

JOE
I don't think that's fair—

IGGY
Oh, you don't think that's fair? How 'bout this? I've been putting my neck on the line behind the scenes, while you take all the credit...

JOE
Bro, you gotta calm the fuck down.

IGGY
And— And, I hear you don't even return Liván's calls anymore.

JOE
Oh, c'mon! You know how busy I am. I barely even see my own kids.

IGGY
He's gonna find another agent.

JOE
Whatever. He's about to eat his way out of the majors with all those cheeseburgers.

IGGY
He's alone out here. All that money and freedom... It's a culture shock.

JOE
Oh, so now it's too much money?! ...Telling you I don't return his calls... Well, I'm not his therapist!

IGGY
Right. Once you cash out, you don't give a fuck about anybody. Just you and the cameras. You don't think your PR spectacle brings heat on the players back in Cuba? What ever happened to loose lips sink ships?

JOE
You tell me! We lost *El Duque* because of your big mouth.

IGGY
Bullshit! Those guys never trusted you. Tom was right. He knew.

JOE
Oh, Tom, sure... Partner up with that schemer, see where it gets you.

IGGY
Fuck around and find out.

He storms out.

CUT TO:

INT. SPORTSWORLD, BOSTON — DAY

Tom slides the 1933 Nap Lajoie BASEBALL CARD onto the counter.

TOM
I know we're in the five figures, but I want a professional appraisal.

Meticulously preserved. Edges, sharp. Colors, vibrant. The DEALER immediately recognizes it and chuckles.

DEALER
It's a fake. Only five exist, and I know where every single one is.

Tom slides it back to him.

TOM
Check it. It's real.

The Dealer removes it from the plastic sleeve.

DEALER
Where'd you get this?

Tom unveils the rest of the cards from Cuba. The Dealer's jaw drops. Tom's phone interrupts.

TOM
(into phone)
Yeah?

INTERCUT WITH: IGGY'S HOUSE — CONTINUOUS

Iggy, pacing anxiously.

IGGY
Tom! Iggy Lopez.

TOM
Uh, hey... I'm in a meeting—

IGGY
You still looking to sign Cubans?

TOM
I'm done with Joe.

IGGY
So am I. I'm starting my own agency. *El Duque*, Mesa, Arrojo... We can get 'em before Joe does. You in?

CUT TO:

INT. QUALITY INN, GEORGIA — MORNING

Team Cuba passes a CLEANING LADY as they exit to their bus.

Joe emerges, disguised in a Team Cuba jersey two sizes too small. He approaches the same cleaning lady.

MOMENTS LATER

She unlocks a guest room door. Joe forces a thick accent.

JOE
Sank you bery mosh!

HOTEL ROOM — CONTINUOUS

Joe searches the room frantically. Spots a Team Cuba coach's DUFFLE. Bingo! Inside, a stack of Cuban passports. He sifts through the names. Stops on ROLANDO ARROJO.

CLEANING LADY (O.S.)
Front desk can issue another key if you can't find—

Joe walks out. Smiles.

JOE
(in perfect English)
Got it. Thanks very much!

Off her puzzled stare —

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL BALLPARK, GEORGIA (PRE-OLYMPIC GAME) — NEXT DAY

Colorful banners herald the '96 Olympic Games. The atmosphere is charged with excitement. Tom and Iggy head inside.

IGGY
Gonna score some nachos. You hungry?

TOM
Nah, I'll meet ya near the dugout.

As Tom wades through the crowd, he overhears an OLDER FAN discussing news of a Cuban defection.

TOM (CONT'D)
Sorry, what was that?

FAN
Starting pitcher for Cuba went missing last night.

TOM
El Dookay?

FAN
Rolando Arrojo. *Dookay*'s stuck in Cuba. Arm injury. We might have a decent chance at gold this time.

Shit. Tom rushes to the...

TEAM CUBA DUGOUT

A ROW OF U.S. MARSHALS out front. The bullpen is lined with SECURITY GUARDS. Tom pulls out his phone.

CONCESSION AREA

Iggy, waiting in line. He answers.

INTERCUT

TOM
We're too late — Joe got Arrojo!

IGGY
What about *El Duque*?

TOM
He was never even here.

Behind Iggy:

MAN (O.S.)
Disgusting rat! We're onto you, fucking parasite.

Iggy turns around. It's a plainclothes CUBAN AGENT.

IGGY
What'd you say to me?

CUBAN AGENT
You heard me. I know why you're here.

He spits on Iggy. Fists fly. Crowd gasps...

Tom arrives just ahead of Cuban security. Through the crowd, we spot the white-haired man snapping photos of Tom and Iggy. Rapid fire. *CLICK. CLICK. CLICK...*

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE, MIAMI

CLICKING CAMERAS FLASH. The Joe Cubas show. Next to Joe, his latest client ROLANDO ARROJO beams in a new suit.

REPORTER #1
Congratulations, Joe. Any truth to the rumor Rolando's signing with Tampa Bay for seven figures?

Joe's smile says, 'yes'.

JOE
No comment.

REPORTER #2
Joe, many are calling you the Cuban Jerry Maguire. Any comment on that?

JOE
The difference, Elliott, is that I'm much more handsome than Tom Cruise.

Everyone laughs.

REPORTER #3
But Joe, you've also been denounced publicly. Castro himself calls you a vulture and a flesh peddler...

JOE
And what can we call him, Marilyn? He has 11 million Cubans starving to death on an imprisoned island.

REPORTER #3
What about death threats? How do you ensure your safety?

JOE
Easy. I don't travel to Cuba.

INTERCUT

INT. HAVANA AIRPORT

Iggy and Tom arrive in Cuba.

An IMMIGRATION OFFICER looks at Iggy, then his passport. He waves him through. Tom steps up.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
Purpose for your visit?

TOM
Vacation.

He looks at Tom's passport. Pauses. Then, steps away to confer with a colleague. Tom looks annoyed.

MAN'S VOICE (O.C.)
I wouldn't worry.

Tom turns to see: the West African Businessman from the Hostel Valencia courtyard, in line behind him. Nods. Smiles.

TOM
You know how they are...

Tom reaches for his wallet, but the officer returns, waving him through. No payoff needed.

INT. RENTAL CAR COUNTER, HAVANA AIRPORT

Iggy and Tom fill out paperwork and are handed car keys.

EXT. RENTAL LOT

Iggy and Tom approach their rental car.

REPORTER #4 (PRE-LAP)
And Joe, what do you say to players like Orlando Hernández?

They load their bags into the trunk.

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE, MIAMI – CONTINUOUS

REPORTER #4
...Sources say Cuban officials banned him from the Olympic team in retaliation, just because he was seen speaking to you—

JOE
Next question.

EXT. RENTAL CAR LOT, HAVANA AIRPORT

Iggy smiles as he reverses out of the parking spot. Suddenly, GOVERNMENT VEHICLES swarm the rental, boxing them in.

Agents rush forward, forcefully pulling out Iggy and Tom.

REPORTER #4 (O.S.)
...But aren't you putting these players at risk for personal profit?

Tom watches as Iggy is shoved into an unmarked car. In the passenger seat: the white-haired man, in military uniform.

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE, MIAMI – CONTINUOUS

JOE
I don't see it that way, Dan. Nobody should be persecuted for pursuing a career as a professional athlete.

EXT. RENTAL CAR LOT, HAVANA AIRPORT

A CUBAN AGENT pulls documents from Iggy's bag. Approaches the passenger window and hands them to the white-haired man.

CUBAN AGENT
Colonel Sosa...

INSERT – VENEZUELAN VISAS made out for: "Germán Mesa" and "Orlando Hernández".

EXT. ORLANDO'S STATE-ISSUED HOUSE, HAVANA

Orlando plays with his daughters. Norita watches from the porch as GOVERNMENT VEHICLES pull up.

JOE (O.S.)
There's always a risk when you defy that kind of oppression...

MEN IN FATIGUES approach Orlando. They show him a photo of Iggy. Orlando shakes his head innocently.

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
For me, the reward isn't financial, nothing like that. It's seeing these young men's faces as they look back and say, 'no more fear'.

Orlando looks back as he's escorted away from his family.

EXT. TARMAC, HAVANA AIRPORT

TWO LARGE MEN march Tom toward a Mexicana airplane. They push him inside. Hand his passport to a FLIGHT ATTENDANT.

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE, MIAMI – CONTINUOUS

JOE
Okay, thanks guys! I'll be in touch.

The room breaks into applause. Joe shakes hands with COMMUNITY LEADERS. René approaches, visibly unnerved. He leans in...

RENÉ
Iggy's been arrested. In Cuba.

Suddenly, Joe's phone starts buzzing. He checks the display: *TOM CRONIN*. His face goes red with rage.

INT. MEN'S RESTROOM

Joe ducks inside. Presses the phone to his ear.

JOE
What the fuck happened, Tom?

INTERCUT: CANCÚN AIRPORT TERMINAL

TOM
(clutching the phone)
They took him, Joe. They took Iggy!

Joe checks the stalls. Empty. He locks the bathroom door.

JOE
You went to Cuba to meet with *Duque* and Mesa, didn't you?

TOM
It was Iggy's idea! We did nothing wrong, I swear!

JOE
YOU WENT TO CUBA, TOM... WITH IGGY! What'd you think was gonna happen?!

TOM
He insisted!

JOE
FUCK!

TOM
You gotta help him, Joe...

JOE
You really don't get it — he's fucked. No one can help him now.

The line clicks. Another call — it's Teresa. *Shit.*

JOE (CONT'D)
Goodbye, Tom.

He clicks over. Genuine concern in his voice.

JOE (CONT'D)
Teresa, honey, I just heard...

INTERCUT

TERESA
Cut the bullshit, Joe. You don't give a fuck about my husband, and you don't give a fuck about me or my kids, okay?

JOE
I get you're upset—

TERESA
You used him, Joe! You sent him down there to do your dirty work.

JOE
That is not what happened—

TERESA
Everyone's just a pawn to you. Once you're done using them, they don't fucking matter... I see exactly who you are now.

JOE
Teresa—

TERESA
Really fucking talented at ripping families apart! Maybe that should be your next business venture.

Click!

Joe exhales, her words sinking in. He looks into the mirror... Slicked-back hair, Armani suit. He stares deeper, into his very soul. All he sees is scum. Guilt courses through his veins. He splashes water on his face, hoping to snap out of it. ELTON JOHN'S "*LEVON*" leads us into a MONTAGE...

INT. JOE'S OFFICE – ANOTHER DAY

On his desk, a newspaper reads: "More Cuban Rafters Missing". Above the fold: "Miami Sports Agent Arrested in Cuba".

Joe sifts through the day's mail. Rips open a letter with the Florida Marlins logo. As he scans it, his face hardens. A mixture of hurt, rage and resignation. He crumples it up.

INSERT – NEWSPAPER BOX – ANOTHER DAY

Front Page reads: "SPORTS: Second Defection! Liván Ditches Joe Cubas. Other players also sever relations".

We begin to hear the incongruous sounds of cheering crowds as "*LEVON*" continues over the time montage...

U.S.: NBC SPORTS COVERAGE OF NLCS (GAME 5, MARLINS VS BRAVES)

A packed crowd at PRO PLAYER STADIUM riveted with excitement.

BOB COSTAS (V.O.)
What a story this youngster is...

Liván on the mound.

JOE MORGAN (V.O.)
I think you're looking at the making of a star here.

BOB UECKER (V.O.)
Look at this crowd... Everybody in the stadium is on their feet.

BOB COSTAS (V.O.)
The 3-2 pitch... Got 'im! His 15th!

U.S.: MIAMI SPORTS BAR BURSTS INTO CHEERS

On the TV screens: LIVÁN SETS AN NLCS STRIKEOUT RECORD.

U.S: JOE'S HOTEL SUITE

The game is on. Joe looks tired, annoyed. He pulls out a bottle of aspirin. Pops two in his mouth and downs a whisky.

U.S.: LIVÁN IS MOBBED BY MIAMI NEWS MEDIA AND FANS

TV REPORTER (V.O.)
Almost overnight, Cuban native Liván Hernández has become the Marlins' sensation. But newfound riches here come with a price back in Cuba...

CUBA: THE SPORTS MINISTER MEETS WITH ORLANDO

TV REPORTER (V.O.)
His brother Orlando, perhaps that island's greatest pitcher, is now banned from baseball for life by his government.

U.S.: LIVÁN SPEAKS TO THE TV REPORTER

LIVÁN
He was a lot better than me...

CUBA: ORLANDO'S FAMILY IS FORCED OUT OF HIS STATE-ISSUED HOME

LIVÁN (V.O) (CONT'D)
...he was the best pitcher in Cuba.

CUBA: ORLANDO WORKING AT THE HAVANA PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

He helps ELDERLY PATIENTS exercise outside. Looming in the distance: the stadium where he's no longer allowed to pitch.

TV REPORTER (V.O.)
The government's suspicion that *El Duque* might even consider defecting precipitated the ruthless decision to banish the Olympic gold-medal winner from the game he loves.

CUBA: NORITA IN LINE AT A BODEGA WITH BARREN SHELVES

Shoppers palm ration booklets. A WOMAN scoops flour from a barrel ringed with flies. Norita spots a MAN reading the newspaper: "EL DUQUE BANNED FROM BASEBALL FOR TREASON".

U.S.: LIVÁN ENJOYS A HEARTY MEAL WITH FANS AT A MIAMI EATERY

LIVÁN (V.O.)
My brother had the chance to defect, but he didn't think like me. He has a family. He has children.

CUBA: KIDS TEASE YAHU AT SCHOOL, FACULTY AVOIDS ORLANDO

U.S.: LIVÁN SIGNS AUTOGRAPHS FOR YOUNG MARLINS FANS BEFORE PULLING AWAY IN HIS NEW LUXURY SPORTSCAR

TV REPORTER (V.O.)
The subtle irony? The more famous Liván becomes, the more trouble it causes his brother back home.

CUBA: ORLANDO JOGGING ALONE ALONG *AVENIDA BOYEROS* — SUNSET

TV REPORTER (V.O.)
The Castro government's hard line tactics against these defections seem to be working...

U.S.: JOE'S OFFICES HAVE BEEN STRIPPED. A SIGN IN THE WINDOW READS: "FOR LEASE".

TV REPORTER (V.O.)
...as the once steady stream of Cuban players appears to be slowing.

U.S.: JOE, PASSED OUT ON THE SOFA OF HIS SMALL APARTMENT. EMPTY BEER BOTTLES. HALF EATEN BAG OF DORITOS. ON TV:

NBC SPORTS COVERAGE OF THE 1997 WORLD SERIES (GAME 1)

Under massive floodlights, 66,000 packed seats encircle the field at PRO PLAYER STADIUM. BOB COSTAS into the camera:

BOB COSTAS
Hello everyone and welcome to the 1997 World Series. I'm Bob Costas.

The PA system blares "Levon" as Liván warms up on the mound.

BOB COSTAS (V.O.)
Despite being less than a hundred miles from Miami, it's uncertain if Liván's family can follow this game.

CLOSE ON the BASEBALL in Liván's hand...

MATCH CUT TO:

A weathered BASEBALL in Orlando's hand. We're back in:

CUBA: A CINDER BLOCK SHACK BEHIND OSMANY'S HOUSE — NIGHT

Orlando is listening to the game on a shortwave radio. Yahu curled up to him, sleeping.

RADIO FREE CUBA (O.S.)
Hernández, remarkably composed...
(crack of a bat)
A liner to center. It drops for a hit, and the Indians grab the lead.

U.S.: JACOBS FIELD, CLEVELAND, WORLD SERIES (GAME 5)

The Indians resume their battle with the Marlins at home. Cleveland fans, bundled up in red, cheer them on.

CUBA: EXT. OSMANY'S HOUSE — DAY

Osmany and Orlando hide a small homemade satellite dish in a plantain tree.

U.S.: PRO PLAYER STADIUM, MIAMI, WORLD SERIES (GAME 7)

BOB COSTAS (V.O.)
The 0-1 pitch... A liner off Nagy's glove! Into center field! The Marlins have won the World Series!

The stadium goes wild as the Marlins storm the field.

BOB COSTAS (V.O.)
The men in teal are for real!

Liván takes a victory lap, waving up at the stands. He drops to his knees and pumps his fists up to the heavens.

BOB COSTAS (V.O.)
Liván Hernández, the Cuban defector, has been named MVP of the World Series...

MATCH CUT TO:

TV SCREEN. Shitty reception from a pirated signal. We are:

INT. OSMANY'S HOUSE, CUBA — CONTINUOUS

Gathered around the SMALL TV, a jubilant group of family and friends, including Orlando, Norita, Yahu, and Steffi.

ON TV: Liván is presented with the massive MVP award. He lifts the weighty trophy over his head.

LIVÁN
I LOVE YOU MIAMI!

Yahu observes her dad. Orlando is both grieving and celebrating in the exact same moment. She embraces him.

YAHU
I love you, dad.

ORLANDO
I know, sweetheart. I love you too.

EXT. OSMANY'S HOUSE, CUBA — LATER THAT NIGHT

Orlando lights a cigarette, pacing. Turns to his best friend.

ORLANDO
This is not how my story ends.

OSMANY
(playfully)
Oh, of course not! You gotta get your own championship ring now.

ORLANDO
I'm serious. They won't let me play, and they won't let me leave—

Osmany stops. Looks at Orlando.

OSMANY
Wait, wait. Are you saying...

ORLANDO
Game's not over. Call Tom. Whatever I need to do, whatever it takes... I'm getting out of here.

CUT TO:

INT. SPORTSWORLD, BOSTON

Door chimes. The Dealer looks up. Tom sets down his ultra-rare baseball card collection.

INT. BANK, BOSTON

Tom slides a $35,000 check from Sportsworld to the TELLER.

Hundred dollar bills flutter in a counting machine.

INT. HOSTEL VALENCIA, HAVANA

A guest's door opens, revealing the West African Businessman. He grants entry to a waiter, carrying a room service tray.

INT. ROOM – CONTINUOUS

As the waiter sets down the tray, we reveal it's Osmany.

The businessman hands him a fat ENVELOPE OF CASH from Tom.

EXT. CAIBARIÉN, CUBA – DAY

A sleepy fishing village. Low-slung houses. Buckled streets. Osmany greets CARLOS, a local fisherman. Orlando keeps a safe distance. Nods 'hello' behind the cover of sunglasses.

They walk down to see a small BOAT, bobbing offshore. Not a yacht, but not a wreck. Osmany looks to Orlando, who nods.

OSMANY
(to Carlos)
Four thousand American dollars to get him off the island...

Orlando removes his sunglasses. Carlos's eyes widen.

CARLOS
When do we leave?

INT. OSMANY'S HOUSE, CUBA – NIGHT

Osmany points to a wall calendar.

OSMANY
First legal Christmas in three decades. Fidel just reinstated it ahead of the Pope's upcoming visit.

NORITA
The streets will be empty.

Osmany sets down a map of Cuba. Runs his finger along the National Highway, from Havana, 200 miles east to Caibarién.

OSMANY
We'll set out after midnight.

Norita turns to Orlando.

NORITA
No one can know. Not even the girls.

Osmany unfurls a navigational chart.

OSMANY
There's a Bahamian cay between the Santaren and Nicholas Channels.

He traces his finger north to a tiny speck surrounded by blue.

EXT. DESERTED PARKING LOT, MIAMI – 3AM

A FORD BRONCO with tinted windows rolls toward a PARKED CAR, glistening with condensation.

Tom's dozing in the driver's seat of the car, unaware of the lurking Bronco. His phone stirs him awake –

TOM
Yeah. Hello?

MAN'S VOICE (O.C.)
You got the money?

TOM
Where are you?

The Bronco blasts its high beams through Tom's windshield.

MAN'S VOICE (O.C.)
Let's see the 20k.

Under the blinding lights –

TOM
Ten thousand, up front. The rest, <u>after</u> they make it here safely.

MAN'S VOICE (O.C.)
Don't open this can of worms with me, bro. Deal was 20k, up front.

Tom exhales. Pulls a CASH ENVELOPE from his jacket and holds it up to the light.

He approaches the Bronco's tinted window. It cracks open just enough. As he slides the envelope through, a HANDCUFF comes down around his wrist — SNAP!

In a blink, Tom is surrounded by UNMARKED CARS with flashing lights. AGENTS in INS and FBI windbreakers —

UNDERCOVER AGENT
You're under arrest for financing and organizing human smuggling...

As he hears his Miranda rights, Tom knows he fucked this up.

CUT TO:

INT. OSMANY'S HOUSE, HAVANA — CHRISTMAS DAY

Orlando watches Steffi play with her new Barbie. Yahu huddles with Norita, whispering excitedly. She rushes over to Orlando and presents him with a small box.

YAHU
Merry Christmas, dad!

ORLANDO
(opening it)
Something for me?

Inside is a small *azabache* AMULET.

YAHU
It protects you.

ORLANDO
Thank you, sweetheart.

YAHU
I found it under a park bench.

He kisses her tenderly on the forehead. Then, turns to Norita. Holds her. Tears in his eyes.

She caresses his face.

NORITA
I love you.
(then)
(MORE)

NORITA (CONT'D)
Steffi! Come give dad an extra big Christmas hug before bed.

EXT. CONUCO CAY, CAIBARIÉN – DAYBREAK

Osmany's car quietly rolls up a short distance from shore, where Carlos and his wife GEIDY (30s) are waiting.

Osmany and Orlando step out. Osmany hands him a plastic bag.

OSMANY
Hold my Spam.

Two cans of it. Osmany pulls out a camera from under his seat.

OSMANY (CONT'D)
Built-in flash! We can use it as a beacon if it gets dark.

Osmany places his car key over the front tire.

ORLANDO
Wait, what're you doing?

OSMANY
Leaving the car for Chino.

Orlando's face is a big question mark.

OSMANY (CONT'D)
Bro, I'm going with you. I gotta see how this all ends.

Osmany takes the plastic bag and starts toward the launch point. Orlando shakes his head, chuckling.

EXT. LAUNCH POINT – DAYBREAK

Carlos looks through binoculars.

CARLOS
Patrols are more active at night. If they catch us we're fucked.

BINOCULARS POV: From the stern of the boat, a small red, white, and blue Cuban flag is raised up a pole.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
There's the signal. All clear.

They wade into the water. Tense. Quiet. Determined.

CUT TO:

I/E. BOAT, CUBAN WATERS — DAY

Bright aqua with shadings of coral mass. In the distance, a CUBAN PATROL BOAT.

Carlos maneuvers the boat as if trolling for fishing zones. His TWO FISHING PARTNERS play along. No one else visible...

INT. CABIN

Orlando, Osmany, Geidy lying face down. Silent. Still. Then, Carlos drops into view:

CARLOS
It's safe! We're out of Cuba.

Seemingly, the hardest part is over.

I/E. BOAT, INTERNATIONAL WATERS — DAY

Everyone emerges. Orlando looks queasy. The fishermen stare.

FISHERMAN #1
Are you El Duque?

Orlando smiles, then vomits over the side. Osmany joins.

EXT. MEETING POINT, BAHAMIAN WATERS — LATE AFTERNOON

Orlando and Osmany stare out into the horizon, recovering.

Orlando sees it first... An uninviting strand of rocks, rising in the middle of the vacant sea.

Carlos maneuvers the boat toward the small patch of land:

ANGUILLA CAY (23°30'01.0"N, 79°32'30.0"W)

Wind-lashed and exposed, like it might disappear in a heavy storm. Patches of sand, carpeted with palmettos and brush.

They drop anchor off the beach. Carlos scans the horizon.

CARLOS
They're late.

Orlando checks his watch. Lights a cigarette.

TIME CUT:

Orlando finishes his cigarette. Flicks it into the sea. The sun is setting... Something's wrong.

ORLANDO
Where's the speedboat?

OSMANY
(using the binoculars)
I gave Tom exact coordinates...

CARLOS
We can't wait out here much longer. If the fishermen aren't back soon, it'll raise suspicion.

ORLANDO
I'm not going back.

They all turn, looking to the small patch of land nearby.

TIME CUT:

EXT. ANGUILLA CAY – LAST LIGHT

From the sandy shore, Orlando, Osmany, Geidy, and Carlos watch the boat disappear into the night. They're totally alone.

The group stares out at the vacant sea, squinting through darkness to locate the tardy rescuers.

OSMANY
Where can they be...

He aims the camera into the night and –

FLASH! A burst of brilliant white light captures the solitary moment. A high-pitched whine crescendos, ready to fire again.

FLASH! Orlando sits alone. A distant gaze. Each burst of light offers an introspective "snapshot" between the darkness.

GEIDY (O.C.)
Osmany, over there!

FLASH! Orlando, clutching the amulet around his neck.

CARLOS (O.C.)
Turn it northwest! Gimme.

FLASH! Orlando, lost in contemplation, staring out at...

FLASH! The empty shoreline.

FLASH! That same shoreline, but now we see Orlando, building sandcastles with Norita, Yahu, and Steffi.

FLASH! Everyone's smiling. Happy.

And in the next blink...

FLASH! Orlando's gone. No longer "in the picture".

FLASH! Norita is anguished. Yahu crying. Steffi screaming.

FLASH! A heavy downpour enveloping them.

FLASH! The shoreline is empty again.

Orlando stares, drenched. Heartbroken. Thunder booms as we

SMASH CUT TO:

DOORS PUSH OPEN. A burst of light. We are:

EXT. COURTHOUSE, MIAMI – MORNING

Tom hastily exits the building, disheveled – in the same clothes we last saw him in. He makes for a phone booth.

TOM
(into phone)
Operator, please connect me to the Coast Guard – it's an emergency...

Tom waits impatiently, a knot in the pit of his stomach.

COAST GUARD DISPATCHER (O.S.)
Coast Guard, how may I assist you?

TOM
I need to report a group of Cubans in distress, near Anguilla Cay...

I/E. CESSNA ("BROTHERS TO THE RESCUE"), OVER OPEN SEA – DAY

The PILOT gazes out the window at the tiny cay below. The beach where we last saw Orlando and the group is empty.

PILOT
(into headset)
U.S. Coast Guard Key West, this is Cessna N2506. Just conducted a visual. Cay appears deserted, over.

COAST GUARD DISPATCHER (O.S.)
Copy that, N2506. Appreciate your assistance.

EXT. ANGUILLA CAY – CONTINUOUS

As the tiny plane disappears, Orlando and the others emerge from the stumpy palmetto palms.

CARLOS
You sure it wasn't U.S. Coast Guard?

OSMANY
They'll send us back to Cuba. We have to wait for the speedboat.

CARLOS
No speedboat is coming, you fucking idiot! We're gonna die out here—

Osmany lunges at Carlos. Orlando gets between them.

GEIDY
LOOK!

Something down the beach... Discarded tarps, planks, and... makeshift crosses in the sand. A rafter's graveyard.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANGUILLA CAY — NEXT DAY, PREDAWN

Osmany stirs awake. He finds a spot in the brush to relieve himself. Something offshore catches his eye... A boat! He starts running, holding up his pants, shouting, pointing.

Everyone's awake now. They see it too. Shouting, waving... Their faces drop as the boat nears. It's not the speedboat.

CUT TO:

I/E. U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER — LATER

Sporting orange life vests, the group sits on the stern. A SEAMAN brings them blankets and coffee.

Carlos quietly observes the American flag rippling in the wind — the way the sunlight casts a shadow over the deck.

CARLOS
We're going to the United States!

He smiles confidently to everyone's relief. Suddenly, the harsh shadows begin to turn like a sundial across the deck.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
We're turning... changing course.

ORLANDO
Wait. What?

CARLOS
They're taking us back to Cuba!

Orlando takes Geidy's hand and runs up to a JUNIOR OFFICER.

ORLANDO
Tell him. Tell him I'm the brother of Liván Hernández, the famous pitcher. Tell him!

GEIDY
This man... He is brother to Liván Hernández. The famous pitcher.

ORLANDO
Liván bro-ther, Liván bro-ther! Base-ball. *Pelota*. Baseball.

The officer flags down BOARDING OFFICER BANDROWSKY.

JUNIOR OFFICER
Bandrowsky! One of these Cubans says he's Liván Hernández's brother.

BANDROWSKY
The Marlins pitcher?

Orlando nods 'yes'.

BANDROWSKY (CONT'D)
(chuckles)
No shit?! Tell him I'm an Indians fan. He won't get sympathy from me.

ORLANDO
Geidy, what'd he say?

Geidy looks puzzled.

CUT TO:

INT. SCOTTY'S LANDING, MIAMI – NIGHT

Tom's wallowing at the bar. His phone rings.

TOM
Yeah?

CALLER (O.S.)
Dis a Mistah Tom Cronin?

TOM
That's right. Who's this?

CALLER (O.S.)
Dis is Miss Sonya callin'. Director of Immigration in De Bahamas.

INTERCUT: INT. CARMICHAEL ROAD DETENTION CENTER, NASSAU

She hits speaker phone. Beside her in handcuffs, Orlando.

MISS SONYA
Go ahead.

ORLANDO
Tom? Tom... It's Orlando.

Tom's face brightens. A man whose ship has finally come in.

TOM
Dookay?!

ORLANDO
What the hell happened? I need to get a hold of Gordo. He'll know what to do.

TOM
No, no. Joe's not part of this. You're with me now. Ma'am... Hello? He's mine. I'll come get him.

MISS SONYA
'Fraid not, sah. I tried 'splainin' to him. De Bahamas 'ave an agreement wid Cuba. Political ting. We sendin' him back in da mornin'.

TOM
Wha— No! I'll pay whatever you want!

MISS SONYA
Don't work dat way, sah. Dere's notin' you can do. He's goin' back.

Tom can't think. A deer in headlights.

ORLANDO
Tom... Call Joe. Call Joe Cubas!

The call ends. Tom exhales. No cards left to play. It's over.

TOM
FUUUCK!

CUT TO:

EXT. CARMICHAEL DETENTION CENTER, NASSAU — NEXT DAY

A media circus. At the center, its ringmaster. It's the return of *El Gordo*.

JOE
And it is absolutely unconscionable to see what's unfolding here...

Behind him, an oddly cheery pink building surrounded by barbed wire. Orlando and the others watch helplessly from inside.

JOE (CONT'D)
For the Bahamians to deny these people asylum and return them to their Cuban oppressors – especially someone like Orlando – they're condemning them to life in prison.

Beside him, the tattered remains of a makeshift raft: a jerry-rigged, knotted kludge of inner tubes and wooden planks.

JOE (CONT'D)
These brave men and women risked their lives through shark-infested waters on a rickety raft like this...
(reaching for the raft)
Guys, these are fragments of broken dreams, a yearning for freedom, a longing for a brighter future...

AP REPORTER
Joe, does this mean you're representing *El Duque* now?

JOE
This is a humanitarian crisis, Phil. I'm not here to talk about baseball. I'm here to help.

A CYNICAL REPORTER quips to a colleague:

CYNICAL REPORTER
Helping and hustling.

CUT TO:

INT. STATE SECURITY, CUBA – A FAX MACHINE

CLOSE enough to read the fax as it emerges: '*Duque Hernández plus three accomplices detained in Nassau...*' It's picked up by the hands of the white-haired Colonel.

EXT. COURTYARD, DETENTION CENTER, NASSAU – THAT NIGHT

Joe presses $100 into a GUARD's hand, and is allowed to pass.

Bathed in floodlights, Orlando stands uneasy, his fingers threaded through the chain-link fence between them.

JOE
Feliz Año Nuevo, champ!

They haven't seen each other since Millington.

ORLANDO
What was that spectacle earlier?

JOE
You wanna get out of here or not?

ORLANDO
I didn't escape on a rickety raft...

JOE
Those details don't matter. What matters is putting those assholes on the spot and stirring up a hornet's nest of international goodwill.

ORLANDO
Did it work?

JOE
Bought us some time. Enough for me to get you a visa into Costa Rica.

Joe's Rolex snags on the fence as he slips him a Marlins cap.

JOE (CONT'D)
(winks)
Brought you a little something.

ORLANDO
Stop. What about my friends?

JOE
Your friends... Uh... they're not...

ORLANDO
Important enough to you.

Joe looks at him. He's suddenly lost his urge to bullshit.

JOE
Look, you probably don't believe me, but my relationships aren't what they used to be. I'm running out of money and favors. And visas don't come cheap or easy. Countries don't just hand them out like napkins.

ORLANDO
Gordo, I'm here because of them.

JOE
They're not star athletes, Orlando.

ORLANDO
If they get sent back to Cuba, they'll go to prison because of me.

Joe groans, paces along the fence.

JOE
No-no-no-no, that has nothing to do with me, okay? This is business...
(talking himself out of it)
I can't be responsible for them. Or feel guilty about that. I wish I could help every single Cuban, okay? But unfortunately, we don't get to decide what's fair.

ORLANDO
Yes, we do. I'm not leaving my friends behind.

JOE
I'm not responsible for them!

Orlando puts the Marlins cap on...

ORLANDO
It has to be all of us.

Joe tenses his jaw.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION CENTER, NASSAU – NEXT DAY

Joe follows a CASE OFFICER to a holding area... where Orlando waits, alone. The GUARD from last night stands by the door.

JOE
Where are the other three Cubans?

CASE OFFICER
Humanitarian parole only get extended ta dis one.

JOE
No, no, Costa Rica sent a letter of authorization for all four of them. Where's the director?

CASE OFFICER
Relax, mon. She be back real soon.

EXT. NASSAU AIRPORT

Miss Sonya greets... the white-haired Colonel and two Cuban agents. They all step into a GOVERNMENT CAR.

INT. DETENTION CENTER

ORLANDO
Everything okay, Joe?

Joe's phone rings.

INTERCUT: INT. FBO LOUNGE, NASSAU AIRPORT

René paces anxiously. There's a Learjet waiting on the tarmac.

RENÉ
JOE! Where are you?!

JOE
Where am I? Where the fuck are the Costa Rican visas, René?

RENÉ
I-I'm sorry. I could only get one.

JOE
I told you I needed four!

RENÉ
Well, one's better than none!
(looks at the Learjet)
If you two don't get over here now, our last favor is gonna fly outta here without us.

HOLD on Joe. Thinking. He looks at Orlando. Then —

JOE
Call San José. Get the visas. You hear me? All four of them... by the time we get there.

RENÉ
Wh-wait, Joe. Don't do anything crazy...

Joe eyeballs the GUARD by the door.

JOE
(into phone)
We're on our way. All of us.

René hangs up the phone, sweating.

RENÉ
Shit!

TIME CUT:

INT. DETENTION CENTER — MOMENTS LATER

The Guard pockets a wad of cash, now sporting Joe's Rolex —

I/E. RENTAL CAR (DRIVING), NASSAU ROAD

Joe floors it. Orlando rides shotgun. Osmany, Carlos, and Geidy are in back, emotions high. Orlando extends his hand.

ORLANDO
Told you I wouldn't leave you behind... I got you.

Joe watches, visibly moved. Orlando sees his bare wrist.

ORLANDO (CONT'D)
I'm proud of you, Joe.

JOE
If we make it out of this, you better win a fucking World Series.

I/E. GOVERNMENT CAR (DRIVING)

As the white-haired Colonel converses with Miss Sonya, a car blurs past them. Joe's car. Heading the opposite direction — toward the airport. The Colonel glimpses the bearded driver and black passenger. He pauses*... Nah, it can't be.*

INT. COSTA RICAN IMMIGRATION OFFICE, SAN JOSÉ

A COSTA RICAN OFFICIAL on the phone, getting an earful.

IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL
(drunk)
But Don Renéééé, por favoooor.

RENÉ
You have two minutes to send me the fucking letter!

EXT. DETENTION CENTER

Miss Sonya and the Cubans pull up to the entrance.

As they make their way inside, Miss Sonya is pulled aside by the Case Officer. The look on her face tells the Colonel everything. He blitzes back to the car, his agents in tow. He pulls out the driver, and floors it out of the parking lot.

INT. FBO LOUNGE, NASSAU AIRPORT

A LOUNGE PERSONNEL hands René a fax as Joe arrives with Orlando and the others. René passes the document to Joe.

Joe's eyes widen... something's wrong.

JOE
It's not signed... there's no seal!

René does a double take. Joe spots an empty ticket counter.

I/E. GOVERNMENT CAR (DRIVING)

The Colonel blows past traffic lights. PATROL CARS follow.

INT. FBO LOUNGE, TICKET COUNTER

Joe takes a pen and scribbles a signature, then stamps the fax with an In-Out stamp and smudges the shit out of it.

I/E. GOVERNMENT CAR (DRIVING), NASSAU AIRPORT

The Colonel swerves past taxis and tourists, barreling toward 'Departures'. Onto the sidewalk... up to the doors, as —

EXT. FBO LOUNGE, TARMAC

Joe hands travel documents to the flight crew and smiles. René, Orlando, Osmany, Carlos, and Geidy follow him up the steps and into the Learjet.

JOE
(to René)
Did you get the bottles I told you to bring?

INT. TERMINAL

The Colonel and his agents RUN through the terminal, pushing past travelers, SEARCHING —

INT. LEARJET

On the runway now. Joe's in his seat, looking out the window at the terminal.

INT. TERMINAL

The Colonel spots the Learjet. Stops. Knows he's too late. In a fit a rage, he kicks a tourist's suitcase.

CUT TO:

INT. LEARJET, IN THE AIR

POP! Joe pours sudsy champagne for everyone. They raise their slender plastic flutes into the air. They made it.

LATER

The soft hum of the jet's engines. Empty bottles. The group is sound asleep in their plush leather seats, having finally succumbed to exhaustion. Except Orlando.

He's wide awake. Tightly grasping the *azabache* amulet close to his heart. Gaze fixed on the fading light outside his window.

Joe takes the seat facing him.

JOE
A lot to process. Few days ago you were a castaway. Now, you're sipping champagne up in the clouds.

Orlando sighs uneasily. His eyes become watery.

ORLANDO
(reflective)
My father wasn't around when I was growing up...

JOE
You okay?

ORLANDO
Jesus, Gordo, did I just make the biggest mistake of my life?

JOE
What? No—

ORLANDO
What kind of man leaves his family to pursue his own dreams?

Joe gulps.

ORLANDO (CONT'D)
We only get a few special years with our children, and I'm gonna miss it.

Joe stares back at him, unable to speak.

ORLANDO (CONT'D)
Probably hard to understand...

CLOSE on Joe.

JOE
Not really, no... I've been spending too much time away from home...

A wistful glimpse of regret. Then, he looks at Orlando, snaps his fingers — he offers a reassuring thought.

JOE (CONT'D)
Listen, escaping was only part of your dream. I'm gonna get you into the major leagues... That's how you're gonna get your family back!

ORLANDO
Coño, Joe, the way you say stuff... You make it sound like a movie.

JOE
Because you're a fucking star.
(leans in)
Look, I've been making calls to all the big clubs...

ORLANDO
And there's interest?

JOE
Oh, lots! There's just a little bit of... Well, that you haven't pitched in two years. You're 32 now... and look, I'll list you as 28—

ORLANDO
They're saying I'm past my prime?

JOE
No, no, no. They just haven't seen you, right? They don't know...

Orlando shifts in his seat.

EXT. DILAPIDATED BALLPARK, COSTA RICA — DAY

In a glossy tracksuit, Joe launches fungoes to a handful of LOCAL PLAYERS in mismatched jerseys.

JOE (O.S.)
I'll set the whole thing up... You pitch a few. Show 'em what you got.

Orlando sprints to the mound. He wipes his brow. Warms up.

Dozens of SCOUTS observe the field. Keen eyes hidden behind dark shades. Radar guns fixed on Orlando.

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
And, just to remind them what a big deal you are — and how serious we are — I invited a television crew. Top-tier. You heard of "60 Minutes"*?*

MORLEY SAFER (67) follows Joe around with a "60 MINUTES" CREW.

MORLEY SAFER
So, what do you think you're gonna get for *Duque*?

JOE
Well, I don't wanna put a figure on him yet.

MORLEY SAFER
(cheeky)
You don't wanna put a figure on him yet because you want these guys to engage in a little feeding frenzy...

JOE
(with a devilish grin)
Well, that's what makes up America. A free competitive atmosphere.

From behind the backstop, in silhouette, various SCOUTS watch Orlando pitch. Their hushed voices from the shadows:

SCOUT #1
I mean, he strikes, but not hard.

SCOUT #2
We're supposed to believe he's 28?

SCOUT #3
And what's with that high kick?

A few scouts peel away, revealing... A different scout. No gun. Focused. Taking fastidious notes.

INSERT — NOTEPAD

He scribbles: "Still got his fastball. Still healthy."

As he looks up, we recognize him: GORDON BLAKELEY from the Yankees. Reflected in his dark wayfarers, we see Orlando jerk his knee chin-high and plow through a hapless hitter.

Gordon cracks a smile.

CUT TO:

A ROOM SERVICE CART ON THE MOVE. Over jingling silverware, we hear the "60 MINUTES" ticking stopwatch, then:

MORLEY SAFER (O.S.)
It's a game of international intrigue, involving Cuban ballplayers who've found fortune and freedom in the U.S...

The cart pulls up to the TV — the only source of light in the

HOTEL ROOM, HOLIDAY INN, CLEVELAND — EVENING

Joe lifts the lid off a covered plate.

MORLEY SAFER
Most have done it with the help of a Miami-based sports agent you'll meet tonight...

Joe sits alone, staring at his food, awaiting his big debut. Neither happy nor sad. His mind elsewhere. He opens his phone.

INSERT — JOE'S PHONE

Display reads: *HOME*. His thumb extends to the "CALL" button.

TIGHT on TV: "60 MINUTES" — JOE, IN A SIT-DOWN INTERVIEW:

MORLEY SAFER
Why are so many players defecting?

INTERCUT: CLOSE ON MARIA, OLIVIA, AND CECI, CAPTIVATED BY WHAT'S PLAYING ON THEIR TV...

JOE
Many reasons. Primarily, because they've found someone to take them to the promised land.

MORLEY SAFER
And that man is?

JOE
Last couple of years it's been me.

MARIA, OLIVIA, AND CECI, REACT... and we realize they're not watching "60 MINUTES". They're watching: "MRS. DOUBTFIRE".

INSERT — JOE'S PHONE

His thumb still over the "CALL" button. He hesitates, teary-eyed. Wracked with guilt, he flips the phone shut.

He looks back to the TV: FOOTAGE OF ORLANDO PITCHING IN COSTA RICA. Joe gets an idea. Flips his phone open again to call —

JOE
René!

RENÉ
I'm taping it! You watching?

JOE
I'm calling about Orlando...

RENÉ
Still no counter from Cleveland—

JOE
Doesn't matter—

RENÉ
Doesn't matter??

JOE
No one's got a bigger hard-on for "Dookay" than Gordon and Steinbrenner. Not why I'm calling... What's the word on Orlando's family?

RENÉ
They denied his wife's request. Castro will never let them leave.

JOE
I'm gonna get them out.

RENÉ
You're gonna— Are you feeling okay?

JOE
Find a backchannel to Havana... There's gotta be someone in D.C. or at the U.N. who can help. I don't care what it costs.

Click! Reinvigorated, Joe turns back to the TV.

MORLEY SAFER (V.O.)
...All eyes and radar guns were on *Duque*. And were the scouts amazed?
(to a poker-faced Gordon)
What's the Yankees interest, would you say? Very interested, mildly interested, or cool?

GORDON BLAKELEY
I'd say we're mildly interested.

JOE
(at the TV)
You're gonna pay, Gordon! You. Are Gonna. Pay. "Show me the monaaayy!"

CUT TO:

A NY YANKEES CAP... on Orlando's head. He's walking with Joe.

INT. MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

They emerge from the terminal to a mob of local press and camera flashes welcoming *El Duque* to America.

UNIVISION REPORTER
Congrats, Duque! How's it feel to be at the doorway to your dreams?

ORLANDO
I left Cuba looking for freedom, and what greater freedom is there than being a Yankee?

Suddenly, Liván Hernández pushes through reporters, his diamond stud earring picking up the TV lights.

As soon as Orlando sees him...

LIVÁN
Don't cry. Don't fucking cry!

Amid the snapping cameras and applause, the brothers embrace. Liván kisses Orlando's shiny head, now buried in his shoulder.

TELEMUNDO REPORTER
Orlando! How do you feel?!

ORLANDO
Marvelous! It's marvelous... I haven't seen him in three years.

Liván's eyes meet Joe's briefly. He nods stoically, grateful.

TELEMUNDO REPORTER
Liván! Any advice for your brother?

LIVÁN
Well, first thing I'd tell him is don't eat too much McDonald's.

Everyone laughs as Liván playfully pats his stomach.

LIVÁN (CONT'D)
But he doesn't really need any advice from me. I've always said he's the better pitcher.

A twinkle in Orlando's eye as we

CUT TO:

SEVEN MONTHS LATER...

INT. CLUBHOUSE, YANKEE STADIUM — NIGHT

STATIC SHOTS of the inner sanctum. No players are present. Only the faint baritone hum of the National Anthem.

Individual lockers: "JETER", "WILLIAMS", "STRAWBERRY"...

"HERNANDEZ". A dogeared photo of Norita with Yahu and Steffi. A small shrine to the Afro-Cuban deity Santa Barbára.

Over a cinder block TUNNEL, a hand-painted sign reads:

"I want to thank the Good Lord for making me a Yankee." — Joe DiMaggio

As the anthem gains volume and clarity, we begin to hear the roar of a sold-out stadium...

BARITONE (O.S.)
...O say does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave...

EXT. FIELD, YANKEE STADIUM (WORLD SERIES GAME 2) — CONTINUOUS

We come up on Orlando in his Yankee pinstripe uniform. NY cap grasped over his heart. Eyes fixed ahead.

BARITONE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...O'er the Land of the Free, and the Home of the Brave."

Orlando puts his cap on and hits the field with his team.

TV SPORTSCASTER #1 (V.O.)
Welcome to the 1998 World Series, and another gorgeous night for baseball at Yankee Stadium!

The grandstands are pulsing under bright floodlights: 60,000 cheering spectators. Families and fans of all ages. Even some Cuban flags. A handmade sign reads: "*El Ruque* of the Year".

TV SPORTSCASTER #1 (V.O.)
The Yankees had a strong start last night, beating San Diego in Game 1 and setting the stage for one incredible story this postseason...

ON THE MOUND – Orlando takes in the stadium. He clutches his amulet and gathers up his strength.

TV SPORTSCASTER #1 (V.O.)
...Orlando '*El Duque*' Hernández! Cuban defector and brother of last year's World Series MVP, Liván.

IN THE STANDS – Osmany cheers in a Yankees bucket hat. Liván beams beside him.

STADIUM CROWD
Let's go Yankees! *clap* *clap* *clap* *clap* *clap* *clap*

TV SPORTSCASTER #2 (V.O.)
Anywhere from 25 to 35 years old... who knows, but he's fun to watch and hard to hit. Partially because of that high leg kick – very deceptive!

INT. OWNER'S BOX, YANKEE STADIUM – CONTINUOUS

Full of VIPs and cigar smoke. STEINBRENNER looks over the stadium he rules. The game plays on mounted TVs.

TV SPORTSCASTER #1 (V.O.)
Pitch 1 of Game 2... Strike! Good start for the fearless refugee.

TV SPORTSCASTER #2 (V.O.)
It's still uncertain when he'll see his wife and daughters again.

TV SPORTSCASTER #1 (V.O.)
We hope they'll be reunited soon.

EXT. OWNER'S BOX

Joe paces outside the inner sanctum. Cell phone to his ear. He looks different. His appearance less slick. Softer.

JOE
Pam, Pam, Pam. We don't have years. It's the World Series! We gotta get his girls out in time to see this. It's now or never.

INTERCUT: PAM FALK'S OFFICE, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Plaque reads: "PAMELA FALK, PROF. OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS".

PAM
Joe, as a mother my heart breaks for those kids, but when we first spoke, I asked you to manage expectations.

PAM (30s) at her desk. Framed photos with diplomats in D.C... Warlords in Guatemala... her kids at Disney World.

JOE
So then that's it? The bad guys win?

PAM
No, but logistically, politically, this stuff takes time. This was not an uncomplicated ask.

JOE
Uncomp— You know how many rookies have started for the Yankees in the history of the World Series?

PAM
Six.

JOE
Six. Six! Since 1903. These girls— a few months ago their dad was an outcast, a castaway, and now he's about to win the damn thing. <u>That</u> was not uncomplicated.

We hear a huge ROAR of the crowd.

PAM
It's the American dream.

JOE
Not without them it isn't.

Joe's voice cracks. It hits home.

JOE (CONT'D)
Please, Pam. He's incomplete without his family.

PAM
I'm sorry, Joe, but right now, *El Duque* is the greatest symbol of defiance against Castro.
(MORE)

PAM (CONT'D)
And the only person with the power to let his family go is Castro himself. I really wanted to deliver that perfect ending everybody was hoping for, but it's a stalemate.

JOE
I know you did, Pam. I understand.

He shuts his phone, gutted.

ON THE MOUND — Orlando. Unaware and powerless, yet unrelenting. In full command of the outcome of the game.

INT. OWNERS'S BOX, YANKEE STADIUM

Joe stares at an opulent spread. Enough food to feed a Cuban village. He's not hungry. He studies the luxury suite. Full of the city's elite — laughing, eating, detached from struggle.

Joe sees Orlando's face on the TVs. Trapped within the boxy monitors. Pitching for their amusement. The money. The fame. It all feels inconsequential to Joe now. Within earshot —

STEINBRENNER
(to a VIP)
Of course I care what's written in the papers about me! They call you a bully and people believe it...
(overlooking the stadium)
Listen, any club owner that tells you he isn't in the game for ego, is full of shit. It's all ego.

PUSH IN on Joe, listening...

STEINBRENNER (CONT'D)
Don't you care what people think about you?

A surge of newfound energy propels Joe out of the room.

INT. PAM FALK'S OFFICE

She turns off her computer, desk lamp. On her way out —

INTERCUT

Joe paces, cell up to his ear again. Calling...

JOE
Pam! It's an ego thing. Castro wants to be liked, right?
(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)
If he releases the family to attend the Series, it'll be seen as a grand humanitarian gesture. Worldwide headlines... you with me? We have a window here.

PAM
Yeah... I'm with you, but—

JOE
We find a celebrity... Someone cushy with Castro, to persuade him personally. Like, a Jesse Jackson.

PAM
Right. Jesse Jackson declined.

JOE
The Reverend? What?!

PAM
Muhammad Ali, Gabriel García Márquez, foreign heads of state... Joe, I tried all that.

JOE
So you're saying, what? It's over?

PAM
I'm saying we'd need a miracle.

JOE
What about the Pope? Did you try the Pope?!

Silence on the other end.

PAM
How much time do we actually have?

JOE
If they keep blowing through the Padres? Less than 48 hours.

PAM
Call you back!

CUT TO:

INT. SAN DIEGO AIRPORT – AFTERNOON

Joe races through a crush of travelers. Cell phone to his ear.

INTERCUT

PAM
Just heard back from the Vatican. The pontiff can't intervene.

JOE
Fuck.

PAM
But they've offered up someone else... A Yankees fan with a longtime relationship with Fidel.

CUT TO:

INT. ARCHBISHOP'S RESIDENCE, NEW YORK

An aura of divine sanctity. Game 3 plays on a TV as CARDINAL JOHN O'CONNER (78) signs a letter on Archdiocese stationary.

INSERT — ENVELOPE reads:

Honorable Fidel Castro Ruz
Presidente de la Republica de Cuba
Palacio de la Revolución

He hands it to his personal emissary, MARIO PAREDES (40).

JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNER
He'll be expecting you...

CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL: EXT. QUALCOMM STADIUM, SAN DIEGO (GAME 4) — NIGHT

TV SPORTSCASTER #1 (V.O.)
Yankees up three games to none, and the crowd here at Qualcomm, hoping for the Padres to get to Game 5...

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACIO DE LA REVOLUCIÓN, HAVANA — NIGHT

Mario Paredes is led up the steps of the dense, monolithic structure. Through dark marbled corridors to —

INT. FIDEL CASTRO'S CHAMBERS — CONTINUOUS

As Paredes approaches, he hears a sportscaster's voice emanating from... a large TV.

FIDEL CASTRO (70s) is watching Game 4 of the World Series. Silhouetted by the TV, Paredes hands Castro the letter, and waits...

CUT TO:

INT. VISITOR'S (YANKEES) DUGOUT, QUALCOMM STADIUM (GAME 4)

A YANKEES SECRETARY approaches first-base coach JOSÉ CARDENAL.

YANKEES SECRETARY
José — urgent phone call for *Duque*.

José looks to the mound as Orlando strikes out the batter, closing out the inning.

INT. YANKEES SECTION, QUALCOMM STADIUM (GAME 4)

Joe arrives with hotdogs and nachos to a flurry of activity.

YANKEES SECURITY
(into walkie-talkie)
I got a twenty on Joe.
(to Joe)
They need you in the clubhouse ASAP.

INT. VISITOR (YANKEES) CLUBHOUSE, QUALCOMM STADIUM (GAME 4)

Joe races down the corridor, spotting Orlando up against a wall, sobbing. Orlando pulls him into a tight embrace.

ORLANDO
They're coming, Joe! You did it!

Joe tears up. Even the burly head of security is emotional. A Yankee staffer interrupts.

STAFFER
They need him out there. Looks like we're about to sweep.

INT. PAM FALK'S OFFICE

Pam answers the phone. Game 4 plays on her small TV.

INTERCUT

JOE
(wiping his face)
We're all a mess over here. And they're gonna sweep!

PAM
Joe, there's no flights.

JOE
What?! Can we get them here in time for tomorrow's victory parade?

PAM
Not without a plane.

INT. STEINBRENNER'S PRIVATE BOX, QUALCOMM STADIUM

Joe pushes through the crowd.

JOE
Where's George?!

He spots Steinbrenner, watching the game intently.

JOE (CONT'D)
George! We need to talk.

STEINBRENNER
Not now, Joe! Fucks sake. We're about to win the fucking series!

JOE
It can't wait, dammit! I've got lives in my hands!

Steinbrenner stops. Turns. *This better be good.*

JOE (CONT'D)
I need to get *El Duque's* family to New York for the parade tomorrow.

STEINBRENNER
What do you need from me?

JOE
Your plane.

CUT TO:

EXT. TETERBORO AIRPORT, NEW JERSEY — 2:30 AM

Steinbrenner's jet descends over the tiny runway. Orlando and Joe watch from the chilly tarmac.

ORLANDO
Coño, Joe. You made it happen.

JOE
No, no, you did.

ORLANDO
I can't survive without them...

JOE
I know exactly what you mean. Thank you.

Joe smiles humbly. Embraces Orlando gratefully.

ORLANDO
¿Todo bien?

Joe nods. Orlando sprints toward the jet, giddy, as it pulls up to a welcome mat.

A small contingent of TV cameras and reporters stand by, ready to catch the emotional reunion. Joe turns to René.

JOE
Did you get the bottles I told you to bring?

Orlando moves to the door as it opens. The steps unfurl and Norita, Yahu, and Steffi jump into his arms. Together again.

Joe watches Orlando's family. A moment of pure joy on his face. Everything comes into focus... He pulls out his phone.

INSERT — JOE'S PHONE

Display reads: *HOME.*

Joe exhales. "*Hee-hee-hee-ho*". Manifesting. "*Hee-hee-hee-ho*".

He presses "CALL" and raises the phone to his ear...

"*NEW YORK, NEW YORK*" begins to play as he walks off into the night. We catch a glimpse as his face lights up. In the distance, the iconic skyline sparkles ever so brighter as we

FADE TO BLACK.

POSTSCRIPT:

ARCHIVAL: YANKEES VICTORY PARADE, NEW YORK CITY

A blizzard of confetti and toilet paper. From atop a parade float, Orlando, Norita, Yahu, Steffi wave to cheering masses.

After Orlando and the Yankees won the 1998 World Series, they won it again in 1999...

George Steinbrenner weeps as he takes a swig of champagne.

...and again in 2000.

ARCHIVAL: ORLANDO RECEIVES KEY TO THE CITY, NEW YORK

To this day, Cuban baseball players continue to sustain a multi-million dollar defector market. Just as Rudy projected.

Orlando beams at the podium.

ORLANDO
Last year my brother said, 'I love you, Miami.' This year, I say, 'I LOVE YOU NEW YORK!'

CUT TO:

INSERT — TV COMMERCIAL (ACTUAL ADIDAS SPOT)

A packed nightclub. An infectious track blares: "*El, El Duque, El-El El Duque...*" Everyone on the dance floor mimics Orlando, whose signature high kick has set off a citywide dance craze.

Yankees pitcher DAVID CONE turns to a FEMALE CLUBGOER.

DAVID CONE
What's this dance called?

FEMALE CLUBGOER
(incredulous)
It's the *El Dookay.*

INT. TOM'S APARTMENT, BOSTON

Tom watches the funny spot on TV. But he's not laughing...

INT. DOWNTOWN MIAMI COURTROOM

Tom on one side. Joe on the other. Orlando on the stand.

Tom Cronin took Joe to court, seeking his finder's fee...

The JUDGE brings down the gavel.

...Tom lost.

CUT TO:

INT. TAMPA BAY DEVIL RAYS PRESS CONFERENCE

CAMERA FLASHES. The Arrojo family in team merch beside Joe.

Rolando Arrojo was reunited with his family and signed with the Tampa Bay Devil Rays for a staggering $7 million.

Insiders claim Joe had preemptively cut a side deal with the team's new Latin American scouting director...

Joe looks over his shoulder, a triumphant smile for

His old friend, Rudy Santín.

CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL: LIVÁN RECEIVING HIS WORLD SERIES MVP TROPHY

Liván Hernández found a new agent. During his 17-year MLB career, he pitched over 500 games. He never returned to Cuba.

CUT TO:

INT. TERMINAL, MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Iggy exits a jetway into the arms of Teresa and his sons.

Iggy served 13 years in Havana's notorious prison, Combinado del Este. He was eventually reunited with his family in Miami.

CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL: ORLANDO *'EL DUQUE'* HERNÁNDEZ TODAY

Since retiring from baseball, Orlando has worked as an analyst for ESPN, and even founded his own cigar brand.

He never returned to his homeland.

CUT TO:

An airport taxi pulls away, wiping frame to reveal:

EXT. CUBAS HOUSE, MIAMI – AFTERNOON

JOE approaches with his suitcase as...

THE DOOR PULLS OPEN ON

MARIA. His ride or die. She offers a soft smile, then opens the door further. Ceci and Olivia run into Joe's arms.

TONY ROBBINS (V.O.)
People ask me all the time: What does it take to be happy? And I always tell them, win the inner game, and you'll win the outer game.

They make their way inside, the door closing behind them.

FIN / END