

TROUBLE WITH THE CURVE

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The sound of PEEING. It's not steady. Sudden bursts hitting the water. Followed by periods of long silence. Then a few drops. Then GUS' VOICE...

GUS' VOICE

... I could paint the goddamn house before you decide to cooperate.

INT. GUS' APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MORNING

GUS LOBEL, stands over his toilet. He's late 60's, and has seen and heard it all -- and then some. Looks down to the source of his trouble.

GUS

Just takin' your sweet-ass time aren't ya'... another body part gettin' temperamental. Wish I could leave you here and come back when you're through. You holdin' some sort of grudge, is that it? Think it's my fault you haven't seen much action since the Carter Administration? It's not as easy as you think it is.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The apartment is drab. Built in the early seventies. No charm. Aside from a new big-screen TV, the rest of the furniture is old and wouldn't bring much in a yard sale.

Essentially awake, Gus comes from the bathroom. On his way to the kitchen when he CRACKS his knee on the coffee table. Grabs it in pain.

GUS

Ahh!

(to the table)

You son of a bitch. Stay the hell out of my way.

Pulls the coffee table across the room out of harms way. We see that the table isn't alone. Joining other exiled pieces that have collided with Gus.

He continues to the kitchen. Stacks and stacks of newspapers are piled everywhere. Not full papers. Just the sports pages. Everything from weekly's to high school journals.

There's a small formica table and not much else. One chair rests at the table. Not expecting company.

He opens the refrigerator. A jar of instant coffee, some beer, a half-smoked cigar and a single slice of pizza greet him. The pizza sits on the cold rack, not covered or wrapped. Reaches for it.

GUS (CONT'D)

... Breakfast of goddamn champions.

Stands at the refrigerator, eating.

He goes to a cupboard and pulls a bottle of Vodka. Pours some into a small bowl.

He sticks his hand in his mouth, pulls out an upper bridge-plate. Sets the teeth in the bowl. Takes a tooth brush and scrubs.

Satisfied, he puts the teeth back in his mouth. Takes a hit off the bottle. Gargles, swallows.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - ATLANTA - DAY

Two college teams play ball under the warm Georgia sun. Clusters of spectators are speckled through the stands.

A few old-timers, SMITTY, MAX, and LUCIOUS, sit with Gus behind home plate. Lucious is black. They're casual and relaxed, like they've seen this a thousand times. They have. They're scouts.

SMITTY

Jack Benny, Jack Paar, Carson... they were funny.

LUCIOUS

Carson wasn't funny. Never made me laugh.

Lucious winks at Gus.

SMITTY

Johnny Carson was the funniest guy on television.

GUS

It was the writers, Smitty. They were funny. Johnny wasn't funny.

LUCIOUS

Tell you who would've been a better host. Arsenio.

GUS

Now he was funny.

SMITTY

You think that Arsenio Hall is funnier than Johnny Carson?

LUCIOUS

No comparison.

Lucious pumps his arm, does annoying Arsenio impression.

LUCIOUS (CONT'D)

'Woof Woof Woof'

Gus and Max join in.

GUS/MAX

'Woof, Woof, Woof'.

Smitty watches his three old friends, 'woofing'. He's not amused.

LUCIOUS

(laughs)

Gets me every time. Arsenio is a comic genius.

GUS

I'd have to agree with you on that one.

SMITTY

I know what you're doing. You're trying to piss me off. It's not gonna to work. Not this time.

Lucious Max and Gus roar.

Gus puffs on his three day old cigar. Looks out at what he came for. The pitcher.

Pitch after pitch sails into the catcher's mitt. From Gus' POV the ball begins to get blurry. Not quite in focus. Gus rubs his eyes. It doesn't help. He gets up.

GUS

Well, happy fishing boys.

SMITTY

Where you going Gus? Don't you wanna see what he's got.

GUS

I've seen it. My kid Mickey's got better stuff than this guy.

LUCIOUS

See you in Carolina?

GUS

I'll be there.

INT. SCHWARTZ ROSENBLOOM AND WATSON - LAW OFFICE - DAY

A designer dress reveals legs that would make most panty hose models envious. The legs belong to MICKEY LOBEL, 30. Mickey's sharp, together. As charming as she is strong.

She sits at a conference table across from the PARTNERS. They each have a folder on her, studying various papers and documents.

WATSON

You did exceptionally well on the bar.

MICKEY

I studied my ass off.

In unison, they peer at her over their glasses. She recovers with a great smile.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Excuse me... I worked very hard. I don't think I slept the entire month of January.

ROSENBLOOM

It's all very impressive.

MICKEY

Thank you.

SCHWARTZ

I'm sure you know, there's too many lawyers and not enough jobs. Particularly for lawyers fresh out of school. A lot of over qualified waiters and waitresses in this town.

MICKEY

That's why I was top of my class every year. I don't ever want to know what kind of dressing you want on your salad.

They share a polite laugh, then back to the papers.

ROSENBLOOM

If we were to make you an offer, when could you start?

MICKEY

Yesterday.

ROSENBLOOM

Good, we're swamped.

WATSON

The adjustment from law school to the life of a working lawyer is quite dramatic. Some don't make it. Acclimation is too much.

MICKEY

I'm pretty confident I can handle the transition, Mr. Watson. I traveled a lot as a kid. I'm used to change.

SCHWARTZ

Your father a Service man?

MICKEY

He's a baseball man. A scout. I've had a lot of road trips.

INT. YOGA STUDIO - NIGHT

Soft new age music plays. Everyone is seated in a lotus position, eyes closed. Mickey sits in the front, deep into it. This is her tonic, her therapy. The INSTRUCTOR leads the class through a breathing exercise.

INSTRUCTOR

... and finally, let the air travel through your body, navigating the road of health, soundness and most of all, healing.

(beat)

... thank you.

They all bow. The class breaks up, everyone collecting their things. Mickey pulls some sweats over her tights, heads for the door. Her friend, CAROL, catches up to her.

CAROL

Feel like getting a salad?

MICKEY

It's dinner with Gus night.

CAROL

Can't you cancel?

MICKEY

No. Although you could go in my place
and he probably wouldn't notice.

CAROL

I think I'd relocate if I had to have
dinner with my father every week.
What do you talk about?

Mickey looks at her.

MICKEY

Not much.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

A TV sits on the counter, the Atlanta Braves playing. Still
dressed in her sweats, Mickey slowly picks through her food,
searching for the most edible of an early-bird-special. Gus
scarfs.

GUS

(re: sweats)

You need some money for clothes?

MICKEY

I just came from Yoga.

GUS

You and that voodoo.

MICKEY

It's hardly voodoo.

Gus turns to the game. Several moments pass before they
speak.

GUS

(re: food)

Good, huh?

MICKEY

... Close your eyes and you're in
Paris.

Gus isn't listening, the game much too interesting. Mickey
tries to pull him away.

MICKEY (cont'd)
I had the interview today.

GUS
What?

MICKEY
Schwartz, Rosenbloom, and Watson. It
was today.

GUS
Are they the best? You should work
for the best. You studied your ass
off.

MICKEY
Yeah, I mentioned that.

Gus watches the game.

GUS
My kid Glavine is amazing. Best damn
control in the bigs.

She gets up.

MICKEY
I'm going to go.

He's still glued to the game.

GUS
What?

MICKEY
I'm going.

GUS
You didn't finish your supper.

MICKEY
I've had enough.

GUS
Hold on, I'll drive you.

MICKEY
I feel like walking. See you next
week.

GUS
Suit yourself.

He goes back to the TV. She watches him. He's oblivious to everything but the game. She turns and leaves.

INT. BAR - BALTIMORE - NIGHT

A dingy spot along the Eastern Seaboard. A TV hangs above the bar. Springsteen's 'Hungry Heart' blasts from the juke box.

Seated at the bar is JOHNNY FLANAGAN. He's a colorful, off-beat, 32. His attention is on the TV, the Atlanta Braves game.

JOHNNY

(announcer like)

Glavine has it working tonight. He's got a lot of movement on the ball and is painting the corners like Picasso.

(normal)

Painting the corners like Picasso... that's a good line. Hell of a good line.

Pulls a small note pad from his pocket. Writes in the good line. Downs his beer.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Can I trouble you for another? This glass seems to have a hole in it.

A waitress laughs. The bartender looks at Johnny stone-faced.

BARTENDER

Haven't heard that one in about twenty minutes.

He slides him a beer.

JOHNNY

She thought it was funny.

BARTENDER

Yeah... tough audience.

WAITRESS

Screw you, Ray.

She pops her gum and gives Johnny a wink.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)

Where you from?

JOHNNY

New York.

She smiles, sizing him up.

WAITRESS

Gonna be with us a while?

JOHNNY

No, just passing through. I'm on a road trip.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Gravesites dot a rolling hillside that's covered in blooming Dogwood. It's beautiful. Quiet. And empty. Except for Gus.

He sits next to a headstone that reads:

JOANNA LOBEL, 1932 to 1969. ' May the Lord grant you extra innings'.

As if she's standing before him, and he might move her hair off her face, or adjust the collar on her blouse, he cares for her... softly wiping dust and dirt off the stone.

A glass of beer is next to the grave. Gus drinks from the bottle and eats a pastrami sandwich. It's lunch with his wife. A ritual he's shared with her every month since she died.

GUS

... Ever since Rosenblatts's closed, you can't get good pastrami. This stuff's not worth a damn.

Raises the bottle to her glass.

GUS (CONT'D)

Cheers, sweetheart. My kid Glavine pitched a helluva game the other night. You should've seen it, it was a beauty. He was workin' the corners, in and out. Just glorious, a state of grace. If you see the man upstairs, thank him for me. This game... it's a gift.

Beat. Puts down the sandwich. Looks around. Taking in the colors and scents of spring.

GUS (cont'd)

Dogwood sure is bloomin' pretty... Mickey used to say that it made you smile.

Stares at the tombstone like it actually is smiling. Caresses the letters that spell Joanna's name.

GUS (CONT'D)

I can feel you, Jo. All the time. I know when they call for me, you'll be there.

(beat)

You'd think it'd get easier, but it doesn't.

(beat)

Mickey's doin' good. Gonna make somethin' of her life.

Downs his beer. Looks at her glass.

GUS (CONT'D)

You done?

Drinks hers. Wipes some bird shit off the headstone.

GUS (CONT'D)

Let me know if those goddamn blue-jays are botherin you. I'll lay out some more of that white bread with tabasco. That'll teach 'em.

He kisses the top of the stone.

GUS (CONT'D)

My beloved...

He slowly walks to the car. The sun filters through the trees.

Birds gather in the grass. Feasting on pastrami and rye leftovers.

EXT. TURNER FIELD - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Home of the Braves.

INT. TURNER FIELD - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

VINCE FREEMAN, 45, heads a meeting. Vince is the General Manager of the Braves. On one side of him sits PETE KLEIN, 50, Director of Scouting. Pete's sturdy, no-frills.

Across the table is PHILLIP SNYDER, Associate Director of Scouting. Armani clad. Razor sharp, 35.

In their own ways, Pete and Phillip represent baseball's past and present.

Phillip's fingers fly across a laptop, inputting and receiving information.

PHILLIP

Tremendous, absolutely fucking tremendous. Jones, playing up in Waterloo, went three-for-four again.

PETE

Wasn't he just arrested on assault charges?

PHILLIP

What's a couple of assaults when you're hitting .350? Based on his current average, the computer tells me he's ready to move to Double A.

PETE

You and that computer.

PHILLIP

Current, Pete. Gotta be current. These new programs are a vital tool in evaluating today's talent.

Vince looks at Phillip, impressed.

VINCE

What about the kid in Chattanooga?

PHILLIP

Struggling. Gus Lobel signed him.

PETE

He'll be fine. Gus could spot talent from an airplane.

PHILLIP

I don't know. I was going over roster reports from the last four years. Lobel only signed three kids.

PETE

So? This isn't a grocery store. Can't just go in and get what you want. Maybe there hasn't been a lot out there. Maybe his territory's thin.

PHILLIP

Just making an observation. Want to make sure we're not missing anything. He's getting up there, you know.

VINCE

Should we send him to scout Gentry?

PETE

Of course. The Carolina's are his territory.

VINCE

Mr. Turner will be here for the combine. I don't want any surprises.

PETE

Wait a minute. We're sending one of the best scouts the organization has ever had. You're talking about the guy who signed Henry Aaron for God's sake. Gus is a legend.

PHILLIP

Pete, with all due respect, that's old news. You think anyone really cares who signed Hank Aaron? The game's changed. It's so much bigger now. It's global. There's millions of marketing dollars to be considered. We need a staff that can relate to these kids on all levels. Who can talk-the-talk. We all hate to face it, but he might be ready for pasture.

VINCE

Think he'll retire?

PHILLIP

We carry the option on his contract. He's got six months left.

PETE

For Christ sakes, Gus Lobel can do the job. If he proves me wrong I'll take full responsibility, but until then, let's worry about the players, not when Gus retires.

EXT. GUS' APARTMENT - GARAGE - EARLY EVENING

Gus is having trouble backing his time-worn 65' Mustang convertible out of the garage. He's dangerously close to the side wall.

GUS

Son of a bitch, did a bunch of goddamn midgets design this garage?

Frustrated. He punches it. SCREECH. The car squeezes through. Taking a chunk of door jam with it.

INT. MUSTANG - EARLY EVENING

Gus drives to the diner. Mickey with him. Silent until Mickey realizes he's going the wrong way.

MICKEY

You missed the turn.

GUS

Gonna try a new place tonight.

MICKEY

How daring. Where?

GUS

Macon stadium.

MICKEY

What?

GUS

My kid from Chattanooga's in town. I thought we'd see him play.

MICKEY

(pissed)

Turn around.

GUS

He's struggling. I gotta see him.

MICKEY

Fine. I'll take a rain check. Take me home.

GUS

What's the big deal?

MICKEY

You didn't even ask me. I could be doing other things. I'd rather serve twenty-five-to-life than see another game.

GUS

Gotta eat don't you? They got food there. Close your eyes. Pretend you're in Paris.

Like he's wearing blinders. He drives. Mickey. Burns.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - MACON GEORGIA - NIGHT

Definitely the minor leagues. Local advertising signs plaster the beat-up outfield wall.

A DRUNK CLOWN leads the crowd through a pathetic version of the wave.

At bat, is TOMMY CLARK, 18. The pitcher winds and throws. Tommy swings and misses.

GUS

Come on, Tommy!

Tommy looks up to the stands and sees Gus and Mickey. Digs into the batters box. The pitcher looks in for the sign, winds and fires.

Tommy takes a big swing. Connecting with nothing but air. Game over.

GUS (CONT'D)

A nice fat fastball and he missed it. Christ, when I scouted him he could hit that like it was T-ball.

The crowd moans as the players walk off the field. The clown makes a futile attempt at one final wave, but tumbles over in the process.

Flops on his back. Lets out a whale-like BELCH and passes out. People step over him. Nothing out of the ordinary.

EXT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

A handful of friends and groupies greet players emerging from the locker room. Gus and Mickey wait for Tommy. He walks over.

TOMMY
How long before they release me?

GUS
You're in a slump. No big deal.

TOMMY
I'm in a coma.

GUS
Listen to me. I signed you because you can hit. I've never seen a quicker bat than yours. A quick bat is what's gonna to get you called up.

TOMMY
I don't know what my problem is. Just not concentrating like I should.

MICKEY
I'm Mickey...

Gives Gus a look.

MICKEY (cont'd)
... You'll have to excuse Mr. Social Graces.

GUS
Tommy, my daughter, Mickey.

MICKEY
Where you from, Tommy?

TOMMY
Ohio. Just outside of Akron.

MICKEY
Traveled much?

He stammers a bit. Uncomfortable.

TOMMY
No.

MICKEY
Family?

TOMMY
Yeah. They'd drive down but... money's kind of tight.

Mickey looks at Gus. He strikes a match to his cigar.

GUS

You just worry about baseball, Tommy.
I'll take care of getting your parents
down to see you.

TOMMY

(excited)

Really? That would be great.

Gus affectionately puts his arm around Tommy. Mickey pretends not to notice. The three of them walk down the tunnel out of the stadium.

INT. GUS' APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING

In T-shirt and boxers, Gus sits at his table enjoying one of his true pleasures -- coffee, the sports page, and a cigar.

He makes a half-hearted attempt to tip his ashes into an ashtray. But misses every time.

Gus uses a large magnifying glass to read. Through the glass we see a headline: BO GENTRY DOES IT AGAIN. With a pen, he circles it.

A knock on the door.

PETE (O.S.)

Gus, you home?

GUS

It's nine o'clock in the morning.
Where the hell else am I gonna to be?

Gus slips the magnifying glass under the paper. Pete lets himself in.

PETE

Guess that means I can come in.

GUS

You hungry? Breakfast'll be here any
minute.

PETE

Busy?

GUS

Just doin' my homework.

Gus motions Pete to a stack of papers.

GUS (CONT'D)

Have a seat.

Pete glances at the headline he's about to sit on. Stares at all the papers. All the hours and hours and hours Gus puts into his work. Shakes his head in wonder.

PETE

Gus, did you ever think in a million years that computers would be a part of the game?

GUS

People using computers don't know a goddamn thing about this game.

PETE

Did you know that we can access from a data base all the high school and college rosters in a designated region? That a computer can down-load stats of any player, anywhere? Isn't that something? You wouldn't have to waste your time with all these papers.

GUS

Not wasting my time. I enjoy it.

PETE

There're special programs that can calculate a players stats, and based on the competition he's faced, tell you whether or not he's ready for the next level. Can you imagine that?

GUS

What else can computers tell you? When you should scratch your balls?

PETE

I don't like it either, but they're becoming a part of our business. Christ, even I got one.

GUS

No computer can tell me if a kid can play. If he has good instincts, if he can hit the cut-off man, if he can hit behind the runner. Ain't no computer anywhere gonna tell you that.

Pete stares at his old friend. Knows he right.

PETE

So, what'd you think about Bo Gentry?
If we do get a shot at him, the front
office would love to show him off at
the combine.

GUS

Let's see if he can play before we
worry about the dog and pony show.

PETE

Spotlight's really on this kid, Gus.

DOORBELL RINGS. Gus crosses to the living room. Pete with
him. He opens to DANNY, the delivery guy.

DANNY

Morning Mr. Lobel. Canadian bacon,
extra anchovies and chili peppers.

Danny lifts the pizza lid to show Gus.

GUS

A goddamn work of art. Whoever said
breakfast is the most important meal
was a genius, Danny.

DANNY

And here's your newspapers.

Places a bundle on the porch.

Gus opens his wallet. Things get blurry. He can't
distinguish the bills. Hands Danny some money.

GUS

Keep it.

Danny passes him the pizza. Starts to walk away. Looks at
the money. Stops.

DANNY

Mr. Lobel... did you mean to give me
fifty?

Embarrassed. Gus tries to cover.

GUS

Hell no. Just testing you, Danny-boy.

Danny hands him back the money.

GUS (CONT'D)

You're a good kid. Take an extra five for yourself.

He does.

Danny leaves. Pete looks at Gus. They walk back through the living room.

Pete sees the furniture pushed to one side. Making an extra wide path to the kitchen.

PETE

Is this some sort of new style I'm not up on?

GUS

Rearranging. Haven't had a chance to put things back.

They go into the kitchen. Gus notices Pete staring at him.

GUS (CONT'D)

What the hell you lookin' at?

PETE

Gus, are you alright?

GUS

Fine.

PETE

We go back a long time. If something were wrong you'd tell me wouldn't you?

GUS

Sure.

PETE

Because if for any reason you're not up to it, we could send someone from Charlotte. It might be easier on you.

GUS

I don't need easier.

Pete treads lightly.

PETE

Gus, have you thought about what you might do when your contract's up?

GUS

Sign another one. For more money.

PETE

Ever think about retiring?

GUS

For what? This is what I do.

Gus looks at Pete. Direct.

GUS (CONT'D)

What's this about?

Pete searches for the right words.

PETE

Gus... there's just a lot of pressure right now. Phillip has Vince's ear. Pumping him full of ideas. Telling him we need new blood. Young new blood.

Gus smiles. Trying to shrug off the terror that shoots through him.

GUS

Oh, he doesn't have a lick of sense. They'll figure that out soon enough.

PETE

They're worried about Tommy Clark, in Chattanooga.

GUS

There's no need to worry, he's gonna hit. Boy just needs to see his momma. I'm puttin' in the paperwork to send for his folks.

Pete sighs. This isn't your typical baseball request.

PETE

Gus, you know this game better than most. And I'll always go to bat for you... I just want to make sure you're up for it.

Gus eats his pizza. Casual.

GUS

Sure you're not hungry?

Pete looks at him. Knows this conversation has gone as far as it'll go.

PETE

No, I'm not hungry.

(beat)

How's Mickey?

GUS

Interviewed at Schwartz, Rosenbloom
and Watson. The best firm in Atlanta.
Thinks she has a good shot.

PETE

Well, tell her I said hey.

Pete walks out. Gus watches him leave. He stops eating.

Just sits there. Still. Then. POUNDS the table.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A 65' Cadillac Convertible is parked on the side of the road.
In a nearby field a group of young kids are playing baseball.

Johnny sits on the hood, watching.

KID #1

I get to be Cal Ripken.

KID #2

So? Cal Ripken's bald.

KID #1

Who are you gonna be?

KID #2

The 'Big Unit'.

Big Unit throws to Cal Ripken who fouls it off.

Johnny talks into a small hand held tape recorder, announcing
the game.

JOHNNY

The Big Unit winds and delivers. He
comes with a nasty slider that Ripken
just barely gets a piece of. Cal's
been in a slump of late, going one for
his last nineteen.

Johnny stops the recorder. Thinks for a moment. Turns the
recorder back on.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

... a nasty slider that Ripken just barely gets a piece of. Cal's in such a bad slump, he couldn't hit the beach with a beach ball.

Johnny likes that better, nods his approval. Big Unit throws another pitch that Cal hits into the outfield.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Here comes the 0-1, Ripken hits a shot to center.

The ball goes between the outfielders legs. Johnny jumps off the car, calling the play.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

The outfielder can't make the play!
The ball goes under his glove and is rolling all the way to the wall!

Cal (the little kid) is flying around the bases, heading for home.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

... Ripken is rounding third, he's going to try to come all the way home! Here comes the throw... safe! He's safe! He beat the tag! The Orioles win the game!

Johnny clicks off his recorder. Looks to see all the kids staring at him like he's some kind of crazy man.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

It's dark. Gus sits in a chair peering into a lens. LLOYD, 60, has been Gus' doctor for the past thirty years.

He sits on the other side of the lens looking into Gus' eyes. Gus isn't happy about it.

GUS

Jesus Christ, are you done yet?

LLOYD

It'd help if you wouldn't fidget.

GUS

If I'm not blind already, this goddamn search light isn't helping. You see anything -- besides open space?

LLOYD

I'm afraid I do. Not sure, but there are indications of glaucoma.

Beat.

GUS

Son of a bitch.

LLOYD

I'm not an eye doctor, Gus. It might be glaucoma, might be macular degeneration. You need to see a specialist.

GUS

Doc, I need my eyes. I can't do my job without my eyes.

(incredulous)

I don't have time for this. I've gotta get the season in.

LLOYD

You're playing with fire, Gus.

Gus pushes his chair away from the lens. Gets up.

GUS

Let's just pretend I was never here. Thanks for your time, Lloyd. Always a goddamn pleasure.

Walks out.

INT. JIMMY'S NEIGHBORHOOD BAR - NIGHT

A nuclear cloud of smoke hangs eye level. The regulars sit in their customary spots, carrying on as usual.

REGULAR #1

I was in Germany when we got word the Japs had surrendered. You talk about a party -- that was a party. Did I ever tell you about the time I was wounded?

REGULAR #2

About five hundred times. And each time the gun gets bigger.

The bartender, JIMMY, 50's, draws deep on a filterless Camel. A blinking neon martini light highlights the red glow in his face, brought on by more than a few good whiskies.

Gus sits alone, staring nowhere.

JIMMY
How's it going, Gus?

GUS
Like shit, Jimmy. Like absolute shit.

Another regular, ROY, shuffles up to the bar. Sits next to Gus.

ROY
How 'bout a quick game of keno, Gus?

GUS
I don't think so.

ROY
Come on, one game.

GUS
(bites his head off)
I said, I don't think so. That means no.

ROY
Okay, okay. What crawled up your ass?

GUS
Old age.

Gus gets up. Walks out.

INT. GUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dark. The only light coming from the big-screen. ESPN is on but there's no sound.

Gus stands in the shadows. Contemplating a wall filled with photos. Pictures of Gus with famous ballplayers. From Mays to Mantle, Drysdale to Koufax.

Pictures of Mickey run a very close second. Grade school through college. One picture stands out. A very young Gus with a woman. They hold a newborn.

He shifts from picture to picture, gazing at his past. Finally moves away. Wanders through the apartment. Feeling it's emptiness.

An old man, who suddenly feels alone. Goes to the refrigerator. Reaches for the security of a beer can.

He sits in his Barcolounger, sipping his Bud. Ever so softly he starts to sing. A song from the past, a song he enjoyed.

GUS

(quietly)

... Rollin' in my sweet baby's arms,
I'm rollin' in my sweet baby's arms...
gonna lay round' that shack, till the
mill train gets back... gonna roll in
my sweet baby's arms...

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A popular place downtown. It's bright, alive, lots of energy. Mickey's at a big table with a group of friends.

They all laugh and carry on, telling one bad lawyer joke after another. It's STEVE's turn.

STEVE

Why do they bury lawyers under twenty
feet of dirt? Because deep down,
we're really good people.

Mickey doesn't find them all that funny. Laughing halfheartedly at best.

STEVE (CONT'D)

What's the difference between a dead
dog in the road and a dead lawyer in
the road? There's skid marks in front
of the dog.

A roar. Mickey forces a smile. Steve looks at her.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Come on, Mickey. We're just kidding.
Everyone knows that you intend to
restore honor and nobility to this
once proud profession. This is all in
jest, because I think everyone at this
table would agree that... deep down,
we really are good people.

Everyone laughs, including Mickey.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

GREG, looks like he just stepped off the cover of GQ. He's cornered Mickey, baring his soul. Her friend, Carol, watches with amusement.

GREG

People just don't understand.
Sometimes it's very difficult being
this attractive.

MICKEY

Been tough on you, huh?

GREG

It can be a barrier. People don't get
to know the real me.

(taps chest)

What's in here.

Leans in close.

GREG (CONT'D)

Mickey, have you ever thought how
perfect we would be together? We're
already friends, both lawyers, both
good looking. If you look at it on
paper, it makes perfect sense.

MICKEY

But that's not how I look at it. On
paper.

GREG

Don't tell me you believe in destiny,
and the stars, and all that nonsense.

She thinks about it.

GREG (CONT'D)

Mickey, come on. You're a lawyer.
You're not allowed to believe in that
stuff.

Two WAITERS stand off to the side. They're talking about the
Braves game.

WAITER #1

A no-hitter. Glavine was awesome.

WAITER #2

Couldn't have done it without that
catch by Jones.

Mickey strains to hear.

MICKEY

(calls to waiter)

Waiter...

He walks over.

MICKEY (cont'd)

Did you say Glavine pitched a no-hitter?

WAITER #1

Walked one guy or he would have had a perfect game. He was blowing people away.

MICKEY

I doubt that.

WAITER #1

What?

MICKEY

Glavine doesn't blow people away. His heater, is mid-eighties, tops. Makes his living on the corners.

Greg and the Waiter stare at her. Big blank looks.

MICKEY (cont'd)

Sorry. Where were we? Something about you being good looking.

Waiter walks away.

GREG

You're quite a baseball fan.

MICKEY

Used to be.

GREG

I've played softball.

MICKEY

(whoopee)

Really?

GREG

Before law school, when I was modeling. The agency I was with had a team. Guess what we were called?

MICKEY

I'm afraid to.

GREG

The Face-Jocks. Isn't that great?

Mickey. Dying.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

She steps inside, gives the dead-bolt a turn and slumps against the door.

Crosses the room, undressing as she goes. A trail of clothing leading to her bedroom.

INT. MICKEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Goes to her nightstand, hits 'play' on the answering machine. Puts on a robe. We HEAR the messages as she goes into the bathroom to start a bath.

CAROL'S VOICE

Hi Mickey, it's Carol. Just calling to see if anything happened between you and Greg.

MICKEY

Not a chance, Carol.

CAROL'S VOICE

He's so good looking.

MICKEY

Yeah, he told me.

CAROL'S VOICE

Maybe he's there right now.

MICKEY

He's probably home giving himself a facial. Sorry, Greg. Just kidding.

CAROL'S VOICE

I'll call you tomorrow.

BEEP. Next message.

WATSON'S VOICE

Mickey, it's Morgan Watson from Schwartz, Rosenbloom and Watson.

Mickey freezes.

WATSON'S VOICE (CONT'D)

I've spoken with the other partners...

Hanging on his every word.

WATSON'S VOICE (CONT'D)

... we'd like to know when you can start?

MICKEY

Whoa! Whoa! Yes! Thank you!

She breaks into a celebration that would rival most NFL touchdown dances.

INT. SCHWARTZ ROSENBLOOM WATSON - LOBBY - DAY

Mickey sits on a big leather couch. She looks more like a CEO than someone starting their first day of work.

Leafs through a collection of magazines. FORTUNE, BUSINESS WEEK, MONEY. A perky RECEPTIONIST, turns to her.

RECEPTIONIST

He'll be right with you. Welcome aboard.

MICKEY

Thank you.

Mickey's about to pick up another magazine when she sees a big bold headline -- GLAVINE PITCHES A NO HITTER. It's the sports page.

Contemplates it. Finally can't resist. Picks it up to read. The receptionist peeks over her glasses, eyeing Mickey curiously.

Morgan Watson walks out through a door. She quickly pushes the paper aside.

MORGAN

Come on, they're moving your furniture in. You like plants?

MICKEY

I love plants.

MORGAN

Talk to Ruth, she'll order whatever you want.

They disappear through the door down a hallway.

INT. LAW FIRM - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Morgan walks Mickey by various offices. They come to a stop. Movers bring furniture into an office.

MORGAN

Take a look. It's your new home.

Mickey steps in. Picture windows give her a great view of Atlanta. Looks around, taking it all in.

MICKEY

I like it.

He hands her a stack of files.

MORGAN

Your first case.

Mickey looks at him, surprised.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

I told you we were behind.

INT. MICKEY'S OFFICE - SAME DAY - LATER

Surrounded by unpacked boxes Mickey sits hunkered down at her desk reading through file after file. A knock at the door, and the receptionist steps in.

RECEPTIONIST

You have a visitor.

Pete steps into her office.

MICKEY

(shocked)

Pete...

INT. MICKEY'S OFFICE - SHORT TIME LATER

Pete and Mickey stand at the window, looking out over the city.

MICKEY

I haven't noticed anything.

PETE

He's at that age where people start to question your ability. I know it's not right, but it's the way it is.

(MORE)

PETE (cont'd)

If something goes wrong up in Carolina with Gentry... he could be out of a job.

Mickey goes back to her desk. Tries to busy herself with another file.

MICKEY

Well, what do you want me to do?

PETE

I don't know what your situation is here, but...

Drops the file on the desk. Pestered.

MICKEY

It's my first day, Pete. That's my situation.

Pete just looks at her.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

What? You want me to go with him?

PETE

That would be going against team policy. I couldn't ask you to do that.

His words say one thing. His eyes another.

INT. MICKEY'S OFFICE - SAME DAY - LATER

Her office is busy with activity. Movers bringing in a sofa, a carpenter hanging pictures.

Through the chaos, Mickey talks on the phone, distracted.

MICKEY

Listen, I'm still pissed at you for that slap on the ass thirty years ago.

The CARPENTER motions to the picture.

CARPENTER

What'd you think? Higher, lower?

MICKEY

(to carpenter)

That's fine. Leave it.

(back to phone)

(MORE)

MICKEY (cont'd)
 Lloyd, I don't really have the time to
 being going back and forth with you.
 Just tell me, okay?

Intercut Doctor's office as needed:

LLOYD
 Mickey, it's a patient's right to
 privacy.

One of the MOVERS.

MOVER
 With the coffee table or without?

MICKEY
 The hell with his privacy. I'm his
 daughter.

The mover gestures, 'well'?

MICKEY (CONT'D)
 (to mover)
 With -- no -- without. Sorry.

LLOYD
 Then he can tell you.

MICKEY
 Oh right, that'll happen. Lloyd...
 please.

Another mover comes in with a large ficus tree.

LLOYD
 He may have glaucoma.

MOVER
 Where do you want it?

Mickey THROWS up a halting hand. Everything around her seems
 to wash out. The phone call now has her complete attention.

INT. GUS APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Gus stands over the stove. Frying up a burger to a black
 crisp. Grease screams out of the skillet, splattering
 everywhere.

If the apartment had a smoke alarm, it'd be blaring.

He pours mounds of catsup directly onto the shrivelling piece
 of meat.

His cigar dangles in his mouth, an occasional ash dropping into the skillet.

The front door opens. Gus hears it. Calls out.

GUS

If this is a robbery, you can have everything but the big-screen.

The door SLAMS shut. Mickey comes in, straight from the office. She's frazzled, spent, and wet from the rain. Tries to wave away the smoke.

MICKEY

You set off a bomb in here?

GUS

I'm sauteing some burgers.

MICKEY

How about opening some windows?

GUS

It's raining.

She goes through the room opening windows.

MICKEY

Outside it's raining. Inside you've got a four-alarm blaze.

GUS

Did somebody die? This isn't our dinner night.

MICKEY

I came by to tell you about my first day at work. My very first day and I had a visitor. It was Pete. Pete came to see me.

Gus flips the meat.

GUS

You see the news? Glavine pitched a no-no.

MICKEY

He wanted to ask me if you're okay.

GUS

A little red meat now and again is not gonna hurt you. Could probably use the protein.

MICKEY

I told him I thought so, but I called
Lloyd just to make sure.

Mickey stares at Gus, waiting for some kind of response.
There isn't any. He concentrates on his burning burger.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Were you planning on telling me?

The shrieking meat is reaching a crescendo. Mickey moves
around Gus. Cuts the flame. Pushes the skillet into the
sink.

GUS

That was a fine piece of meat.

MICKEY

Lloyd told me, okay? Will you talk?

GUS

Goddamn guy couldn't keep a secret to
save his ass. What's left to talk
about?

MICKEY

Oh let's see, meeting with a
specialist, the prognosis, how you're
feeling, little things like that.

GUS

I feel fine, I just can't see all that
well. Prognosis? Who the hell knows,
because I'm not doing anything until I
see this kid in North Carolina.

MICKEY

Do you know what glaucoma is?

GUS

Yeah, it's the green shit they give
you at Mexican restaurants.

MICKEY

Oh that's great. Joke about it,
pretend it's not there.

GUS

Listen to me. I have a job to do, and
if I don't do it the Braves will get
someone who can. They already think I
should start spending my time playing
bingo and getting drunk on umbrella
drinks.

MICKEY

They can't fire you for having
glaucoma.

GUS

But they can phase me out. My
option's up in six months.

MICKEY

How are you going to scout him with
your eyes not right?

GUS

I'll manage.

MICKEY

How?

GUS

It's what I do. I'll handle it.

Looks at her.

GUS (cont'd)

Is there anything else?

MICKEY

You know, I had this crazy notion that
we might be able to talk about this,
rationally.

GUS

Just don't worry about it.

MICKEY

I wish it were that easy. I really
do.

Gus stares at her. She goes to the door. Looks at him.
Leaves.

GUS

Nice seeing you too.

EXT. GUS' APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Rain pours down. Mickey makes a dash for her car. In a few
short seconds she's drenched.

Jumps in. The rain beats against her windshield. She doesn't
move. She just sits. And sits. Staring out into the wet
night. A tear runs down her cheek.

INT. LAW FIRM - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Schwartz, Rosenbloom, and Watson, stare at Mickey across a table.

WATSON

Are you out of your mind? We've already assigned you a case. There's no one to pick up the slack.

SCHWARTZ

Do you know that lawyers line up around the block waiting for a chance to get in here.

MICKEY

I know. I know all that.

ROSENBLOOM

Mickey, we made it clear during the interview that we need you now.

MICKEY

It's only for a few days.

SCHWARTZ

What if he needs care at home?

MICKEY

He won't. Considering the circumstances can't you be a little lenient? I have to help him. There's no one else. It's his life.

SCHWARTZ

What about your life, your career? We have high hopes for you, Mickey.

MICKEY

I'll be back in no time and won't miss a beat. I'll bring my computer. E-mail everything back to you. The work'll get done.

She searches their faces for support. The partners exchange looks. Mickey sweats it.

WATSON

The client will be here next Thursday. We expect you'll be back to present the case.

MICKEY
(sigh of relief)
... Thank you.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Mickey comes out of the high-rise. Walks along the sidewalk.
Crosses the street. Cuts through a park.

In the park. A father gently tosses a ball to his young
daughter who tries to hit it.

Mickey sees them. Her walk slows. Finally stopping to watch.
Almost subconsciously, she says to herself...

MICKEY
... See the ball, hit the ball.

EXT. GUS' APARTMENT - DAY

Carrying a small travel bag, Gus walks to his car. Stops dead
in his tracks. Mickey stands next to the Mustang loading a
suitcase in the back.

GUS
Going somewhere?

MICKEY
North Carolina. It's nice this time
of year.

GUS
What the hell are you doin'?

MICKEY
You're going to need help.

GUS
I don't need any help.

MICKEY
I'm going with you.

GUS
I can take care of myself.

MICKEY
Look, you don't have to like it, you
don't have talk to me, but I'm going
with you.

GUS

This won't work.

MICKEY

Give me the keys. I'll drive.

Stare at each other. Both standing firm.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Well?

GUS

Christ Almighty.

He reluctantly hands them over. She's about to get in the car when she notices the scratch on the door.

MICKEY

What happened here?

GUS

The garage is shrinking.

EXT. MUSTANG - DAY

The Mustang makes it's way along the beautiful Blue Ridge Parkway. Mickey drives. Gus smokes.

GUS

What about your job?

She puts on a good poker face.

MICKEY

They were great. It's really slow right now, so it's not a big deal.

They pass a sign -- Welcome to North Carolina.

EXT. 'TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT MOTEL' - BLACK MOUNTAIN - DAY

The only motel in this tiny mountain town. A partially burned out vacancy sign struggles to flash, spelling... ANCY.

The Mustang pulls into the parking lot, top up.

INT. MUSTANG - CONTINUOUS

Gus and Mickey check out the motel.

MICKEY

This is...

GUS

Better than a goddamn Four Seasons.
Aren't you glad you came?

Pulling in from the other direction. Johnny in his Cadillac convertible, top down.

The fronts of their cars face each other. He checks out the motel.

JOHNNY

You've got to be kidding me. I'll
sleep in my car before I'll set foot
in this roach resort.

BOOM. A sensational THUNDER STORM fills the sky. Rain pours down.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

Jesus...

There's one spot open. They both go for it -- then stop, avoiding a collision. Mickey sticks her head out the window.

MICKEY

Excuse me, I was here first!

JOHNNY

I don't think so!

Sees his New York plates.

MICKEY

You're in the south now. Why don't
you try to find your manners!

Mickey punches it into the spot. She and Gus get out and hurry for the door.

Johnny hits the switch to activate the car roof. It starts to go up... gets about half-way and stops. Flicks the switch back and forth. Stuck. Pounds the steering wheel.

JOHNNY

Shit!

EXT. BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY - DAY

A shiny new BMW convertible speeds along the parkway.

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

A MAN, early thirties, drives. The wind can't make a dent in his slicked back hair. A map lays open on the seat next to him.

EXT. SWANNANOA HIGH SCHOOL - BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

The Swannanoa Grizzlies prepare to play another local high school. The players warm up.

People linger about, waiting for the game to start. A high school kid sells hot dogs from a stand.

HOT DOG KID

Support your Grizzlies! Eat a dog!

A group of players stand around BO GENTRY, 18, as he holds court.

Bo's a big white kid with all the accessories of a modern day baseball star. Wrap around reflector sunglasses, gold chain necklace. And attitude.

BO

First thing I do when I make it to the majors is meet the chick on 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'.

WILSON, a slightly built kid with glasses speaks up.

WILSON

What if she doesn't want to meet you?

BO

Wilson, that's a dumb question, but I'm going to be patient with you because you're not yet worldly. Once a player gets to the majors, chicks come out of a deep freeze -- they migrate from hundreds of miles for a chance to munch your unit. Celebrity chicks, non-celebrity chicks, chicks from every walk of life. It's a chick fest.

Gus and Mickey stand off to the side, watching the warm-ups. Mickey takes it all in.

MICKEY

I remember this.

GUS

What?

MICKEY

Everything. The smell of the grass,
the sun, the sound of the ball popping
in the glove.

Gus dismisses it.

GUS

Come on, lets go sit down.

BEHIND THE BACKSTOP:

A line has formed. Bo now sits at a small folding table with his FATHER. He autographs a stack of 8x10's.

FATHER

That'll be five dollars.

FAN

Five dollars? He's still in high
school.

FATHER

And when he's in the majors it'll cost
you fifty. You want it or not?

The fan reluctantly coughs up the money.

FAN

Instead of 'I'm giving you a
headache', can you write 'Jim, I'm
giving you a headache'?

BO

I don't normally customize my slogan,
it's not good to dick around with the
creative energies that I'm in tune
with.

FATHER

Cost you an extra five.

The fan glares at him. The father smiles smug. Bo continues to sign pictures. The coach, CHARLIE, walks over.

CHARLIE

Bo, we're ready to start.

FATHER

Give us a minute, Charlie. We got
some money to make.

CHARLIE

And I got a game to manage. Let's go.

Bo gathers his stuff.

FATHER

Charlie...

The father holds up a picture.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Half-off, for you.

Charlie looks at him. Spits a nasty wad of tobacco juice. Walks away.

EXT. SWANNANOA HIGH SCHOOL - DIRT PARKING LOT - DAY

Dust scatters. Johnny speeds up in his big Caddie, the top still stuck half-way up. He parks, jumps out. Makes his way through the crowd to the stands.

The stands are filled. Gus sits with Mickey. He looks around.

GUS

Jesus Christ, everybody's here. Surprised the goddamn Japanese aren't scouting him. It's damn near impossible for a kid to slip through. If he plays on a team, somehow someway, we'll find'em.

PLAY BALL. Bo struts to the plate, stands in the batter's box. Points to the pitcher.

BO

I'm giving you a headache!

The pitcher throws. WANK -- the distinctive sound of the ball off an aluminum bat. Bo drills the pitch into the gap.

Rumbles around first and pulls into second with a double. Throughout the stands men reach in their pockets and scribble in note pads.

Gus watches with his head turned, his ear cheating toward the field. Compensating.

GUS

Fastball?

Mickey looks at him, realizing what he's doing.

MICKEY

Yeah.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER IN THE GAME, bottom of the ninth. Scoreboard shows 3-2, Swannanoa trailing. Bo kneels in the on-deck circle. The pitcher, a HEAVY SET KID, winds and throws. Wild. Ball one.

He throws wild again, ball two. The next two pitches even more wild. Ball four.

The batter runs down to first. Bo steps to the plate. From the bench, one of the Grizzlies yells out.

GRIZZLY PLAYER

(to the pitcher)

You're in trouble now, Bacon Boy!

Trying to be sly, the pitcher looks at the Grizzly player and scratches his face, flipping him off.

The Manager hurries out to the mound.

MANAGER

You alright?

PITCHER

He calls me Bacon Boy again, I'm gonna kick his ass.

MANAGER

Listen to me. I want you to walk Gentry. Don't give him anything to hit.

PITCHER

Did you see the last four pitches? I don't think that'll be a problem.

Manager trots back to the dugout.

GRIZZLY PLAYER

Better put some grease on it, Bacon Boy!

PITCHER

Why don't you step out here and call me Bacon Boy!?

UMPIRE

(to the pitcher)

Come on, play ball!

Bo stands in the batter's box. The pitcher looks in for the sign. He throws, right down the middle of the plate. Bo crushes it.

The ball sails well over the left field wall. Game over. Grizzly players and fans scream with joy.

MICKEY

Geez, you'd think by now they'd pitch around him.

GUS

I think he tried to.

MICKEY

Nice swing.

Gus tries to sound convincing even though he can't see all the particulars.

GUS

Not bad.

EXT. DIRT PARKING LOT - DAY (LATER)

All the scouts stand around, waiting for a chance to talk to Bo. His father next to him, they walk to a car. Like a swarm of bees the scouts move towards him.

FATHER

(to the scouts)

We're not talking 'til after the playoffs. Then we'll give everyone an appointment at the house. If you'd like an autographed picture of Bo, he signs before every game. A bargain at five bucks.

They get in their car, drive away. Mickey looks at Gus.

MICKEY

Autographs?

GUS

You've been away a while.

They move to the Mustang, about to get in when Mickey notices the car next to them. Convertible Caddie.

MICKEY

That's the car from the motel yesterday.

JOHNNY

You'll be happy to know I found my manners. They were in my suitcase.

Mickey whirls around to see Johnny next to her.

MICKEY

You must be a comedian.

He suddenly brushes past Mickey. Wraps Gus in a bear-hug.

JOHNNY

Gus Lobel!

Gus looks at him. Johnny's a little surprised he doesn't instantly recognize him.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

What's the matter with you, it's me.

GUS

Johnny 'The Flame' Flanagan?

JOHNNY

Before your very eyes.

Gus throws his arms around him.

GUS

Son of a bitch... Johnny Flanagan. You used to throw the cover off the ball.

JOHNNY

Used to.

GUS

What the hell you doin' down here?

JOHNNY

Same thing you are. I'm a scout. For the Yankees.

MICKEY

The Yankees. How appropriate.

JOHNNY

(to Mickey)

Where's that southern hospitality I hear so much about?

They look at each other. Somewhere underneath it all, they like what they see.

GUS
This is my daughter, Mickey.

JOHNNY
It's nice to meet you. I think.

Gets in his car.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
(to Gus)
Gonna be at Boots tonight?

GUS
What the hell else would I be doin'?

JOHNNY
I'll buy you a drink.

Smiles, drives off. Mickey watches him.

MICKEY
So, how do you know 'Mr. Flame'?

GUS
I signed him years ago. Then they
traded him to the Yankees in a three
player deal. Was a helluva a pitcher.

INT. BOOTS BAR - NIGHT

You won't find any blended drinks here. Pool tables, a small
dance floor. And men getting drunk. Some good honky-tonk
plays in the background.

Gus sits at a table with Smitty, Max, and Lucious. They all
smoke, drink, and tell tall tales.

LUCIOUS
Babe Ruth wouldn't of done shit in the
Negro leagues. Fat ole' boy would've
washed up.

SMITTY
(irritated)
How bout' Hank Aaron? Would he have
washed up in the Negro leagues?

LUCIOUS
Gus?

GUS
Hell no. Henry could play.

SMITTY

(more irritated)

You're telling me Hank could play but George Herman Ruth couldn't? What about Gehrig, could he play?

LUCIOUS

Gus?

GUS

Don't want to say nothing about a man that was sick.

LUCIOUS

Me neither. But no, he couldn't play.

SMITTY

Let me get this straight. If you're black, you can play. But if you're white, you can't?

LUCIOUS

Gus?

GUS

That's right, brother.

Gus, Max, and Lucious bust out laughing.

GUS (CONT'D)

Smitty, how many goddamn years is it gonna take before you realize we're yankin' your chain?

SMITTY

You did it. You pissed me off.

Lucious slaps Smitty on the back. Gus puffs his cigar. He shines. Happy. No other place he rather be.

That feeling stops. Mickey walks in. All heads turn. She waves to Gus and the gang.

MICKEY

Hey, guys.

They all wave and watch her cross to the pool tables.

GUS

Shit. I'll be right back.

LUCIOUS

Been a long time since we've seen that little girl of yours, Gus.

GUS

Been a long time since she was a
little girl.

Gus walks over. Two DRUNK GUYS, stare at her unmercifully.

GUS (CONT'D)

What're you doin' in here?

MICKEY

Same thing I always did when we were
on the road. Shoot pool. Wanna play?

The two drunks stumble forward, nearly falling over
themselves.

TWO DRUNKS

Yeah!

GUS

Back off, you freakin' sewer rats.

They slither away.

GUS (cont'd)

This is no kind of place for you to
be.

MICKEY

I hate to ruin your image of me, but
I've been to a bar before. I've even
kissed a boy -- french kiss.

Gus throws up his hands in protest.

GUS

Stop it.

MICKEY

What do you want to do, lock me up in
the motel?

GUS

I want you back in Atlanta where you
belong.

MICKEY

Trust me, so do I.

Mickey picks up a que.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

So, why do they call him 'The Flame'?

GUS

What?

She points to the bar. Johnny sits having a beer.

GUS (CONT'D)

He had a hundred-and-five mile an hour fastball.

MICKEY

I've never heard of him. What happened?

GUS

Got into some sort of bar fight protecting his girlfriend. Ended up ruining his shoulder.

She sinks a stripe.

GUS (CONT'D)

How long you plan on playin'?

MICKEY

I'll probably close the place.

He doesn't want to hear anymore. Goes back to his table. Mickey drains another shot. RICK, good looking, comes over.

RICK

Practicing, or looking for some action?

MICKEY

Action? That sounds serious.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE GAME:

Mickey continues her impersonation of 'The Hustler', sinking shot after shot. Rick's concentrating a lot more on Mickey than the game.

RICK

I'm starting to feel like I've been had.

MICKEY

Just lucky.

RICK

My name's Rick.

MICKEY

I'm Mickey.

RICK

Live here in Black Mountain?

MICKEY

Just visiting. My dad's a baseball scout. He's looking at a player.

RICK

Bo Gentry?

MICKEY

Yeah.

RICK

I'm here from Lexington. With the Reds.

MICKEY

Eight ball, side pocket.

She shoots. Game over.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Well, thanks for the game.

RICK

Wanna dance?

MICKEY

I think I'll just stay here and practice.

GUS' TABLE:

Gus and the other scouts continue to carry on. All the while Gus keeps an eye on Mickey.

GUS

I'm goin to the bar. You guys ready for another?

They all nod affirmative.

POOL TABLES:

Rick steps close to Mickey.

RICK

Come on, one dance.

MICKEY
I don't think so, Dick.

RICK
It's Rick.

MICKEY
Sorry.

Moves even closer to her.

RICK
One dance won't hurt anything. After
the beating I just took, you owe me.

MICKEY
I owe --

She can't get the words out. Johnny is suddenly next to her.
Turns her around. Plants a big KISS on her.

JOHNNY
Sorry I took so long. Bartender was
buried.

Mickey, thunderstruck. Before she can recover, Johnny decides
to take the opportunity to kiss her again.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
... Missed you.

GUS' TABLE:

He watches, grimacing.

POOL TABLES: Johnny turns to Rick. Extends his hand to
shake.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Johnny Flanagan. Anything I can help
you with?

Poor Rick's in a daze.

RICK
Uh... bye.

Rick bolts. Mickey takes her pool cue and jams it between
Johnny's legs. Holding his manhood in the balance.

MICKEY
What the hell was that?

JOHNNY

I thought you might've been in trouble.

MICKEY

I can take care of myself.

As she removes the que from between his legs.

JOHNNY

Something tells me pretty well, too.

Beat. They look at each other.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

If you put the stick away, I'd love to buy you a drink.

She's about to answer when Gus steps between them.

GUS

Not exactly what I had in mind, but thanks, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Don't mention it.

MICKEY

Thanks for what?

JOHNNY

Nothing.

MICKEY

What?

GUS

That guy was just a little too close for my liking.

MICKEY

(to Gus)

You sent him over?

GUS

I asked him if he wanted to play pool with a beautiful woman.

JOHNNY

And I said --

MICKEY

I'm outta here.

JOHNNY

That's actually not what I said.

Mickey storms out. Gus looks to Johnny.

GUS

Shit.

EXT. BOOTS BAR - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Mickey and Gus stand in the middle of the lot. The 'Take it or Leave it' motel in the distance.

MICKEY

I'm thirty years old. Are you trying to make up for lost time?

GUS

The guy was being a nuisance.

MICKEY

I can handle it, okay? You don't have to send in Johnny 'The Flame' to save the day. He was just some harmless scout for the Reds that was about to get decked if he took a step closer.

GUS

He's away from home, he's up to no good. In case you didn't notice, women were not in the majority tonight. There couldn't have been more than three or four in the whole place, and by the looks of them they were probably bouncers. This isn't some yuppie bar in Atlanta. Most of these scouts are so damn oily, you need a pair of gloves to shake their hands.

MICKEY

I came here to help, not to stay locked up in my room.

GUS

I don't want your help and you don't want to be here. Let's make it easy on ourselves.

MICKEY

Unfortunately, we don't do things that way.

GUS
It's not a good environment.

He turns and walks.

MICKEY
Now what are you doing?

GUS
Left a full drink on the bar.

MICKEY
Are you okay to walk back to the
motel?

GUS
I may be blind as a slab of concrete
but I'm not totally goddamn helpless.

MICKEY
Are you ever going to understand that
I'm not going to melt being around a
bunch of scouts? I grew up this way,
remember?

He doesn't answer. Mickey watches him walk away.

MICKEY (CONT'D)
(quiet)
Damn you...

Covered by the night shadows. Johnny leans against the
outside wall. Watching.

INT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - MICKEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mickey typing away on her laptop. Files scattered around her.
She hears something. Stops typing.

From outside. A key struggling to find it's way into the
keyhole. The door finally opens. Then shuts. She's about to
resume typing when there's a bang.

GUS' VOICE
...Ahh!

She springs out of bed.

GUS' VOICE (CONT'D)
You son of a bitch. Stay the hell out
of my way.

She runs out of her room and knocks on Gus' door.

MICKEY
Are you alright?

Silence.

MICKEY (CONT'D)
Gus, are you okay?

GUS' VOICE
Fine.

MICKEY
Who're you talking to?

GUS' VOICE
The goddamn furniture.

MICKEY
Let me in.

GUS' VOICE
Go bed to bed.

MICKEY
Gus...

GUS' VOICE
Can't hear you. I'm sleepin'.

She waits at his door. There's no sound. No movement.

GUS
That means go back to your room.

Mickey sighs, exasperated. Goes back to her room.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Filled with players from the Swannanoa Grizzlies. Charlie drives. Bo sits in the front. Eyes closed. Rubbing pine tar on a bat.

BO
(chant like)
My name's Bo Gentry and I'm giving you
a headache. My name's Bo Gentry and
I'm giving you a headache...

The rest of the team is in the back, laughing.

PLAYER #1
Your mother's so ugly, she's got to
sneak up on a glass of water.

PLAYER #2

Well your mother's teeth are so yellow, her tonsils need sun glasses. And I've seen them when she tried to make-out with me.

The players roar. Bo gets up and storms over.

BO

Excuse me? Earth-to-losers? I'm trying to do my visualizing. I'm hitting homers, I'm signing endorsement deals, I'm banging chicks. Respect my space.

CHARLIE

Hey, everyone back in their seats! This is a big game.

Charlie checks the rear view.

CHARLIE (cont'd)

Looks like a funeral procession.

EXT. SCHOOL BUS - CONTINUOUS

A line of cars follows the bus.

INT. MUSTANG - CONTINUOUS

Mickey drives, trailing the bus. It's quiet. She suddenly starts laughing. Gus looks at her.

GUS

I miss somethin'?

MICKEY

I was just thinking about the time we were somewhere, Mississippi, I think, and they had that player race a horse around the bases.

GUS

It was Mobile Alabama and the kid won. I'll never forget that night. You damn near gave me a heart attack.

MICKEY

How?

GUS

Kept pesterin' me to let you sit on the horse. So I finally put you up there and the goddamn thing raced off like a bat outta hell, headin' straight for the center field wall. Thought he was gonna bust right through it and take you with him. Took both teams to finally chase him down. I wanted to take that goddamn horse straight to the glue factory for that.

Mickey, laughing and grimacing. Beat.

MICKEY

See, this can be fun. Like it used to be.

Gus stares ahead. Silent.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, did I mumble?

GUS

That was a long time ago.

Mickey stares at him. He doesn't look over.

GUS (CONT'D)

I'd like to get there alive. Will you watch the road?

She looks ahead and drives. The car rumbles down the road. Blows past a sign. 'Welcome to ARDEN'.

EXT. ARDEN HIGH SCHOOL - BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

The Grizzlies play the Arden team. Gus and Mickey walk up the bleacher steps. Johnny stands off to the first base side, watching them.

From Gus' POV the steps get blurry. He trips, falling hard.

GUS

Ahh!

Mickey bends down to him. People turn to look.

MICKEY

Are you alright?

GUS
Couldn't be goddamn better.

Johnny hurries over, helps him up.

JOHNNY
You okay?

GUS
I've gotta stop drinking in the morning.

JOHNNY
You hit pretty hard. Sure you're alright?

GUS
What're you two, a couple of nervous nellies? I'm fine. Now leave me the hell alone. I've got a game to watch.

Gus sits down. Mickey breathes deep. Nervous. Never seen her Dad so much as stumble. Johnny looks at her.

JOHNNY
You alright?

MICKEY
Yeah. Thanks.

JOHNNY
About last night...

MICKEY
Forget it.

JOHNNY
FYI... the kiss was my idea.

Johnny walks away.

On the other side of the field, the MAN we saw in the BMW sits in the stands watching Gus and Mickey.

They finally get settled. Gus lights a cigar. Mickey gets up.

MICKEY
I'll be back.

GUS
Where you going?

MICKEY

Third base side.

GUS

Make sure you watch his hips.

MICKEY

I know.

GUS

See if they carry him through the ball.

MICKEY

Yeah, I know.

GUS

Watch his swing. Is it a two-piece, or fluid? Then move to the right side and see how --

GUS/MICKEY

He goes the opposite way.

They look at each other. Gus knows there isn't much he can tell her that she doesn't already know.

GUS

Well, what are you waiting for?

She walks to the third base side. From the first base side Johnny stares at her. He follows.

Mickey sets herself just right to watch Bo. Johnny comes over and steps next to her. Obstructing her perfect position.

JOHNNY

This is a good idea.

MICKEY

You've been working the first base side, why all of a sudden the change?

JOHNNY

Because you're the first scout that I've ever been attracted to. Thank God.

MICKEY

I'm not a scout. I'm a lawyer.

JOHNNY

Tell you what, I'm not gonna to hold that against you. I'm still attracted to you.

Mickey studies him.

MICKEY

You just come right out with things don't you?

JOHNNY

It's the best way.

Bo steps to the plate. Mickey and Johnny line themselves up to get a good view. Johnny looks at her... inches a little closer.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

How would you feel about having dinner together? Maybe catch a little mud-wrestling afterwards?

MICKEY

I don't think so.

The pitcher peers in for the sign.

JOHNNY

Bring the heat.

MICKEY

He'll jump all over the heat. Come with the off-speed stuff.

The pitcher winds and throws. Heat. Bo drives it deep to left. Going -- going -- gone.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Told you.

She writes something in her notebook.

JOHNNY

Gus must have a lot of confidence in you.

She blows off his remark. Flips her book shut.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

So, what'd you see?

Looks at him. Considers.

MICKEY

He stayed back on the pitch. Uses his legs and hips for power. Looks like he has quick hands.

Mickey starts to walk away.

MICKEY (cont'd)

You're on your own.

JOHNNY

The mud-wrestling was a joke if that makes any difference. If you promise not to eat too much I'll even pay.

She turns to him. Almost gives him a smile. Walks away.

DISSOLVE TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS:

Bo hits another deep homer to left. Scouts reach for their note pads. Gus turns to Mickey.

GUS

What was it?

Mickey looks at him. Surprised he's asking.

GUS (CONT'D)

(off her look)

Well, you can see it better than I can.

MICKEY

Fastball. Hanging fastball.

BO'S NEXT AT BAT. The pitcher winds and throws. WANK. Bo flares a single to right field.

GUS

(listening)

That was different. Breaking ball?

MICKEY

You got it.

Gus stares ahead, puffing on his cigar.

EXT. ARDEN HIGH SCHOOL - BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Almost everyone has gone. Gus and Mickey stand at home plate. A bat and ball have been left behind.

Mickey demonstrates Bo's swing to Gus. The man from the BMW sits alone, watching them.

MICKEY

His bat speed is good. Quick hands,
stays back.

GUS

Wasn't exactly facing Nolan Ryan.

Mickey picks up the ball and hands it to Gus.

MICKEY

Show me what you got.

GUS

What?

MICKEY

Come on.

Gus hesitates.

GUS

I'm too old for this.

MICKEY

Come on. Just like old times.

Like they've done hundreds of times before, he walks out the mound. Mickey stands in the batters box. Gus looks at her.

GUS

Remember...

GUS/MICKEY

See the ball, hit the ball.

He lobs one up. With a beautiful swing, Mickey strokes it into the outfield. She starts to run the bases. Joyful. Gus watches her.

GUS

What're you doin'?

MICKEY

Enjoying my home run trot.

He smiles. Been a long time.

INT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - MICKEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mickey talks on the phone. Laptop open.

MICKEY

What'd you think?

Intercut Morgan Watson, law office as needed: He studies his computer screen.

WATSON

It's good. Real good. I just wish there was more of it. Hoping you'd be farther along.

She stresses.

MICKEY

Well... I'm... I'm working on it. I should have everything wrapped up real soon.

INT. BOOTS BAR - NIGHT

Johnny and Gus sit at the bar. Gus has had a few. He's open. Reflective.

GUS

... Somehow or other we got lucky, and weren't on the road. She was fourteen or fifteen, her first dance. Came into the room, nervous, asked me how she looked.

(beat)

It was like I'd just seen her for the first time. She wasn't a kid anymore. Looked like a woman. Like a beautiful woman. Like her mother.

JOHNNY

How old was Mickey when --

GUS

Five. Let me tell you somethin'. I wish it had been me. Every kid should have their mother.

JOHNNY

How'd you handle all that by yourself? Being a teenager, dating?

GUS

Sent her to prep school up north. Sent a fifteen year old girl away. That's how I handled it.

Gus takes a belt. Wanting to wash away the memory.

GUS (CONT'D)

So, what the hell you doin' Flanagan? Aren't you in over your head handling a number one pick? That's a lot of pressure.

JOHNNY

I'll be okay.

GUS

You never wanted to scout.

JOHNNY

A means to an end. Trying to stay in the game. There's going to be a job in the booth next year. Rizzuto's finally retiring. I'm going for it. Been doing some segment work. They know me. I just have to convince them I can handle the big time.

GUS

Announcing? You?

JOHNNY

It's what I want. I can't scout. I'm not cut out for it.

Gus looks at him.

GUS

You ever think about what might've been? If the Braves didn't trade you. If you didn't get in the fight?

JOHNNY

Just about every day.

Beat.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

So, did you ever tell her?

GUS

Who?

JOHNNY

Mickey. How beautiful she looked.

No answer. Stares into his glass.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Maybe you should.

GUS

Maybe you should tend to your own
goddamn business.

Drains his drink. Gets up. Walks out.

EXT. MOVING SCHOOL BUS - DAY

The bus travels down the road. The line of cars is longer.

EXT. SWANNANOA HIGH SCHOOL - BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Bo signing autographed pictures. Horny cheerleaders flirting
with him. His father collecting money.

HOT DOG KID

Support your Grizzlies! Eat a dog!

Johnny comes over.

JOHNNY

Whenever you get a chance.

He hands Johnny a hot dog. Johnny pays him. Moves to the
condiment table.

Gus steps up to the Hot Dog Kid.

GUS

Gettin sick of hot dogs. Want you to
start carrying pizza.

Johnny looks over to Gus.

JOHNNY

Hey, Gus. Nice seeing you last night.

GUS

Of course it was. It's always nice
seeing me. Gimme a hot dog, extra
onions.

The kid loads up the onions.

HOT DOG KID

Two bucks.

Gus opens his wallet. Things get blurry. He can't
distinguish the bills. He just stares into his wallet.

Johnny sees he's struggling. Calmly reaches in Gus' wallet and pulls out two dollars, hands them to the kid. Gus looks at Johnny.

GUS
Might be time for glasses.

JOHNNY
You and me both.

GUS
Last night... I didn't mean to --

JOHNNY
Don't worry about it. Come on, we got a game to watch.

Johnny and Gus walk to the stands. Mickey stands off to the side, watching the whole thing.

THE GAME:

Bo at bat. He hits a long homer to left. Starts to round the bases. Yells to the pitcher.

BO
I'm giving you a headache!

More Bo. He gets a hit, runs down to first. Mickey's on the first base side of the field with a stop-watch. She reads the time and makes a note of it.

The man from the BMW continues to watch Gus and Mickey.

INT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Mickey paces in the lobby while Gus talks on the phone.

GUS
They've got one more game, then the family will talk.

Intercut as needed:

INT. PETE KLIENE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

PETE
Word's out and it's all good. What'd you think?

GUS
I don't know yet.

PETE

Think the Yankees are gonna pass?

GUS

How the hell should I know?

PETE

Flanagan's there. Try and get a sense of what they're gonna do. If they pass I think we should take him.

GUS

How's my kid, Tommy Clark doin'? Did you send for his folks?

PETE

Yeah, I caught hell from Vince, but they're there.

Mickey tries to hurry him along.

MICKEY

I'm starving.

GUS

I'm gonna go, Pete. Me and Mick are hungry.

PETE

(pleased)

Mickey? She's with you?

GUS

Yeah. Taking in the sights. I'll call you later.

EXT. THE GROVE PARK INN - ASHEVILLE - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

Four star. Three hundred a night.

INT. GROVE PARK INN - ROOM - NIGHT

The BMW man is MATT NELSON, early 30's, well kept, with nary a hair out of place. Sips a cocktail and talks on the phone.

MATT

He's incredible. A monster. Three for three, two homers and a single. We could be looking at the next Mark McGwire.

Intercut as needed:

INT. PHILLIP'S OFFICE - NIGHT

PHILLIP

Oh man, this is epic. This is absolutely epic.

MATT

Six foot four, uses his hips and legs for power, and has quick hands.

Excited, Phillip reaches for some smokes.

PHILLIP

I need a smoke.

MATT

So, what do you want me to do?

PHILLIP

Make sure Grandpa doesn't screw it up. I want a shot at getting this guy. This could be the break I need.

MATT

I think he's got a helper.

PHILLIP

What'd you mean?

MATT

Some young babe traveling with him.

PHILLIP

Are you sure?

MATT

Yeah. Seems to know what she's doing too.

PHILLIP

Wait 'till Vince hears this. Listen to me, don't let Gentry get away. Keep your eye on him every step of the way.

MATT

You got it.

PHILLIP

How's the hotel?

MATT

Not bad. They make a nice martini.

INT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Gus and Mickey stand at the door to their rooms.

GUS

Gonna sleep like a baby after that meal.

MICKEY

I never thought bisquits and gravy could taste so good.

GUS

For years that's all I could get you to eat. When you were ten or eleven, we were at a night game in Shreveport. You weren't feeling well. So I brought you into the kitchen and talked them into makin' you some. Fed'em to you right there. Covered you up, and you fell asleep next to the bread oven. Slept the whole game.

Mickey smiles.

MICKEY

I think I remember that.

They look at each other. There's been a lot of good times. Gus fumbles with his keys. This is uncomfortable territory.

He struggles to get the key in the hole. Mickey tries to assist him.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

I'll get that.

GUS

I can do it.

MICKEY

Let me help you.

He JERKS the keys away.

GUS

I said I can do it!

She stops. Shocked. It's been a long time since she's been yelled at.

GUS (cont'd)
I don't need any goddamn help, okay?!
I'm not helpless!

Gus looks at her, a flurry of emotions. Angry, embarrassed, ashamed... he's almost shaking. He brushes past her down the hall.

MICKEY
Where are you going?

He turns the corner. Walks out the door.

MICKEY (cont'd)
Shit.

Goes after him.

EXT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - NIGHT

Mickey steps out front to see Gus taking off in the Mustang. She runs after him.

MICKEY
Wait!

He drives away. Panicked. She looks around for help. Sees Boots Bar across the lot.

INT. BOOTS BAR - NIGHT

Mickey hurries in. Spots Johnny at the bar. Hurries over.

MICKEY
I need your help.

INT. MOVING CADDIE - NIGHT

Johnny drives. Mickey's a wreck.

MICKEY
He could get himself killed.

JOHNNY
There's only two bars in town. We'll find him.

MICKEY
What am I doing? I should just leave him alone, like he wants.

(MORE)

MICKEY (cont'd)
I'm risking the best job in Atlanta
trying to help someone who doesn't
want it? Does that make any sense?

JOHNNY
Yeah. Makes a lot of sense.
Do you know how lucky you are? I lost
my father at fifteen. I'd give
anything to have him back.

MICKEY
I'm sorry.

She stares out the window.

MICKEY (CONT'D)
I'd guess I'd give anything too.

EXT. THE OTHER BAR - NIGHT

The Caddie pulls into the parking lot. Mickey sees the
Mustang.

MICKEY
He's here.

INT. THE OTHER BAR - NIGHT

Johnny and Mickey walk in. Gus sits alone at the bar. Mickey
hesitates. Staring at him. Johnny encourages her to go over.
He hangs back.

She crosses to the bar. Sits next to him. Gus doesn't look
at her. Stares ahead. She treads softly, trying to find a
way in. Beat.

MICKEY
Try to understand... I'm... worried.

GUS
You're like a dog with a bone. You
need to let it go.

She looks away, feeling like she's just been kicked in the
stomach. Gets up.

MICKEY
I'll wait for you in the car.

EXT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - NIGHT

Johnny leans against his car. Mickey walks out the front door.

MICKEY

He's a mean SOB, but he's safe and sound.

She stands next to him against the car.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Thanks for your help.

They look at each other.

JOHNNY

Since we never had dinner, how bout' dessert?

MICKEY

No mud wrestling?

JOHNNY

No mud wrestling.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A lively place in Asheville. Mickey and Johnny sit at the bar playing sports trivia. Shots of tequila, punishment for the loser.

JOHNNY

Name the only team to have four twenty game winners in the same season.

MICKEY

'69 Orioles. Palmer, McNally, Cuellar, and Dobson. And they lose to the Mets in the series -- go figure. Did you know Palmer was the only one to win twenty games in a season after that?

Looks at her, blown away.

JOHNNY

You gotta be kidding me.

Downs his tequila.

MICKEY

Have you had enough?

JOHNNY

Fire away, hot shot.

MICKEY

Seventy five World Series, Carlton
Fisk hit the homer to win the game...

JOHNNY

Right.

MICKEY

Who hit the three run homer to tie the
game and send it into extra innings?

JOHNNY

(announcer like)

Here's the three two pitch. This
one's hit deep to center, way back,
way back, this baby's got a chance...
it's gone!!!

Johnny's really into it. People turn to look.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

It's gone! It's gone! It's gone!
Bernie Carbo has just tied the game!
Bernie Carbo has just tied the game!
Bernie Carbo has just tied the game!

The bar gets quiet. Everyone staring him. They start to
clap. Johnny bows.

MICKEY

(laughs)

You know something? You're good. You
sound like the real thing.

JOHNNY

Lets hope the Yankees agree with you.

MICKEY

I'd listen to you.

He motions for Mickey to do her shot. She does.

JOHNNY

Who's the only player to be named MVP
in both leagues?

MICKEY

Frank Robinson. Cincinnati and
Baltimore.

JOHNNY

Shit.

Does his shot.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Traded for?

MICKEY

Milt Papas.

JOHNNY

Damn.

Does another shot.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You're trying to get me drunk, aren't
you? Hoping to get lucky.

A band plays. In the center of the dance floor a group of
people are clogging. Mickey and Johnny watch.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Too much moonshine? What are they
doing?

MICKEY

Clogging. It's an old mountain dance.

JOHNNY

Where I'm from they'd take you right
to Bellevue for that.

MICKEY

You want to try it?

JOHNNY

I'm not much of a dancer.

MICKEY

It's really fun.

Gives him a killer smile. One that he can't resist.

JOHNNY

I'll deny it ever happened.

They get up and go to the dance floor.

MICKEY

Just try and keep up.

They fall into line and go for it. Before long Johnny's doing great, enjoying the dance and definitely enjoying Mickey. The crowd gathers around, cheering them on.

EXT. ASHEVILLE - NIGHT

The lights of the city skyline sparkle against the back-drop of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Johnny and Mickey walk the quiet streets.

JOHNNY

... It was my first start after being called up. There was nothing like it. Putting on those pinstripes, taking the mound... thinking about all the great players that have played there. Every once in a while, life grants us a moment that tells us we're alive. That was my mine. Guess I've been looking for another moment ever since.

MICKEY

What was the fight about?

JOHNNY

A guy had too much to drink. Was yelling at his girlfriend. She started to cry. He kept telling her to stop, but she couldn't, she just couldn't... she was embarrassed and hurt. He kept on yelling. I went over to see if she was okay. He didn't like that very much. Next thing you know, I'm out for the season. And every season after that.

MICKEY

You mean... Gus told me it was your girlfriend.

JOHNNY

No. I didn't know her.

Mickey studies him.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

If I had minded my own business...

MICKEY

Why didn't you?

JOHNNY

Because I gotta sleep at night.

MICKEY

... Nice.

JOHNNY

So, what's Mickey short for?
Michelle?

MICKEY

Mickey is short for Mickey. Mickey
Mantle. Gus scouted him. Begged the
Braves to sign him. They wouldn't.
He told them he was so sure that
Mantle would be a star, he'd name his
unborn kid after him. Here I am.

JOHNNY

Good thing he didn't scout Yogi Berra.

She laughs.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

So, what's wrong with Gus?

MICKEY

There's nothing wrong with him.

JOHNNY

You can trust me.

Looks at him.

MICKEY

How do I know that?

JOHNNY

When he scouted me, we spent a lot of
time together. Was always good to me.
Told me the things I needed to work
on, things I needed to know. Told me
he had a daughter in college. He
would laugh and say she was smarter
than him and me put together. I think
when I was traded it bothered him more
than it did me.

(beat)

I like Gus.

Mickey stops walking.

MICKEY

Why can't he ever tell me anything?

JOHNNY

My guess is that he wants to.

MICKEY

Men from the south, born in the first half of this century aren't real inclined to share their feelings. I hate to make such a sweeping statement, but it's the truth. When my mother died, he re-married and her name was baseball. Everything was okay as long as it was baseball. But then things started to change... and now I hate this game.

JOHNNY

You don't hate it. I've watched you. You're a natural. You belong.

MICKEY

You think you're pretty smart, don't you, Yankee-boy?

JOHNNY

Is that a good thing? Are you attracted to smart Yankee-boys?

MICKEY

They've got to have it both. Here and here.

She points to her heart and head.

JOHNNY

Then I'd have to say I'm pretty much what you're looking for. I was voted 'world's biggest softy' in high school.

MICKEY

Were you now?

They come to an old-time Street Musician playing the guitar and singing the hell out of a bluesy ballad.

Mickey drops a dollar in his open case. He nods his 'thanks'.

MUSICIAN

It's a good night for dancing.

Like nervous teenagers they assess the situation.

MUSICIAN (cont'd)

Don't be shy.

JOHNNY

You heard the man. Make a move on me.

MICKEY

I barely know you.

JOHNNY

I'm really a great guy.

Mickey takes his hand. They come together and dance. Slow. The romantic light from the moon shining over them. Mickey is thoroughly enjoying herself when...

MICKEY

... This is really nice, but can you take me back?

JOHNNY

What's wrong?

MICKEY

I've gotta work.

INT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - MICKEY'S ROOM - MORNING

Mickey sleeps. On top of the covers. Fully clothed. Laptop on. Papers strewn everywhere.

Dead-to-the-world. Doesn't hear the KNOCKING on the door.

GUS' VOICE

You tryin' to starve me to death?
Let's go. I'm hungry.

Slowly stirs, coming back to life.

GUS' VOICE (CONT'D)

You got a man in there?

MICKEY

... We're taking a shower together.

Drags herself off the bed. Opens the door.

GUS

Not funny.

Gus looks her over. Sees the mess of the room.

GUS (CONT'D)

What's goin' in here?

MICKEY

Working.

GUS

For what? Thought you said it was slow.

MICKEY

I'm trying to make a good impression.

INT. PETE KLEIN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Pete works at his desk. Phillip comes in.

PETE

Morning.

PHILLIP

So, I hear the old man has a girlfriend up in North Carolina. A young one.

PETE

What're you talking about?

PHILLIP

Lobel. Matt Nelson tells me he's got a babe with him.

PETE

What the hell is Matt Nelson doing in Gus' territory?

PHILLIP

I sent him to make sure everything goes okay. Just trying to cover our asses, Pete. I hear we could be talking about the next Mark McGwire. We don't want any mistakes, do we?

PETE

Listen, you jack-ass, the 'babe' is his daughter, Mickey.

PHILLIP

Well from what Matt tells me she knows the game. Wouldn't be helping him, would she? Come on, Pete. We can't let the daughter of one of our scouts impact an important Atlanta Braves decision.

Pete stares fire at Phillip. Not hiding his disdain.

PETE

You're just a real team-player, aren't you, Phillip?

PHILLIP

This is business, Pete. Don't take it so personally. I'm not after your job because I just want to be 'Director of Scouting'. I want the GM job. You know how it works.

PETE

Get the hell out of my office.

Phillip looks at him.

PHILLIP

Mark McGwire. Pretty important stuff.

He leaves.

INT. DINER - DAY

A mix of truckers and locals. A crusty WAITRESS leans against the counter sucking on a cigarette, working a crossword puzzle. She surveys Gus and Mickey. Gus eats.

WAITRESS

You kids doin' alright?

GUS

Just fine.

WAITRESS

Wouldn't happen to know the state bird of New Jersey would ya'?

GUS

It's a trick question. There are no birds in New Jersey.

Gus looks at Mickey's plate. She hasn't touched her food. She stares off. A thousand miles away.

GUS (CONT'D)

Some good food goin' to waste.

MICKEY

Did I ever tell you how much I hated that place?

GUS

What?

MICKEY

Boarding school. It always felt cold, even when it wasn't. I hated everything about it. The uniforms they made us wear, those stuck-up attitudes.

She looks at him.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

And I hated you for sending me.

GUS

What're you doin'? Did I say something wrong? We're here to watch a kid play baseball, not to --

MICKEY

Talk, right? Everything's okay as long as we don't try to talk. Well there's no TV, there's no game on. It's just you and me.

Gus is panicked. Tries to signal for the waitress.

GUS

I need a check.

MICKEY

For the longest time I'd thought maybe I'd done something wrong, and that's why you sent me away. And then I just figured that's the way you wanted it. So I always pretended like everything was okay.

GUS

This is not the time or the place.

MICKEY

Are you kidding? There's never been a time or a place.

GUS

Jesus, do you have to start this? Do you have to turn into some dime-store psychologist?

MICKEY

Sorry. I'd hate to make you uncomfortable.

She gets up. Walks out.

The waitress is still in deep deliberation over her puzzle.
Gus blows.

GUS

A check! I need a GODDAMN CHECK!

The place goes quiet.

WAITRESS

Sure thing, honey.

EXT. SWANNANOA HIGH SCHOOL - BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

The league championship game. The Morgantown Devils play the Grizzlies. The stands are packed. Local news crews are set up around the field.

People line up against a cyclone fence stretching down both foul lines.

Some diehards stand on the hoods of their cars trying to get a view.

The marching band stomps around the field blaring the school fight song.

Lucious, Max, and Smitty sit together.

SMITTY

(to Lucious)

You're telling me Cy Young couldn't pitch?

LUCIOUS

Not like Oil-Can-Boyd.

MAX

He's gotta point, Smitty.

SMITTY

Cy Young won more games than anyone in baseball history.

LUCIOUS

Maybe, but he was no Oil-Can.

Gus and Mickey sit in the stands. Both silent. Mickey makes herself busy with her note pad.

Gus prepares to light his cigar, taking longer than usual. Tries to ease the tension.

GUS
Let's hope for a good game.

MICKEY
Let's hope.

Johnny squeezes his way through the crowd. Walks over to Gus and Mickey.

JOHNNY
My two favorite people in the entire state of North Carolina. How are you?

GUS
Fine.

MICKEY
Fine.

JOHNNY
Okay... listen, don't let me interrupt. I'm going to go take my seat.

Johnny leans down to Mickey.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Get your work done?

MICKEY
Yeah.

JOHNNY
Had a nice time. I'm quite a dancer aren't I?

He gives her a wink. She can't help but smile.

CUT TO:

THE GAME IN PROGRESS:

Bo at bat. He digs in. The pitcher looks in for the sign. He throws. Bo hits a single to left. Again, Gus has his head turned, favoring his hearing.

GUS
Off-speed, right?

MICKEY
Yep.

LATER IN THE GAME:

Scoreboard shows 6-6. A Grizzly player at bat. Pitcher throws -- ball four. The player runs to first. Crowd cheers as Bo walks to the plate.

BO
(to the pitcher)
I'm giving you a headache.

GUS
Why doesn't the catcher throw down the two? He's been hittin' the one all goddamn day.

MICKEY
(yells to the catcher)
Yo, Catch! Mix it up a little!

The catcher peeks over his shoulder. Mickey stands up and flashes two fingers down, for the curve.

The pitcher looks in for the sign. He nods and throws. Bo swings and pops it up. Gus looks at Mickey.

GUS
Did you hear that?

MICKEY
What?

GUS
Was that last pitch a breaking ball?

MICKEY
Yeah.

GUS
Son of a bitch, that's it. It's a different sound when he hits the breaking stuff. Like he's getting everything off the end of the bat. Have you noticed a hitch in his swing?

MICKEY
No.

GUS
Get down there. Next at bat, look for it when he swings at any breaking balls.

MICKEY
What if they don't throw him any?

GUS

Tell'em to. They seem to listen to you.

NINTH INNING:

Scoreboard shows 7-6. Grizzlies trailing. Charlie paces the dugout encouraging the players.

CHARLIE

Come on, this is it. Let's go. Somebody get on base.

Mickey has positioned herself on the first base side. The first Grizzly steps to the plate.

The pitcher winds and throws. A line shot right back to the mound. Pitcher snags it. One out.

The next batter steps in. After a series of pitches he works the count to three-and-two. Excitement from the crowd swells.

The pitcher winds. Comes with the heat. Batter whiffs. Two out.

Wilson, is the last hope for the Grizzlies. He nervously walks to the plate.

Bo moves out to the on-deck circle. Both benches yell out encouragement to their players.

BO

Wilson!

He steps over.

BO (cont'd)

You better get your skinny little ass on base. I've got a chance to win the game. There's a lot of scouts here. This could determine how big my signing bonus is.

WILSON

I'll do my best, Bo.

Wilson steps in. Nervous as hell. Whispers a prayer.

WILSON (cont'd)

... Dear God, let me get a hit.

The pitcher kicks high and fires. It's inside. Very inside. Wilson takes it smack in the back. He flinches in pain. Walks down to first.

WILSON (cont'd)

I guess you misunderstood me. It was
let me get a hit, not get hit. Shit,
that hurt.

Crowd starts to cheer as Bo struts to the plate. Mickey moves
into position.

MICKEY

(to the pitcher)

Make him work!

The pitcher looks in for the sign. Catcher flashes 'two'.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Alright, lets see how you handle the
hook.

Pitcher winds and throws. A curve. Bo swings, fouling it
off. Mickey studies his swing. Concerned.

MICKEY (cont'd)

Oh shit.

The pitcher looks back in for the sign. Catcher signals for
another CURVE. Mickey watches Bo intently.

Pitcher throws. WANK. It's hit deep to left. Going - going -
gone. Mickey's not even watching the ball. Instead looking
at Bo, considering his swing.

The ball just barely clears the wall for a homer. Crowd
erupts. Mickey searches Gus out.

GUS

Is there a hitch?

MICKEY

Worse. Everything is back-side
generated.

GUS

Well, that's the end of that story.
He'll never make it.

Bo raises his arms as he rounds the bases. The Grizzly
Players storm the field in CELEBRATION.

Bo is greeted as a hero at home plate.

INT. MICKEY'S MOTEL ROOM - SAME DAY - LATER

Mickey holds the phone against her ear. Laptop open. On the screen we see a FOLDER -- Schwartz-Rosenbloom-Watson.

She pulls down the menu and scrolls to SEND. She highlights, clicks.

Intercut:

INT. LAW FIRM - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The three partners sit around a table. A printer spits out paper. They all read the pages. A phone rests between them, speaker on.

ROSENBLOOM

... Didn't leave yourself much time to spare, but this is terrific, Mickey. Good job. I'm impressed just reading it.

SCHWARTZ

Now we see why you were top of your class.

MICKEY

Thank you.

WATSON

I must say I had my doubts whether or not you'd get it done. You really came through.

ROSENBLOOM

The client's going to be very happy.

SCHWARTZ

When are you leaving?

She's breathes deep, hoping they wouldn't ask.

MICKEY

Probably some time tomorrow.

SCHWARTZ

Tomorrow? The client's here tomorrow. Three-o'clock.

MICKEY

We talk to the player tomorrow. There's nothing I can do about it.

The partners share a look of concern.

WATSON

Mickey, you've got to be here to present the material. It's a must.

She's stressed, trying not to choke on her words.

MICKEY

... I told you I would have the work done, and I have. I'm doing the best I can, but... I can't just leave him. Don't you understand?

SCHWARTZ

As good as this work is, you're putting yourself in a very precarious position.

ROSENBLOOM

Mickey, we'd all like to be sympathetic, but we have a practice to run. You're going to have to make a decision.

WATSON

It's the principle.

She's strangely affected by what she's just heard. Her life passing before her.

SCHWARTZ

Mickey...

She stares at the file on her computer screen. Puts the cursor on: Schwartz-Rosenbloom-Watson.

Slowly drags it to the trash.

On her screen: ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO THROW THIS ITEM AWAY?

ROSENBLOOM

Mickey are you there?

She clicks. YES.

MICKEY

You're right. It's the principle.

Lays the phone in the cradle. Turns off her laptop.

EXT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT MOTEL - BACK PORCH - NIGHT

A great southern night. Fire bugs dart across the night sky. Mickey and Johnny sit on a porch swing, staring out at the Blue Ridge mountains.

MICKEY

They're so beautiful.

JOHNNY

If you stare at them long enough they actually look blue.

They're completely in the moment. Enjoying the beauty. And each other.

Mickey softly starts to sing. It's the same song Gus sang earlier.

MICKEY

... Rollin' in my sweet baby's arms,
I'm rollin' in my sweet baby's arms...
gonna lay round' that shack, till the
mill train gets back... gonna roll in
my sweet baby's arms...

Johnny looks at her.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Gus used to sing it to me. Anytime we were feeling sad or down, we would sing it to each other... and feel better.

Gus stands at the screen door. Listening. And remembering. He waits a moment and steps out.

GUS

So, what're you gonna do with that number one, Flanagan?

They turn to see him.

JOHNNY

Try not to mess it up. Got any advice for me?

GUS

Save it. He can't hit a curve.

JOHNNY

The last homer was off a curve ball.

GUS
(to Mickey)
Tell'em what you saw.

MICKEY
He got it off the end of the bat.
When he hits the breaking stuff, it's
all back-side generated.

JOHNNY
Yeah, but he still hit it out.

GUS
The Sisters of the Blind could hit it
out with those goddamn aluminum bats.
Sweet spot's as big as a mule's ass.

JOHNNY
He's only eighteen. Don't you think
he can adjust?

GUS
Maybe, maybe not. Less than ten
percent of the kids signed ever get
called up. If he's got trouble with a
high school curve, using a tin bat,
they'd have him for lunch in the bigs.

JOHNNY
I don't know, Gus. From everything
the Yankees have heard, they think
we're drafting the next Barry Bonds.

GUS
He'd be damn lucky if he could be the
next Michael Jordan. It's not
everyday you get a number one. Be
careful.

MICKEY
Tell'em what's going on. That you
don't think they should take such a
big chance.

JOHNNY
Are you sure? Not even as a project?

GUS
You want to use the number one pick on
a project? Look, if you're just
tryin' to cover your ass, fine, sign
him. I don't work that way.

JOHNNY

I'm just trying to be sure.

GUS

Listen loud and clear to what I'm tellin' you. A lot of young scouts who don't know any better would draft him because they think he'll learn. But anything back-side generated is next to impossible to fix. It's a rhythm that's created at birth, like being a righty or lefty. Understand? I'm not signing him.

Gus steps in the door.

GUS (cont'd)

Now... bedtime for this old man.

He walks away into the lobby. Johnny looks to Mickey.

JOHNNY

Think he's right?

MICKEY

He's the best, Johnny.

She stands up.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Come on, I feel like doing something.

EXT. MOUNTAIN LAKE - NIGHT

A full moon throws beautiful light on the lake. Mickey and Johnny sit on the edge of a dock.

JOHNNY

Sooner or later, he'll give. Just keep working on him. Take charge. You're smarter than both of us, remember?

Mickey looks at him. Smiles.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

What?

MICKEY

You're all right, Flanagan.

They stare at each other, wanting to come together for a kiss.

Mickey gets up. Runs to a large tree. Stands behind it. She kicks off her boots and slides out of her jeans.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

What're you staring at?

JOHNNY

Nothing. Just admiring the bark on the tree.

In T-shirt and panties, she darts from the tree and dives into the soft silk-like water.

MICKEY

This is incredible. Coming in?

JOHNNY

I gotta tell you, I've never swam in a lake before.

MICKEY

What're you, a wimp?

He grins.

JOHNNY

But I've always wanted to.

Johnny starts to undress. It's slow, deliberate. They stare at each other. Both liking what they're feeling. He's down to his boxers.

He starts backing up. Mickey watching his every move.

MICKEY

I'm waiting.

He suddenly runs for the edge of the dock. Leaps. Coils into the cannonball. SPLASH.

He emerges from under the water. He's right next to her, face to face.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Isn't this beautiful?

JOHNNY

... You're beautiful. You're so beautiful.

They come together for a kiss. The water and the light from the moon dripping over their embraced bodies.

INT. MOVING CADDIE - DAY

Johnny drives through the town. He talks on his cell phone.

JOHNNY

... I'm trying to do what's best for the Yankees. Sure, I could play it safe and take him, cover my butt. But you don't want that. It's not everyday we get a number one. His power is back-side generated. Has trouble with the breaking stuff. The Braves aren't taking him either... because I know.

INT. MOVING CADDIE - DAY

Johnny driving. And singing. On the radio is Van Morrison's 'Crazy Love'. He's jacked. Singing at the top of his lungs, his voice creaks and cracks.

JOHNNY

... Love, love, love, love, crazy love... she gives me love, love, love, love, crazy love. She's got a fine sense of humor when I'm feelin' low down...

Turns down the radio, stops singing as he pulls up to a house. He looks at a slip of paper, checking the address. A wood plaque hangs on the front door... 'I'M GIVING YOU A HEADACHE'.

INT. PETE KLEIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Pete's too wound up to sit. He paces while he talks on the speaker phone.

PETE

What?!

Inter-cut Gus on the phone.

INT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

GUS

I'm not signing him.

PETE

I've heard nothing but great things about this kid.

GUS
He can't hit a curve, Pete.
Everything's back-side generated.

PETE
You saw it?

GUS
Yeah.

PETE
With your own eyes, you saw it?

GUS
What, you got shit in your ears?
Trust me, he's a dead-red hitter. He
needs to play in college. We can keep
an eye on him, see how he develops.

PETE
You know how I feel about you, Gus.
But God almighty if you're wrong about
this.

From the outer office area, Phillip walks in. Hears Gus on
the speaker.

GUS
I'm on my way to talk to him. I'll
see you in Atlanta.

Gus hangs up.

PETE
We're not signing the kid in Black
Mountain.

PHILLIP
What??

PETE
Gus says he can't hit a curve and
doesn't want to use such a high pick
on him. Gonna recommend that he go to
college.

PHILLIP
College? The hell with college!

Phillip races out.

INT. PHILLIP'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Phillip punches numbers on the telephone.

PHILLIP

Give me Matt Nelson... I don't know what goddamn room he's in, just get him!

INT. BO'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Gus and Mickey sit across from Bo and his father.

GUS

Less than ten percent of all the kids signed, ever make it to the big leagues.

FATHER

We know that.

BO

Hey man, I don't want any negativity, it's not good for my psyche. I'm hitting homers, I'm signing endorsement deals, I'm making something of myself. In addition to helping a team with my physical powers, I can be an asset creatively. I'm giving the marketing department my slogan free of charge. How huge is that? 'I'm giving you a headache' could be bigger than 'Just Do It'.

Gus looks at Bo. Would really like to slap him.

GUS

Mr. Gentry, I've been in baseball over fifty years. I've seen a lot of players. You're son has... among other things, talent. And if he accepts a scholarship to play in college, he can further develop his game and get a good education free of charge. But at this point, I think it's a mistake to forgo college and sign a minor league contract. I can't speak for the other teams, but the Braves won't be drafting him.

FATHER

Is this some kind of a bad joke?

GUS

Nobody's joking.

FATHER

What's wrong with you two? He's already committed to the Braves. Bo's going to the combine. We told the other guy that not more than twenty minutes ago.

GUS

What other guy?

FATHER

After the scout for the Yankees told us they weren't going to take him, Mr. Nelson from the Braves came in and offered us a contract.

MICKEY

Mr. Nelson? Who's Mr. Nelson?

GUS

Son of a bitch.

EXT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - DAY

The Mustang screeches into the parking lot. Gus and Mickey get out and hurry for the lobby.

GUS

I'm gonna yank his head through the goddamn phone line.

In the parking lot Johnny starts to drive out. Mickey sees him. Runs for the car.

MICKEY

Johnny wait!

She goes to the front of the car. Blocks him. Johnny stares at her. Cold.

JOHNNY

Front office just left me a message with the news. Getting duped by the Braves doesn't go over too well. Did you know I'd get fired or do you not concern yourself with the fallout?

MICKEY

Oh my God...

JOHNNY

They won't take my fucking call! I don't even get the chance to beg and plead! That's it!

MICKEY

It wasn't us. They went behind our backs.

The car moves closer.

JOHNNY

Gimme a break, alright?

MICKEY

Goddamn it, it's the truth!

The front bumper is now up against her.

JOHNNY

The truth, is that it's over for me. My shot at the booth, down the tubes, thank you very much. This was a way in, and now it's gone.

MICKEY

Johnny, please, you've gotta believe me.

JOHNNY

Get out of my way.

MICKEY

No.

JOHNNY

Move!

MICKEY

You're just a bunch of talk, you know that!? You come in here and tell me all the things I should do, and then you quit on me. You're nothing but a quitter!

The car moves, pushing her back.

MICKEY (cont'd)

Are you going to run me over?

JOHNNY

Get out of my way and I won't have to.

MICKEY

You want to go? Go ahead!

She steps out of the way. They look at each other. Johnny punches it. Car screeches away.

INT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - GUS' ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gus is packing. Mickey comes in.

GUS

I imagine I'll be receiving my retirement watch pretty soon. Their appreciation for all my years of service. Can always use a good watch. See how long it takes to piss in the morning.

MICKEY

If I would've seen it earlier...

GUS

It wouldn't have changed a thing. Phillip Snyder sent him. He's been here the whole time. Just to make sure I didn't screw things up.

MICKEY

Well, things are definitely screwed up. What're we going to do?

GUS

We're going home. My career just ended. Yours is gettin' started.

She stares at him.

MICKEY

I lost the job. They wanted me to come back, and I wouldn't.

The packing stops. Gus turns to her.

GUS

What??

MICKEY

I couldn't leave you.

Gus slowly implodes, his whole world shaking down.

GUS

No! Damn it, no!! I worked myself ragged so you could have more. And you throw it away to come to this... garbage can!? This is no kind of life for --

MICKEY

For a girl?

GUS

For my kid! Spending your summers living out of a suitcase, traveling from one shit hole town to another is not what I wanted for you.

MICKEY

How about what I wanted? I guess that didn't matter.

GUS

You don't like baseball!

MICKEY

I loved it! You know I loved it!

GUS

You were a kid. You didn't know any better. I didn't want you livin' life in the cheap seats.

MICKEY

They weren't cheap seats. You know why? Because I was with my dad. Spending every waking moment with my dad watching baseball games, eating food that wasn't good for me, shooting pool, staying up too late. Are you kidding me? I had the best seats in the house. And then one day my dad told me it'd be best if I go live with other girls my own age... and it all stopped.

GUS

I couldn't be everything! Can't you understand that?

MICKEY

I had what I needed. I had my father.

Their eyes are locked. Years of smothered feelings trying to break free. Gus wants to talk. But the words won't come.

He sadly turns back to his suitcase and resumes packing. Mickey walks out.

INT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - GUS' ROOM - NIGHT

Lights are out. Gus lies in bed, awake. He stares at the darkness. Reliving years of hurt. Of regret.

His insides scream. Gets up. Walks the small room. Hoping to quiet the voices.

He goes to the bed. Sits. Buries his face in his hands.

INT. TAKE IT OR LEAVE MOTEL - MORNING

Mickey comes out of her room. She looks to Gus' door. About to knock, she sees that it's open. Goes inside. Finds a note on the bed.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - DAY

Mickey speeds up in the Mustang. Sees Gus holding his bag, ready to board the bus.

She gets out of the car. Goes to him. They stare at each other.

GUS

It's better this way.

MICKEY

You going to be okay?

GUS

It's a four hour bus ride. Not a whole lot can go wrong.

The DRIVER shouts from the bus.

DRIVER

All aboard for Atlanta!

They look at each other. Gus steps towards her like he might hug her, but doesn't. Instead gives her an awkward pat on the arm.

He turns and climbs on the bus. Mickey watches. The bus rolls away.

INT. BOOTS BAR - DAY

Almost empty. Just a few professional drinkers at the bar. Mickey walks in.

BARTENDER

Can I help you?

MICKEY

No, just... looking for someone.

BARTENDER

Aren't we all.

She looks around. A small TV sits on the bar. There's a game on. She stares at it. The bartender watches her.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)

Sit down and have a drink. Watch the ballgame.

She walks out.

EXT. MOUNTAIN LAKE - DAY

Mickey sits on the edge of the dock staring out at the still water. Spiritless. Tosses a rock in the lake.

INT. MUSTANG - DAY

With no direction in mind, Mickey travels the country roads. She drives. And drives.

Passes a sign -- 'WELCOME TO TAYLORSVILLE'.

A stop light forces Mickey to view an old-time gas station, and a post office. Light turns green. She passes another sign:

'THANK YOU FOR VISITING TAYLORSVILLE COME BACK SOON'.

INT. MUSTANG - DAY

Farther out into the back roads. Mickey looks around. No idea where she is.

MICKEY

What the hell am I doing?

Stops the car. No one around. About to emotionally crash.
Leans her head on the steering wheel.

SMASH! The windshield cracks.

MICKEY (cont'd)

Ahh!! Oh my God...

She looks at the windshield. There's a BASEBALL STUCK RIGHT
SMACK IN THE MIDDLE, cracks all around it.

Two teenage boys come running across a field. GUN HARRISON,
18, and his brother DREW, 13.

GUN

Are you okay?

DREW

Did it hit you in the head?

MICKEY

No...

DREW

Good. Would've killed you if it hit
you in the head.

GUN

I didn't see your car.

DREW

You'd be dead as a doornail if it hit
you in the head.

MICKEY

It scared me half to death, will that
do?

GUN

Sorry about your windshield.

(looks to Drew)

I told you to back up.

DREW

You've never thrown it that far.

GUN

Yes I have.

DREW

No you haven't.

MICKEY

What happened?

GUN

He bet me I couldn't throw it across
the road.

MICKEY

Where were you throwing from?

GUN

The barn.

Mickey looks around.

MICKEY

What barn?

Gun points. She sees the barn. It's a good two hundred yards
across the field. Mickey looks back to Gun.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

You threw it from the barn?

GUN

(humble)

Yeah.

EXT. SIDE OF BARN - DAY

Drew squats behind a small piece of cardboard that serves as
home plate. Mickey stands next to him.

Gun is ninety feet away, pitching to him.

He's left handed. Although he's not polished, his talent is
obvious, raw. Lighting in a bottle. He lets one rip. It
nearly knocks Drew over.

MICKEY

(to herself)

Pinch me if this is a dream.

Gun continues to throw, evoking some serious memories of Sandy
Koufax.

DREW

Can we stop now?

He yanks off his mitt, then two pairs of garden gloves. His
hand is RED, burning.

MICKEY

Let me try.

Drew looks at her in disbelief.

DREW
Are you crazy?

MICKEY
Probably.

DREW
Maybe it did hit you in the head.

She takes the mitt. Kneels behind the plate.

MICKEY
(to Gun)
Give me another fastball.

GUN
Ma'am, are you sure?

MICKEY
Come on, bring it.

Gun kicks and fires. SMOKE. Mickey somehow snags it and throws it back.

MICKEY (cont'd)
Is that your favorite pitch?

GUN
Beg your pardon?

MICKEY
Can you throw a curve?

GUN
Never been showed a curve, ma'am.

Mickey walks over.

MICKEY
What's your name?

GUN
Gunthar. But I prefer Gun.

MICKEY
Do you play in school?

GUS
No, ma'am. Never had the grades to suit my dad. Kept gettin' B's in chemistry.

MICKEY
Thank God for chemistry.

GUN

Excuse me, ma'am?

MICKEY

Gun, would you like to learn how to throw a curve?

GUN

You can you teach me that?

MICKEY

Come here.

Mickey stands with Gun, holding up the ball, showing him all sides of it. Takes his hands and rubs them across the seams.

Demonstrates the different fingerings. Shows him all the ways the ball can rotate, and move.

She's a good teacher. Gun shifts his gaze between Mickey and the ball, totally focused. He's ready to try it. Mickey goes back behind the cardboard -- homeplate.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Let it fly.

He throws. THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CURVE WE'VE EVER SEEN. The ball looks wide, then drops perfectly over the plate.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Oh my God... will you throw that again?

Gun delivers another perfect curve.

MICKEY (cont'd)

Again?

He does. Pure beauty.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

We need to talk.

INT. GUN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Southern hospitality at its finest. Mickey sits with the Harrison family. JOE and THELMA, Gun and Drew. Everyone enjoying some high cholesterol fried chicken.

MICKEY

This is delicious, Mrs. Harrison.

MRS. HARRISON

Call me Thelma, honey. I'd be glad to give you the recipe.

MICKEY

Mr. Harrison, I know baseball pretty well. Gun has major league stuff. He has a gift.

JOE

I always thought he'd make a good school teacher.

MICKEY

Well, if that's what he wants to do I'm sure he can. He could teach in the off-season, he could teach when he retires. The way he pitches, he could buy his own school if he'd like.

Joe and Thelma have a conversation with their eyes.

JOE

What happens at the combine?

MICKEY

It's a big event showcasing all the hottest prospects. He'll throw for the front office. If they feel like I do, I think they'll offer him a contract.

JOE

I don't want to deal with a bunch of business people tryin' to take advantage of the boy.

MICKEY

You won't have to. I'll make sure of that.

EXT. BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY - DAY

Cracked windshield and all, Mickey drives south on the Parkway. The Harrison family follows behind in a late model station wagon.

EXT. BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY - DAY

Convertible top still stuck, Johnny heads north on the Parkway.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Johnny pulls in. The attendant walks over. Johnny doesn't notice him. He just stares ahead. The attendant looks at him.

ATTENDANT

Blink once for regular, twice for super.

Johnny looks to the garage.

JOHNNY

Got anyone here who can fix my top?
It's stuck.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

A mechanic works on the Caddie's roof. Johnny sits on the hood. He holds his recorder, laboring through his announcing. It's lifeless.

JOHNNY

Here comes the three two -- strike three. He missed it. That's the ballgame folks. Game over. You choked. Take your sorry-ass back to the clubhouse and think about what you let get away.

(really down)

... think about what you let get away.

The words hang in the air. He takes the recorder and throws it as far as he can across the road.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Johnny talks on the phone.

JOHNNY

(yelling)

Just let me talk to him, okay? ... I know I'm still fired... I just need to talk to him. It's important! It's very important!

Johnny looks around to see the attendants all staring at him.

INT. TURNER FIELD - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Vince, Phillip and Matt Nelson, sit across the table from Gus.

VINCE

(to Gus)

You can take an early retirement and collect disability. With the pension we offer, you should be comfortable.

PHILLIP

Thank God I sent Matt or this kid would've gotten away.

GUS

He can't hit a curve.

VINCE

Gus, now that we all know about your condition, I can't help but ask, how could you tell?

GUS

I heard it.

PHILLIP

(laughs)

You heard it?

GUS

I heard it, and Mickey saw it.

PHILLIP

Mickey saw it? This is getting interesting.

GUS

You're damn right she saw it.

Pete walks in. Turns to the person behind him.

PETE

Come on...

Mickey follows in. She and Gus stare at each other. Long.

PHILLIP

Well, her timing's good anyway. So let me get this straight. We were putting the fate of this years draft choice in Mickey's hands? Hey, I've got a two year old at home, maybe we should ask her what she thinks.

GUS

Phillip, if anymore shit dribbles out of your mouth, I'll reach down your throat and pull your tongue clean out.

Gus looks around the room. His emotions swirl. Everything in his life at a crossroads.

GUS (CONT'D)

She knows as much about the game as anyone in this room. And if she would've gotten any help from me along the way, she'd probably be running a team by now.

MICKEY

Dad...

GUS

But I didn't know what to do with her, so I pushed her away.

MICKEY

Dad, it's okay...

GUS

(to Mickey)

Under the best circumstances I'm pretty sure that most parents have their share of guilt. Things they should've done that they didn't, things that needed to be said, that weren't.

(beat)

We didn't have the best circumstances. You were robbed ... you needed your mother... and I needed her. I needed her help with all the things I didn't understand. All the things I couldn't do or say. Because this game is the only thing I know... and that shames me. I did what I thought was best for you. I never wanted you to end up like your old-man. And for years it's been hanging over me. Like pieces of broken glass, I been carrying this around inside. Blaming myself for not doin' better with you. And when I got tired of blaming myself, I blamed the game. But for better or worse this game is in my blood. And I didn't want to face it... but it's in your blood too.

Tears fill their eyes.

MICKEY

Why didn't you tell me? Talk to me?

GUS

I didn't know how. I just didn't know how. Dear God forgive me... I love you Mick... with all my heart... you're my baby... and I'd like her back.

Mickey goes to him. Gus gets up. No hesitation. Holds her. Tight. Thirty years worth.

MICKEY

I love you.

GUS

(to Vince)

You may be pushing me out, but if you were smart you'd hire Mickey to replace me.

MICKEY

Nobody's pushing you out. Let's all take a walk down stairs to the combine.

EXT. TURNER FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Making like Mario Andretti, Johnny screeches into the parking lot.

EXT. TURNER FIELD - BASEBALL FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The combine is buzzing with activity. Reporters and camera crews are everywhere, trying to get their take on the next big thing.

A crowd has gathered around TED TURNER.

REPORTER

This combine must be pretty important for you to make an appearance.

TED TURNER

It's a good opportunity to see some players who might be the stars of tomorrow. Find out who'll be costing me all that damn money.

Ted breaks away, goes to the batting cage. The reporters follow.

Vince, Phillip and Matt stand on one side of the cage, Gus and Pete on the other. Ted looks to Vince.

TED TURNER (cont'd)

(to Vince)

Alright, who's this Bo Gentry
everybody's talking about?

VINCE

That's him, Mr. Turner.

Vince points to Bo, who's in the cage. Balls scream off his bat as he takes his swings against the pitching coach.

Phillip calls out to Gus.

PHILLIP

Curve ball doesn't seem to be
bothering him.

IN THE STANDS:

Mickey sits with Gun and his family.

MICKEY

(to Gun)

Alright, let's go show'em what you've
got.

Mickey and Gun walk over to the batting cage.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

Gentleman, this is Gun Harrison. And
Gun can throw a curve.

They all look at him. Ted turns to Vince.

TED TURNER

Who's this?

VINCE

I... don't know.

PHILLIP

What's going on here? I've seen all I
need to see.

MICKEY

Keep your ass right where it is.

Gun walks to the mound. Takes the ball from the pitching coach.

MICKEY (cont'd)

(calls to Gun)

Start with fastballs.

Johnny walks down the stadium steps onto the field. He stands off to the side and watches.

Bo takes his stance in the batters box, waiting for the pitch.

Gun looks at all the faces. All the cameras. Mickey runs out to the mound.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

You alright?

GUN

Yes, ma'am.

MICKEY

Nervous?

GUN

No, ma'am. It's just a game.

Mickey looks at him. A smile crosses her face.

MICKEY

You're right, Gun. It's just a game.

She runs off the field. Gun winds up. Throws. It's heat. Pure heat. Bo watches it blaze past him.

Vince looks to Phillip. Phillip looks to Matt.

VINCE

Jesus Christ, he looks like Sandy Koufax.

MICKEY

That's not even his best pitch.

(to Gun)

Let him see the curve, Gun.

Ted Turner looks to Vince.

TED TURNER

Who is this kid?

Gun throws the curve. The BEAUTIFUL CURVE. Bo misses, and misses, and misses. Gun throws more dazzling curves. More misses.

VINCE

He knows it's coming and he still can't hit it.

GUS
(to Phillip)
This is what's known as trouble with
the curve.

VINCE
(to Matt)
You didn't see this? He's got
potential, but using our number one
pick?

PETE
I think Gus tried to tell us that.

Vince shoots Phillip a dagger.

TED TURNER
Who found this kid?

MICKEY
I did.

TED TURNER
Who are you?

MICKEY
His agent. Come on in, Gun. That's
it.

VINCE
I want to talk to him.

MICKEY
You'll talk to him when I tell you you
can.

Dumbfounded. They all stare at Mickey.

MICKEY (cont'd)
I want a meeting. Pronto.

Like nervous little boys, they walk off the field. Gus
whispers to her.

GUS
How did you find him?

MICKEY
You'd never believe it if I told you.
I'll meet you upstairs. Law school is
about to come in pretty handy.

Mickey walks Gun over to his family.

MICKEY (cont'd)

(to Gun)

Wait here for me. This shouldn't take long.

INT. TURNER FIELD - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Vince, Phillip, Pete, Matt, and Gus, all sit at the conference table. Mickey stands in front.

MICKEY

We're here to lay it all on the table. To make a deal.

VINCE

What kind of a deal?

MICKEY

We're going to work out the contract for Gun Harrison. As his lawyer and agent, I'll be handling all negotiations on behalf of my new client.

PHILLIP

Oh shit.

MICKEY

And the first order of business is a new contract for the best scout in the organization.

Vince growls at Phillip.

VINCE

I don't think anyone would dispute that.

MICKEY

The contract will be for as long as Dad wants it. He'll know when to call it quits. Nobody's going to do it for him.

VINCE

We can get going on Gus' contract immediately.

GUS

I don't think so.

They all look at him.

MICKEY

What?

GUS

(beat)

I'm done.

MICKEY

No you're not.

GUS

It's okay. Think it might be time for the bullpen. I wanna do some other things. Gonna get my goddamn eyes taken care of, and then I plan on spending some quality time with my daughter. Who knows, maybe even keep the TV off.

MICKEY

Are you sure?

GUS

I'm sure.

Gus and Mickey smile at each other. A healing has started.

GUS (CONT'D)

I'll do some independent scouting. After all, with this new business, you're going to need clients.

The door opens. Johnny bursts in trailed by a frazzled SECRETARY.

SECRETARY

Sir, if you don't leave, I'll have to call security.

PHILLIP

Who is this?

Mickey stops dead in her tracks.

MICKEY

What are you doing here?

JOHNNY

I thought of one you'll never get. 78' World Series, Reggie hits three homers in one game. Name the pitchers he took deep.

Mickey stares at him, serious.

MICKEY

You came all this way to ask me that?

JOHNNY

No. I think I found that 'moment'
I've been looking for.

Mickey goes to him. He holds her.

PHILLIP

What is this, a baseball team or a
soap opera? Who is this guy?

JOHNNY

Easy, sparky.

An ASSISTANT walks in the room.

ASSISTANT

Sorry to interrupt, but here's the
reports from last night's game.

She hands some papers to Vince. He looks them over.

VINCE

Unbelievable... Tommy Clark went five
for five -- again. He's been hitting
close to .400 since his parents came
to visit him.

Mickey gives Gus a wink.

PETE

That was Gus' idea.

PHILLIP

That's all well and fine, but how much
money did it cost the organization to
put his parents up? Will somebody
tell me that?

VINCE

Phillip. You're fired.

EXT. TURNER STADIUM - PARKING LOT - SAME DAY

The Mustang and the Cadillac are parked side by side. Gus
sits in the Mustang. Johnny and Mickey in the Caddie.

INT. CADDILAC CONVERTIBLE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny and Mickey sit close. Gus watches from the Mustang.

MICKEY

I'm really glad you decided to turn around.

JOHNNY

Remember...

(points to head and heart)

here and here.

Johnny leans into her. They start to kiss. BOOM. A thunder storm pours rain.

Johnny flicks the switch and the top begins to close. Mickey flicks it back and it opens.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

What're you doing? It's raining.

MICKEY

Isn't it wonderful?

They go back to their kiss. The rain pours over them. Mickey pulls back.

MICKEY (cont'd)

Charlie Hough, Elias Soscia and Bob Welch.

JOHNNY

What?

MICKEY

The pitchers that Reggie took deep.

Johnny laughs. Pulls her back to their kiss. A great kiss.

From the Mustang. Gus puffs his cigar. Smiles. And we:

FADE TO BLACK: