

THE SHIFTBUSTER

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3/13/2015

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FADE IN:

A series of framed photos and posters of great baseball hitters.

- TED WILLIAMS making his classic swing with the inscription: "SHORT to the ball, LONG through it."
- STAN MUSIAL, the National League's all-time greatest hitter, swinging a bat. The inscription: "Stan the Man Musial."
- ROD CAREW, seven-time American League batting champ, in a batting cage. It's signed: "Best Wishes to my Fellow Leatherneck. Semper Fi, Johnny Mac! Rod Carew."
- TONY OLIVA, three-time American League batting champ, in a hitting stance. It's signed: "Keep Your Hands Back, Johnny! Best Wishes, Tony Oliva."

IN THE BACKGROUND, voices of baseball game announcers.

A PULL BACK REVEALS a bedroom wall covered with lots of baseball pictures and memorabilia.

IN THE DIM LIGHT, A NAKED MAN WITH AN ATHLETIC BUILD IS LYING ON HIS BACK in bed with his hands behind his head.

A SHAPELY NAKED WOMAN PRESSES AGAINST HIM -- her bent leg covering his manhood -- as she rubs against his thigh. He seems disinterested.

A YANKEES BASEBALL GAME is being viewed on a flat screen television at the foot of the bed. Derek Jeter is at-bat for the Yankees in the "Big Ballpark" in the Bronx. He hits an opposite field single to win the game, and raises his fist as he rounds first base. Jeter

is suddenly surrounded by teammates who have swarmed onto the field.

The man speaks.

JOHNNY (O.S.)
Thata boy, Jeets! Game over!

Then the woman.

PEGGY (O.S.)
Turn it off now, Johnny.

JOHNNY (O.S.)
Shhhhhh, Peg! I'm listening!

PEGGY (O.S.)
(whiny)
Johnny, turn it off... and come to mama!

INT/EXT. OLD PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY - TRAVELING

TOOLING ALONG OLD RTE. 66 IN TEXAS.

A hot, sunny summer's day on the famous old highway surrounded by plains as far as the eye can see.

The truck motors past signs that read "Historic Rte. 66" and "Welcome to the Midpoint between Chicago and L.A." Also seen are some famous regional oddities including the "Cadillac Ranch," the "Leaning Water Tower of Groom" and a 190-foot Christian cross in the middle of nowhere.

The skyline of a small city appears.

SUPERIMPOSE:
Amarillo, Texas

Amarillo is a classic U.S. western city, population 200,000. Mostly sprawl with just a modest downtown, it's a twenty-first century poster child for American cow towns. Longhorn cattle, cowboys, horses, ranches and stockyards are still in force here. Oil and gas drilling rigs also dot the plains along the highway.

With the slowly setting sun as a backdrop, a small baseball stadium comes into view.

The driver pulls into a parking lot.

EXT. AMARILLO STADIUM - "THE RANCH" - DAY

MONTAGE - OUTSIDE AND INSIDE "THE RANCH"

- A sign outside reads:
"7:30 Tonite - Mustangs vs. Rockhounds."
- The parking lots fill up pick-ups, SUVs and some school buses. Even a semi pulls in at one end.
- People enter stadium gates and buy tickets and programs. Inside they look for their seats. They eat and drink like there's no tomorrow.
- Kids with gloves hang over fences and shout to players for autographs and balls.
- The big-screen display reads, "WELCOME TO THE RANCH -- HOME OF THE MUSTANGS."
- Everybody's sweating because it's hot -- Texas hot! Temperature on the scoreboard says 95 degrees at 6:45 p.m. Rock music blasts over the PA system.
- Ballplayers perform routine pre-game drills:
Hit in the batting cage, field grounders and fly balls, run in the outfield, play catch in foul territory. A coach hits fungos to fielders.

END OF MONTAGE.

EXT. THE BALLFIELD - DAY

HOME PLATE AREA

As the background music and noise fade, the focus is on a hitter in the batting cage.

A MAN STARTS TO TALK.

TURK (O.S.)

Howdy, folks. The name's Turk McKenna. Actually Joseph "Turk" McKenna. I became "Turk" very early in my rookie league days. I was tall and lanky with an Adam's apple and floppy hair that had a tendency to stick up in back, so naturally some vet said, "Hey, look at the turkey!"

(beat)

The baseball culture can be very cruel at times, like big kids picking on young kids on the playground.

(beat)

Fortunately I was pretty good, but was also good-natured about the ribbing.

(beat)

You gotta have a thick skin to play this game.

TURK YELLS instructions to the player in the cage. We realize that Turk is STANDING DIRECTLY BEHIND the cage.

TURK (O.S) (cont'd)

Chico, I wanna see you go to the right side on at least three consecutive swings! Vaya la derecha! You gotta practice that more!

(under his breath)

God, this kid is a stubborn SOB. He wants to pull everything.

CHICO, the young Latino right-handed hitter in the cage, TURNS AROUND AND ADDRESSES TURK.

CHICO

(in a thick accent)

Okay, Skeeper. I go la derecha!

TURK (O.S.)

Bueno!

TURK CONTINUES HIS NARRATIVE as Chico continues to hit.

TURK (O.S.) (cont'd)

Most nicknames, especially those in baseball, stick -- and "Turk" actually became a term of endearment for me as I gained the respect -- and the love -- of my teammates, coaches and eventually, my players.

(beat)

Baseball is all about love for the game...and for the fellows.

CHICO

(turns around again, now joking)

Turk, my Skeeper! I love you. I love you like no other man!

TURK (O.S.)

(laughing)

Chico, shut the fuck up and get the hell outta that cage!

THE PLAYERS around the cage waiting for their turns to hit ARE NOW LAUGHING as well.

TURK AGAIN CONTINUES HIS NARRATIVE as a new batter steps in.

TURK (O.S.) (cont'd)

(chuckling)

Don't pay any heed to those wise asses! Oh, forgot to mention that even the wife calls me "Turk" after 30 years. Hell, I'd feel creeped out if she called me "Joe" or "Joseph."

(beat)

Although I know it'll be on the card that they give out at my funeral.

A PAN REVEALS TURK MCKENNA, 50s, handsome and lean, with greying hair and a grey moustache, and still in good shape. He's in uniform and has his arms folded and leans against the back of the batting cage. He's called "Skipper" by his players.

TURK LOOKS TO THE CAMERA AND TOUCHES THE BRIM OF HIS CAP.

HE GOES BACK TO BUSINESS -- BARKING COMMANDS TO PLAYERS AND COACHES. Like most baseball people, he talks a lot.

DESPITE TURK'S PENCHANT FOR CARRYING-ON AND JOKING WITH PLAYERS, it's obvious they respect him as their leader and listen to his orders and advice religiously. In baseball, he's called a "PLAYER'S MANAGER."

HE TALKS TO THE CAMERA.

TURK

I manage here in Double A ball in the Texas League with the Amarillo Mustangs. Been managing in the minors fifteen years after a minor league career that saw me make it to Triple A as a catcher -- but never got called-up to play one frickin' game in the bigs. That's baseball.

HE TAKES A WAD OF DIPPING TOBACCO from a can, wraps in in some bubble gum that he takes from his mouth, and STUFFS IT ALL BACK INTO HIS CHEEK.

HE CONTINUES TALKING TO THE CAMERA.

TURK (cont'd)

Enough about me. I want to tell you about a ballplayer who's having his best year ever...and hoping it'll last...

(beat)

... 'cause baseball's like the weather -- it can change overnight -- and usually does.

INT. THE MUSTANGS CLUBHOUSE - DAY

A LARGE, RECTANGULAR ROOM LINED WITH CUBICLES jammed with clothes hanging from pegs and

cubbies stuffed with gloves, bats, shoes and other baseball equipment. A folding chair sits in front of each cubicle.

There are couches and lounge chairs down the middle, and at the far end, behind a glass partition, are exercise machines, whirlpools and a refrigerator case with a glass door. It's full of water bottles, sodas and beer. A sign that reads "No beer until after the game" is taped to the door.

JOHNNY RHODES, 30, a tall, handsome ballplayer with dark closely cropped hair, blue eyes, chiseled features and wearing only a baseball undershirt and a jockstrap.

JOHNNY SITS ON A TRAINER'S TABLE in the shower area getting his thigh wrapped with tape. He STUDIES a pitching chart for that night's game.

TRAINER

(smacks Johnny on knee)
After the game I want you to
take 20 minutes in a warm tub,
kay Johnny?

JOHNNY

Will do, Pop.

Taping done, Johnny gets up off the table, GRABS A BAT AND STARTS SWINGING IT in front of a large mirror.

TURK (V.O.)

That's Johnny Rhodes. He's a career minor leaguer like I was. He's sort of slow-footed and doesn't have much of a glove. Did I mention a less-than-average arm? Well, let's say he wasn't ever considered a "five-tool" prospect. But what he can do is hit. He's a natural hitter.

JOHNNY TALKS WITH A COUPLE OF TEAMMATES as he sits in front of his cubicle and pulls on his

baseball socks and stirrups. He prefers the traditional look.

TURK (V.O.) (cont'd)

Johnny's getting better with age. The fact that he's a switch hitter makes him even more of a challenge for minor league pitchers. So, last season when he batted .350 -- 30 points above his career average -- and led the league in hitting, with 15 dingers to boot, everyone was wondering if it was his so-called career year.

(beat)

Personally, I wondered if he'd earned himself another call-up.

BEGIN FLASHBACK SEQUENCE:

EXT. VARIOUS BALLPARKS - DAY/NIGHT

JOHNNY HITTING during games played prior to tonight:

MONTAGE

- JOHNNY SMACKS THE BALL HARD -- hitting line drive "ropes" and sizzling grounders.

TURK (V.O.)

Johnny's a classic professional hitter: he feasts on fastballs and will sit on a pitch when the count is in his favor.

- JOHNNY HITS THE BALL EVERYWHERE -- to left field, center, right center, drops one over the shortstop's head, lines one down the right field line, and lines another down the leftfield line. He hits one between the pitcher's legs and up the middle.

TURK (V.O.) (cont'd)

And he rarely misses "his" pitch because he's just looking to put

a good bat on the ball, not hit it 450 feet. He's become the perfect DH in my opinion

- A SWITCH HITTER TO BOOT -- it doesn't matter which way he's hitting -- they can't seem to get him out from either side.
- JOHNNY BATS LEFTHANDED AND SLAMS ONE over the center field fence. It's a walk-off, and he rounds the bases pumping his fist and is greeted by teammates as he jumps on home plate.

TURK (V.O.) (cont'd)

He goes yard every so often, but Johnny's strategy at the plate is to hit the ball where it's pitched, and get at least two base hits every game. He's averaging about one point seven.

(beat)

Yeah, he's quite a hitter. One of the best I've ever seen.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. BIG LEAGUE SPRING TRAINING BALLPARK - DAY

It's a beautiful, sunny day. There are some palm trees, cactus and colorful flowers outside the ballpark. Inside, players are on the field. The stands are full of spectators.

SUPERIMPOSE:

Surprise Stadium, Phoenix, AZ
Spring Training HQ
Kansas City Royals

A ROYALS' INTERSQUAD GAME is in progress.

TURK (V.O.)

So why's he still in the minors? Good question. The answer is that Johnny's got a couple of big bugaboos.

(beat)

First, he's had trouble with major league sliders. When he got called up to play with the big boys in the Cactus League for Spring Training last year, he was fed a steady diet of sliders.

ON-DECK CIRCLE

JOHNNY, IN A ROYALS UNIFORM, KNOCKS A WEIGHTED DONUT OFF HIS BAT AND WALKS TOWARD HOME PLATE. He steps into the right-handed batter's box AND DIGS IN.

IN THE DUGOUT

MAJOR LEAGUE MANAGER

Okay, Johnny boy. Let's see you do something!

(yells to catcher)

Joey!

AT HOME PLATE

JOEY, THE CATCHER, looks to his manager for a sign.

MANAGER HOLDS UP three fingers.

Joey calls time and run out to the pitcher's mound.

AT THE PITCHER'S MOUND

JOEY

Lefty, Skip wants all sliders.

PITCHER

Check.

JOEY GOES BACK BEHIND THE PLATE and settles into his crouch.

The PITCHER WINDS UP AND THROWS A PERFECT SLIDER, down and away, just off the black.

JOHNNY LETS IT GO BY.

UMPIRE

Strike!

JOHNNY

(without turning his head)
Pretty low and away, eh Ump?

UMPIRE

Had the corner at the knees.

TURK (V.O.)

Since he has a pretty upright
stance from both sides, and
stands about six-one, Johnny
doesn't get down fast enough to
hit on top of a good slider.
He's a high-ball hitter. Low and
away is his blind spot...

(beat)

And big league sliders with lots
of tilt are much tougher to pick
up than minor league "tumblers."

The PITCHER THROWS ANOTHER SLIDER, same spot.

UMPIRE

Strike two!

JOHNNY

(turns and glares at umpire)
Damn Ump! Way too low!

UMPIRE

Same spot. Get back in there!

JOEY

Not like back on the farm,
eh Johnny boy?

JOHNNY

Fuck you, Joey!

JOEY LAUGHS and gets ready for another pitch.

THE PITCHER WINDS AND DELIVERS another slider
in the same spot.

JOHNNY SWINGS TENTATIVELY, sending a bouncing ball toward second base.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
 (running)
 Son of a bitch!

JOHNNY IS THROWN OUT AT FIRST and kicks the dirt as he runs back to the dugout, where he slams his helmet and bat back into their respective spots in the rack.

HE SITS ALONE at one end of the bench sulking.

TURK (V.O.)
 The more Johnny argued with the umps that spring, the worse it got.

EXT. ANOTHER SPRING TRAINING BALLPARK - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE:
 Goodyear Ballpark, Goodyear, AZ
 Spring Training HQ
 Cleveland Indians

A SIGN READS: "Royals vs. Indians, 1pm."

AT HOME PLATE - GAME IN PROGRESS

JOHNNY IS BATTING RIGHT-HANDED with a count of one ball and one strike.

UMPIRE
 One 'n one.

THE NEXT PITCH COMES IN, low and away.

UMPIRE (cont'd)
 Strike two!

JOHNNY
 That's bullshit, Ump! Had no part of the plate.

UMPIRE
 (takes off mask)

You best be swinging now, big mouth!

UMPIRE'S P.O.V. -- THE NEXT PITCH IS AT LEAST A FOOT OUTSIDE.

BACK TO SCENE

UMPIRE (cont'd)
Strike three! Yer outta there!

JOHNNY
You fucking bastard!
(gets in ump's face)
I should deck you right here,
you sonnuvva bitch!

UMPIRE
(emphatically points)
Hit the showers, bush leaguer!
Go back to the farm where you belong!

JOHNNY
Fuck you, asshole!

JOHNNY STANDS AT THE PLATE WITH HIS FACE UP TO THE UMPIRE'S MASK SPITTING MAD, until a coach and teammate pull him away and walk him back to the dugout.

TURK (V.O.)
Assume you guessed Johnny's second big bugaboo -- he's hotheaded...
(beat)
...and umpires hate guys with hot tempers who have shit-fits if they don't like a call.
(beat)
And big league men in blue particularly don't like call-ups and rookies giving them any shit...
(beat)
So the word on Johnny got around ... and he got the strike zone expanded on him *by every umpire.*

INT. BIG LEAGUE SPRING TRAINING CLUBHOUSE - DAY

JOHNNY CLEANS OUT HIS LOCKER. He packs his duffle bag with clothes, shoes and gear and stuffs his bats into another bag.

He drapes one bag over each shoulder and leaves the clubhouse. Left hanging behind in his locker are his Royals cap and uniform with "RHODES" across the back of the jersey.

TURK (V.O.)

That spring in the Cactus League, after he batted an unimpressive .240, with a few doubles, one homer, six walks, ten strikeouts -- and a hefty fine -- Johnny found himself heading back to the minors when camp broke.

(beat)

He kinda got stereotyped as a hothead. Personally, I thought he got the shit-end of the stick.

END FLASHBACK SEQUENCE.**EXT. AMARILLO STADIUM - DAY (DUSK)**

ON THE SCOREBOARD: The digital clock reads 7:25.

IN THE DUGOUT

With tonight's game ready to start, the Mustangs sit on the bench talking and joking, with gloves on, waiting to take the field.

Johnny, the team's designated hitter, sands and doctors his bat handles.

TURK SITS AT ONE END OF THE BENCH by himself with his arms folded.

He turns his head to the side away from his players and TALKS TO THE CAMERA.

TURK

I'm not making excuses for Johnny, but good sliders are hard to square up even the best hitters in the game. But Johnny's temper became a bigger problem than sliders.

(beat)

So will he ever get another shot at the show? Hard to predict.

(beat)

You never know what'll happen in baseball. Like I said...things can change overnight.

There's a commotion at the other end of the dugout. A YOUNG WOMAN IN THE STANDS IS LEANING HER HEAD INTO THE DUGOUT ARGUING with a player.

TURK TURNS HIS ATTENTION to the situation.

TURK (cont'd)

Butch! Cut that shit out now! Take it off-line.

BUTCH

Sorry, Skipper!

TURK

These young guys and their girlfriend problems...a pain in my ass...

JIMMY, the bat boy, comes over and hands Turk a clipboard and a pouch of chewing gum.

Turk sits down again.

TURK (cont'd)

Thanks, Jimmy.

(turns to camera again)

Where was I? Oh yeah. Johnny still gets hotheaded at times, but he's been working hard on keeping it under control. He's a passionate guy...

(beat)
 ...and if he wasn't, he probably
 wouldn't be the player that he
 is.

Turk gets up again, climbs the dugout steps and
 walks to home plate to meet with the umpires
 and visiting manager to exchange line-up cards.

AT HOME PLATE

ROCKHOUNDS MANAGER
 Got your boys playing pretty
 good there, Turk!

TURK
 Hey, like you I jus' fill out
 the card and send them out on
 the field to play.

ROCKHOUNDS MANAGER
 J. Rhodes is having some year.

TURK
 Yeah, he's hopin' the bubble
 don't burst!

ROCKHOUNDS MANAGER
 We're gonna do our best to try
 and burst it.

TURK
 Good luck.

They laugh and slap each other on the shoulder
 and shake hands before the meeting breaks up.

In the background, a ground crew guy rakes the
 pitcher's mound while others spray down the
 infield.

UMPIRE
 God, this heat's fuckin' killin'
 me. Have your boy bring me fresh
 water along with the balls,
 willya Turk?

TURK
 Willdo, Charlie.

TURK TALKS TO THE CAMERA as he walks back to the dugout.

TURK (cont'd)

As you heard, my boy Johnny's got everybody talking. When he started off this season the way he ended last year -- like a house afire -- the press naysayers said it would never last.

(beat)

Teams have been using all kinds of shifts against him, but he always figures out ways to bust them.

TURK STOPS AT THE TOP of the dugout steps.

HE CONTINUES TALKING TO CAMERA.

TURK (cont'd)

Now it's July -- and it's hot as a bitch -- and they're still trying to cool Johnny off. And he's still bustin' shifts and hitting .375!

(beat)

Can you believe that?

IN THE MUSTANGS DUGOUT

Turk sits back down in the dugout and motions to Jimmy for a bottle of water. The kid comes over and hands him a bottle.

TURK (cont'd)

(to the bat boy)

Jimmy, bring the ump a fresh bottle of water when you give him balls...from the bottom of the cooler!

(looks down the bench at his team)

Okay 'Stangs, let's take it to 'em tonight!

THE MUSTANGS TAKE THE FIELD.

TURK MOTIONS TO JOHNNY to come over to the far end of the bench. Johnny slides in next to his Skipper.

INT. PRESS BOX - DUSK

ANNOUNCER

(into microphone)

Now, would all you Ranchhands please stand for the national anthem...

He turns to the organist, a middle-aged church lady sitting at an electric organ.

ANNOUNCER

(hand over the mike)

Ok, hit it!

The organist PLAYS "The Star-Spangled Banner."

INT. THE MUSTANGS DUGOUT - SAME

AS THE ANTHEM PLAYS, Turk talks to Johnny OUT OF THE SIDE OF HIS MOUTH. Both hold their caps over their hearts.

TURK

Three-fucking-seventy-five!
Enjoy it while it lasts, my man.
Let's talk a little. . .

JOHNNY

So ya think they might call me up to Triple A by the end of the month... and maybe give me one more shot come September?

TURK

(wipes his face with a towel)

That's what I wanna talk about, J... I kinda know that's been on your mind the way you been going...

(beat)
...but I don't think it's in the
cards right at the moment.

JOHNNY
Whatta ya mean?

TURK
I mean they got different plans.
(beat)
Hey, meant to ask, are those
anger management classes doing
you any good?

FLASH: Johnny and his anger management
therapist are having a mock argument across the
therapist's desk. The therapist IS WEARING A
BASEBALL FACE MASK and plays the role of an
umpire.

BACK TO SCENE

JOHNNY
Let's forget about the A-M
classes for the moment. What
"different plans?"

TURK
Well, *I first wanna know* if the
classes are helping, or are you
still gonna have a shit-fit
every time you hear something
you don't like?

JOHNNY
They're okay. Got me counting to
ten a lot.

TURK
Okay. Ya better start counting
then.

NATIONAL ANTHEM OVER, they sit back down.

JOHNNY
Goddammit! Knew something was
up!

TURK

(looks down the bench)

They have a special assignment for you. But it's a positive J, because it'll involve a decent bonus...and you'll create lots of goodwill with the Royals' brass.

(beat)

Heaven knows you need that!

JOHNNY

Special assignment? What's that all about?

JOHNNY COUNTS UNDER HIS BREATH, "1, 2, 3, 4, 5..."

TURK

You've heard about that Mexican kid at Single A Wilmington? Carlos Mendoza is his name.

JOHNNY

...8-9-10.

(beat)

Yeah.

TURK

They bought him from a Mexican League team last year for big dineros. He's supposed to be the next great big league shortstop.

(beat)

A "comes-along-once-every-ten-years" type player.

JOHNNY

Yeah? So what?

TURK

They want you to be his hitting guru.

JOHNNY

Hitting guru? What the hell is that? In Wilmington? No fucking way! I just paid my fucking rent!

TURK

(sticks the towel over
Johnny's mouth)
Jesus, would you keep it shut
and just listen. This is on the
q.t., it ain't public yet and it
certainly ain't open to debate!

JOHNNY

Okay. Okay.

TURK

First of all, we're talking
right here in Amarillo. So don't
get your ass in an uproar.

JOHNNY

Okay!

JOHNNY holds his batting gloves in one hand and
SLAPS THEM ANGRILY into the other hand.

TURK

(yells to player in the
field and claps)
Nice one, Butchie!

TURK (cont'd)

You calming down?

JOHNNY

Tryin' to.

TURK

Like I was saying...this kid's
got the goods, and they believe
he could be the Royal's regular
shortstop next season.

Johnny sits with his head down, listening and
looking dejected.

JOHNNY

Yeah.

TURK

They want to call him up to the Show in September so he can get "acclimated." You know how the brass talks.

TURK LOOKS ALL AROUND to make sure nobody's eavesdropping.

TURK (cont'd)

Meantime, they want him to come here and play shortstop for us for the next two months...

(beat)

...and have you help him work on his hitting.

JOHNNY

Great! Just what I fuckin' need!

TURK

(stands up)

Hold on...

(gives signals to his catcher behind plate)

Okay. Where were we?

JOHNNY

What happens to Sammy?

TURK

(puts his finger to his mouth)

Sammy's going back to Wilmington to play shortstop there. I haven't told him yet...so keep this just between you and me!

JOHNNY

Okay. So why am I so fucking honored to be chosen as the hot shot's nursemaid?

TURK

Let's see...you're the best hitter in the league, you played a season in the Mexican League and you know Spanish - and because you're under contract

and you'll do any *fucking* thing
the Royals brass wants you to
do!

(beat)

Need more reasons?

JOHNNY

Okay. I get it.

TURK

Anyway...this kid's defense
is world-class.

JOHNNY

I got that already!

TURK

Last I heard he was hittin'
about .280 with six dingers. And
twenty stolen bases. So he hits
pretty good, has decent power
and lots of speed.

(beat)

They like everything about him
except that he tries to pull
everything... and strikes out
too much.

(beat)

They want him to learn to go the
other way more and be more
selective.

(beat)

And that's gonna be your new
assignment.

JOHNNY

So in two months I'm s'posed to
teach a free swinging kid how to
go the other way and not swing
at bad pitches... fuckin' aye!

TURK

And I told them you'd be "more
than willing" to do this for the
organization...

JOHNNY

Great... I'm trying to get
myself another shot -- and now

I gotta nursemaid a hot shot --
with a free ticket!

TURK

(looks him in the eye)

Johnny, listen to Turk!
Son, you gotta get real. This is
baseball! It's a fuckin'
business. It ain't always fair!
And we do what we're told by the
man who pays our salaries!

(beat)

Would you rather I have told
the GM he's making a big fucking
mistake?

(beat)

"Forget the kid and give Rhodes
another shot?"

(beat)

We'd both be working at Taco
Bell tomorrow!

JOHNNY

Yeah, I s'pose. A bonus, huh?
How much?

TURK

Not sure. They'll let me know,
and I'll let you know.

(beat)

But get the complaining out of
your system a.s.a.p.

(beat)

They got a lot of time and money
invested in this kid -- they
believe he could become the next
Jeter!

(beat)

Help him, and you'll be helping
yourself!

(beat)

Unless you really do wanna end
up at Taco Bell!

JOHNNY

Okay.

He gets up, smacks his batting gloves against
his leg and heads to the bat rack.

THE CROWD CHEERS as the last out in the top of the first inning is made by the Mustangs.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

(over the PA)

Nothing across for the Rockhounds in the top of the first, and now our Mussss-tangs are coming to bat!

(beat)

Tonight's paid attendance is nine thousand, two-hundred fifty. Another sellout!

ROCK MUSIC BLARES. The Wranglers come off the field and back into the dugout for their turn to bat.

TURK

(stands and claps)

Okay, 'Stangs, let's lay some wood on 'em!

MONTAGE - THAT NIGHT'S GAME

- JOHNNY, BATTING LEFTY, DRILLS A LINER OVER THE SHORTSTOP'S HEAD FOR A BASE HIT. Two runners score.
- WITH RUNNERS ON IN THE THIRD, JOHNNY COMES TO BAT AGAIN. THE CATCHER CALLS FOR TIME. The Rockhounds manager runs out behind the pitcher's mound and directs his players into a new, pre-designed shift.
- A NEW SHIFT. It's something Johnny hasn't seen before:
 - The second baseman moves directly behind the bag into short center field.
 - The shortstop and third basemen play on the outfield grass.
 - The left fielder moves way in and the center fielder plays in left center.
 - The right fielder plays where the center fielder normally plays.

WHEN PLAY RESUMES, JOHNNY HITS THE FIRST PITCH OVER THE SHORTSTOP'S HEAD, but the shifted leftfielder IS NOW IN PERFECT POSITION TO CATCH IT.

- IN THE SEVENTH, Rockhound's best hitter, Donnie Johnson, hits a two-run homer and struts around the bases. Rockhounds now lead, 4-3.
- IN THE BOTTOM OF THE NINTH, the scoreboard still reads: Rockhounds 4, Mustangs 3.
- The bases are loaded with Mustangs with two out. JOHNNY GETS UP and the Rockhounds SHIFT AGAIN.
- IN THE BACKGROUND, THE ANNOUNCER BARKS: "Now batting, the designated hitter, our one and only, Johnny Rhooooodes!"
- CHEERING GETS LOUDER. TENSION BUILDS. THE CROWD STANDS.
- JOHNNY GETS SET IN THE BOX. THE PITCHER WINDS AND DELIVERS. JOHNNY SMACKS A SINKING LINER OVER SECOND BASE. All the runners are off. It looks like a sure game-winning hit!
- JAKE BROWN, THE ROCKHOUND'S SECOND BASEMAN, playing behind the bag, turns and runs.
- WITH HIS BACK TO THE INFIELD, BROWN MAKES AN INCREDIBLE, OVER-THE-SHOULDER GRAB OF JOHNNY'S sinking liner in shallow center to end the game.
- THE CROWD IS STUNNED AND GOES QUIET.
- JOHNNY, ROUNDING FIRST, KICKS THE DIRT AND SLAMS HIS HELMET TO THE GROUND.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. THE MUSTANGS CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT

Players walk around half-dressed or naked, joke and blast music, eat pizza and drink beer.

Despite the loss, the 'Stangs are having a good season thus far, and the team's spirit is high. Johnny sits in the manager's office with Turk. The door is closed.

IN THE MANAGER'S OFFICE

TURK

I think you'll be seeing a lot more of what you saw tonight.

JOHNNY

(picks at a callus on his hand)

Oh, that new shift? No big deal.

Johnny's still put out about his new assignment and gives Turk some of the cold-shoulder treatment.

TURK

(looks at his charts)

What'd ya think I meant? Everybody and his brother was shifted in or around to the left knowing that you hit the ball that way. I shuda made you bunt...

JOHNNY

Lou Boudreau of the Indians shifted against Ted Williams all the time... and Teddy boy always busted it. And he *never* was asked to bunt!

TURK

Yer good, Johnny. But don't start comparing yourself to Ted Williams outside this room.

JOHNNY

Yeah, well I'm not going to get too excited about it. It's just one game.

(beat)

When's the new superstar coming?

TURK

Next week.

JOHNNY

(sarcastically)

Can't wait! Anything else?

TURK

Yeah. I really called you in
'cause I need a real big favor.

JOHNNY

Jesus...a night of surprises.

(puts a finger to his
forehead)

Lemme guess. You're gonna ask me
if the kid can stay with me
until he finds his own place.

TURK

You're a fucking mind reader, J!

(laughs)

I figured the kid could stay
with me and the wife, but it'd
be like staying at grandma's
house.

(beat)

It'd make a helluva lot more
sense if he stayed at your
place.

(beat)

Well, wouldn't it?

JOHNNY

(holds back a smile)

You fucking own me, Turk! You
really do.

(beat)

Do you want me to wipe his ass,
too?

TURK

I'll make sure you're
compensated extra for ass
wiping!

They both have a good laugh and ease the
tension.

TURK (cont'd)

By the way, J, this kid's not a typical 22 year old from what I hear.

JOHNNY

Really, he can wipe his own ass?

TURK

(chuckles, then gets serious)

No, I mean it. This kid is married, his old lady's expecting their first baby and he's got other family members living with him. I'm told he's very serious about his responsibilities as head of his family. Lost his parents.

(beat)

Supposedly killed...by drug dealers.

(beat)

That's definitely confidential.

JOHNNY

Holy shit! That's on the level?

TURK

Yeah, but that's all I was told. But it's on the big q.t., so let's leave it between you and me.

JOHNNY

Okay.

Turk looks at some papers while talking.

TURK (cont'd)

And I'm also told he's already got a real estate person finding him a place. So I don't imagine you'll need to put up with him for too long.

Thumps pencil on the desk, thinking.

TURK (cont'd)

About that shift. You're gonna start seeing more of it. The league's getting tired of you making their defenses look like Swiss cheese and their pitchers like fucking salad makers.

(turns to camera)

"Salad" is an easy pitch to hit.

(winks)

Baseball talk...

JOHNNY

(gets up to leave)

Turk, you know as well as me that Jake playing behind the second base bag was lucky as shit. An over-the-shoulder, look-what-I-found, circus catch!

(beat)

Hell, that was the best fricking play he's ever made!

TURK

Maybe so. But unless he's playing five steps behind the bag to start with, your dying quail woulda been the game-winner.

(beat)

I never saw a second baseman play where he was playing. But now I know why he was there.

JOHNNY

Why?

TURK

(holding up a chart)

Because, smart guy, you've put 39 knocks out there in the same spot all season. That's your go-to spot. You might not be getting' that spot anymore.

(beat)

I'm just sayin'.

JOHNNY
 (as he walks out)
 Yeah, we'll see.

TURK
 (yells after Johnny)
 Hey!

JOHNNY
 (sticks head back in)
 Yeah?

TURK
 So you're on board with me and
 the Mexican kid, right?

JOHNNY
 Turk, I'm always on board with
 you. You should know that by
 now.

(beat)
 I'll make him another fucking
 Jeets.

TURK WINKS. Johnny turns to leave again.

TURK
 Hey!

JOHNNY
 Now what?

TURK
 Tell Sammy I want to see him.

EXT. MINOR LEAGUE BALLFIELD - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE:
 Wilmington, North Carolina
 Wilmington Blue Rocks
 Advanced Single A

A TEAM PRACTICE

A young Latino man of medium height and strong
 build fields ground balls and throws with
 perfection and ease. He effortlessly dives for
 balls and gets up ready to throw, almost like

he's an acrobat. His arm is, as some baseball coaches like to say, "a howitzer."

This is CARLOS MENDEZ, EARLY 20s, the young shortstop who the organization believes could be the linchpin of the major league team's infield for the next dozen years or so.

IN THE DUGOUT

WILMINGTON MANAGER

(talking to a coach)

I hate to lose him, Billy. But he's wasting his time here. He could play in the bigs tomorrow if they really needed him.

BILLY, THE COACH

I agree, Skip. I'm wondering if playing with Turk and Rhodes will help his hitting. Turk's a good guy and will give him some good advice. Rhodes is a hellva hitter, but he's a loose cannon.

(beat)

I don't picture him as a great teacher.

WILMINGTON MANAGER

We'll see. If they can at least teach Carlos how to hit the other way, the kid could really have an impact. Hell, he'll make an impact with his glove, no doubt.

P.O.V. - FROM THE DUGOUT

Carlos scoops a ball deep in the hole and throws toward first base over his shoulder without even looking. A perfect strike!

He pounds his glove with enthusiasm - AND DOES A FLIP a la Ozzie Smith.

BACK TO SCENE

WILMINGTON MANAGER

Jesus, I hope Turk can break him
of that habit before he hurts
himself.

BILLY

Amen.

INT. JOHNNY RHODES' APARTMENT - DAY

Typical bachelor pad, with clothes all over the
place and a pizza box and beer bottles on a
table.

We see a women's brassiere draped over a chair,
but no woman in sight.

Johnny is sleeping on the couch with the
television on, a couple of beer bottles on the
floor near his head.

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

JOHNNY

(opens eyes)

Cleaning lady, today?

(yells)

Rosa, is that you?

NO ANSWER. Johnny realizes whomever it is can't
hear him over the television. When the knocking
continues, Johnny springs up, rubs his face and
hair, smells his breath and walks to the door
in his underwear. He opens the door a crack and
sees a young man with a dark complexion.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

Yeah?

CARLOS

Hello. Mr. Rhodes?

JOHNNY IS SURPRISED. Wonders if this is the
kid?

JOHNNY

You Mendez?

CARLOS
Yes. I'm Carlos Mendez.

JOHNNY
Habla Ingles?

CARLOS
Si, lo hablo.

CARLOS EXTENDS HIS HAND through the small opening.

JOHNNY
Wasn't expecting you. Thought we were meeting at the ballpark.

JOHNNY OPENS THE DOOR AND LETS CARLOS IN. The kid is smartly dressed in slacks and white shirt with a sports jacket. He has a suitcase, and two duffle bags with him. He speaks fluent English with a slight accent.

CARLOS
(politely)
I apologize, Mr. Rhodes. *I'm* sorry if I caught you at a bad time. I thought I'd try to catch you before you left for the ballpark.

JOHNNY
Kid, let's get one thing straight right off the bat...

CARLOS
(frowns)
Yes?

JOHNNY
Don't ever call me "Mr. Rhodes" again, got it?
(breaks a smile)
I'm "Johnny," or "J" if you prefer.

CARLOS
Sorry. It's just that I was always taught to address elders as "mister" until told

otherwise. I just do it out of habit.

JOHNNY

Jesus, kid, I'm just joshing. I'm not that much older than you, am I?

CARLOS

I'll be 23 in September.

JOHNNY

Holy shit! And I'll be 31 in November. So yeah, I guess in your eyes I am "elderly."

CARLOS

No, no, Johnny! I didn't mean for it to sound like I think you're old -- just that you're a vet and I mean to treat you with the respect you deserve.

JOHNNY

I know what you meant. No offense taken.

JOHNNY PATS HIM ON THE BACK. HAS TAKEN AN IMMEDIATE LIKING to the kid. Not at all what he expected the hot shot to be like.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

Let me show you around. Not a palace, but comfortable. Don't mind the mess.

INT. THE MUSTANGS CLUBHOUSE - DAY

Players are getting ready for practice before a night game -- talking and joking, eating, blasting music. A few play cards. Some watch TV.

CARLOS SITS IN FRONT OF HIS NEW CUBICLE TALKING with several sports writers standing around him. They've caught wind of the move by the organization to make him the "heir apparent" at shortstop for the Royals.

TURK STANDS NEXT TO CARLOS AND PLAYS THE DUAL
ROLE of media flak and guardian.

WRITER #1

Carlos, how soon do think it'll
be until you're called up to the
big leagues?

CARLOS

I look forward to playing here
with the Mustangs and Mr.
McKenna until he and others in
the organization feel I'm ready
to move up.

WRITER #2

Carlos, some baseball observers
think you'll be wasting your
time here, and that you could
move up to Triple A or even the
Royals right now. Whatta you
think?

TURK

(quickly interrupts)

Come on, Joe! That's an unfair
question to ask a young man
who's under contract to play
where he's told to play! When
Carlos is ready for the Royals,
he'll be moved up. Whether
that's this year, next year or
whenever.

(beat)

Next question.

WRITER #3

What part of your game will work
on the most while you're here?

CARLOS

I'm always working on all parts
of my game to improve them.

TURK SMILES AND NODS HIS HEAD APPROVINGLY as
the Carlos talks. We can see that Turk feels
the kid has the PR part of the pro game down
pretty well and has listened to him carefully

about how to best answer tricky and leading questions. A smart kid.

CARLOS (cont'd)

But I feel that I need to pay particular attention to my hitting, since the challenges you face as a hitter change the most as you move up in this game.

TURK

(interrupts again)

Okay, fellows, that's it for now. We got to get ready for the game. See you after the game.

TURK USHERS THE WRITERS OUT of the locker room. Motions to Carlos to come into his office.

IN THE MANAGER'S OFFICE

TURK (cont'd)

(sits at desk)

Good job, Carlos. Good job. You got the idea down - give them a good quote but not a whole lot of information.

CARLOS

Thanks, Mr. McKenna.

TURK

Kid, please don't ever call me "Mr. McKenna" again. It creeps me out. Call me "Skipper" or "Skip" -- or even "Turk."

CARLOS

Okay, Skipper.

TURK

Here's the plan. Every day, as soon as you're dressed for practice, you're going to have a "hitting session" with Johnny. Right now he's in the hitting cage under the right field

stands. He's expecting you there, pronto.

EXT. AMARILLO STADIUM - DAY

BATTING CAGE UNDER THE STANDS

Johnny and Chico are in a batting cage equipped with a pitching machine under the seats at The Ranch. Johnny tends to the pitching machine as Chico hits. Johnny calls this area his "hitting laboratory."

CARLOS ENTERS.

JOHNNY
(yells to Chico)
Other way, la derecha!

CARLOS
Hi, guys! Wow, this is a real cave under here. What's your deal when you hit here, Johnny?

JOHNNY SHUTS MACHINE OFF AND COMES FROM BEHIND THE PROTECTIVE NETTING.

JOHNNY
Hey, kid. I'll show you.
(to Chico.)
Chico...you go feed. Set it at 88.

Chico goes behind the netting to the machine and adjusts the dial. He feeds more balls into a loader basket and flips the switch to it on.

A BALL WHIPS IN TOWARD Johnny standing next to a home plate, which is screwed down to plywood decking.

The ball flies directly over the middle of the plate and SMACKS LOUDLY against the backstop mat.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Good!
(gives a thumbs up)

Thanks, Chic!

Johnny steps in as a right-hander and proceeds to hit three consecutive pitches to the left side, three up the middle and three to the right side.

He then turns around left-handed and does the same.

CARLOS

Wow, that's something else. You do that with such ease.

JOHNNY

It's just a matter of "bat control." I need to help you develop it because you're gonna need it.

CARLOS

How so?

JOHNNY

When you make it to the bigs they're gonna ask you -- no, they're gonna tell you -- to hit behind runners, to hit in front of runners, to hit fly balls -- and lots of things you're probably haven't been asked to do.

CARLOS

So far it's pretty much been "strike out less" and "use the whole field."

JOHNNY

And cutting down on strike outs and going the other way come under the heading of "bat control."

(beat)

Now get in there and hit some.

CARLOS, A RIGHTY, STEPS IN NEXT TO THE PLATE AND GETS SET. Johnny signals Chico to start the machine up again.

CARLOS FOULS A FEW OFF THE THEN HITS SOME TO THE LEFT SIDE.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

Okay. Now hit the next pitch to the right side.

Carlos swings, and hits another to the left side.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

Try again.

Carlos tries, but fouls it off. He keep trying to hit one to the right side.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

Keep trying!

Carlos finally succeeds, but it was a chore. Johnny signals to Chico to turn the machine off.

CARLOS

(frustrated)

Damn. It's not so easy when you're trying to do it.

JOHNNY

(grabs a bat and moves in next to Carlos)

No, it isn't easy, especially if you're doing what you're doing.

(gets in hitting stance)

As you pull your hands back, you're going back way too strong with your bottom hand. That's causing your back elbow to go up or "chicken wing."

Johnny flaps his right arm like a chicken wing.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

The result is a longer swing. Less bat control with a long swing.

CARLOS

That's keeping me from hitting
to the right side?

JOHNNY

(demonstrates)

A long swing means you need to
start everything early to make
good contact -- you open up your
front side too quick and need to
get your hands moving too early.

(beat)

You're committing yourself to
swing at a pitch before you've
had a really decent look at the
pitch.

(beat)

Not good.

CARLOS

So what's the fix?

JOHNNY

Repeat this: *Short to the ball,*
long through it. And keep
repeating it.

CARLOS

Billy in Wilmington used to say
that!

JOHNNY

Well, Uncle Billy was right.

CARLOS

You knew Billy?

JOHNNY

Shit yeah. He was my first
hitting instructor in rookie
league.

CARLOS

Really?

JOHNNY

Yeah, baseball's like a big
fucking family spread all over
hell...

(beat)

Just remember that "short to the ball" means you keep your swing as compact as possible, with your elbow close to the body. No chicken wing.

(beat)

"Long through it" means once you make contact you crank those wrists and bring that bat head all the way around. No letting go with the top hand.

(motions to Chico)

Start it up!

THE PITCHING MACHINE STARTS UP AND BALLS SLAP AGAINST BACKSTOP. Carlos steps back up to the plate. He hits the next pitch to the right side.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

That's the idea! Stay back, and wait 'til the last split second to throw barrel at the pitch...and picture smacking it over the fucking second baseman's head!

Carlos starts hitting every pitch to the right side.

CARLOS

God, it's a whole different feeling! I feel like I'm almost swinging too late.

JOHNNY

Damn right! That's because you're waiting an extra five-hundreds of a second to swing. Waiting is good. Before you were swinging too early. It's all relative.

CARLOS

I've never had it explained like that. It makes great sense.

JOHNNY

No prob, it comes with the service.

(beat)

Now all you have to do is practice it a thousand times so you can do it with a pitcher who's not throwing everything down the middle at the same speed.

EXT. AMARILLO STADIUM - NIGHT

GAME IN PROGRESS

ON-DECK CIRCLE

CARLOS KNEELS in the circle waiting to bat in the home half of the seventh. Johnny comes out of the dugout and kneels next to him.

UMPIRE (O.S.)

Ball four!

Their teammate at the plate walks to first, loading the bases with one out.

ON THE SCOREBOARD: ROCKHOUNDS 3, MUSTANGS 3.

THE ORGANIST PLAYS THE FAMOUS "CHARGE" refrain over the PA: "Da, da, da, dant-la, daaaa!"

JOHNNY

Your first situation, kid. They'll pitch you hard outside, hoping that you'll hook a grounder to short to start a DP.

CARLOS

Ya think?

JOHNNY

Yeah. But don't think too much when you get up there.

CARLOS

Just short to the ball and long through it. God, I'm all nerves, J.

JOHNNY

Take a deep breath and count to ten.

Carlos breathes and counts.

CARLOS

(surprised)

Hey, I feel better. Calmer.

JOHNNY

Good. Now listen.

(beat)

Turk will make you take a strike.

(beat)

After that all you do is look for a good pitch on the outer half.

(beat)

Be patient. Stay back. Don't swing until you get a good look at a pitch. Don't be afraid of two strikes.

CARLOS

Gotcha.

CARLOS KNOCKS THE WEIGHTED DONUT OFF THE BAT and walks to the plate.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

(over the PA)

Now coming to bat, our newest Mustang -- Shortstop Carlos Men-dez!

The crowd roars. The organist plays "Da-da-dadant-la, daaaa" three times, going up an octave each time.

The excitement grows.

AT HOME PLATE

CARLOS P.O.V. -- He watches the third base coach go through a series of signs. Finally, the coach TOUCHES HIS NOSE.

THE "NO-SWING"/"TAKE" SIGN.

BACK TO SCENE

CARLOS
 (blesses himself as he
 digs in)
 Father, watch over me.

CATCHER
 That ain't gonna help,
 hot shot.

CARLOS
 Father, forgive this sinner.

CATCHER
 Thanks!

UMPIRE
 (points to pitcher)
 Let's play ball!

THE PITCHER LOOKS IN FOR THE SIGN. HE NODS,
 WINDS AND DELIVERS.

UMPIRE (cont'd)
 Strike!

CARLOS BACKS OUT FOR A SECOND AND LOOKS DOWN TO
 THIRD.

CARLOS P.O.V. - The third base coach goes
 through signs again, then SLAPS HIS SLEEVE.

THE "SWING-AWAY" SIGN.

BACK TO SCENE

CARLOS STEPS BACK IN THE BOX. THE PITCHER SETS
 AND WINDS AGAIN. He throws and it's low and
 away. Carlos lays off.

UMPIRE (cont'd)
 Ball!

CARLOS BACKS OUT AGAIN.

CARLOS P.O.V - He looks to the third base coach who gives more signs and then SLAPS HIS SLEEVE AND CLAPS HIS HANDS.

HE GLANCES OVER AT JOHNNY ON THE CIRCLE. Johnny nods.

BACK TO SCENE

CARLOS STEPS BACK INTO THE BOX.

THE PITCHER WINDS AND THROWS AGAIN.

UMPIRE (cont'd)
Strike two!

CARLOS STEPS OUT AGAIN.

CARLOS
Where was it, ump?

UMPIRE
Outside corner.

CARLOS STEPS IN THE BOX AND SETS. Down the line, the coach is chattering away.

THIRD BASE COACH
(clapping)
Hit away, kid. Hit away!

QUICK CUTS:

- The catcher gives a sign. The pitcher WINDS AND DELIVERS.
- CARLOS SWINGS AND SENDS A SHARP LINE DRIVE OVER THE FIRST BASEMAN'S HEAD and down the line.
- THE BALL HITS THE RIGHT FIELD LINE, sends up a puff of chalk, and rolls toward the corner.

- The first base umpire with his back to the infield POINTS AND SHOUTS: "Fair ball! Fair ball!"
- CARLOS ROUNDS FIRST, AND WITH HIS BLAZING SPEED, CRUISES INTO SECOND standing up. He watches as the second baseman gets the relay from the right fielder.

SECOND BASEMAN
(smacks Carlos on thigh
with glove)
Nice hit, Rook!

CARLOS
(touches his index finger
to the brim of his helmet)
Thanks.

ON THE SCOREBOARD - All three runner on base have scored and it now reads "MUSTANGS 6, ROCKHOUNDS 3."

THE CROWD IS GOING WILD!

THE MUSTANGS IN THE DUGOUT ARE STANDING AND CHEERING.

JOHNNY GIVES A FISTPUMP to Carlos. He smiles like a proud big brother. Carlos pumps back.

INT. "THE WATERING HOLE" - A LOCAL BAR - NIGHT

A CELEBRATION. Johnny, Carlos, Chico and some other teammates are drinking to the victory and Carlos's heroics. SMITTY, 25, a Mustangs outfielder, is dancing on the bar with a young woman. Everyone else is standing in a group chugging beers and shots and laughing and joking. Girlfriends and groupies are milling about and getting hugged and pawed by players.

CHICO
(very tipsy)
Carlos, when you get to the
Show, you be sure to tell them
about *su major amigo* Chico!

CARLOS
 (hugs Chico)
 Sure I will, major amigo!

Carlos turns to Johnny and holds his bottle up. They clank bottles and each take a long guzzle.

CARLOS (cont'd)
 Thank you for being such a good teacher, Mr. Rhodes.

JOHNNY
 You're welcome, you wise ass hot shot! Remember it's just one game.

CARLOS
 Yes. But it was a very, very important game for me. I feel worthy to be here.

JOHNNY
 I hear ya.

CARLOS'S CELL PHONE RINGS. He pulls it out of his pocket and answers.

CARLOS (cont'd)
 (looks at phone)
 Excuse me, J. It's my wife from Carolina!
 (speaks into phone while holding other hand over ear)
 Mi hermosa mama! Como estas?
 Y el bebe?

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE:
 Wilmington, North Carolina

Carlos's wife, JULIA, early 20s, a beautiful young woman with long black hair in a bun and piercing dark eyes. She is six months pregnant and is sitting on a couch in a nightgown with her feet curled underneath her, and speaking into her cell phone.

She is in the couple's apartment back in North Carolina.

JULIA
 (into phone, in
 Spanish subtitled)
 Hello, my darling. I'm fine.
 We're fine. I miss you. How was
 your game?

CARLOS, MEANWHILE, HAS QUICKLY SLIPPED OUTSIDE
 THE NOISY BAR.

EXT. THE SIDEWALK - NIGHT

CARLOS
 (into phone, in
 Spanish subtitled)
 Better than you could have ever
 imagined, my beauty. I got the
 game-winning hit and I'm now
 having a beer with the guys.

INTERCUT LIVING ROOM AND SIDEWALK

JULIA
 (yells to off-screen
 family members, in Spanish
 subtitled)
 Oh my god! Oh my god! Carlos got
 a big hit and was the hero!

JULIA MOTIONS TO THE OTHERS to come over. We see Carlos's younger brother JUAN, 17, and older sister RAFAELA, late 20s, come over to the couch and nestle in on either side of Julia.

JUAN is a handsome teenager who is still very boyish. REFAELA is an exotic-looking beauty, with dark hair and eyes and a prominent nose and lips. She is of medium height with a model's physique. She is even more beautiful than her sister-in-law.

JULIA (cont'd)
 (in Spanish, subtitled)
 Carlos, I put you on speaker.
 Juan and Rafi are here. Tell us
 all about the game, hero!

JUAN
 (in Spanish, subtitled)
 Hi, big brother!

RAFAELA
 (in Spanish, subtitled)
 Hi, little brother!

CARLOS
 (into phone in Spanish,
 subtitled)
 Hi, my darlings, I miss you all
 so much. I wish you could be
 here right now with me!

JUAN
 (in Spanish, subtitled)
 C'mon Carlos! Tell us about the
 game!

CARLOS
 (into phone in Spanish,
 subtitled)
 Okay, Okay. The bases were
 loaded and the game was tied 3-
 3. I got a good pitch and lined
 a rope...

INT. "THE WATERING HOLE" - SAME

JOHNNY is talking with PEGGY, late 20s, a local
 blonde honey he's been hanging out with.
 They're seated at the bar.

Peggy's a very good-looking woman with a low-
 cut blouse, beautiful cleavage, lots of make-up
 and the slightly bedraggled look of someone
 who's been through the singles-bar wars.

PEGGY
 You haven't asked me over in a
 while, lover. Waz up?

JOHNNY
Been busy, Peg.

PEGGY
You been seeing someone else?

JOHNNY
Got a new houseguest.

PEGGY
Is she young and cute?

JOHNNY
He's very handsome.

PEGGY
(wide eyed)
Whoa, Johnny! Whatta you mean,
handsome?

JOHNNY
Jus' kidding, Peggy-Poo. Have a
new player staying with me 'til
he finds his own place.

PEGGY
Ooow! Maybe we can do a
threesome!

JOHNNY
Have another drink, willya!

PEGGY
Yessir, Mr. Rhodes!
(motions to barkeep)
Another Cosmo, Charlie!

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - DAY

THE NEXT MORNING

Carlos is up and dressed and MAKES A SMOOTHIE
IN THE BLENDER at the breakfast bar that
overlooks the living room.

He's ready for his morning run -- wearing shorts, tank top and sneakers. He has a sweatband around his head. He is extremely buffed and handsome.

Peggy enters the kitchen area looking bedraggled, hung-over and wearing only a T-shirt.

CARLOS
Good morning, Peggy!

PEGGY
(still foggy)
Hi, honey. I met you last night at the bar, but forgot yer name.

She waltzes over to him. Hugs and kisses him on the cheek. Peggy loves men to a fault.

CARLOS
(puts hands up, defensively)
I'm Carlos. Johnny's new teammate. Nice to meet you!

PEGGY
Nice to meet you, Carly! You're hunky. Do you like older women?
(in a husky voice)
We know what you like...

CARLOS
(gently pushes back from her embrace)
Ahhh, Peggy, you seem like a nice person...but I'm taken. And you're Johnny's friend.

PEGGY
Johnny, Shommny! The slugger fell asleep on me last night when I was still raring to go! I need a younger, more virile man, Carly!

CARLOS
Peggy, I'm married and don't know you. Please don't do this now...

PEGGY LIFTS HER T-SHIRT up to her chin and SHOWS OFF HER VERY SHAPLEY NAKED BODY to Carlos.

PEGGY

Kinda makes you forget all about wifey, huh Carly?

CARLOS

(puts hands up again)

Jesus, Mamacita! Johnny's gonna get up and be real pissed!

PEGGY

(sits on a chair)

You likey, Carly? Come to mama. Kiss, kiss, kiss!

Leaning back on the chair, SHE PUCKERS HER LIPS AND SPREADS EAGLE!

CARLOS

Jesus, Peggy, please stop! No mas!

JOHNNY SUDDENLY BURSTS OUT OF THE BEDROOM and surprises Peggy. He's angry, and apparently has been listening to her act. He confronts her.

JOHNNY

Close your legs, cover up, pack up and get the fuck out here! And this time take all yer shit with you!

PEGGY

Oh Johnny, I was just teasing your new friend! Don't be so fucking prudish. We're all adults!

JOHNNY

Yer right, Peg. And adults know when it's the right time - and when it isn't. The man said no, and he asked you to stop.

(beat)

So just get the fuck out!

(beat)

Now!

Peggy gets up, pulls her T-shirt back down and stomps off to the bedroom, insulted and hurt.

INSIDE THE BEDROOM

PEGGY (O.S.)
(muffled voice)
Fuck you, Johnny! Fuck you and
your little Mexican boyfriend!
Assholes!

AT THE BREAKFAST BAR

CARLOS
Jesus, Johnny. I'm sorry. I
don't know what to say. She just
started coming on to me...

JOHNNY
(finger to lips)
Shhh.

P.O.V. - FROM THE BREAKFAST BAR

PEGGY STORMS OUT OF THE BEDROOM WITH A BAG OVER HER SHOULDER. She's dressed in her low-cut blouse and her hair is tousled and her make-up smeared. She goes to the door, stops and turns to them.

PEGGY
See if I ever talk to you again,
Johnny - you fucking bastard!
Now you and your boyfriend can
get it on!

BACK TO SCENE

JOHNNY WALKS INTO LIVING AREA AND GRABS a brassiere that was hanging over a chair.

HE FLINGS THE BRA in Peggy's direction.

JOHNNY
Here... you forgot that!

SHE PICKS IT UP and stuffs it into her bag.

PEGGY

Fuck you, Johnny! I'm the best
thing you've ever had!

She stands at the door and starts to weep,
maybe looking for a reprieve.

JOHNNY

Don't leave sad, Peggy-Poo...
just leave!

PEGGY

Fuck you! See if I ever talk to
you again!

SHE OPENS THE DOOR, STORMS OUT AND SLAMS IT
behind her.

JOHNNY GOES TO THE DOOR, LOCKS IT AND WIPES HIS
FOREHEAD.

JOHNNY

Thank you, god!

CARLOS

Johnny, I'm sorry about all
this. I didn't...

JOHNNY

Forget it. It had nothing to do
with you. The girl's a sex
addict who drinks too much and
comes on to on every good-
looking guy she meets. She
started doing it behind my back.

(beat)

I needed to catch her in the
act.

CARLOS

So you knew she would do that?

JOHNNY

Yeah, sorry kid. I kinda used
you. I wanted a good excuse to
kick her out. For good.

CARLOS

She doesn't own a gun, does she?

JOHNNY

Don't worry, she's pretty harmless. All she does is drink, have sex, sleep a little -- then gets up and wants to do it all over again.

(beat)

Been seeing her off and on for a while, but lately it's worn real thin. My mistake for getting involved with someone who I knew had issues.

CARLOS

Makes me glad I'm married.

JOHNNY

Hey, there's lots to be said for having a loving woman who's sane and sober.

EXT. AMARILLO LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY

Johnny talks with a group of kids and shows them how to hold their bats and hit balls off a tee. He is smiling and laughing and seems to really enjoy being with the kids, and the kids look up to him as a true hero. He gives them each a "Mustang" baseball that he autographs before leaving.

TURK (V.O.)

Without getting too personal, I always thought that Johnny should settle down with a nice girl and have kids. He's always loved working with kids, and spends lots of his free time doing it.

(beat)

He's had a bunch of different woman -- all beautiful girls mind you -- but those I met always seemed to be more

interested in his image and
making the scene with him,
rather than the man himself.

FLASH: JOHNNY IN BARS AND AT SOCIAL EVENTS WITH
SEVERAL DIFFERENT WOMEN, all extremely good-
looking.

TURK (V.O.) (cont'd)
We used to call them gold-
diggers or groupies, and I guess
that still applies.

INT. AMARILLO HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

Johnny WALKS to a podium.

TURK (V.O.) (cont'd)
And because he knows Spanish,
Johnny also gives his time
speaking to local Latino kids
about the benefits of staying in
school and learning English.

JOHNNY
(in Spanish, subtitled)
Good morning. Some of you know
me -- I'm Johnny Rhodes and I
play for the Amarillo Mustangs.
I'm here today not to lecture
you about why you should stay in
school... I'm here to tell you
my story as a high school drop-
out...

TURK (V.O.)
And they listen to him.
(beat)
The more you get to know Johnny,
the more you realize he's not
just another talented prima
donna athlete -- but that he's
really a good guy with his heart
in the right place.

(beat)
When he's off the field of
battle.

INT. VFW HALL - DAY

Johnny IS WEARING A DRESS BLUE MARINE UNIFORM and stands before a group of vets at a local post. They're celebrating the return of local soldiers from the Mideast.

TURK (V.O.) (cont'd)

And speaking of battle - *real battle* - Johnny's also a vet. He spent two years in the Mideast, but he doesn't really like to talk about it with us civvies.

JOHNNY

(salutes)

Post commander, fellow veterans, active servicemen and women, family members and distinguished guests.

(beat)

Thank you for asking me here today to speak. It's a distinct honor. I always will have a special place in my heart for my comrades in arms from all services...

As Johnny speaks to the gathering, TURK'S VOICE IS HEARD OVER HIS...

TURK (V.O.)

Part of Johnny's appeal to me always has been that no matter how hot he ever gets, I have never seen or heard of one instance where he became physical or violent. No bar fights, no punching out of disrespectful fans or competitors. He's never even gone after one pitcher who's clunked him. Not one!

(beat)

He's called them everything in the book *mindya*, but he's never charged the mound.

(beat)

And I'm glad he's like that,
because Johnny probably could
kill anybody if he was of a
mind...

EXT. MARINE BOOT CAMP - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Johnny instructs recruits in hand-to-hand
combat. He gets a trainee in a headlock
and brings him to his knees.

TURK (V.O.) (cont'd)
... 'cause he taught martial
arts in the Corps...
(beat)
... you know where they teach
you to gouge a guy's eyeballs
out with your fingers, and then
get him in a headlock and snap
his neck to sever his spinal
cord. Whew!

**EXT/INT. MUSTANGS TEAM BUS - DAY - (BACK TO
PRESENT)**

On a road trip to Midland and San Antonio. Turk
is sitting up front with his coaches.

Most of the players are listening to music with
earbuds connected to smartphones. Some are
playing games or texting. Others sleep. Johnny
and Carlos chitchat.

JOHNNY
(doing a crossword)
How's the apartment search?

CARLOS
You ready to kick me out, huh
amigo?

JOHNNY
Just wondering.

CARLOS
Actually, found a good place not
far from yours. They said it'll

be cleaned and repainted by August first.

JOHNNY

Great. When's your wife coming?

CARLOS

She, my sister and brother are planning to drive out right after the first. I'm a little worried, but they told me everything will be okay.

JOHNNY

Yeah, that's a helluva long drive from North Carolina.

CARLOS

About fifteen hundred miles. Wish I could go back and drive them myself. But my kid brother is a good driver, and he can't wait to hit the road.

JOHNNY

They got a decent car?

CARLOS

A year-old SUV. I bought it after I got my signing bonus.

JOHNNY

That's nice...if you're lucky enough to get one.

CARLOS

Yeah. I was lucky. It was a good chunk of change. Half of it went to taxes and my agent. Then I had to spend most of the rest just to get my wife and family out of Mexico permanently.

JOHNNY

You had to pay...

TURK STANDS UP IN THE FRONT OF THE BUS. He raises his hand and waves for everybody's attention. Players stop what they're doing.

They poke the guys who are sleeping. Turk takes a mike plugged into the bus PA system.

TURK

Guys, just listen up for a minute. I want to get a few words in before we get to Midland and the hotel.

(beat)

So, we're in first by three, and the next eight we play against Midland and San Antone could make or break us. I know we're all well aware of that...

(beat)

So let's just keep it simple. Stay focused and play like we've been playing...and show the Rockhounds and Missions why the 'Stangs are the best fucking team in this league. Am I right?

TEAM

(shouts)

Right!

TURK

Is Turk always right?

TEAM

Right!

TURK

And with a guy on first, we hit to...

TEAM

Right!

Turk waves and sits down as the players laugh and cheer.

EXT. MIDLAND STADIUM - NIGHT

GAME IN PROGRESS

ON THE SCOREBOARD: MUSTANGS 4, ROCKHOUNDS 4.
It's the bottom of the ninth. Runners on first
and second with none out.

IN THE MUSTANGS DUGOUT

TURK SITS ON THE BENCH NEXT TO OZZIE, 60, a
longtime coach. The ninth inning is turning
into a mess. BILLY, 25, the Mustangs' pitcher,
just misses on a 3-2 count and the bases are
now loaded, none out.

TURK

(to himself)

Shit Billy! Don't nibble so
fucking much!

Billy misses the corner with his next pitch.

AT HOME PLATE

UMPIRE

Take your base!

MIDLAND

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

(over the PA)

Now coming to bat for the
Rockhounds, Donnie Johnson.
Come-on Donnie - let's have a
DONNIEBROOK!

The crowd cheers.

IN THE MUSTANGS DUGOUT

TURK

(to Ozzie)

Son of a bitch, Oz! Wanted us to
win this first one to get off to
a good start.

(gets up and goes to mound)

Time Ump!

UMPIRE

Time!

AT THE MOUND

The infielders gather along with the pitcher and catcher.

TURK

(hands in back pockets)

Okay, guys. Let's try to pull this one out of the shitter. Shorten up. Come home with the ground ball.

(points to Billy)

All fastballs, Billy. No nibbling!

(turns and motions to outfielders to shorten up.)

Okay, let's see if we can catch some lightening.

Turk trots back to dugout. He turns and stands on the top step.

AT HOME PLATE

DONNIE JOHNSON, the Rockhounds' best hitter and biggest mouth, digs in right-handed batter's box.

JOHNSON

(to catcher)

Hey, watch your first place lead get cut to two games real quick.

MUSTANGS CATCHER

Hey Donnie, your kid sister's in our dugout. She's good!

JOHNSON

Fuck you, and your asshole team!

UMPIRE

Okay. Okay. Let's play ball.

BILLY LOOKS IN. HE SETS, WINDS AND DELIVERS.
JOHNSON HITS A LOW LINER HEADED TOWARD CENTER.

It appears that the game will be over. The runner from third trots home while looking over his shoulder.

QUICK CUTS:

- CARLOS, AT SHORTSTOP, TAKES A CHEETAH-LIKE STEP TO HIS LEFT, SPRINGS AND DIVES THROUGH THE AIR PARALLEL TO THE GROUND, FULLY EXTENDING HIS GLOVE HAND.
- INCREDIBLY, HE STABS THE LINE DRIVE IN THE WEBBING and lands prone on the infield dirt WITH A THUD.
- The runner from third, half way down the line, SEES THE CATCH AND RACES BACK TO THIRD.
- CARLOS QUICKLY GETS TO HIS FEET AND FIRES A STRIKE to his third baseman, doubling the runner.
- The Rockhound runner who was on second is still in front of the play. HE TURNS AND FRANTICALLY SCRAMBLES BACK TO SECOND BASE.
- CARLOS BEATS THE RUNNER TO THE BAG.
- HE STRETCHES TO GET A WIDE RETURN THROW FROM HIS THIRD BASEMAN - AND IN ONE MOTION - DIVES AND TAGS THE RUNNER ON THE FOOT BEFORE HE CAN SLIDE SAFELY back into the bag.
- A SPECTACULAR TRIPLE PLAY!
- As Carlos comes running off the field with his teammates, he does an 'OZZIE SMITH' FLIP.

IN THE MUSTANGS DUGOUT

Turk, Ozzie and the players and coaches on the bench are SHOUTING AND JUMPING UP AND DOWN.

TURK

If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it! Holy mothera god!

OZZIE

Never seen anything like it in my 42 years in pro ball!

The Mustangs ARE SLAPPING CARLOS ON THE BACK
AND HIGH-FIVING EVERYBODY.

Now it's onto the 10th inning.

CARLOS leads off, with Johnny to follow.

JOHNNY

(to Turk)

Turk, they brought in their
closer. You know this guy. All
heat. Let us hit the first
pitch... it's always down
Broadway.

TURK

You're right, J. Talk to
Carlos.

JOHNNY GRABS HIS BAT AND HEADS TO THE ON-DECK
CIRCLE. Carlos is kneeling there, watching the
Rockhounds pitcher warm up.

INSERT - RADAR GUN IN THE STANDS behind home
plate. It registers 97...then 98!

BACK TO SCENE

ON-DECK CIRCLE

CARLOS

Guy's got serious heat!

JOHNNY

Yeah, but his cheese always has
a lot of the plate - usually
middle out. Turk says we can go
after the first pitch if it
looks good.

CARLOS

Short to the ball...and long
through it.

JOHNNY

And if you catch up to one of
those cheese balls, it'll go a
long fucking way!

CARLOS WALKS TO HOME PLATE, LOOKS DOWN AT THE
THIRD BASE COACH, AND STEPS IN THE BOX.

AT HOME PLATE

CARLOS

(blesses himself as he
digs in)
Help me, Father.

CATCHER

What a lucky son of a bitch!
What a fucking lucky catch!

CARLOS

I call it faith - not luck. You
have to believe.

CATCHER

Fuck your faith!

CARLOS

An atheist, huh? I'll pray for
you.

UMPIRE

Play ball!

THE PITCHER GETS THE SIGN, WINDS AND DELIVERS.
A fastball right down the middle.

CARLOS SWINGS AND HITS A TOWERING DRIVE TOWARD
THE RIGHT FIELD CORNER. It looks like it might
drift foul, but it glances off the right field
foul pole.

FIRST BASE UMPIRE

(signaling)
Home run!

CARLOS

(looks back at catcher)
You gotta believe!

HE FLIPS THE BAT AND TROTS THE BASES. Johnny
PATS him on the helmet and SLAPS HIM ON THE
BUTT after he crosses home plate.

IN THE MUSTANGS DUGOUT

THE PLAYERS ARE STANDING AND CLAPPING. CARLOS IS GREETED WITH BACKSLAPS AND HIGH-FIVES. TURK GIVES HIM A HUG.

AT HOME PLATE

JOHNNY DIGS IN THE LEFTHANDED BATTER'S BOX.
The big shift is on again.

CATCHER

(to Johnny)

Your little buddy hit a fucking lucky Mexican cheapie! We'll get it back in the bottom of the inning.

JOHNNY

Just like your little sister in our dugout will get her cherry back? I don't think so, jerkoff!

A BURST OF LAUGHTER COMES FROM the Mustangs dugout.

CATCHER

Fuck you, Rhodes! You and all your smartass dicksucking teammates.

(flips a bird toward dugout)

Let's see ya hit another one tonight right into the shift.

UMPIRE

Cut the bullshit! Play ball!

THE PITCHER looks in and delivers. It's cheese right down the middle.

JOHNNY SLAMS A MOONSHOT WAY OVER THE RIGHT FIELD FENCE AND INTO THE PARKING LOT.

JOHNNY

(to catcher)

Great fucking shift!

HE FLIPS THE BAT AND TROTS THE BASES.

A SHORT TIME LATER...

The last Rockhound batter grounds out in the bottom of the tenth, and the game is over.

IN THE ROCKHOUNDS DUGOUT

Guys look at the field in disbelief. One guy kicks a helmet.

MIDLAND

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

(over the PA)

And the final score... Mustangs 6 and the Rockhounds 4. Next game tomorrow night at seven thirty.

INT. THE ROCKHOUNDS CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT

DEAD SILENCE. Everybody's slumped in the seats. Donnie Johnson speaks up.

JOHNSON

How the fuck did we lose that game?

NO RESPONSE.

INT. THE VISITORS' CLUBHOUSE - SAME

Lots of laughing, drinking, eating and back-slapping.

TURK

(standing on a bench)

And the game ball goes to who else, but the fucking amazing magician at shortstop - Carlos the Magnificent!

CARLOS

(joins Turk on the bench)

Gracias, Skipper. I am so happy that I have come to play with the Mustangs. You've made me

feel like a verdadero mano -- a true brother.

(teammates cheer)

And a special thanks to my big brother Johnny Rhodes -- mi mano grande -- who has helped me to open my eyes in my preparation and at the plate...

(looks up)

And Father in heaven, mucho gracias for helping us make that triple play tonight!

Touched, Turk quickly wipes a tear out of his eye as the guys cheer Carlos. Then they spray him with beer.

When they get down from the bench, Turk takes the kid by the arm and whispers to him.

TURK

Congrats again, kid! Great play. Nice homer. But that flip you did...don't do it again, okay? No mas!

CARLOS

Okay, Skipper. No mas.

INT. THE MUSTANGS TEAM BUS - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE:

A week later

THE ROAD TRIP IS OVER. The Mustangs are on their way back to Amarillo.

Most everybody is sleeping. Johnny and Carlos are fast asleep next to each other. A few players are up, as we see the faint light from their smartphones.

Turk is snoozing. An ambulance with a flashing light comes from the opposite direction and shoots past the bus. Turk wakes up and slowly opens his eyes. He takes a drink from a bottle of water in his cup holder.

HE TALKS TO THE CAMERA.

TURK

Yeah, that was some road trip. I don't know what woulda happened if we'd lost that first game to Midland...

(beat)

...but I do know this - the way we won that game - it lit a frickin' fire under us.

(beat)

We ended up taking seven outta eight. In first place now by nine full games. And we're on this roll because of the "Carlos and Johnny Show."

(beat)

Never woulda guessed those two would become like Frick and Frack. But that's baseball - you never know what'll happen.

EXT. KAUFFMAN STADIUM (KANSAS CITY) - DAY

Outside view of the Kansas City Royals' ballpark, before moving inside to the executive offices.

INT. KAUFFMAN STADIUM/EXECUTIVE SUITE - SAME

DAYTON MOORE, 50, THE ROYALS' GENERAL MANAGER, is seated at his desk. He's looking at a piece of paper with the stats on CARLOS since he's been in Amarillo.

INSERT - CARLOS MENDEZ'S AMARILLO STAT SHEET

G-15
 AB-50
 Hits-17
 2B-6
 3B-2
 HR-2
 BA-.340
 OBP-.417
 Runs-14

RBI-8
BB-5
SAC-2
K-7
HBP-3
SB-5
CS-0
Asst.-62
E-1
A/G-4.13
F%- .984

BACK TO SCENE

MOORE PICKS UP HIS PHONE AND PUNCHES THE SPEED-DIAL. We hear ringing.

TURK (V.O.)
(over the phone, filtered)
Turk McKenna.

DAYTON
Turk, Dayton Moore. Got those stats you faxed over.

TURK (V.O.)
(over the phone, filtered)
Hello, Dayton! Yeah, the kid's doing pretty well here in Amarillo.

DAYTON
Pretty well? Turk, you're makin' me look like a frickin' genius!

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE IN AMARILLO - DAY

Turk is sitting at his desk on the phone.

TURK
Well, thank you, Dayton. I appreciate it. But I'm just sending the kid out there to play every day. He's doing it on his own...his glove and arm are the best I've ever seen.
(beat)

... he's living up to his
billing.

INTERCUT CONVERSATION

DAYTON

We knew he would do it with the
glove. And that triple play was
amazing. But his hitting is off
the frickin' chart! The average
at .340 and OBP of .417.

(looks at another chart)

Christ, in Wilmington his
numbers were .280 and .340. I
know it's only been 15 games,
but damn, what a trend!

TURK

Yes, it's only 15 games...and
he'll come back down to earth a
little, no doubt. But he's doing
as well as anybody I've seen
after 15 games at this level.

DAYTON

So what's your secret down
there?

TURK

Dayton, I wish I could take even
some of the credit, but it's all
on Johnny Rhodes.

DAYTON

Rhodes has worked that well with
him?

TURK

Yessir. Johnny's teaching Carlos
how to wait on pitches a lot
better. And how to be more
selective. He's really taken him
under his wing.

DAYTON

What's your read on Rhodes now?

TURK

I know Johnny's had issues - particularly attitude - but Dayton, I have to say this to you, he's still one of the best hitters I've ever seen. And he's showing he can be an effective coach.

DAYTON

Is he still a hothead?

TURK

He still has his moments...but he's mellowing with age.

DAYTON

This might seem like an unfair question... but would you stake your reputation on him?

TURK

No, it isn't unfair. And, yes I would. I think Johnny's turned the corner.

(beat)

I believe he deserves another shot. That's my opinion for what it's worth.

DAYTON

Interesting.

TURK

I'd be happy to send along Johnny's latest numbers if you'd like to see them. He's tailed off a tad from his high, but he's still leading the league at .367...

DAYTON

Not necessary at the moment. But I'll keep in mind what you said. And I'll keep in touch.

TURK

Dayton, let me add this before you go. I'm extremely proud that

my 'Stangs are nine games in front. I know you're well aware of that.

(beat)

But here in Amarillo, they're calling our surge the "Carlos and Johnny Show." As corny as it might sound, the whole team has bought tickets.

(beat)

It's been a truly gratifying experience. Best time I've ever had managing.

DAYTON

You're a good man, Turk. You're loyal to your players, you treat them with respect - and they go to the mat for you. And it's showing.

TURK

Thank you, Dayton. What else can I say...but I try to do my best. I love the game and my boys.

DAYTON

I know you do. And I give you my personal word that when the right openings come up in Triple A or here in KC, I'll give you a call. You're on my short list.

TURK

Thank you very much. I truly appreciate the vote of confidence.

DAYTON

Thank you, Turk. Glad you're on our side. I'll be in touch when we're ready to have you put the kid on a plane. Good luck. Keep winning! Bye.

TURK

Bye, Dayton.

Turk HANGS UP AND POUNDS HIS FISTS ON THE DESK in a fit of glee. He sits back and puts his feet up.

He pulls a bottle of Granddad and a glass out of his bottom desk drawer and pours himself a hefty snort. He holds it up and toasts himself.

TURK

To me! Woohoo!

EXT. AMARILLO STADIUM - DAY

BATTING CAGE UNDER THE STANDS

Johnny and Carlos are in batting cage working at the pitching machine. Johnny tends to the pitching machine as Carlos hits. Johnny stops the machine and gives Carlos a batting tip.

TURK (V.O.)

Carlos keeps working on the hitting with Johnny every day, and he continues to blossom at the plate. He's become a very confident hitter, knowing he can hit any ball where it was pitched. And Johnny has shown that besides being a great hitter, he can be a great teacher.

(beat)

Carlos has become like his younger brother...something Johnny never had growing up as an only child.

INT/EXT. SUV ON THE HIGHWAY - DAY - TRAVELING

It's early August now, and Carlos's family - wife Julia, older sister Rafaela and younger brother Juan, are finally heading west from North Carolina.

Juan is driving, Rafaela is in the passenger seat and pregnant Julia is sleeping in the back. The entire rear of the vehicle is stuffed

to the gills, and boxes covered with a tarp are tied down on the roof rack.

RAFAELA

Where are we, honey?

JUAN

In Arkansas. Almost to Oklahoma!

RAFAELA

Where's Oklahoma?

JUAN

It's right next to Texas. We'll make it to Amarillo tomorrow night!

RAFAELA

Oh, I can't wait to kiss our Johnny.

JUAN

Me, too. Or at least hug him!

Rafaela laughs, and rubs her younger brother's shoulder tenderly.

INT. CARLOS'S NEW APARTMENT - DAY

A large, nicely laid out place with bedrooms and baths up a short stairway off the living area. A large living area. A new couch with the tags still on it sits in the living area. Boxes are stacked against a wall.

IN THE BEDROOM

Carlos is setting up a new bed. He hears Johnny come in from outside. Johnny's carrying a box that he adds to a pile.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

JOHNNY

Yo!

CARLOS (O.S.)
(shouts back)
Hey, J! Can you help me up here
in the bedroom with the
mattress?

Johnny goes up the stairs leading to the
bedrooms.

IN THE BEDROOM

A box spring and mattress are leaning against
the wall. Together, they slip them into the new
bed frame.

JOHNNY
Nice big bed. For you and mama?

CARLOS
Yeah. We move around a lot.

JOHNNY
When they due in?

CARLOS
Manana. Tomorrow. At night. So
I'm real glad you could help me,
J. I kept putting it off.
(beat)
Least I have the bedrooms all
set.

JOHNNY
Lucky I was in the mood to help.

CARLOS
Yeah. Hey, gotta case of Dos
Equis in the box. Let's go have
a few.

JOHNNY
Shit, you're getting me hooked
on that stuff. I can't drink Bud
anymore!

They LEAVE the bedroom.

IN THE KITCHEN

Johnny sits down at a small table full of odds and ends. He pushes them to one side.

Carlos grabs two beer bottles from the refrigerator and pulls up a chair at the table.

They open the bottles, clank them and take long guzzles.

JOHNNY

Gonna kinda miss you at my place.

CARLOS

I wouldn't let that get around the clubhouse, mano.

They laugh and drink. Carlos gets two more beers from the refrigerator.

Carlos starts texting on his phone. Johnny drinks and looks at his phone. He puts it down on the table and looks like he has something on his mind. Finally, he speaks up.

JOHNNY

Hey, remember that we conversation we had on the bus going to Midland?

CARLOS

(looks up)

Yeah. That's when you asked How soon I was going to find my own place.

JOHNNY

No, no. Not that. When you were talking about getting your family out of Mexico.

CARLOS

Yeah. It's not a place I want to I wanted to stay with my family.

JOHNNY

You never finished telling me what happened...to your parents.

CARLOS

(hesitates)

They died. I just want to leave that back in Mexico. It's a sad place, a sad place with bad memories. I will always keep my mama and papi in my heart.

JOHNNY

I think I know you well enough now to ask you this -- were they killed?

CARLOS

(surprised)

Who told you that?

JOHNNY

I was told in confidence.

CARLOS

(eyes suddenly fill
with tears)

Yes, mano, they were. They were murdered by the bastard narcos and the filth that does their dirty work. My parents spoke out, and they were murdered for it!

JOHNNY

What do you mean... they "spoke out?"

CARLOS

They were both journalists. They both wrote some stories on how corrupt officials in Veracruz were being paid off by the cartels.

(beat)

They received threats. They were told to stop.

(beat)

They didn't.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD IN MEXICO - DAY (FLASHBACK)

SUPERIMPOSE:

Mexican Baseball Academy
 Veracruz, Mexico
 Six years earlier

CARLOS (V.O.)

My parents dropped me and my brother off at my game. My little brother Juan always came to watch my games. They did too, but on that day they had to buy my older sister a dress for a big dance.

(beat)

I was fifteen. My brother was only eleven.

YOUNG CARLOS TURNS TO WAVE to his parents in their car.

TWO MEN on a motorbike pull next to his parents' car.

ONE THROWS SOMETHING METAL onto the hood WITH A THUD. THEY DRIVE OFF.

A LARGE EXPLOSION.

YOUNG CARLOS RUNS TOWARD THE CAR, CRYING.

INT. CARLOS'S NEW APARTMENT - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

IN THE KITCHEN

CARLOS

They were publicly executed for speaking the truth. I could hardly recognize their bodies - my poor mama and papi!

(beat)

My sister Rafaela in the back seat survived only because my parents' bodies took most of the shrapnel and glass.

He puts his head in his arms on the table and sobs. Johnny pulls his chair around next to Carlos and puts his arm around him.

INT. THE MUSTANGS DUGOUT - NIGHT

GAME IN PROGRESS

Carlos, Johnny and the rest of the Mustangs are on the bench as a teammate bats.

A CELL PHONE RINGS. It's in Carlos's glove behind him on the bench. He grabs the phone and answers.

CARLOS

(into phone in Spanish,
subtitled)

Ya? You here? Outside Gate 3?

(looks up)

Thank you, Father!

TURK

Dammit! I told you guys to leave those things in the clubhouse!

(beat)

Oh, oh ...it's Carlos. La familia musta arrived.

(waves to Carlos)

Go! Go!

(points to player)

Phil, bat for Carlos and play short. Don't forget to report in.

Carlos grabs his gear and runs out the dugout through the tunnel and through clubhouse, slipping and sliding on his spikes. He runs out of the stadium into the parking lot.

EXT. STADIUM PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Julia, now nearly seven months pregnant, sees Johnny and runs toward him holding her belly. She hugs him and they embrace and smother each other in kisses. He bends down and kisses her belly.

His sister Rafaela and brother Juan join in for a group hug. Carlos kisses and hugs them both.

They are all laughing and crying. A joyous scene.

INT. THE MUSTANGS CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT (SEVERAL DAYS LATER)

The Mustangs come in from the field, sweating and giddy, having won another game by a big margin and still very comfortably in first place. Everybody's laughing, joking, back-slapping, eating and drinking.

TURK

Amazing performance, guys.
Sixteen runs and twenty-two hits! Wish we could bottle these games or at least save a few runs for when we need 'em.
Oz, give us quick run down...

OZZIE

For starters, everyone in the line-up had at least one hit. Johnny led the way going five for six, Chico and Carlos each went three for five.

(players cheer)

Bunch a guys with two hits. Smitty, you only had one hit, but we forgive you...

(beat)

'cause it was a grand salami!

More cheers and laughter.

INT. THE MANAGER'S OFFICE - NIGHT (SHORT TIME LATER)

Carlos knocks on the door. Turk waves him in. Carlos sits down. He's dressed and ready to go home for the night.

TURK

Kid, you've only been here six weeks, but you've made this a different team. I just wanted to

say "thank you" for your hard work and have a little talk.

CARLOS

Gracias, Skipper. But this team has made me a different person as well...

TURK

Yeah? How's that?

CARLOS

I came to this country with the dream of playing big league baseball, but have had my blinders on most of the time so I could focus only on my dream.

(beat)

Never did I once think I would meet players who I would come love like brothers. I have taken my blinders off here in Amarillo.

(beat)

Do I make sense?

TURK

Kid, you make lots of sense. If you love this game, you have to respect -- and love - your comrades.

(beat)

Amen a sus companeros.

CARLOS

Si! Si! Yes! Yes!

(beat)

And I have learned that lesson here.

TURK

It's a good lesson to learn.

CARLOS

Yes!

TURK

Kid, you're playing great ball here, and you're hitting has improved. I thought they would wait until September to call you up, but it might happen sooner.

CARLOS

Do you really think so?

TURK

Well, you never know what'll happen in baseball. If they call you up before the 31st, you might make it on their post-season roster. Anyhow, just get ready in your head to get on a plane to Kansas City.

CARLOS

Yes, Skipper.

TURK

And just keep this between you and me for now. Don't say anything to Johnny. Understand?

CARLOS

Yes, Skipper.

(he gets up to leave)

Skipper, by the way, next Thursday on our off day, my family and I are having a dinner. Johnny is coming to meet them. Chico and a couple others will come, too. I would like you and your wife to come as well.

TURK

Thanks, kid. But I usually don't do dinner with the troops. And Thursday is my wife's bowling night.

CARLOS

So please come yourself. My Julia makes the most delicious chicken casadillas. And she and my sister and brother would so

like to meet you. Please think about it.

TURK

Chicken casadillas, huh? And enchiladas?

CARLOS

Yes, she makes the best cheese and onion enchiladas you've ever tasted. With both red and green sauces. And not too hot!

TURK

Okay. I'll think about it.

INT. CARLOS'S NEW APARTMENT - DAY

It's a beautiful late August evening in Amarillo. It's a rare off-day, and Turk and Johnny arrive for dinner. Turk hits it off with beautiful Julia, Johnny's pregnant and gregarious wife. He helps and blabs with her in the kitchen.

Johnny goes out on the veranda to take in the view and drink a beer. He talks with Juan, Carlos's younger brother.

Carlos is inside with Chico and his wife, and a few other guests.

Rafaela comes to the veranda doorway. Juan immediately gets up and brings her over to meet Johnny.

ON THE VERANDA

JUAN

Johnny, this is my sister Rafaela.

JOHNNY

(quickly stands)

Very pleased to meet you.

Johnny is wide-eyed -- like he's just met the President or a big celebrity. He takes

Rafaela's outstretched hand and gently shakes it.

She is stunning, with long flowing dark hair and dark eyes. He notices something else about her, but isn't quite sure what it is.

RAFAELA

Johnny Rhodes! I have so wanted to meet you. Carlos speaks very highly of you. He calls you his big brother.

(to her brother)

Juan, let us talk for a while.

Juan nods and leaves.

Rafaela continues to hold onto Johnny's hand. He's a bit confused by this, having just met her. But he continues to hold her hand and they walk toward an outside lounge. She moves slowly and carefully.

RAFAELA (cont'd)

Sit Johnny, and then help me sit next to you.

He then realizes that she can't see. He gingerly takes her by the arms and guides her into the seat.

RAFAELA (cont'd)

Thank you.

JOHNNY

You're welcome.

A long moment of silence.

RAFAELA

Carlos never told you that I was blind, did he?

JOHNNY

No. He told me about the horrible deaths of your parents. And that you were with them.

She gazes straight ahead and tears fill her eyes.

RAFAELA

It's been dark for me ever since. Sometimes I wish it was just a bad dream, but each day wake up and nothing has changed. But I go on. I must go on.

JOHNNY

(nervous)

Rafaela. That's a beautiful name.

RAFAELA

You can call me Rafi.

JOHNNY

(unsure of what to say)

I'm sorry for your situation, Rafi. I realize that no matter what I say, it won't make anything better, so I'll just leave it at that.

RAFAELA

Why do you say that?

JOHNNY

Well, when I was in the Marines a good friend was killed in the Mideast. And when I went to his parents' home and expressed my deep sympathies, they were very appreciative -- outwardly. But I heard it in their voices.

RAFAELA

What did you hear?

JOHNNY

Bitterness. How I was lucky to come back alive, and how they secretly wished it could have been me that came home in a box...

(beat)

in place of their son.

RAFAELA

I've never been bitter like that.

JOHNNY

I wouldn't blame you if you were. I was, once.

RAFAELA

You were?

JOHNNY

My father died in a car crash when I was 16. I heard many nice words spoken about him. But all the nice words didn't make it better -- and never brought him back. I was bitter for a long time.

RAFAELA

And your mother?

JOHNNY

She has since died.

Rafi searches for Johnny's hand and takes it in hers.

RAFAELA

Then you know about the loneliness that follows the death of loved ones?

JOHNNY

Yeah. And I don't have any brothers or sisters. Some days I try to not to think about my folks passing and just say to myself, "Live and be happy." Sometimes it's not easy.

RAFAELA

Yes. It's very hard for me sometimes as well. I get angry and want to lash out... but it only makes me feel worse. Like you, I just want to be happy.

She squeezes his hand.

CARLOS (O.S.)
 (in a loud voice)
 La Cena esta servida!
 (beat)
 And for you gringos...dinner is
 served!

Laughter from inside.

RAFAELA
 Let's join the others, and we'll
 talk more.

AT THE DINNER TABLE

Everybody is eating and talking and having a good time. Rafaela sits next to Johnny. She puts her hand on his leg under the table.

He puts his hand on top of hers.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE APARTMENT - DUSK

Rafaela and Johnny take a walk after dinner. They hold hands.

RAFAELA
 You have really helped my
 brother. He says if he gets
 called up to Kansas City he owes
 it to you.

JOHNNY
 Carlos is a highly talented
 young guy. And he's a good guy.
 Your folks raised him right.
 Whatever he gets, he deserves.

She stumbles slightly, and he grabs hold of her.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
 Careful, darling!

RAFAELA
You're very sweet.

JOHNNY
(laughs)
I can't recall ever being called
sweet.

RAFAELA
(now holding his arm)
And you have a good heart and a
kind way about you, Johnny. My
brother told me that, and he was
right.

Johnny stops walking.

RAFAELA (cont'd)
Is something wrong?

JOHNNY
Not at all.

He caresses her face and kisses her gently on
the lips.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
I hope you don't mind.

RAFAELA
(smiles, and kisses him
back)
Not at all.

When they finish kissing, they continue to
walk.

RAFAELA (cont'd)
Johnny, does it bother you that
I'm blind?

JOHNNY
Why would it bother me?

RAFAELA
I suppose I mean, if I had my
sight, but was missing an arm or
leg, would that be better? Would
that be more appealing to a man?

JOHNNY

(stops and faces her)

Rafi, why are you talking like this now?

RAFAELA

(getting emotional)

I like you, Johnny Rhodes. I like you very much. I like the way you talk to me. I like how you gently touch me and hold me. I like the way you kiss me.

(beat)

But I don't want to be with any man who in his heart feels sorry for me, or feels he is doing me a favor.

JOHNNY

I don't feel like that.

RAFAELA

And I don't want to be with a man who thinks I'm not a complete woman.

(beat)

I don't want a man to love my womanliness, but hate my blindness.

JOHNNY

I told you I don't feel like that!

Johnny pulls her closer and hugs her, and gets emotional as he speaks.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

I'm with you here right now for one reason -- and it isn't for charity or feeling sorry, or anything like that!

RAFAELA

Why are you here?

JOHNNY

Because I'm falling in love with
you.

He kisses her again.

RAFAELA

(she speaks softly as he
kisses her)
How do you know?

JOHNNY

I feel different when I'm with
you, Rafi.

RAFAELA

How do you feel?

JOHNNY

I don't feel lonely anymore.

She reaches for his face with both hands. They
kiss deeply and passionately.

RAFAELA

(breathing heavily)
We'll see if you continue to
feel like that when you must
help me shave my legs or cut my
toenails, or have to share my
dark days. I don't want to ever
want to be a burden. Not even
for one moment.

JOHNNY

(jokes)
I'll not only cut your
toenails...I'll paint them!

RAFAELA

Oh, Johnny!

She laughs, and then cries. She can't quite
believe this is happening. They hold each other
tightly.

EXT. AMARILLO STADIUM - NIGHT

GAME IN PROGRESS

AT THE ON-DECK CIRCLE

Carlos is next to bat, and Johnny's in the hole. Johnny comes out and kneels next to Carlos.

JOHNNY

I'm in love with your
sister, bro.

CARLOS

I know you are.

JOHNNY

How do you know?

CARLOS

You've asked me how she's doing
three times tonight. I think
she's in love with you, too.

JOHNNY

(eagerly)

Did she tell you?

CARLOS

She didn't have to. All she does
is sing and walk around all day
banging into things. And laughs.
She's a very, very happy woman.

JOHNNY

Are you okay with me seeing her?

CARLOS

Okay? Of course I am. And so are
Julia and Juan. You've given our
beautiful sister a new lease on
life!

(beat)

The question is...are you okay
with it?

JOHNNY

Because she's blind?

CARLOS

Of course. Not at this moment.
But a month from now? Or six
months? Will she become like a
Peggy to you?

JOHNNY

Don't ever mention your sister
in the same breath as Peggy.

CARLOS

I'm sorry. I suppose what I
meant is will you regret it --
regret that you ever got
involved in the first place?

JOHNNY

I would hope my only regret is
that I hadn't met her sooner.

INT. THE MUSTANGS CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT

AFTER THE GAME

The players sit around eating and drinking and
getting out of their uniforms. Turk pokes his
head out of his office.

TURK

J! Need to have a word with you.

IN THE MANAGER'S OFFICE

Johnny enters.

JOHNNY

What's up, boss?

TURK

Sit.

Johnny sits.

TURK (cont'd)

Our boy got his call-up. Wanted
you to be the first to know.

JOHNNY

I guess I knew this day was coming. I wondered how I was going to feel. But I'm okay with it.

TURK

He probably wouldn't have got the call this early if it hadn't been for you.

JOHNNY

Well, thanks for saying so.

TURK

I mean it, dammit! And I told Dayton Moore the same. He agrees you've done a great coaching job with the kid. He thinks you might have a solid future as a hitting coaching.

JOHNNY

I guess I got that going for me.

TURK

Hey, J. I know how you feel. But I'd like to tell Carlos the good news with you in here. But not if you don't want to be.

JOHNNY

No, no... I good with it.

TURK

Okay. Grab three beers from the cooler. I'll get Carlos in here.

Johnny leaves. Turk goes to the door.

TURK (cont'd)

Carlos! Need a word.

Carlos comes into the office.

CARLOS

Yes, Skipper?

TURK

Sit.

Carlos sits. Johnny comes back in holding three beers.

TURK (cont'd)

(to Johnny)

Close the door.

Turk takes three glasses from his bottom drawer of his desk along with his bottle of Granddad. He pours three healthy shots. Johnny cracks the beers and hands them out.

TURK (cont'd)

(holding glass up)

Carlos... to you!

JOHNNY

(holding glass up)

To you, Carlos!

CARLOS

What's going on?

TURK

Congrats, kid! You got the call. They want you to join up with the Royals on Friday when they return to K.C.

CARLOS

(blesses himself)

Oh my god!

(looks up)

Thank you, Father!

TURK

You've earned it, kid. You'll fly outta here on Friday morning. So that gives you a few days to say your good-byes and squared things away at home.

JOHNNY

You're on your way, bro!

He tousles Carlos's hair.

CARLOS

I couldn't have done it without
the both of you.

(beat)

But I don't drink this hard
stuff.

TURK

(feigns anger)

Drink it! That's an order!

They all drink their shots and guzzle some
beer. Carlos makes a face and coughs. Turk and
Johnny laugh.

EXT. AMARILLO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Carlos kisses his wife and sister good-bye, and
hugs his brother and Johnny, before boarding a
plane to Kansas City.

TURK (V.O.)

I really had to hand it to
Johnny when I heard that he went
to see Carlos off with his
family.

(beat)

Even if he did it at the request
of Rafaela, it was still a big-
hearted and truly unselfish
gesture.

(beat)

In his heart of hearts, Johnny
wished it was him on that plane
instead of the kid.

EXT. KAUFFMAN STADIUM - NIGHT

TURK (V.O.)

And the kid made a splash from
the get-go in K.C.

MONTAGE - CARLOS'S FIRST BIG-LEAGUE GAME

- Playing at shortstop for the Royals, he
makes a great diving play to snare a

grounder up the middle, and throws from his knees to nail the runner.

- Julia and Juan watch on the television in their apartment. Johnny watches the game from his apartment, where he and Rafaela are snuggled up on a couch.
- At bat, Carlos gets his first hit -- a single to right field -- and drives in a runner from second base. His first base coach retrieves the ball as a memento and tosses it into the dugout.
- Johnny texts Carlos after the game: "You go, little bro!"

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. AMARILLO STADIUM - NIGHT

It's September in the Texas Panhandle, and the nights are cooling down.

GAME-IN-PROGRESS

AT HOME PLATE

Johnny bats left-handed against a righty pitcher with runners on second and third. There's a big shift to the left side. He lines an off-speed pitch to the right side, over the first baseman's head. With the right fielder shifted toward center, the ball rolls all the way to the wall.

P.O.V. FROM HOME PLATE

The runners score and Johnny, while not the world's fastest baserunner, keeps chugging and circles the bases.

An inside-the-park home run!

THE SCOREBOARD: "Congratulations, Johnny on your 16 HR of the season. . . a new personal best! And still leading the league at .370!!!

INT. THE MUSTANGS CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT

AFTER THE GAME

Players are walking around the clubhouse eating and drinking, some dressed others half-dressed and a few naked.

TURK (V.O.)

So with Carlos moving on to the big club, Sammy was back at shortstop. We clinched first place and were playing out the string before league playoffs. It was an uneventful stretch... until I saw something I'd never seen in all my years in the game...

Johnny sits in front of his cubicle. A PAN REVEALS Rafaela sitting next to him in her own chair!

TURK (V.O.)

A beautiful woman with flowing black hair with the face of an angel and the figure of a model, who unfortunately happens to be sightless, is sitting in the middle of our clubhouse! Lately, she's become a nightly fixture. Johnny asked me a while back if she could sit on the bench, and I said, "What the hell! Sure!"

(beat)

Then he just brings her into the clubhouse one night and it was kinda odd at first, but then every guy came over and introduced himself. Now she's like our class mother.

IN THE MANAGER'S OFFICE

TURK

(speaks into camera)

But this is baseball, and like I've told you, things can change overnight -- and usually do.

He goes to the door and sticks his head out into the clubhouse.

TURK (cont'd)

Hey J! Need a word.

Johnny enters and sits.

JOHNNY

Yeah boss.

TURK

Close the door and sit.

JOHNNY

Lemme guess. You don't want me to bring Rafi into the clubhouse anymore, right?

TURK

Yer wrong this time, mindreader! Besides she's been here for a week! If I had a problem, wouldn't I have told you? No, we got more important stuff to discuss.

He passes a perforated sheet of paper to Johnny. It's a bonus check.

TURK (cont'd)

...you got \$10K as a bonus and cleared about sixty-five. Not too bad. Don't even ask me how they figured it. The deductions are all listed.

JOHNNY

Holy shit! I guess they do think I'd be a good coach after all.

TURK

You'll like this even better.

Turk flips Johnny another, smaller piece of paper.

JOHNNY

(eyes light up)

Mothera god! A ticket to Kansas City International! For Friday, September 11. That's tomorrow!

TURK

(like a proud father)
Congrats, J! Another shot... and you deserve it. And Dayton Moore feels the same. We'll miss you for the playoffs but hey, that's baseball.

JOHNNY

What's up with Morales?

Kendrys Morales is the Kansas City Royals DH. He has just been put on the 15-day disabled list.

TURK

He came up lame last night after running one out. A hamstring. They just put him on the DL for the rest of the season. So you'll probably get a shot to DH a lot.

JOHNNY

(smiling)

Sunnuvabitch!

TURK

I told you helping Carlos would earn you big points...

JOHNNY

You were right, Turk. You're always right.

TURK

Well, almost always!

They laugh. Turk pulls out the bottle of Granddad. They kill it.

QUICK MONTAGE OF THE NEXT 24 HOURS:

- Johnny says good-bye to teammates.

- Johnny hugs and kisses Rafaela at the Amarillo airport with Julia and Juan.
- Johnny's plane takes off in Amarillo and lands at Kansas City International.
- Johnny arrives at Kauffman Stadium by limo.
- The driver opens the trunk and Johnny loads up with his bags of gear.
- Johnny sits at his new locker and dresses into his Royals uniform with "Rhodes" across the back.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. KAUFFMAN STADIUM - DAY

PREGAME WARM-UPS ON THE FIELD BEFORE A NIGHT GAME.

IN THE DUGOUT

Johnny sits on the bench next to Carlos with a several other call-ups. NED YOST, 60, THE K.C. ROYALS MANAGER, talks.

NED

Guys, we're glad to have you all up here now. We need help, and I really mean it. As you know we've been bitten by the injury bug of late. Five of our regulars are on the DL.

(beat)

Although we're getting' closer, we still haven't clinched the division yet... and I'll be shittin' bricks until we do.

The players laugh.

NED (cont'd)

(points to Carlos)

Carlos here has been around for about a week and he's already helped us reduce the magic number. I'd like nothing more

than to see you all do the same
for us when you're called on.

(points to Johnny)

J. Rhodes, tonight you'll get
your first crack DH.

Johnny busts into a big smile, as does Carlos.

JOHNNY

Thanks, Skipper!

NED

Make the most of it.

The pep talk ends, and the players join the
others on the field for warm-ups. Johnny grabs
a bat and heads to the batting cage.

AT THE BATTING CAGE

Johnny takes his hacks both left-handed and
right-handed and slams a few balls into the
seats. The ball is flying off his bat well, and
he has caught the attention of an interested
observer.

GEORGE BRETT, 62, Hall of Famer with the Royals
and now Vice President of Baseball Operations
and principal owner of a Single A team, watches
Johnny.

GEORGE

Johnny, like your stroke. Nice
and smooth.

JOHNNY

(sheepish)

Hello, Mr. Brett. Geez, thanks
very much.

Johnny exits the cage and meets Brett behind
the cage. They shake hands.

GEORGE

Johnny, it's George!
We're all family!

He slaps Johnny on the back.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Dayton told me that he wanted call you up when Morales went down. I agreed it was the right move.

JOHNNY

Thanks. Thought I'd end up in Omaha this season, so it was a big surprise when Turk handed me the ticket to KC International.

GEORGE

You shuda been in Omaha, probably by the end of May or June. That's between you and me. But they got the idea for you helping Mendez. So it was decided to keep you put. But I guess it worked out okay -- because you're both here.

(beat)

Whad ya end up at?

JOHNNY

.371...with 16 dings and 85 RBIs.

GEORGE

Nice.

JOHNNY

What advice can you give me?

GEORGE

Glad you asked. I been thinking about you.

JOHNNY

I'm all ears.

GEORGE

First, relax. You're here, and you belong here. Second. Only say this to umpires: "Howya doing, ump?"... "Time, ump"... and if you don't like a call ask, "Where was it, ump?" Don't give him them any reason to

squeeze you. Third, and most important, look for fastballs early in the count. I talked to Ned about this, and he agrees.

(beat)

You'll probably get a green light even on first pitches ... unless the meat can't find the plate.

JOHNNY

Sounds like you really have been thinking of me.

GEORGE

You're a good guy, Johnny. You've done well by this organization. You've served your country well. You've had a couple of bumps in the road. We all do. So now's your chance to show some people they might have been wrong about you.

EXT. KAUFFMAN STADIUM - NIGHT

GAME IN PROGRESS

ON THE SCOREBOARD: RANGERS 5, ROYALS 4 in the bottom of the eighth inning.

IN THE BROADCAST BOOTH

PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

Two outs in the home half of the eight, with runners on first and third. Johnny Rhodes, the newest call-up, will come to the plate.

COLOR MAN

Rhodes, who batted .371 this year in Double A Amarillo to lead the Texas league, is oh for three tonight. He's grounded out, was called out and flied to deep center in his last at-bat.

PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

(to Color Man)

Joe, Rhodes is trying to fill
some big shoes.

COLOR MAN

That he is, Dan. Ned Yost has
Rhodes in the line-up replacing
Kendrys Morales who tweaked a
hamstring and was put on the 15-
day DL effective September
ninth. Yost says Kendrys may be
out 'til the playoffs.

AT HOME PLATE

Johnny digs in the left-handed box to face the
righty reliever. The looks to down to the third
base coach and gets the "hit-away" sign.

IN THE DUGOUT

NED

Come on, Johnny. You just missed
your pitch last time.

The pitcher looks in for the sign. HE SETS AND
DELIVERS.

AT HOME PLATE

UMPIRE

Strike!

JOHNNY

(unhappy with call)
Where was it, Ump?

UMPIRE

Outside corner at the knees.

JOHNNY

Time, Ump.

UMPIRE

Time!

Johnny steps out and looks down at the coach
again. The "hit-away" is still on.

The pitcher looks in and gets the sign. HE SETS AND DELIVERS.

A curve in the dirt.

UMPIRE (cont'd)

Baal! One 'n one!

Johnny knows the next one will be a fastball. They're shifted around the left expecting him to hit that way, so he knows he'll have to jump on it early and pull the ball to right.

IN THE DUGOUT

NED

(standing on the first step)
Come on, Johnny! This is your pitch!

CARLOS

(on the bench, blesses himself)
Help him, Father!

AT HOME PLATE

Johnny digs in again. The runners lead away. The pitcher SETS AND DELIVERS.

It's cheese down the middle. Johnny, anticipating the pitch, cheats and hooks it down the right field line, just fair. It rolls into the corner.

QUICK CUTS:

- BOTH RUNERS SCORE AS JOHNNY cruises into second with a double.
- THE STADIUM ERUPTS!
- EUPHORIA IN THE DUGOUT! Carlos springs off the bench and jumps up and down with the other Royals.
- NED IS ON THE TOP STEP CLAPPING in Johnny's direction at second.

NED

Now that's the J. Rhodes I been expecting!

- George Brett, in the executive box, IS STANDING AND CLAPPING.
- Johnny LOOKS UP AND DOFFS his helmet.
- ON THE SCOREBOARD: ROYALS 6, RANGERS 5.

INT. CARLOS' S NEW APARTMENT (AMARILLO) - NIGHT

Julia, Juan and Rafaela are jumping up and down in front of a large flat screen T.V. They are SCREECHING AND HUGGING!

RAFAELA

(crying)

Oh my god, Johnny! Be happy, love! Be happy!

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Well, Rhodes has delivered, and if the bullpen can close it out, the Royals magic number will be down to five with Detroit losing.

INT. ROYALS CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT

The Royals hang on to win, 6-5. Johnny is high-fived and back-slapped by all his Royals teammates, including Carlos, after the game.

TURK (V.O.)

I knew getting a big hit in that situation was just what Johnny needed to get jump started.

(beat)

And, boy did he! Over the next several games, he homered twice and doubled twice and won two of the games with his hitting. And on the night the Royals clinched the division, he

administered the "coup de grace"
as the saying goes.

**EXT. KAUFFMAN STADIUM - NIGHT (SEVERAL DAYS
LATER)**

IN THE BROADCAST BOOTH

PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

If the Royals can hang on to
this 4-2 lead for the next two
innings, they'll clinch the
American League West and get a
well-needed rest before the
playoffs. And, boy, do they need
the time so their wounded
warriors can heal.

COLOR MAN

You got that right, Dan! With
five regulars on the DL and
several others day-to-day, they
need all the time they can buy
to get everybody healthy.

PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

The silver lining to the dark
injury cloud that's been hanging
over K.C. has been its new one-
man wrecking crew -- Johnny
Rhodes. Since being called up
from Double A last week to take
over the DH slot for injured
Kendrys Morales, Rhodes has -
get this - gone eight for 20
with three doubles, two homers
and 10 RBIs! And he's had three
game-winning hits.

P.O.V - FROM THE BROACAST BOOTH

COLOR MAN (V.O.)

Amazing! Well, here's another
big spot for Rhodes right now,
with the bases juiced and two
outs here in the seventh.

(beat)

Mendez, the new shortstop phenom is on third after leading off with a double, and Cain and Hosmer both walked.

PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER
(V.O.)

The Indians' new righty reliever Johnson is ready, and Rhodes digs in at the plate.

(beat)

Johnson looks in for the sign. He's at the belt, he kicks and delivers...and it's a high drive to deep right field, no doubt about it, this one's way outta here!!!! A grand salami!!!

(beat)

Now it's Royals 8, Indians 2!!! Rhodes' has pretty much iced the division for the Royals and the entire team is waiting at the plate to greet him!

COLOR MAN (V.O.)

Again, what an amazing performance by Johnny Rhodes, who has made the Royals front office look like they have a crystal ball. Rhodes came up from Amarillo a week ago and has basically clinched the division for the Royals all by his lonesome with an awesome display of clutch hitting!

INT. THE MANAGER'S OFFICE IN AMARILLO - NIGHT

Turk is sitting at his desk. HE SPEAKS INTO THE CAMERA.

TURK

(looks up)

FYI...the Mustangs lost in the playoffs without Johnny and Carlos, but that's okay. It was a good year all round.

(beat)

K.C.'s in the playoffs, and Carlos is doing well. He could very well be K.C.'s regular shortstop next season.

(beat)

Unfortunately, Johnny's back home watching it on T.V. For you unfamiliar with the rules, if you get called up after Aug. thirty-first by the big club, they can't put you on their post-season roster. That's baseball.

(beat)

Dayton Moore admitted to me his biggest mistake was not calling Johnny up sooner. I tried to make him feel better by saying, "Hey, spring training's only four months away, and we all get a chance to start over again."

(beat)

He agreed.

TURK WINKS, AND SALUTES THE CAMERA.

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT/BEDROOM - NIGHT

We see familiar framed photos and posters of great baseball hitters on the wall:

- TED WILLIAMS making his classic swing with the inscription: "SHORT to the ball, LONG through it."
- STAN MUSIAL, the National League's all-time greatest hitter, swinging a bat. The inscription: "Stan the Man Musial."
- ROD CAREW, seven-time American League batting champ, in a batting cage. It's signed: "Best Wishes to my Fellow Leatherneck. Semper Fi, Johnny Mac! Rod Carew."

- TONY OLIVA, three-time American League batting champ, in a hitting stance. It's signed: "Keep Your Hands Back, Johnny! Best Wishes, Tony Oliva."

A NEW PHOTO HAS BEEN ADDED TO THE WALL:

- JOHNNY connecting with the pitch he hit for a grand slam to clinch the division for the Royals. It's inscribed: "Nice way to clinch a flag, Johnny boy! See you at Spring Training! Your Bud, George Brett."

IN THE BACKGROUND, we hear the voices of baseball game announcers.

IN THE DIM LIGHT, A NAKED JOHNNY LIES on his back in bed with his hands behind his head.

RAFAELA, ALSO NAKED, CUDDLES AGAINST HIM WITH HER ARM ACROSS HIS CHEST.

JOHNNY'S P.O.V. -- He's watching a Royals playoff game on television.

JOHNNY (O.S.)

Damn, Carlos, why'd you swing at that pitch!

RAFAELA (O.S.)

Johnny, are you upset that Carlos is playing, and you're not there?

JOHNNY (O.S.)

I'm upset that I couldn't be with the team for the playoffs, but I'm happy for your brother. I'll get another shot.

RAFAELA (O.S.)

Are you happy now that you will get another chance to play big league baseball?

JOHNNY (O.S.)

Yeah, I'm happy about that. But I'm very, very happy that I'm with you.

They come into view. He holds her tight and kisses her, then goes back to watching the game.

RAFAELA

Johnny, I've been thinking about something a lot lately, but I don't want you to think I'm crazy.

JOHNNY

(reacts to game)
Come on, K.C., come on!

RAFAELA

Johnny, are you listening?

JOHNNY

Uh-huh.

RAFAELA

I've been thinking about it since we met. I know we've only know each other for two months, but I've never wanted to have a baby until I met you. What do you think?

The television click offs and the room goes dark.

RAFAELA (cont'd)

Johnny, what do you think? Is it crazy for me to think about us making a baby?

There's a short silence.

RAFAELA (cont'd)

Johnny?

JOHNNY

Ummm...I think we should start right now.

RAFAELA

(giggles)
Oh, Johnny!

A rustling of bed covers.

FADE OUT.

THE END.