"BULL DURHAM"

by

Ron Shelton

In baseball, you don't know nothing.

--Yogi Berra

Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball.

--Jacques Barzun

You could look it up.

--Casey Stengel

Titles over --

FADE IN:

A series of still photos. Black and white. Ancient.

BABE RUTH SWINGS -- An icon of American history. His giant upper body balanced delicately on tiny ankles and feet. The huge bat in an elegant follow-through...

DISSOLVE TO:

TY COBB ROUNDS THIRD -- The most vicious ballplayer of them all, a balletic whirling dervish.

DISSOLVE TO:

JACKIE ROBINSON STEALS ROME -- Yogi Berra applies the tag. Too late.

DISSOLVE TO:

JOE DIMAGGIO WITH HIS SON in the Yankee clubhouse. Walking down the runway, Joe in uniform. Number five.

PULLBACK REVEALS:

A WALL COVERED WITH BASEBALL PICTURES behind a small table covered with objects and lit candles. A baseball, an old baseball card, a broken bat, a rosin bag, a jar of pine tar -- also a peacock feather, a silk shawl, a picture of Isadora Duncan. Clearly, the arrangement is -- A SHRINE -- And it glows with the candles like some religious altar.

We hear a woman's voice in a North Carolina accent.

ANNIE (V.O.)
I believe in the Church of Baseball.
(beat)
I've tried all the major religions and most of the minor ones -- I've worshipped Buddha, Allah, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, trees, mushrooms, and Isadora Duncan...

PAN AWAY FROM THE SHRINE across the room. Late afternoon light spills into the room, across fine old furniture, to a small dressing table. A WOMAN applies make up.

ANNIE SAVOY, mid 30's, touches up her face. Very pretty, knowing, outwardly confident. Words flow from her Southern lips with ease, but her view of the world crosses Southern, National and International borders. She's cosmic.

ANNIE (V.O.)
I know things. For instance --
(beat)
There are 108 beads in a Catholic rosary. And --
(beat)
There are 108 stitches in a baseball.
(beat)
When I learned that, I gave Jesus a chance.
(beat)
But it just didn't work out between us. The Lord laid too much guilt on me. I prefer metaphysics to theology.
(beat)
You see, there's no guilt in baseball... and it's never boring.

ANNIE OPENS A CLOSET DOOR -- Dozens of shoes hang from the door. She chooses a pair of RED HIGH HEELS, with thin straps. She sits on a bench and

ANNIE
Which makes it like sex.
(beat)
There's never been a ballplayer slept with me who didn't have the best year of his career.
(beat)
Making love is like hitting a baseball -- you just got to relax and concentrate.

ANNIE SLIPS ON THE RED HIGH HEELS -- Smoothing her hands up her calves as she does.

ANNIE
Besides, I'd never sleep with a player hitting under .250 unless he had a lot of R.B.I.'s or was a great glove

man up the middle.
(beat)
A woman's got to have standards.

SHE HOLDS OUR HER LEGS DISPLAYING THE HEELS, side by side. Like a little girl showing off her new shoes.

ANNIE
The young players start off full of enthusiasm and energy but they don't realize that come July and August when the weather is hot it's hard to perform at your peak level.
(beat)
The veterans pace themselves better. They finish stronger. They're great in September.
(beat)
While I don't believe a woman needs a man to be fulfilled, I do confess an interest in finding the ultimate guy -- he'd have that youthful exuberance but the veteran's sense of timing...

ANNIE STARTS PACKING A HUGE HANDBAG -- With fruit, an official scorebook, binoculars, a radar gun, and lipstick.

ANNIE
Y'see there's a certain amount of "life-wisdom" I give these boys.
(beat)
I can expand their minds. Sometimes when I've got a ballplayer alone I'll just read Emily Dickinson or Walt Whitman to him. The guys are so sweet -- they always stay and listen.
(beat)
Of course a guy will listen to anything if he thinks it's foreplay.

ANNIE TOUCHES PERFUME BEHIND HER EARS and, ever so slightly, in her cleavage.

ANNIE
I make then feel confident. They make me feel safe. And pretty.

ANNIE POSES IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR -- She smoothes her dress along her hips. And puts on a flashy pair of sunglasses. Stylish and slightly mad.

ANNIE
What I give them lasts a life-time. What they give me lasts 142 games. Sometimes it seems like a bad trade.
(quickly rebounding)
But bad trades are part of baseball -- who can forget Frank Robinson or Milt Pappas, for Godsakes!

(beat)
It's a long season and you got to trust it.

ANNIE STARTS FOR THE DOOR and grabs her baseball glove

CUT TO:

EXT. ANNIE'S HOUSE -- DUSK

A frame house with porch and lots of trees -- a Thomas Wolfe house... with a 1959 faded red Volvo in the driveway.

ANNIE LEAVES ON FOOT, turning onto the sidewalk of a bucolic, old Durham, North Carolina neighborhood. In the b.g. other people are heading the same direction ANNIE PULLS A DURHAM BULLS BASEBALL CAP from her handbag and pulls it on her head.

ANNIE
I've tried them all -- I really have --
(beat)
and the only church that truly feeds the soul -- day in, day out -- is the Church of Baseball.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHURCH -- DURHAM BASEBALL PARK -- DUSK

Now visible In the late afternoon sun, a rickety old stadium carved into the center of an old Tobacco town.

People are arriving on foot from all around...

"Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley fills the air.

CLOSE ON A BASEBALL CLOWN -- MAX PATKIN, 60, at home plate doing his famous Bill Haley routine. A comic pitcher's windup full of twists and goofy choreography.

RECORDING OVER P.A.
One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock, rock... Four o'clock, five o'clock, six o'clock rock...

ANNIE SITS DOWN IN HER PRIVATE BOX SEAT -- Her chair is wiped off by a young black boy, JACKSON, 11, who then sits next to her. He is her employed errand runner, note sender, and friend.

A GROUP OF GROUPIES ENTERS THE PARK -- 20 year old girl/women, dressed in tight pants, tight everything.

Friendly, eager, innocent -- THEY WAVE TO ANNIE.

FIVE PLAYERS' WIVES AND THREE SMALL CHILDREN sit in a special box seat behind a small sign "Players' Wives".

RECORDING OVER P.A.
Seven o'clock, eight o'clock, nine

o'clock rock... we're gonna rock
around the clock tonight

CUT TO:

EXT/INT. THE DURHAM BULL DUGOUT -- NIGHT

As Max Patkin continues his routine, players warm up, and -- THE MANAGER, JOE RIGGINS, 45, known merely as SKIP, short for "Skipper", a chaw of tobacco in his cheek, stands with his pitching coach, LARRY HOCKETT late 30's, an ex-big leaguer whose body has seen too many cocktail lounges.

LARRY ROLLS SOME RED MAN CHEWING TOBACCO into a slab of pink bubble gum, carefully folding the corners, tucking it neatly together. Larry examines it as they talk -- And shoves the giant chaw into his mouth.

SKIP
Where's Ebby?

LARRY
Ain't he warning up?

SKIP
(cynically)
No. The guy's professional debut and
he forgets about it.

LARRY
Better find our bonus baby, eh?

A PLAYER, DEKE, 25, stuffs a hot dog into his mouth.

SKIP
Seen Ebby?

DEKE
(mouthful of food)
Nope.

SKIP WHIRLS AND HEADS UP THE TUNNEL into the:

CUT TO:

INT. THE DURHAM CLUBHOUSE -- NIGHT

SKIP enters, shouting --

SKIP
Ebby?!

CLOSE ON A BARE ASS -- Baseball uniform around the ankles, short t-shirt on top, and on top of that the head of EBBY CALVIN LALOOSH, baseball cap on backwards. EBBY is a great looking energetic man-child with the endless confidence, naivete and horniness of youth.

Life is a party.

A YOUNG WOMAN, MILLIE, 20, half nude, is dressing quickly.

EBBY WHIRLS as Skip enters.

SKIP
Jesus. Game starts in four minutes!
(beat)
Why ain't you warm?!

EBBY
I am warm.

SKIP
I'm fining you a hundred dollars. Jesus, Ebby, this is your professional debut tonight -- you know how many guys out there'd give blood to be in your shoes an' you're leavin' your fastball in the locker room for some piece of ass!

MILLIE LOOKS OUT FROM BEHIND A BAT RACK -- Outraged.

MILLIE
Skip, It's me! I'm not some quote piece of ass unquote.

SKIP
Oh, Millie, jeez, sorry -- I didn't recognize ya. Don't take it personal but if I catch you in here again you're banned from the ballpark.

MILLIE
You can't ban me from the ballpark 'cause Daddy donated the scoreboard and if you banned me he might take the scoreboard away.

SKIP
Whatta we need a scoreboard for? We haven't scored any runs all year
(tough, to Ebby)
Get your ass out there.

As Skip starts to leave.

EBBY
Hey Boss, I got a question.

SKIP
(stops, exasperated)
What?!

EBBY
You think I need a nickname? I think I need a nickname. The great ones have nicknames -- somethin' like Oil Can or Catfish...

Skip stares at him. He can't believe this guy.

SKIP
Ya got three minutes.

SKIP WHIRLS AND HEADS BACK OUT TO THE FIELD -- And Ebby unperturbed, turns his attention back to Millie.

EBBY
Got time for another quickie?

MILLIE
Jesus, you got a game to pitch!

EBBY
But we got three minutes.

EXT. THE BALLPARK -- MOMENTS LATER -- NIGHT

CUT TO:

MAX PATKIN STILL FLAILING AWAY to "Rock Around the Clock".

RECORDING
When the clock strikes two, three,
and four and the band slows down
we'll yell for more, gonna rock around
the clock tonight.

ANNIE LOOKS THROUGH HER BINOCULARS -- Studying the players warming up casually on the sidelines as Patkin winds up his act.

P.O.V. A LATIN PLAYER PLAYING PEPPER.

ANNIE
Number twenty-two's thighs are just
great. Who's he?

JACKSON
(reading the program)
Jose Galindo. He hit .314 at Lynchburg
last year.

ANNIE
Three-fourteen? Hmmm... Look't those
thighs, Jackson.

BACK TO MAX PATKIN -- He finishes his routine.

RECORDING OVER P.A.
Gonna rock, gonna rock around the
clock tonight.

INT. PRESS BOX -- NIGHT

CUT TO:

A WOMAN ANNOUNCER, MARYLOU, 30, speaks into the P.A. mike.

ANNOUNCER
Let's hear it for Max Patkin --

Applause as Patkin takes his bows, leaves the field, shakes hands with a the BULL MASCOT LEADING THE APPLAUSE.

ANNOUNCER
"The Greatest Show on Dirt" -- your own Durham Bulls!

CUT TO:

INT. THE DUGOUT

CLOSE ON ANOTHER PLAYER -- MICKEY MCFEE, 23, black. Smoking a cigarette -- always smoking a cigarette. He snuffs out his cigarette and RUNS onto the field with the rest of the team, as --

EBBY ENTERS THE DUGOUT from the runway. Larry and Skip encourage their players running onto the field. Ebby is trying to get the zipper on his fly unstuck. He smiles broadly at Skip and Larry, and grabs his glove.

EBBY
I'm there, Skip, I'm ready.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PRESS BOX

THE RADIO ANNOUNCER, TEDDY CULLINANE, 50, leans into the radio mike of a very small local station. Next to him is the local SPORTSWRITER, WHITEY SHERRARD, 40. Between them they've seen a million minor league players come and go.

WHITEY
Is this guy LaLoosh worth a hundred grand? I hear he's a quart low?

TEDDY THE RADIO MAN
(covering the mike)
He's left handed. Whattya expect?
(on the air)
The Bulls are off to a slow start having dropped their first three games, but hope to turn it around tonight with the professional debut of the heralded young left hander, Ebby Calvin LaLoosh.
(beat)
Stepping in for the Peninsula White Sox is leadoff hitter Willie Foster

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BALLFIELD -- NIGHT

ANGLE TO ANNIE'S BOX SEAT -- Millie has joined Annie and Jackson. Clearly, the younger women look up to Annie for

wisdom and insight.

ANNIE
-- Millie, you've got to stay out of the clubhouse. It'll just get everybody in trouble.

MILLIE
I got lured.

ANNIE
You didn't get "lured". Women never get lured. They're too strong and powerful for that. Now say it -- "I didn't get lured and I will take responsibility for my actions".

MILLIE
"I didn't get lured and I will take responsibility for my actions".

ANNIE
That's better.
(to Jackson)
Got the radar ready?

JACKSON
Ready.

JACKSON AIMS A RADAR GUN at the plate.

THE PENINSULA WHITE SOX LEADOFF HITTER steps in.

TEDDY THE RADIO MAN (V.O.)
The word on LaLoosh is that the good looking young lefty has a major league fastball but sometimes has problems with his control.

EBBY CALVIN LALOOSH WINDS UP and fires. The pitch sails over the batter's head, over the catcher's head, over the backstop, and CRASHES INTO THE PRESS BOX.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PRESS BOX

THE ANNOUNCER AND SPORTSWRITER CRASH to the floor as the ball smashes into their booth.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DUGOUT

SKIP SPITS TOBACCO, mumbles flatly to Larry.

SKIP
Little high.

LARRY

(shouts to EBBY)
C'mon big 'un, you're okay...

ANNIE'S BOX SEAT -- She turns to Jackson.

JACKSON
Ninety-five miles an hour.

ANNIE
He looks great, just great!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE PITCHER'S MOUND

THE CATCHER TALKS TO EBBY, trying to calm him down.

CATCHER
What the hell was that?! Lighten up a little. Awright?

EBBY
(to catcher)
Hey -- what's your name again -- I'm bad with names --

CATCHER
Ed. You want me to write it on my chest? Jesus ...

EBBY
Sorry. Hey, Ed, I got a question.

CATCHER
What?

EBBY
Who's the beef sitting behind the third base dugout?

CATCHER
(slowly)
That's Annie Savoy. Nice eh? But that's more woman than you ever dreamed of, Rook. She could kick your ass and have you for breakfast.

THE CATCHER RETURNS to the plate.

INT. THE PRESS BOX

CUT TO:

WHITEY AND TEDDY WARILY CLIMB back to their seats.

TEDDY
One ball and no strikes to Willie Foster...

CUT TO:

EBBY'S NEXT PITCH HITS FOSTER in the ribs. He crumples.

CUT TO:

ANNIE'S BOX SEAT -- She's writing a note. She hands it to Jackson.

ANNIE
Take this to Ebby in the dugout between innings.

JACKSON
What's it say?

ANNIE
It says he's not bending his back on his follow-through.

JACKSON RUNS OFF with the note. Annie turns to Millie.

ANNIE
Well let's get down to it, honey -- how was he?

MILLIE
Well, he fucks like he pitches. Sorta all over the place

P.O.V. EBBY LALOOSH FIRES ANOTHER ONE INTO THE STANDS. AND --

Hit "Rock Around the Clock" --

DISSOLVE INTO:

QUICK MONTAGE OF EBBY'S FIRST GAME -- Strikeouts and wild pitches. A young, gifted, uncontrollable thrower.

BILL HALEY AND HIS COMETS
When the chimes ring five, six and seven -- We'll be right in Seventh Heaven, Gonna rock around the clock tonight...

EBBY UNLEASHES A WILD ONE -- And decks the Bull Mascot.

EBBY IN THE DUGOUT READS THE NOTE from Annie.

EBBY STRIKES OUT a Peninsula batter.

EBBY UNLEASHES ANOTHER WILD ONE and a batter hits the dirt.

End "Rock Around the Clock" and --

CUT TO:

INT. THE BULL LOCKER ROOM -- NIGHT

SKIP WALKS THROUGH THE PLAYERS ROOM -- Players are up, joking irreverently.

JOSE
Hey Lefty, hold 'em to 12 runs every night, you'll win 20 --

EBBY
(he might be serious)
Had 'em all the way.

A DURHAM PLAYER SITTING HALF DRESSED in front of his locker. A PICTURE OF JESUS hangs amidst his gear. The player, JIMMY, 25, has a Bible and prays softly to himself.

JIMMY
Dear Lord, thank you for being with us tonight, thank you for protecting us from injury and --

DEKE WALKS BY, shaking Jimmy irreverently as he prays.

DEKE
Wake up, wake up --

MICKEY (A BLACK) COMPLAINS TO TONY as they undress.

MICKEY
This league is racist, man.

TONY
Every time you go 0 for 4 you think the league is racist -- face it, Mick, you're an equal opportunity "out".

CUT TO:

THE MANAGER'S OFFICE -- A tiny cubicle, a desk, phone Larry joins him with the pitching charts. Skip studies the charts.

SKIP
He walked eighteen?!

LARRY
It's a league record.

SKIP
Struck out eighteen...

LARRY
League record.
(beat)
And he hit the Radio Announcer, a Sportswriter, and the Bull Mascot twice -- also league records --
(beat)
Joe, the guy's got some serious shit.

THE DOOR OPENS -- A PLAYER ENTERS, in street clothes, carrying his suitcases. CRASH DAVIS, 30, older than the other players. And different. More than just opinions, he actually has a

point of view. A career minor leaguer, hanging on wherever he can get a job. Unlike Ebby -- Crash knows a lot about the world without baseball. Also unlike Ebby -- he loves baseball desperately.

LARRY
Who're you?

Crash speaks slowly, with a trace of cynicism and pride, like an old warrior who knows he's just a hired gun.

CRASH
I am the player to be named later.

Beat. Skip looks out, half dressed, from his cubicle.

SKIP
Crash Davis?

CRASH
The Crash Davis.
(beat, then nonstop)
And you, Larry Hockett, should recognize me 'cause five years ago in the Texas League when you were pitching for El Paso and I was hitting cleanup for Shreveport, you hung a curve on an 0-2 pitch of a 3-2 game in bottom of the 8th and I tattooed it over the Goodyear Tire sign, beat you 4-3 -- and I got a free wheel alignment from Goodyear.

LARRY
(remembering)
Oh yeah. I shoulda throwed a slider. Damn, Crash, how're ya?

SKIP
I'm Joe Riggins. Sit down

CRASH
I'm too old for this shit. Why the hell am I back in "A" ball?

SKIP
'Cause of Ebby Calvin LaLoosh.
(beat)
The Big Club's got a hundred grand in him --

LARRY
He's got a million dollar arm and a five cent head.

SKIP
-- we had the gun on him tonight -- the last five pitches he threw were faster than the first five. 96 miles an hour, 98, 97, 97. 97.

(beat)
He's got the best young arm I've seen in 30 years.

LARRY
But he ain't quite sure which plane he's on, y'know what I mean...

SKIP
You been around, you're smart, you're professional, you know what it takes --
(beat)
We want you to mature the kid.

CRASH
"Mature" ain't a fuckin' verb.

LARRY
You go to college or what?

SKIP
We want you to room with him on the road and stay on his case all year.
(beat)
He can go all the way.

CRASH
And where can I go?

SKIP
You can keep going to the ballpark and keep gettin' paid to do it.
(beat)
Beats hell outta working at Sears.

LARRY
Sears sucks, Crash, I tried it once. Sold Lady Kenmores -- it's nasty, nasty work.

SKIP
Even if it's the Carolina League -- this is a chance to play everyday.

CRASH
(angrily)
You don't want a player, you want a stable pony. My Triple A contract gets bought out so I can hold the Flavor o' the Month's dick in the bus leagues?!
(angrily)
Fuck this fucking game... I fuckin' quit.

CRASH RISES TO LEAVE -- Picks up his luggage, and turns to Skip and Larry before exiting. A deep breath

CRASH
Who we play tomorrow?

Beat. They know, they share the inability to quit the game. They're all clinging to the Church of Baseball.

SKIP
Winston-Salem. Batting practice at 4:30.

CRASH LEAVES and as he does -- Ed (the catcher) enters.

ED
You wanted to see me?

SKIP
Yeah, Ed, shut the door...

He does. Remains standing. He can see it coming.

SKIP
This is the toughest job a manager has, Ed...
(deep breath)
But the organization has decided to make a change -- we're releasing you from your contract...

CLOSE ON ED -- Silent. Motionless. Empty.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM --

CRASH PUTS HIS BAG IN A LOCKER as other players return from the shower. Crash watches as EBBY SOAKS HIS ELBOW IN A TUB OF ICE WATER as the sports writer, Whitey, interviews him.

WHITEY
How's it feel to get your first professional win?

EBBY
It feels "out there". A major rush. I mean it doesn't just feel "out there" but it feels out there.

CRASH
Hopeless. Utterly fucking hopeless.

CUT TO:

INT. MAXWELL'S BAR -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Loud country music in the players' hangout and pickup spot. It's full of players and lots of young women.

MILLIE SITS DOWN NEXT TO YET ANOTHER PLAYER, TONY, 25 -- He's slick, urban, smooth.

MILLIE
Hi, I'm Millie.

TONY
I'm Tony. I play left field.

MILLIE
I know.

ANNIE SITS IN THE CORNER at her own table. Max Patkin, looking spiffy in a turtle neck sweater and double breasted blazer, sits down next to her. Old friends.

MAX
Love the game, Annie, love it
(dead serious)
When I die I'm gonna have my ashes sprinkled around a pitcher's mound in some ballpark somewhere --
(beat)
-- and I'll have a few ashes saved for the rosin bag so I'll still be in the game after I'm gone.

ANNIE
What a sweet idea --

A COCKTAIL WAITRESS DELIVERS another round to them.

ANNIE
We didn't order this, honey...

WAITRESS
(she points)
He did.

P.O.V. Crash davis sitting alone in the other corner. He waves, and smiles easily.

ANNIE
(to Max)
Who's that?

MAX
Hey -- that's Crash Davis. He's played in more towns than I have. Helluva guy -- real different... I actually saw him read a book without pictures once

ANNIE
Really? Kinda cute...

ANNIE NODS AT CRASH -- He comes over to her table, greets Max as an old friend, and introduces himself.

CRASH
I'm Crash Davis.

ANNIE
Annie Savoy. Wanta dance?

CRASH
I don't dance.

ANNIE
I don't trust a man who don't dance.
It ain't natural.

SUDDENLY -- HARD CORE ROCK AND ROLL on the juke box. Several couples dance, and out of the pack --

EBBY DANCES WITH A GROUPIE -- Spinning and whirling, uninhibited and infectious. He's suddenly dancing with a different WOMAN, then another, and another...

ANNIE, CRASH AND MAX WATCH the mad performance.

MAX
Who's he dancing with?

ANNIE
All of 'em, I think...

EBBY PUTS ON A ONE MAN SHOW ON THE DANCE FLOOR -- The whole bar stops to watch him, applauding as he spins to a finish. A quirkier "Saturday Night Fever" show. More naive, fun. He climbs off the floor and joins Annie's table.

EBBY
Thanks for the note -- you're right,
I wasn't bending my back.

ANNIE
You got a live arm there.

He extends his hand to introduce himself.

EBBY
Ebby Calvin LaLoosh.

ANNIE
You need a nickname.

EBBY
That's what I been telling everybody!
Wanta dance?

CRASH
She's dancing with me.

ANNIE
Crash, I didn't think you --

CRASH
I'll learn. C'mon --

EBBY
Just a minute, pal...

The two men square off quickly. Annie mocks them.

ANNIE
You boys gonna fight over little me?

CRASH RISES, pulling Annie with him. But --

EBBY STANDS to challenge Crash.

EBBY
Step outside, pal.

CRASH
Love to --

ANNIE
Oh don't be such guys --

But Crash and Ebby head outside. She turns to Max --

ANNIE
Hell, Max, wanta dance?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

A circle is formed. Everybody gathers. Millie clings to Tony, her guy of the moment. Crash and Ebby face off.

CRASH
I don't believe in fighting.

EBBY
Pussy.

CRASH
Take the first shot at me.

EBBY
I ain't hitting a man first.

CRASH
Hit me in the chest with this...

CRASH PULLS A BASEBALL from his jacket pocket, tosses it to Ebby.

EBBY
I'd kill ya.

CRASH
From what I hear you couldn't hit a bull in the ass with a slingshot

EBBY
Don't try me.

CRASH
Throw it. C'mon, right in the chest.

EBBY

No way.

CRASH
C'mon, Meat. You can't hit me 'cause you're starting to think about it already, you're starting to think how embarrassing it'll be to miss, how all these people would laugh.
(teasing mercilessly)
C'mon, Rook -- show me that million dollar arm 'cause I'm getting a good idea about the five cent head --

EBBY REARS BACK AND FIRES THE BALL -- From ten feet away, right at Crash's chest. But, alas --

THE BALL GOES THROUGH A SECOND STORY WINDOW in the distance. Crash never blinks.

CRASH
Ball four.

EBBY IS ENRAGED -- HE CHARGES CRASH, lunging at him.

EBBY
Who the fuck are you?!

CRASH LASHES OUT A SHORT LEFT -- With lightning speed, effortless. And brutal. BANG! Ebby goes down. And stays there stunned. He looks up.

CRASH
I'm Crash Davis. Your new catcher. And you just got Lesson Number One -- "Don't think -- it can only hurt the ballclub".
(beat)
Buy ya a drink?

CUT TO:

INT. THE CLUB -- NIGHT

ANNIE AND MAX DANCE to Billy Eckstein on the juke box. Millie and Tony are also on the dance floor.

ECKSTEIN
(on juke box)
April in Paris, chestnuts in blossom, Holiday tables under the tree...

EBBY AND CRASH WATCH FROM THE CORNER TABLE -- Ebby's right eye is blackened. He holds a drink on it.

EBBY
We fight, she gets the clown -- how's that happen?

CRASH
Shut up -- I like this song...

(sings along)
April in Paris, this is a feeling,
No one can ever reprieve...

EBBY
She's playing with my mind.

CRASH
It's a damn easy thing to play with.

ANNIE SUDDENLY APPEARS at the table.

ANNIE
Well -- you boys stopped fighting yet? Are you pals now? Good. I love a little macho male bonding -- I think it's sweet even if it's probably latent homosexuality being "re-channeled" but I believe in "re-channeling" so who cares, right?
(beat)
Shall we go to my place?

EBBY
Which one of us?

ANNIE
Oh both of you, of course...

CLOSE ON EBBY -- His eyes full of fear and wonder.

CLOSE ON CRASH -- He smiles.

THE THREE OF THEM LEAVE the bar together.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

THE SHRINE OF BASEBALL GLOWS -- Annie lights the candles.

EBBY AND CRASH SIT ON OPPOSITE ENDS OF HER COUCH -- Both men look around the room with wonder. Ebby is clearly more nervous than Crash, who's been in some strange rooms in his minor league career.

ANNIE
These are the ground rules.
(beat)
I hook up with one guy a season -- I mean it takes me a couple of weeks to pick the guy -- kinda my own spring training...
(beat)
And, well, you two are the most promising prospects of the season so far.
(beat)
So... I thought we should get to know each other.

CRASH
Why do you get to choose? Why don't I get to choose?

ANNIE
Actually none of us on this planet ever really choose each other. It's all Quantum Physics and molecular attraction. There are laws we don't understand that bring us together and break us apart.

EBBY
Is somebody gonna go to bed with somebody or what?

ANNIE
You're a regular nuclear meltdown, honey -- slow down.

Crash rises to leave, and heads for the door.

CRASH
After 12 years in the minor leagues, I don't tryout. Besides -- I don't believe in, Quantum Physics when it comes to matters of the heart... or loins.

ANNIE
(challenging him)
What do you believe in?

Crash at the door. Annie's question is slightly taunting. He stops, and speaks with both aloofness and passion:

CRASH
I believe in the soul, the cock, the pussy, the small of a woman's back, the hanging curve ball, high fiber, good scotch, long foreplay, show tunes, and that the novels of Thomas Pynchon are self-indulgent, overrated crap.
(beat)
I believe that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, I believe that there oughtta be a constitutional amendment outlawing astro-turf and the designated hitter, I believe in the "sweet spot", voting every election, soft core pornography, chocolate chip cookies, opening your presents on Christmas morning rather than Christmas eve, and I believe in long, slow, deep, soft, wet kisses that last for 7 days.

ANNIE

(breathless)
Oh my...
(softly)
Don't leave...

CRASH
G'night.

Crash heads out into the night. Annie hurries to the-door while Ebby sits on the couch, bewildered.

EBBY
Hey -- what's all this molecule stuff?

ANNIE STANDS IN THE DOORWAY -- Crash is on the porch.

ANNIE
Wait, Crash -- don't go -- all I want is a date. I'm not gonna fall in love with you or nothin'.

CRASH
I'm not interested in a woman who's interested in that boy.

ANNIE
I'm not interested yet.

Ebby appears in the door.

EBBY
Who you calling a "boy"?

CRASH
See ya at the yard, Meat.

Crash walks out into the Durham night. Ebby and Annie stand in the doorway. She speaks softly to Ebby.

ANNIE
No ballplayer ever said "no" to a date with me.

EBBY
Well shit, then, let's fuck.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

ANNIE PUTS ON A RECORD -- Edith Piaf sings "Le Trois Cloches".

EBBY STARTS UNDRESSING across the room.

ANNIE
Wait, honey, slow down -- I want to watch.

She sits in a chair. Piaf sings. Ebby practically rips his shirt off, exposing a great upper body.

ANNIE
No, no, no. Put it back on and take it off slowly.

EBBY
Jesus, what kinda broad are you?

ANNIE
When you know how to make love, you'll know how to pitch.
(turning to the stereo)
Shh. I love this part.

Piaf sings. Annie listens. Ebby re-buttons, then unbuttons his shirt. It drops, revealing his back.

ANNIE
Oh my -- what a nice back.

Ebby drops his pants.

ANNIE
No, no, honey... first the shoes and socks.

EBBY
The socks? It's cold in here.

ANNIE
(sweetly, unthreatening)
You think Dwight Gooden leaves his socks on?

Ebby considers this. Pulls his pants back up. Takes his socks off. Then his pants.

ANNIE
Ebby honey have you ever been handcuffed in bed?

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN DURHAM -- NIGHT

Deserted streets of the old tobacco town. Crash walks alone. He picks up an old newspaper out of a trash can. He stops in front of a store window. He rolls the newspaper like a short bat. He takes a batting stance, and --

CRASH TAKES HIS BATTING STANCE in front of the window, studying his reflection. He taken a "swing". And another.

A GROUP OF OLD BLACK MEN stand in a doorway, watching.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM -'CONTINUOUS NIGHT

CLICK -- A handcuff is locked onto Ebby's wrist. Both his

arms are outstretched -- he's getting very excited.

EBBY
Awright! I read about stuff like this. Bring it on!

Annie calmly drags a chair over and sits down.

ANNIE
Sweetie, have you ever heard of Walt Whitman?

EBBY
Who's he play for?

ANNIE
Well, he sort of pitches for the Cosmic All-Stars.

EBBY
Never heard of 'em.

Annie opens a book and begins reading as Piaf sings softly.

ANNIE
Good -- then listen.
(reading)
"I sing the body electric. The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them -- "

EBBY
We gonna fuck or what?

ANNIE
Shh, shh...
(reading)
"They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them, and discorrupt them and charge them"

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME SCENE -- LATER

ANNIE
"Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous -- quivering jelly of love, white blow and delirious juice --

CLOSE ON EBBY'S FACE -- Intrigued, aroused, frightened.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN DURHAM -- NIGHT

THE OLD BLACK MAN is tossing wadded up balls of paper at Crash who takes beautiful, fluid swings with the rolled up newspaper. Batting practice.

CLOSE ON CRASH'S EYES -- Studying the "pitches" with intense concentration, endlessly working on his game.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DURHAM FIELD -- NEXT DAY

LARRY, DEKE, MICKEY AND BOBBY ARE SINGING at home plate as a pre-game show. Larry is Diana Ross, the other three are the Supremes, and the routine is brilliantly tacky.

LARRY (AND THE SUPREMES)
Baby love, oh oh, baby love, I need ya oh how I need ya, All ya do is treat me bad, Take my heart and leave me sad...

CUT TO:

INT. DURHAM BULLS LOCKER ROOM -- DAY

JIMMY STANDS ON A BENCH trying to get the players' attention.

JIMMY
Listen up, guys, could I have your attention a minute?
(a few heads turn)
I'm going to be leading a daily chapel service at three in the afternoons here in the locker room and you're all invited to drop by and worship before batting practice.

BOBBY
Jimmy, God damn it -- loosen up and get laid.

BOBBY, 25, smooths the creases of his uniform, preening.

JIMMY
I don't care If you think I'm square but I believe what I believe.

All heads turn as:

EBBY ENTERS THE LOCKER ROOM -- He looks trashed.

BOBBY
Jesus, Ebby, what truck ran over you?

EBBY
(glassy eyed)
Call me "Nuke". Annie said it's my new nickname.

Lots of teasing from around the clubhouse.

DEKE
Annie nailed you? That's great, means

you're gonna have a helluva year.
Does she fuck as good as they say?

EBBY
We didn't do it, man -- she read
poetry to me all night, I swear.
It's more tiring than fucking.

EBBY GOES TO HIS LOCKER and starts undressing. Crash sits next to him, looking straight ahead. Bobby nearby.

EBBY
-- of love"... hey, Crash, does that
mean what I think it means? What's
the deal here?

Crash studies Ebby.

CRASH
Your shower shoes have fungus on
'em. You'll never get to the Bigs
with fungus on your shower shoes.
(beat)
Think classy and you'll be classy.
If you win 20 in the Show you can
let the fungus grow back on your
shower shoes and the press'll think
you're colorful.
(beat)
Until you win twenty in the Show,
however, it means you're a slob.

CRASH RISES AND HEADS OUT to the field. Ebby sits silently, holding his shower shoes, taking it all in.

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM BALLPARK -- GAME IN PROGRESS -- DAY

IN THE DUGOUT -- THE GAME FROM A DUGOUT P.O.V. The players sit, stand, stir restlessly. A combination of relaxation and intensity not visible from the stands.

CRASH IS HANDED HIS BAT and helmet by the bat boy.

DEKE
This guy's bringing some serious
smoke out there.

DUGOUT P.O.V. THE WINSTON-SALEM PITCHER throwing hard.

CRASH
He ain't got shit.

FOLLOW CRASH INTO THE ON-DECK CIRCLE -- The ritual. The bat boy hands him the pine tar rag and he rubs pine tar on the bat with great care.

CRASH RISES -- Heads to the plate. Talking to himself.

CRASH
You ain't getting that cheese by me, meat.

CRASH TAKES HIS STANCE -- Upright. Calm. Head still.

CRASH (V.O.)
Look for the fastball up. He's gotta come with the cheese. Relax. Relax. Quick bat. Pop the clubhead. Open the hips. Relax. You're thinking too much. Get outta your fuckin' head, Crash.

CLOSE ON CRASH'S FACE -- His eyes intensely focused.

CRASH'S P.O.V. THE PITCHER -- Starts his windup.

CRASH (V.O.)
Get on top of the ball. Quick bat. Don't let him in your kitchen --

THE PITCHER DELIVERS -- Crash strides. Curveball.

Crash swings and misses, offstride. Strike one.

CRASH QUICKLY STEPS OUT OF THE BOX and picks up dirt. Rubs it on his hands. He's pissed.

CRASH (V.O.)
You stupid fuck, Crash. What're you swinging at a breaking ball for? Why's he starting me off with a hammer? Fuck me.
(more dirt)
You're okay. Stay back. Stay back, you dumb fuck. Wait. Wait.

P.O.V. THE PITCHER'S NEXT DELIVERY -- CURVE BALL AWAY.

CRASH STRIDES INTO THE PITCH -- Lashes a line drive down the first base line. Just foul.

Crash has started to first. Pulls up. Returns slowly to the plate. Picks up his bat.

CRASH
Throw that shit again, meat. Throw that weak ass shit.
(beat)
Now he's gotta try to slip the cheese by me. One and one. You're on top. Now bring me the gas --

P.O.V. PITCHER'S THIRD DELIVERY -- High and tight. Right at Crash's head. The ball seems to accelerate. About to explode his skull. For a moment -- THE FEAR OF DEATH...

CRASH HITS THE DIRT -- It just misses his head.

CRASH CLIMBS OUT OF THE DIRT -- Brushes himself off.

CRASH
This son of a bitch throws hard.
(beat)
Annie, Annie, Annie -- who is this Annie?
(catching himself)
Jesus, get outta the box you idiot, where's your head? Get the broad outta your head.

CRASH HOLDS UP HIS HAND to the ump.

CRASH
Time out.

UMP
Time out!

CRASH STEPS OUT OF THE BOX -- Motions to the bat boy for the pine tar rag. The boy brings it over. Crash re-applies it to his bat.

BAT BOY
Get a hit, Crash.

CRASH
Shut up.

CRASH WALKS BACK TO THE BOX -- Talking to himself.

CRASH
Awright, awright. You've seen all his pitches. Two and one. Relax. Wait. Quick bat. You can hit this shit --

CRASH IN THE BATTER'S BOX -- Digs in-again. Takes his stance. Upright. Relaxed. Ready.

CRASH
Shorten up. Bring the gas... Be quick -- be quick -- yeah, yeah...

CUT TO:

ANNIE AND JACKSON IN THE STANDS -- She's writing a note quickly, and hands it to Jackson, who hurries off.

CUT TO:

CRASH'S P.O.V. THE PITCHER'S NEXT PITCH -- A major league fastball. It explodes to the plate. Crash swings. And misses. Strike Three.

CRASH WALKS BACK TO THE DUGOUT -- Head high, no show of emotion. Almost proud. An old Warrior, not giving an inch even in defeat.

HE RE-ENTERS THE DUGOUT -- Sits down and starts putting the catcher's gear back on. Deke leans over.

DEKE
Serious heat, eh?

CRASH
He ain't got shit.

THE BATBOY TAKES THE NOTE FROM JACKSON -- And hands it to Crash, who refuses to accept it, being busy putting his gear on.

BAT BOY
From Annie.

CRASH
Read it.

BAT BOY
Dear Crash. You have a lovely swing but you're pulling your hips out too early. I'd be happy to meet you at the Batting Cage tomorrow to discuss it. Signed, Annie.

DEKE
Well if there's one chick'd know when you're pulling your hips out early, Annie's the one.

Crash doesn't seem too amused. He grabs the note, and the pen hanging from the starting lineup card taped to the dugout wall. He scrawls a quick note.

CUT TO:

ANNIE'S PRIVATE BOX -- She's watching the players through binoculars as Jackson returns with the note.

ANNIE
(looking through the glasses)
What'd he say?

Jackson looks at the note uneasily, then reads --

JACKSON
It says... "I want to -- make... love to you. Crash".

ANNIE PUTS DOWN THE GLASSES -- Takes the note.

ANNIE
Oh my...

CUT TO:

EXT. A LOCAL BATTING CAGE DAY

ANNIE DIGS IN AT THE PLATE -- Bat in hand. Crash a few feet away. Annie spits on her hands, wear batting glove, pumps the bat back and forth.

THE MECHANICAL PITCHING MACHINE DELIVERS -- Kawoosh.

ANNIE SWINGS -- Lashes out a line drive. Crash smiles.

ANNIE
See my hips?

CRASH
Yep.

ANNIE
I think Thomas Pynchon's a genius.

CRASH
When you're hitting you shouldn't think about anything but hitting.
(beat)
But you shouldn't think about it too much. The trick is to use your brain to not use your brain.

ANNIE
But you were pulling your hips last night.

CRASH
So... Wanta make love?

ANNIE SWINGS AND MISSES the next pitch.

ANNIE
I'm committed to Nuke for the season. You had your chance the other night.

CRASH
What'you see in that guy -- he's dim, pretty boy. A young, wild...

ANNIE
Young men are uncomplicated.
(Crash mutters)
And he's not "dim". He's just inexperienced. My job is to give him "life-wisdom" and help him make it to the major leagues.

CRASH
That's my job too.

ANNIE SWINGS AND MISSES another pitch.

ANNIE
Damn.

CRASH
You're pulling your hips out.

ANNIE
But they're nice hips.
(beat)
I looked up your records -- You've hit 227 home runs in the minors. That's great!

ANNIE FOULS ONE OFF and digs in gamely.

CRASH
Don't tell anybody.

ANNIE
Why not? If you hit twenty homers this year you'll be the all time minor league champ! The record's...

CRASH
247 home runs in the minors would be a dubious honor, if ya think about it.

ANNIE
Oh no, I think it'd be great! The Sporting News should know about it.

CRASH
No. Please.

ANNIE SWINGS AND MISSES another one.

ANNIE
Damn.

CRASH
Let me.

CRASH STEPS IN TO HIT -- He takes his familiar stance. The pitch comes. Crash drills it.

CRASH
Your place or mine?

ANNIE
Despite my love of weird metaphysics and my rejection of most Judao-Christian ethics, I am, within the framework of a baseball season, monogamous.

CRASH
Fact is you're afraid of meeting a guy like me 'cause it might be real so you sabotage it with some bullshit about commitment to a young boy you can boss around --
(whack -- a line drive)
Great deal. You get to write self-indulgent little poems all winter

about how hard it is to find a man
even though you just sent him packing --
(whack -- a line drive)
So what do you really want? You wanta
be a tragic woman figure wallowing
in the bullshit of magic?
(whack -- a line drive)
Or do you want a guy?

The pitching machine arm flaps. Empty. Silence.

ANNIE
Oh Crash... you do make speeches...

Crash puts the bat down, heads out the gate. She follows.

A LITTLE LEAGUE TEAM ARRIVES -- Twenty-five 10 year olds in uniform with a couple PARENT COACHES.

LITTLE LEAGUER #1
Hey, are you Crash Davis! Can I have
a autograph?!

CRASH STOPS TO SIGN AUTOGRAPHS amidst 25 Little Leaguers.

CRASH
(as he signs autographs)
Well, Annie, your place or mine?

ANNIE
You got me all confused.

CRASH
A batter has two tenths of a second
to decide whether to swing --

ANNIE
I'm not a real batter. I'm a woman.

LITTLE LEAGUER
Hey, when are you guys gonna start
winning? You're terrible!

ANNIE
It's a long season, boys.

SUDDENLY A VOICE -- Nuke pulls up, gets out of his Porsche.

NUKE
Hey!
(coming over)
What're you guys doing here --
stealing my girl?

CRASH
Now, Nuke, would I do a thing like
that?
(to the little leaguers)
Hey kids, this is the great Ebby
Calvin "Nuke" LaLoosh.

LITTLE LEAGUERS
It's Nuke, it's Nuke! Can I have your autograph?! Etc.

NUKE
No prob, kids --

And suddenly Nuke is swept up into a sea of Little Leaguers. Crash smiles as he turns Annie and the kids over to Nuke.

CRASH
See you guys at the ballpark.

Crash leaves Annie with Nuke and 25 Little Leaguers.

CUT TO:

EXT. CRASH GETS INTO HIS CAR -- CONTINUOUS

AN AGING SHELBY MUSTANG CONVERTIBLE -- The paint's fading, a couple dings in the body, but loaded under the hood.

CRASH PUNCHES HIS TAPE DECK -- Sam Cooke's "You Send Me".

ANNIE BITES HER FIST watching Crash leave.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

The sounds of lovemaking in a darkened room lit only by a few candles.

ANNIE
Yes, yes, yesnmmmmyes...
(beat)
Oh my...
(several beats)
Oh, that was just fabulous, Crash.

Several beats of silence.

NUKE
Crash?

He flips on a lamp near the bed.

NUKE
You mean Nuke. You said "Crash".

ANNIE
I didn't say "Crash". I said Nuke.

NUKE
You said "Crash".

ANNIE
Honey, don't ever listen to a woman when she's making love. They'll say

the strangest things.

NUKE
You said "Crash".

ANNIE
Would you rather me be making love to him, using your name, or making love to you, using his name?

Nuke considers this fabulous logic.

NUKE
Yeah maybe you're right.

ANNIE
You see how nice things are when we go slow?

Nuke sighs; and lets his head sink in the pillow.

NUKE
Mmm, hmmm.
(beat)
You shoulda seen how many people came to the airport to see me off. When I got drafted first it was the happiest day of my Father's life.
(beat)
He likes baseball more than I do...

ANNIE
You can learn to like it.

NUKE
I wanted to be the host of Dance Fever, somethin' like that...

ANNIE
Y'know if you make it to the Bigs you could still become the host of Dance Fever. Baseball's a good stepping stone for things like that.

NUKE
God, I never thought of that.

ANNIE
(sweetly)
There is a lot of things you never thought of, sweetie -- now get some rest for tonight's game.

Nuke rests his head on Annie's shoulder. His eyes are wide open and full of nervous energy.

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM BASEBALL PARK -- DUSK

NUKE ON A PAY PHONE -- In his uniform. Players warming up in the background as the ground crew prepares the field.

NUKE
Hello? Dad? This is Ebby.
(beat)
Yeah, I know, I know -- you got the Durham papers yet? Well I been a little wild...
(defensively)
These hitters down here are better than the ones in high school...
(trying to change subject)
How's Mom? Yeah? Well I am trying hard... I am bending my back... you're not coming down' here to visit just yet, are you?
(beat)
Can I talk to Mom?

CUT TO:

EXT. HOME PLATE -- THE BALLPARK NIGHT

THE MAYOR OF DURHAM AND THE CITY COUNCIL stand at a mike in front of home plate. 300 LITTLE LEAGUERS in uniform are lined up along the foul line, restrained by a rope.

VOICE OVER P.A.
Ladies and gentlemen, the Mayor of Durham, the honorable Mutt Clark...

THE MAYOR STEPS to the mike. A classic Southern mayor.

MAYOR
Welcome to the "Atlantic Seaboard Tobacco Growers City Council Little League Cash Drop Night"!

As the honorable Mutt Clark drones on -- we INTERCUT:

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BULLPEN -- CONTINUOUS

NUKE IS WARMING UP TO PITCH -- Crash and Larry watch him closely, giving advice. As Nuke delivers --.

CRASH
Drive off your back leg. You pitch with your legs as much as your arms --

NUKE
I thought I was --

CRASH
Don't think.

A MANGY DOG EATS FROM A DISH provided by the players. A couple

kids sit with the players.

MILLIE SITS DOWN NEXT TO A PLAYER -- BOBBY, 25.

MILLIE
Hi, I'm Millie.

BOBBY
I'm married.

JOSE FASHIONS A SMALL CROSS OUT OF CHICKEN BONES and rubs it on his bat. Bobby notices this.

BOBBY
What's that?

JOSE
Chicken bone cross take the curse off this bat and bring me hits.

BOBBY
You a God damn witch?

JOSE
Yes. A switch hitting witch. Very common in Puerto Rico.

BOBBY
Will that work for me?

JOSE
If you believe in Voodoo.

BOBBY
I'm 0 for 16! Gimme some of that shit.

BOBBY HOLDS OUT HIS BAT for Jose to rub with the cross.

JOSE
No, that is not belief. That is desperation.

BOBBY
C'mon, God damn it, gimme some!

ALL HEADS TURN, A HELICOPTER APPEARS ABOVE THE FIELD

CUT TO:

BACK TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL -- Hair and hats blowing from the chopper turbulence.

MAYOR
...five, four, three, two, one... let 'er go! One thousand big ones!

THE HELICOPTER DUMPS HUNDREDS OF DOLLAR BILLS above the field.

The night sky fills with fluttering money THE ROPE IS DROPPED --

THREE HUNDRED LITTLE LEAGUERS charge across the infield to the falling money, scooping it up wildly, brawling, shoving, clawing for the cash.

As the money flutters down...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DURHAM BASEBALL STADIUM -- SHORT TIME LATER

CLOSE ON THE ROSIN BAG on the mound. A hand picks it up.

Puffs of rosin "smoke". Nuke is on the mound.

NUKE NERVOUSLY WALKS AROUND THE MOUND -- Just before the first batter. He picks up the rosin bag. Digs a slot for his lead foot to land. And CRASH APPROACHES, in full gear, mask tipped up on his head.

CRASH
Don't try to strike everybody out.
(beat)
Strikeouts are boring. They're Fascist. Throw some ground balls, it's more Democratic.

CRASH TURNS AND HEADS TO THE PLATE and we hear the beginning of Nuke's interior monologue.

NUKE (V.O.)
What's this guy know, eh? If he's so great why's he been in the minors for ten years? And if he's so hot how come Annie wants me instead of him.

CRASH TURNS AROUND HALF WAY TO THE PLATE and returns to the mound, as if he knows everything Nuke's thinking.

CRASH
And listen, meat. You don't know shit. If you want to get to the Show, you'll listen to me. She only wants you 'cause she can boss you around, got it?
(beat, complete tone change)
Relax, have a ball out here. This game's fun, okay? Fun, God damn it.
(beat)
And don't squeeze the ball so tight. It's an egg. Hold it like an egg.

CRASH SMILES -- And trots back to the plate.

NUKE'S P.O.V. The first batter steps in. Crash gives the sign for the pitch.

NUKE
Fun? What's he know about fun?

(beat)
Why's he calling for a curveball? I wanta bring heat.

CRASH
Shake off the pitch. Throw what you wanta.

NUKE SHAKES OFF THE PITCH -- Here comes Crash back out to the mound before Nuke's thrown a pitch.

CRASH
Why you shaking me off?

NUKE
I wanta throw the heater to announce my presence with authority.

CRASH
"To announce your fucking presence with authority"? This guy's a first ball fastball hitter. He's looking for heat.

NUKE
But he ain't seen my heat --

CRASH
Awright, meat, give him your heat.

CRASH RETURNS ONE MORE TIME to behind the plate.

CRASH CROSSES THE PLATE, past the hitter. He speaks to the opposing leadoff batter.

CRASH
Fastball.

NUKE
Why's he always call me "Meat"? I'm the guy driving a Porsche.

NUKE WINDS UP AND DELIVERS -- A fastball.

THE LEADOFF HITTER TEES OFF on the pitch and sends a line shot over the right field fence.

CLOSE ON BILLBOARD -- "Hit Cow, Win Steak" sign, The home run hits the cow on a target painted on the cow's rump.

The COW'S MOUTH OPENS AND MOOS.

THE BATTER STANDS AND WATCHES the home run, admiring the shot, enjoying the moment. CRASH GETS IN HIS FACE instantly -- and gets very tough.

CRASH
What're you lookin' at?! You're showing up my pitcher, bush -- get your ass in gear!

THE BATTER TAKES OFF ON A HOME RUN TROT -- Slightly scared.

AND CRASH HEADS TO THE MOUND where Nuke watches the Mooing Cow and the circling batter with dismay. Crash smiles.

CRASH
Guy hit the shit outta that one, eh?

NUKE
Well, I held it like an egg.

CRASH
An' he scrambled the son of a bitch.
(beat)
Having fun yet?

NUKE
I'm having a blast.
(beat)
God, that sucker teed off on it just like he knew I was gonna throw a fastball.

CRASH
He did know.

NUKE
How?

CRASH
I told him.

CRASH SMILES -- Drops the mask, returns behind the plate.

NUKE SIGHS -- Takes a deep breath.

NUKE
Don't think. Just throw. Don't think. Just throw.

NUKE'S WINDUP AND DELIVERY -- A fastball. A powerful, clean, overwhelming fastball. Strike one.

NUKE
God, that was beautiful. What'd I do?

NUKE WINDS UP AND DELIVERS HIS NEXT PITCH -- A monster. An Ebby Calvin "Nuke" LaLoosh fastball. Twenty feet wide of the plate.

THE BULL MASCOT DIVES FOR COVER -- The ball hits the bat rack. Bats go flying.

CUT TO:

ANNIE IN HER BOX SEAT -- Jackson with the radar gun.

ANNIE

Oh dear... easy honey...

JACKSON
Ninety-five miles an hour...

CUT TO:

BACK TO NUKE -- Pacing the mound. Looks in for the sign.

NUKE PITCHES AGAIN -- The batter lines a single to left.

NUKE'S P.O.V. THE MANAGER AND PITCHING COACH TALKING

NUKE
Christ, Skip and Larry are talking about me. Don't get anybody warm in the pen yet. I'm okay. I'm having fun.

NUKE PITCHES AGAIN -- The batter lines a single to right.

NUKE'S P.O.V. THE BULLPEN -- TWO PITCHERS start warming up.

NUKE
Don't yank me in the first, man.

NUKE'S P.O.V. -- THE MANAGER comes out to the mound to talk.

NUKE
Aw, shit.

THE MANAGER AND CRASH MEET NUKE on the mound.

SKIP
Relax.

NUKE
Don't pull me, Skip. I'll settle down. I'm okay!

SKIP
(fatherly)
Relax, Nuke, Relax...
(to Crash)
What kinda stuff's he got?

CRASH
I don't know. I haven't caught anything yet.

SKIP
What're you thinking about out here, Nuke?

NUKE
I'm trying not to think.

SKIP
Good. But just 'cause you ain't s'posed to think don't mean you ain't

s'posed to use your head.

SKIP SLAPS NUKE ON THE ASS in a gruff, reassuring way, and returns to the dugout. Leaving Nuke and Crash.

CRASH
Have some fun, God damn it.

CRASH SMILES -- And as he returns to the plate...

CUT TO:

ANNIE WATCHES IN THE STANDS with Jackson and the radar gun.

ANNIE
Here we go again, Jackson, hold on tight...

Hit Professor Longhair rock and roll... and:

DISSOLVE TO:

NUKE DELIVERS -- A batter grounds out weakly.

DURHAM AT BAT -- DUGOUT -- Crash lets Jose rub his bat with a chicken bone cross. Then steps to the plate and --

CRASH HITS A LONG HOME RUN -- And circles the bases.

NUKE DELIVERS -- A line drive nearly undresses him. Runners circle the bases.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- NIGHT

THE SHOWERS -- Naked bodies in the steamy room. No joking around. A team on losing streak.

SUDDENLY SKIP STEPS INTO THE SHOWER in his uniform and angrily throws an armload of bats into the shower.

SKIP
Anybody not outta the shower in ten seconds gonna get fined a hundred bucks. One, two...

THE SHOWER EMPTIES in seconds. Players grab a seat, and:

WHITEY THE SPORTSWRITER ENTERS as he does every night.

SKIP
No press for five minutes, Whitey.

WHITEY
I'm doing a column on the Myth of Sisyphus as manifest in a minor league losing streak, Joe, and I thought...

SKIP PICKS UP A CHAIR AND FIRES IT AT WHITEY -- The chair

crashes into a locker. Whitey hurries out.

SKIP
If I ever need a brain transplant I'll choose a sportswriter 'cause that way I'd be getting a brain that's never been used.

A couple snickers from the players. Skip whirls.

SKIP
What're you laughing at?!

Silence.

The Durham Bulls sit and stand quietly.

SKIP
You guys lollygag the ball around the infield, ya lollygag you're way to first, ya lollygag in an' outta the dugout. You know what that makes ya
(beat)
Lollygaggers. What's our record, Larry?

LARRY
We're eight and sixteen.

SKIP
Eight and sixteen?! How'd we ever win eight?
(beat)
Jose, what's this sign?

SKIP FLASHES THROUGH A SEQUENCE of signs. Hand to face, hand to belt, hand brushes letters, etc.

JOSE
That's the steal.

SKIP
Wrong. That's the bunt. This is the steal.

SKIP FLASHES QUICKLY ANOTHER SEQUENCE -- Hand to face, hands to hands. He speaks rapidly -- a private language.

SKIP
Face is "skin to skin". Skin starts with "S". "S" stands for steal if it follows the indicator which is hand to eye 'cause the word "indicator" starts with an "I" so I figure "eye" --
(touches his eye)
-- would remind you of "I" for indicator to indicate that what follows is the sign. I figure wrong -- You're a buncha lollygaggers.

(beat)
This is a simple game.
(beat)
ya throw the ball, ya hit the ball,
ya catch the ball.

CLOSE ON FACES OF THE PLAYERS -- Sitting silently.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BALLPARK SIMULTANEOUS -- NIGHT

THE SIX PLAYERS' WIVES WAIT in a cluster. Three of them have SMALL CHILDREN. The children are crying.

The long-suffering women try to calm the kids.

BOBBY'S WIFE
Bobby went hitless again. He's gonna be in a terrible mood... terrible. How'd Mickey do?

MICKEY'S WIFE
He got two hits.

BOBBY'S WIFE
Lucky you.

CUT TO:

BACK INSIDE THE LOCKER ROOM -- Skip is winding down.

SKIP
We can't win at home -- how we gonna win on the road? We got a twelve day road trip starting tomorrow.
(beat)
Bus leaves at six in the morning.

SKIP HEADS BACK INSIDE his little office with Larry.

CUT TO:

INSIDE SKIP'S OFFICE -- He and Larry open a couple beers.

THE DOOR OPENS -- BOBBY ENTERS wearing only a towel.

BOBBY
You wanted to see me?

SKIP
Yeah, Bobby, shut the door.
(he does)
This is the toughest job a manager has...
(beat)
But the organization has decided to make a change --

BOBBY

Skip, I know I'm in a slump but I hit the ball hard tonight, right at 'em. A couple flares drop in, and I'm back in the groove!

The nearly naked 25 year old man pleads helplessly -- his career is over.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STADIUM -- NIGHT

THE PLAYERS EXIT -- The Groupies wait in a cluster. The wives wait in another group. Bobby's wife sees Bobby.

BOBBY'S WIFE
(to child)
There's Daddy! Wave to Daddy!

-- P.O.V. BOBBY COMING OUT OF THE CLUBHOUSE -- Another player has his arm around Bobby, consoling him. The wife knows.

BOBBY'S WIFE
Oh God...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STADIUM PARKING LOT -- DAWN

THE DURHAM BULLS TEAM BUS is parked. Luggage is loaded. Sleepy players arriving, escorted by wives and girlfriends.

ANNIE BIDS NUKE GOODBYE -- Off to the side. She pulls something from her handbag and hands it to Nuke. A pair of WOMEN'S RED PANTIES, with lace and frills.

ANNIE
I want you to wear these on the road trip when you pitch.

NUKE
What?

ANNIE
They'll fit snugly against your balls in such a wonderful way that you'll start seeing things differently -- plus they'll remind you of me which is better than thinking about those nasty hitters.

NUKE
Jesus, Annie, I don't know --

ANNIE
You've been pitching out of the wrong side of your brain. These'll help move things to the right side.

NUKE

Big League pitchers don't use these.

ANNIE
They did when they were in the Carolina League.

NUKE STUFFS THE PANTIES in his pocket, bewildered. A small kiss from Annie, and he hurries to the bus.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- DAWN

PLAYERS THROW THEIR GEAR into their travel bags.

A PAPER BEER CUP IS TAPED TO THE WALL -- With a sign:

"Married men deposit wedding rings here for road trips".

CLOSE ON THE CUP -- A ring is dropped in, and another, and...

We begin hearing Annie's VOICE OVER:

ANNIE (V.O.)
A woman should never ask questions about road trips.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE PARKING LOT -- DAWN

THE TEAM BUS PULLS OUT -- Wives and girlfriends head back to their apartments, leaving:

ANNIE WALKING BACK ROME -- Several blocks to her house.

ANNIE
Men don't realize that women always know when they've been unfaithful.
(beat)
The fact is, upon exact moment of penetration -- the woman knows.

AS ANNIE WALKS BACK through Durham...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY THROUGH THE SMOKY MOUNTAINS - EARLY MORNING

THE TEAM BUS ROLLS through the North Carolina landscape.

ANNIE
This sort of spiritual awareness can be a mixed blessing, especially if you're dating a ballplayer. I believe a woman oughta take care of her man so thoroughly that he can go on the road for a few days without having the desire to search out another pair of panties

(self-aware)
That is probably, however, my most ridiculous belief.
(sigh)
I just hope the boys start winning soon. In some profound way I fear that a last place team is a reflection on its women...

THE BUS ROLLS through North Carolina.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BUS -- MORNING

SKIP SITS IN THE FRONT of the bus, doing a crossword puzzle.

LARRY READS A BOOK -- "How to Make a Million Dollars in Real Estate with No Money Down".

DEKE TURNS UP HIS TAPE DECK -- George Jones sings "He Stopped Loving Her Today".

MICKEY TURNS UP HIS TAPE DECK across the aisle -- Aretha Franklin sings "R-E-S-P-E-C-T".

DEKE TURNS HIS VOLUME LOUDER -- Mickey does likewise, and soon we have DUELING TAPE DECKS. C & W going head to head with R & B. A cacophony.

SKIP LEAPS TO HIS FEET, WHIRLS and shouts.

SKIP
I got one word to say to you -- Shut up!

Silence.

And then from the back of the bus, some soft, gentle, but slightly dissonant guitar chords.

THE BACK OF THE BUS -- Nuke sits across the aisle from Crash, who's re-reading Thomas Pynchon. Nuke has a guitar and is struggling with some chords to "Try a Little Tenderness". He butchers the chords and the words.

NUKE
(singing softly)
Oh she may get wooly, women do get wooly, because of all the stress...

CRASH
(in disgust)
Gimme that.

CRASH STRONGARMS THE GUITAR from Nuke.

CRASH
I hate people who get the words wrong. It ain't "woolly" it's "weary" and

it nobody's got stress, they're
wearing a dress.
(beat)
Listen.

CRASH WHIPS THROUGH THE FIRST FEW BARS of the song.

CRASH
(sings softly)
Oh she may be weary, Young girls do
get weary, Wearing the same old
dress...

HE SHOVES THE GUITAR back at Nuke.

NUKE
How come you don't like me?

CRASH
'Cause you don't respect yourself,
which is your problem, but you don't
respect the game -- and that's my
problem.
(beat)
You got a gift.

NUKE
What do I got?

CRASH
A gift. When you were a baby the
gods reached down and turned your
left arm into a thunderbolt.

Nuke looks at his left arm rubs his shoulder curiously.

CRASH
You got a Hall of Fame arm but you're
pissing it away.

NUKE
I ain't pissing nothing away -- I
got a Porsche already. A 944 with
A.C. and a quadraphonic Blaupunkt.

CRASH
You don't need a quadraphonic
Blaupunkt -- you need a curve ball.
(beat)
In the Show, everybody can hit the
fastball.

NUKE
You been in the Majors?

CRASH
Yep.

Tony and Deke overhear this and turn around. And Crash gets
wistful, lyrical, and even slightly hopeful.

CRASH
I was in the Show for 21 days, once.
(beat)
It was the greatest 21 days of my life. You never touch your luggage in the show -- somebody else handles your bags. It's great.
(beat)
The ballparks are like cathedrals, the hotels all have room service, the women have long legs and brains -- it's a smorgasbord.

DEKE
The women are hot, eh?

CRASH
Yeah -- and so are the pitchers. They throw ungodly breaking stuff in the Show -- exploding sliders.

Nuke, Tony, and Deke murmur in awe at Crash's pronouncement.

CRASH
You could be one of those guys -- but you don't give a fuck, Meat.

NUKE
God damn it I'm sick of you calling me "Meat"! You wanta step outside!

CRASH HOPS TO HIS FEET as the bus barrels along, grabbing Nuke by the collar.

CRASH
Yeah, let's go.

Nuke quickly has second thoughts -- Crash can be terrifying.

NUKE
No. Wait a minute. Calm down, Crash...

Nuke sits back down. Calms. Reaches for a baseball sitting nearby. He hands the ball to Crash.

NUKE
Teach me how to throw a breaking ball.

Crash takes the ball gently and speaks softly:

CRASH
As I was saying ya hold it like an egg.

As the bus rolls through the country:

A LATE 60'S OLDS CONVERTIBLE ROARS PAST -- Max Patkin at the wheel. He waves at the team bus and honks.

The opening bars on the National Anthem -- "Oh Say Can You See"

And Max roars off through the rolling green-landscape...

Hit Hank Williams music to play over:

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WINSTON-SALEM BASEBALL STADIUM -- DAY

MAX PATKIN COACHES THIRD in his comic routine, now, for the Winston-Salem team, as Durham is in the field.

A WINSTON-SALEM BATTER lines a double off the wall.

CUT TO:

INT. DURHAM RADIO STATION -- DAY

TEDDY THE ANNOUNCER re-creates the game for broadcast with a several second delay.

HIS ASSISTANT (P.A. ANNOUNCER FROM THE BALLPARK) has a phone to her ear, and writes down each play on a piece of paper, holding it up for Teddy who enhances shamelessly in his ON THE AIR "play by play".

CLOSE ON PAPER -- His assistant writes "DOUBLE TO LEFT".

TEDDY HITS A TINY MALLET against a jar. Thunk. The sound of ball hitting bat. He punches one of several tape cassettes cued up. A crowd roars. An array of special effects is at his fingertips.

TEDDY
(on the air)
...double off the wall by Higgins, and once again the Durham pitchers are unable to get the first out of the inning...

HIS ASSISTANT WRITES ANOTHER NOTE -- "ERROR MCFEE"

Thunk -- The mallet again.

TEDDY
(on the air)
Line drive to center -- a diving stab by McFee -- ohhhh! Ball gets by his glove, another run in and the crowd loves it --

PUNCHES A CASSETTE -- A crowd roars.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY THROUGH SMOKY MOUNTAINS -- NIGHT

The bus rolls through a small town.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHEAP MOTEL IN GREENSBORO -- DAWN

THE TEAM BUS PULLS IN -- Players stagger off, half asleep.

TEDDY (O.S.)
(on the air)
Bulls will attempt to end a six game losing streak against the Greensboro Astros with Nuke LaLoosh on the hill...

CUT TO:

INT. GREENSBORO BALLPARK LOCKER ROOM -- DAY

NUKE DRESSES FOR THE GAME -- He pulls the RED PANTIES out of his bag. Looks around the clubhouse. Nobody sees them. He's embarrassed anyway -- and stuffs them back.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREENSBORO BALLPARK DAY

NUKE WINDS AND DELIVERS -- The batter swings, and:

CUT TO:

INT. RADIO STATION -- DAY

TEDDY AND HIS ASSISTANT -- A note is held up, "Single"--

THUNK -- The mallet strikes.

TEDDY
(on the air)
Base hit centerfield off LaLoosh...

HIS ASSISTANT (ON THE PHONE) SCRAWLS another quick note.

THUNK THUNK THUNK -- A rapid sequence of the mallet striking the percussive box, and:

TEDDY
(on the air)
That closes the book on LaLoosh today, 5 earned runs, 5 hits, 5 strikeouts, 5 walks, 5 wild pitches...

CUT TO:

EXT. GREENSBORO BALLPARK -- DAY

SKIP REMOVES NUKE FROM THE GAME and he heads for the showers.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S KITCHEN -- DAY

ANNIE SITS WITH MILLIE at the kitchen table, listening to the radio. Annie sighs. Millie consoles her.

CUT TO:

INT. GREENSBORO LOCKER ROOM -- DAY

NUKE IN THE SHOWERS ALONE -- Letting the water run over him.

The voice of Teddy an the air, editorializing shamelessly.

TEDDY
(on the air)
It's time to tell it like it is, sports fans -- and this is the most wretched road trip I've seen in 20 years, and possibly the worst Durham team in half a century.
(beat)
Where are the great Bull players of yesteryear? Where are the Footsie Blakes, the Digger O'Dells, the Gus Palowitzes?

TEDDY'S VOICE PLAYS OVER road trip images:

NUKE STARTS TO PUT ON THE RED PANTIES -- Changes his mind, and hides them again.

THE TEAM BUS rolling across North Carolina.

THE TEAM BUS at a drive through hamburger stand somewhere in the Smoky Mountains. Sack after sack of fast food is passed through the window to Skip.

THE TEAM BUS PULLS INTO YET ANOTHER HOTEL and this time, a Bus with a sign -- "Holiday on Ice" pulls in next to them.

TEDDY
(on the air)
Is the modern athlete a pale imitation of the great old warriors? Only Crash Davis stands out this year, begging the question, "What are these boys thinking about, 'cause it sure ain't baseball".

CUT TO:

EXT/INT. THE BUS IN FRONT OF THE KINGSTON HOTEL -- NIGHT

As the players rise in the bus, Deke is trying to work up excitement about the "Holiday on Ice" bus from which twenty great looking women ice skaters are getting off.

P.O.V. HOLIDAY ON ICE GIRLS getting off the bus.

TONY

Ice skaters. God. Look't em. that's what we need, y'know -- one night with some skaters and we can get back on track...

DEKE
We need a night off just to stop our losing streak. We need a rainout.

CRASH
I can get us a rainout.

MICKEY
It's 90 degrees, there ain't been a cloud in the sky in weeks.

CRASH
Hundred bucks says I can get us a rainout tomorrow.

TONY
You're on.

CUT TO:

EXT. KINGSTON BASEBALL STADIUM -- NIGHT

A CAB PULLS UP in the dark. Late at night. The cab leaves, and the four men climb over the fence.

CUT TO:

EXT. INSIDE THE KINGSTON BALLPARK -- NIGHT

CRASH PULLS THE LID OFF A BOX -- Several valve handles.

Crash turns several handles with an iron bar, and...

THE SPRINKLER SYSTEM COMES TO LIFE -- And suddenly the field is covered with the clicking of rain-bird sprinklers, throwing long slow arcs of water across the entire field.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SCOREBOARD OF THE BALLPARK -- MINUTES LATER -- NIGHT

THE FOUR PLAYERS sit on the scoreboard, watching the sprinklers flood the field. A six-pack is passed around.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BALLPARK -- EARLY THE NEXT MORNING

A QUAGMIRE ON THE INFIELD -- The Kingston GENERAL MANAGER stands in the muck with his ground crew. Wheelbarrows, shovels, sand is piled around. It's hopeless.

KINGSTON G.M.
God damn it! Vandals. Damn kids!

GROUND CREW MEMBER
We can't get it ready by game time, boss.

The General Manager studies the field. Hopeless.

He looks up at the sky. Cloudless, sunny.

KINGSTON G.M.
(to his assistant)
Call the radio and the paper.
(with disgust)
The game's been rained out.

Organ music -- "The Blue Danube Waltz".

CUT TO:

INT. THE KINGSTON CIVIC ARENA -- DAY

"HOLIDAY ON ICE" in its matinee performance. The beautiful, leggy women skating to the "Blue Danube Waltz".

TEN OF THE DURHAM BULLS sit in the front row. Nuke, Deke, Tommy, others, but not Crash. Tony waves to a skater.

THE SKATER WAVES BACK as she swirls past the Bulls.

CUT TO:

INT. THE KINGSTON HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

DEKE ICES THE CHAMPAGNE -- In the b.g. Tommy is blow drying his hair. Mickey puts the finishing touches on his outfit. Several other players get ready to party.

DEKE
Par--ty! I blew a whole day's meal money for this champagne seven dollars, man, it better be good.

MICKEY
For seven bucks it better be some serious shit.

TOMMY
What time is it, eh? When are they coming?

The guys lounge around nervously, trying to be casual.

CUT TO:

INT. KINGSTON HOTEL COFFEE SHOP -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON A STEAK DINNER set down in front of Crash.

Nuke hands Crash a hundred dollar bill.

NUKE
This is from Tony for the rainout.
C'mon, man, let's go to the party.

CRASH
Naw...

NUKE
"Naw"? There's ice skaters coming!
You ever made love to an ice skater?

CRASH
By the dozen. Holiday on Ice, Ice
Capades, Ice Follies --
(beat)
I'm through with one night stands.

NUKE
You're through with one night stands?!
What do you want?

CRASH
I just wanta play everyday despite
small nagging injuries -- and go
home to a woman who appreciates how
full of crap I truly am.

Nuke just stares at him.

NUKE
You're weird, man -- I want a ice
skater real bad.

CRASH
Go for it.

NUKE
If I get laid, you won't tell Annie?

CRASH
I won't have to.

NUKE LOOKS AT HIM STRANGELY -- And hurries to the party.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PARTY ROOM -- NIGHT

THE GUYS ARE GROOMING TO EXCESS -- Still blow drying and preening for each other.

A knock at the door.

THEY QUICKLY GET "CASUAL" and lounge seductively.

DEKE
It's them, it's them! Be casual.
(calling out)
Come in!

THE DOOR OPENS -- It's Nuke.

NUKE
Hey, guys, pa--rty!

TOMMY
Shut up and be cool, man. Like Mickey there...

MICKEY "LOUNGES" WITH A DRINK and a cigaret.

MICKEY
You wanta make it to the Show, Rock, you gotta learn how to "lounge".

NUKE LEANS ON THE BAR with an elbow, striking his version of a "lounging" pose.

NUKE
How's this?

MICKEY
You got it.

A knock at the door.

TOMMY
Entre.

EIGHT ICE SKATERS STAND IN THE DOORWAY -- Ready to...

ICE SKATER #1
Pa--rty!

POP THE CORK ON THE SEVEN DOLLAR CHAMPAGNE -- And party...

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

THE WIVES AND SOME GIRLFRIENDS WATCH "DYNASTY" on Annie's television. Annie hosts, filling their drink glasses, serving popcorn, and largely staying in the background.

MICKEY'S WIFE
Do you think your husband plays around on the road trips?

DEKE'S WIFE
No way. Well... God... do we have to talk about that?

MICKEY'S WIFE
I guess not... it's just that once I asked Mickey if he was faithful to me on the road trips and he said "in his heart he was faithful".
(beat)
What the hell does that mean?

DEKE'S WIFE
It means he's unfaithful -- but only a man would put it in those words.

A BABY CRIES -- Tommy's Wife lifts a baby from the couch, begins rocking It.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PLAYERS' HOTEL -- NIGHT

Players are dancing, drinking, hustling the ice skaters, the music is up, the party swinging, when:

SKIP ENTERS -- He's steaming and slightly drunk. Larry is with him.

SKIP
I just got one word to say to everybody -- shut up!

THE PLAYERS AND ICE SKATERS freeze in mid-party.

SKIP
Nuke -- get everybody in here. Hundred dollar fine anybody's not here in five.

NUKE HURRIES OUT THE DOOR

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

NUKE POUNDS ON DOORS in a hurry.

-- P.O.V. IN FIRST DOOR -- Jimmy is on his knees at the bed, bare chested, praying with an open Bible.

NUKE
Get your holy ass in Room 401.

He hustles to the next door, and pounds madly.

-- P.O.V. IN SECOND DOOR -- TWO NAKED WOMEN with Jose and Tony, nearly nude.

NUKE
Hundred dollar fine if you're not in #401 in five.

JOSE
Hundred dollars?!

JOSE AND TONY LOOK AT THE TWO WOMEN -- It's a lot of money in Class AAA ball.

TONY
Christ. Sorry ladies...

JOSE AND TONY HURRY OUT in their shorts.

NAKED LADY
Go to hell! You're in last place anyway!

AND NUKE HURRIES DOWN THE HALL -- Pounding on each door.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP -- CONTINUOUS

CRASH EATING ALONE -- Peacefully. Nuke arrives excitedly.

NUKE
Crash! Skip wants everybody in #401 for a team meeting. Hundred buck fine if ya don't show!

CRASH PULLS OUT THE HUNDRED DOLLAR BILL and hands it to him.

CRASH
Party without me.

NUKE
God -- what a Big League move.

NUKE TAKES THE MONEY and hurries back.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PARTY ROOM CONTINUOUS

24 PLAYERS AND 8 ICE SKATERS -- Some of the players Nuke rounded up are partially dressed. Skip spots the women.

SKIP
Who are you?

ICE SKATER #1
We're ice skaters. Can we go now?

SKIP
No. I want you to hear my philosophy. It'll do you some good
(beat)
Here it is. This is a simple game. You throw the ball, you hit the ball, you catch the ball. You got that?!

ICE SKATER #1
(frightened)
Yes.

SKIP
Are you lovely creatures aware that you are about to compromise yourselves with a buncha bums who are --
(to Larry)
-- what are we?

LARRY
Eight and twenty-four.

SKIP
Eight and twenty-four! How'd we ever win 8 games?

LARRY
It's a miracle.

SKIP
Look, guys -- I'm a man, I got needs too. I understand this party -- but...
(beat)
sex is the one thing you can get further behind in and catch up faster than anything I know.
(beat)
There's a baseball lesson in there somewhere.
(looking around)
Where's Crash?

NUKE STEPS FORWARD -- Hands Skip the hundred dollar bill..

NUKE
He can't make it. Here's his fine.

SKIP
Aw Christ, he don't have to come. He's hitting .350.

TOMMY
Don't you think that's a double standard -- we're here and he ain't?

SKIP
I believe in a double standard for guys hitting .350.
(beat)
Look, men -- you got a choice. You wanta be roasting your nuts off for Midas Muffler welding exhaust pipes up the assholes of Cadillacs... or --
(beat)
You wanta be sitting in the Caddy while some other guy's crawling around in a monkey suit with a blow torch?
(beat)
There's only two places you can be in life -- in the Caddy or under it.
(nearly pleading)
These are the best years of your lives. These are the glamor days.
(beat)
It don't got any better than this.
(threatening, tough)
But... if this club don't start

winning soon, there's gonna be changes made!

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE SIMULTANEOUS -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON TELEVISION -- "DYNASTY" drones on.

DEKE'S WIFE
(wistfully)
Deke was a great player in high school. I thought held go right to the Major Leagues -- I was gonna be a Big League wife.
(beat)
Pass the Pampers, please.

CRASH
Helluva guy --

Silence.

Crash flips off the T.V. with the remote.

NUKE
Can I ask you something?

CRASH
What?

NUKE
What would you think of a pitcher who wore women's panties?

CRASH
If he had a good breaking ball, I'd respect the shit outta him.

Crash turns off the light.

CLOSE ON NUKE -- A bit of light spill on his face. Eyes open. A long ways from sleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CAROLINA LEAGUE BALLPARK -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON NUKE'S FACE -- He takes his cap off, wipes his brow.

He's pitching. Everything in SLO-MO.

FANS IN THE BALLPARK LAUGH at Nuke, mocking his.

EXTREME CLOSE UP ON NUKE'S EYES -- Frightened.

SLOW FULLBACK ON NUKE -- HE'S STARK NAKED save for his cap and glove. Everyone else is clothed.

NUKE WINDS AND PITCHES in the nude. SLO-MO... and as the

batter cranks up to take a vicious swing --

CUT TO:

INT. TEAM BUS -- DAWN

CLOSE ON NUKE'S FACE -- He awakes with a start.

NUKE
No!

CRASH LEANS OVER and shakes him.

CRASH
Wake up, it's okay... you're dreaming...

CRASH HELPS NUKE back to consciousness. Nuke shakes his head, trying to wake up. Crash is almost tender.

NUKE
I was playing naked.

CRASH
I know, I know -- I have that dream all the time. We're almost home.

The Bus continues across the Carolina landscape.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STADIUM PARKING LOT -- DAWN

The team bus pulls into a deserted parking lot. A few of the players' cars are parked. Some of the wives and girlfriends. And Annie.

THE PLAYERS SHUFFLE OFF the bus. Tired and beat.

CLOSE ON NUKE -- He looks worse than the rest. He sees Annie and waves. She's waiting next to her old Volvo.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF DURHAM MOMENTS LATER

ANNIE'S VOLVO PULLS OUT -- She drives.

INT. THE VOLVO -- DAY

Annie is up -- Nuke is down.

NUKE
God I'm tired. What a trip I was lousy. I was worse than lousy. Everytime I pitched -- it was like throwing gasoline on a fire. Kaboom. I --

ANNIE

What is this "I, I, I" stuff? You only talk about yourself? Aren't you glad to see me? Don't I look nice?

NUKE
Sorry. You look great. I'm totally exhausted.

ANNIE
Good. Total exhaustion can be spiritually fabulous.
(beat)
Let's play catch.

NUKE
Catch?

CUT TO:

EXT. ANNIE'S BACKYARD -- MORNING

Flowers and birdfeeders everywhere. And, 60 feet away in complete, oversized catcher's gear --

JACKSON IN A CATCHER'S CROUCH -- Nuke stares, in his street clothes, but now with a glove and ball.

JACKSON
Hum, babe, hum, babe, fire it in here, hum babe--

ANNIE
That's not necessary, Jackson --
(beat)
Okay, Nuke, now lean in for the sign.

He does. Jackson flashes some ridiculous signs.

NUKE
This in ridiculous. I'm a pro.

ANNIE
Just do what I say. Now, which nostril are you breathing through?

NUKE
Which nostril am I breathing through?

Annie puts her hand under his nose.

ANNIE
The right nostril. Good.

NUKE
My right nostril?

ANNIE
There are two important psychic conduits called the "pingala" and the "ida". The pingala starts with

the left testicle (or left ovary of the female) and ends at the right nostril.

She touches his left nut through his pants in a matter of fact manner. He stares back.

ANNIE
The ida originates at the right testicle (or ovary) and terminates at the left nostril.

NUKE
I'm really beat. I need some serious "z's" --

ANNIE
The pingala is the nostril used for throwing a baseball.
(beat)
And if you discover before a game you're in the wrong nostril, it's easy to switch.

NUKE
Switch nostrils?

ANNIE
Right. Okay, fire a couple in there.

NUKE TOSSES AN EASY PITCH to Jackson. Annie's incensed.

ANNIE
You're patronizing me! I will not be patronized --

NUKE
If I throw too hard I'll hurt the kid.

ANNIE
He's handled a lotta pitchers whose records were better than one and six.

Nuke gets a little steamed. He feels his nostril, winds, and fires a medium speed fastball to Jackson.

NUKE
(a bit angry)
How was that?

ANNIE
A little better.

NUKE
Gimme the God damn ball!

NUKE WINDS UP and fires a pitch to Jackson. Alas --

THE BALL SAILS THROUGH A WINDOW -- Crashing glass.

NUKE
(cynically)
How ya like that?

ANNIE
Much better. Your delivery was fully integrated because you weren't thinking about it 'cause you were pissed off at me.
(beat)
This is progress.

Nuke smiles and gives in. And reaches for her.

NUKE
I give up. Let's go inside, make love, and fall asleep till it's time to go to the ballpark.

She takes his hand and leads him up to the back porch.

ANNIE
Or...
(taking his hand)
...We could just take that sexual energy and save it for a few hours and re-channel it into your pitching tonight.
(shouting)
C'mon, Jackson, I've got some lemonade!

Jackson runs over in full gear to join them.

SITTING ON THE BACK PORCH -- A pitcher of lemonade.

NUKE
I can't keep up with you. First you say sex is gonna make me a better pitcher -- now no sex is gonna do it?!

ANNIE
It's all the same thing.

SUDDENLY NUKE'S FACE IS FILLED WITH ALARM -- He points.

NUKE
What's that?!

-- P.O.V. A CARDBOARD BOX ON A TABLE NEARBY -- Scrawled in larged letters on the side are the words "MAX PATKIN".

ANNIE
(matter of factly)
That's Max. His ashes anyway. He left no kin...

Nuke stares, unsettled.

NUKE
God... I think I'm gonna be sick --

ANNIE
Oh don't be silly. Death is nothing to be scared of. It's just another way of living. It's just a fresh start -- kinda like spring training.

Nuke thinks about this carefully. Looks at the ashes, at Annie, and at Jackson, in full gear, mask on his head.

NUKE
Death is like spring training?

ANNIE
Yes. And so is birth. Now look me in the eyes, Nuke --
(sweetly accusing him)
You haven't been wearing my panties, have you?

CLOSE ON NUKE -- Utterly bewildered.

CUT TO:

INT. BULLS LOCKER ROOM -- NIGHT

NUKE PULLS HIS JOCKSTRAP ON over the red panties.

Crash notices the panties, and snaps the waistband.

CRASH
Hot. Very hot...

Nuke looks around nervously, continues dressing quickly.

NUKE
Annie says her panties will keep one side of my brain occupied while I'm on the mound, thus keeping my brain slightly off center, which is where it should be for artists and pitchers. She also said I should throw whatever pitches you call for.

CRASH
Annie's a smart lady.

Suddenly Deke spots Nuke's panties.

DEKE
Hey, fruit alert! Check out the Rook.

SEVERAL PLAYERS GATHER AROUND -- Wolf whistles aimed at Nuke as the players are dressing into their uniforms.

NUKE

Annie says there's no such thing as straight and gay. We're all sexual creatures to start with, and we get formed into certain roles.

TOMMY
You believe that?

NUKE
When I'm one and six I'll believe anything.
(as they dress)
Annie also says that God is a woman. You believe that, Crash, you think God's a lady?

CRASH
God's definitely a woman -- but she's no lady.

TOMMY
This is all Commie bullshit.
(beat)
God has a dick, man.

TONY
God damn it, Jimmy, you're an expert -- does God have a dick or a pussy?

JIMMY TURNS FROM HIS CUBICLE to answer the theological question. Ll heads wait for the answer.

JIMMY
The Lord God is tri-une -- Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

TOMMY
Father and Son. Awright!

The guys slap fives, convinced God is a man.

MICKEY
(baiting them)
Yeah, but He is a brother.

TOMMY
Bullshit! God ain't no brother!

Deke turns to Crash, full of despair.

DEKE
If there is a God, why am I hitting .200?

SUDDENLY SKIP AND LARRY APPEAR to restore order.

SKIP
Shut up! This is a damn noisy clubhouse for a team that's lost 15 straight.

Silence.

Skip takes off his cap -- instantly sincere.

SKIP
Patkin was a tribute to baseball...

LARRY
...and one helluva guy.

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM BALLPARK -- DUSK

A BLACK GOSPEL GROUP at a mike at home plate, singing:

GOSPEL SINGER
(singing)
I come to the garden alone, When the dew is still on the roses, And the voice I hear, whispering in my ear,. The Son of God discloses --

ANNIE SPRINKLES MAX'S ASHES on the pitcher's mound, as:

JACKSON SITS IN THE DUGOUT FILLING ROSIN BAGS with the extra ashes from a box.

EXTREME CLOSE UP -- A ROSIN BAG MARKED "MAX"

DISSOLVE TO:

EXTREME CLOSE UP -- "MAX" ROSIN BAG on the mound.

EXT. DURHAM BALLPARK -- GAME IN PROGRESS -- NIGHT

NUKE ON THE MOUND -- PICKS UP the rosin bag, and paces. A small crowd. A batter steps in to hit. Nuke looks in for the sign.

NUKE
God, these panties feel great. That don't make me queer, right? Right. Whoo.
(reads the sign)
Breaking ball.

NUKE WINDS AND DELIVERS -- Breaking ball for a strike.

NUKE
I ain't queer. I know I ain't...
(reads the sign)
Fastball.

NUKE WINDS AND DELIVERS -- Fastball for a strike.

CUT TO:

ANNIE'S BOX SEAT IN THE STANDS -- She charts pitches.

JACKSON
Ninety-three miles an hour.

ANNIE
He looks wonderful, Jackson...

CUT TO:

NUKE ON THE MOUND -- He looks in for the sign.

NUKE
Fastball again? Why's he want the heat -- I just threw heat. Don't think, Meat -- give 'em the gas.

NUKE WINDS AND DELIVERS -- An eye-popping fastball. The batter swings and misses. Strike three.

CUT TO:

IN THE DUGOUT -- SKIP AND LARRY LOOK AT EACH other warily.

SKIP
Jesus -- what's got into Nuke?

LARRY
I heard he's wearing women's underwear -- and he's breathing through his pingala nostril.

SKIP
(spitting tobacco)
I'm getting too old for this game.

P.O.V. NUKES FASTBALL SHATTERS A BAT -- THE HITTER hits a weak roller to third for the second out.

CUT TO:

BACK TO THE MOUND -- Nuke is pumped up. Paces.

NUKE
God, Annie's got a great ass... How come her panties fit me? That's one of the mysteries of sex I guess...

NUKE WINDS AND DELIVERS A VICIOUS CURVEBALL -- A check swing dribbler to first for the third out. And the players run into the dugout.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DUGOUT

NUKE PUTS ON HIS WARM UP JACKET and sits down next to Crash, who's taking off his gear, readying to hit.

NUKE
I was great, eh?

CRASH
Your fastball was up and your curveball was hanging -- in the Show they woulda ripped you.

NUKE
Can't you let me enjoy the moment?

CRASH
The moment's over.
(rising to get a bat)
If this guy starts me off with a breaking ball, I'm going downtown --

CRASH SMILES in his disarming way, and grabs a bat.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ON DECK CIRCLE

Crash kneels, rubbing the bat handle with pine tar. He studies the pitcher working the first two hitters.

CRASH RISES and heads to the plate.

CRASH STEPS INTO THE BOX -- Digs in.

CRASH
I dare you to throw me the hammer -- you ain't that stupid...

CRASH'S P.O.V. IN SLOW-MOTION -- The pitcher winds and delivers. And as the ball leaves the pitcher's hand--

CRASH
Breaking ball -- you fool!

CRASH UNLOADS ON THE PITCH -- Crushing a home run deep over the left field wall.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE PRESS BOX

TEDDY THE RADIO ANNOUNCER is wary about these events.

TEDDY THE RADIO MAN
Two-nothing Bulls in the second -- first time the Bulls have been ahead in weeks, eh Whitey --
(beat)
Let's see if the real Nuke LaLoosh will show up --

CUT TO:

NUKE FIRES THREE QUICK PITCHES for another strike out. Curve ball, fast ball, curve ball. Overpowering.

CUT TO:

ANNIE AND JACKSON in her box seat.

ANNIE
Oh my...

CUT TO:

SKIP AND LARRY IN THE DUGOUT -- Skip looks at Larry as if to say "What's happening?" Larry just shrugs.

CUT TO:

BACK TO THE FIELD -- Nuke's next pitch.

THE NEXT BATTER POPS UP -- Crash circles into foul ground to make the catch, whipping the ball around the infield.

AND CRASH GOES TO THE MOUND for a visit.

NUKE
Hey, I'm cruisin', man -- what're you doing out here?!

CRASH
I want you to throw this one at the bat rack.

NUKE
Why?! I'm finally throwin' the damn thing where I want to.

CRASH
It'll keep the fear of God in the hitters. Trust me.

NUKE
You're the boss.

CRASH RETURNS TO THE PLATE -- Flashes a sign.

CUT TO:

THE PRESS BOX Teddy's getting worked up.

TEDDY THE RADIO MAN
-- a staggering start by LaLoosh -- he's thrown 5 cuts on 9 pitches, all of them strikes -- he's got pin point control here tonight, Bull fans... here's the pitch --

CUT TO:

NUKE'S NEXT DELIVERY -- A wild ass rocket thirty feet off line. The BULL MASCOT DIVES for cover.

THE BATTER STEPS OUT OF THE BOX nervously, muttering.

BATTER
This guy's crazy.

CRASH
Yep. Next one might be at your head. Hell if I know where the damn thing's going...

CLOSE ON NUKE -- Smiles. Winds. Delivers. A change up.

THE BATTER SWINGS TERRIBLY OFF STRIDE -- Strike three. Crash whips the ball around the infield.

CUT TO:

SCOREBOARD: DURHAM 11, KINGSTON 0 -- TOP OF THE NINTH

TEDDY THE RADIO MAN
-- top of the ninth, two outs, one out away from a stunning two hit shutout for LaLoosh...

CUT TO:

NUKE ON THE MOUND -- Bearing down.

NUKE
Bear down, Meat, don't let up. You own these guys. Dad'll love a shutout...

P.O.V. CRASH FLASHES THE SIGN -- Nuke doesn't like it.

NUKE
No, no -- this guy's looking for heat -- lemme give him the deuce --

NUKE SHAKES OFF THE SIGN Cocky, full of himself.

CUT TO:

ANNIE AND JACKSON in her box seat.

ANNIE
Oh no -- he's shaking off the sign, Jackson. Big mistake...

JACKSON
He'll learn.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON CRASH BEHIND THE PLATE

CRASH
This son of a bitch is throwing a two hit shutout and he's shaking me off?!

(to batter and umpire)
Hey Charlie, here comes the deuce.

NUKE WINDS AND DELIVERS -- A hanging curveball. The batter takes an ungodly cut, and BLASTS a long home.

THE BATTER STANDS AT THE PLATE watching the blast... until CRASH SHOVES HIM toward first with a sneer. For a moment it looks like there'll be a fight -- but the hitter backs off and takes the home run trot as:

NUKE STARES AT THE OUTFIELD WALL as the batter circles the bases. Crash walks to the mound.

NUKE
You told him I was throwing a deuce, right?

CRASH
Yep. He really crushed that dinger, didn't he. Musta gone 450 feet... damn...

NUKE HOLDS OUT HIS GLOVE -- Says nothing. Crash puts a new ball in the glove. Returns to the plate.

NUKE GETS THE SIGN -- Winds. Delivers. Batter hits a weak one hopper back to the mound. Game's over.

CUT TO:

INT. MAXWELL'S BAR -- LATER -- NIGHT

A raucous celebration of the victory. Booze flows.

And we begin hearing the familiar sounds of Piaf...

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE -- LATER -- NIGHT

ANNIE COMES OUT OF THE BATHROOM -- Dressed in a long, flowing nightgown, elegant and old fashioned. She looks fabulous, PRESENTING HERSELF to Nuke.

ANNIE
I'm yours.

NUKE
Y'know, Annie, I been thinking if it works for one game, maybe it'll work for a whole buncha games.

ANNIE
Breathing through your pingala always works, honey --

NUKE
Not that. I mean the re-channeling of my sexual energy.

(beat)
Maybe we shouldn't make love for awhile.

ANNIE
Now don't go overboard, I look incredibly hot, right?

She strikes a pose. She does look hot.

NUKE
You know what it feels like to throw a three hitter?
(nervously, with resolve)
We better not fuck.

ANNIE
Nuke?!

NUKE
Just till I lose.

ANNIE
Get over here.

NUKE
No.

ANNIE
Ebby Calvin "Nuke" LaLoosh --

She starts toward him -- and Nuke flees. Out the door, into the night. Annie slumps in disbelief.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

ANNIE SITS IN BED ALONE -- Lights a cigarette. A puzzled expression -- things have got out of control.

ANNIE (V.O.)
Nuke was so encouraged that he took a vow to not have sex until they lost...

Annie reaches over, opens a drawer in her nightstand, and pulls out her baseball glove. She cradles it fondly in her lap, puts it on, pounds it gently...

ANNIE (V.O.)
Y'see a ballplayer on a streak considers himself touched with magic and he'll do anything to keep from breaking the spell...

CUT TO:

INT. DURHAM BULL LOCKER ROOM -- DAY

NUKE NEATLY UNFOLDS THE RED PANTIES in his locker.

ANNIE (V.O.)
In fact the whole team started making religious connections and everybody got hot.

JOSE BLESSES THE BATS with a chicken bone cross.

JIMMY READS THE BIBLE and prays alone in the corner.

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM BASEBALL FIELD -- DAY

PLAYERS TAKING GROUND BALLS and batting practice.

ANNIE (V.O.)
I figured Nuke would win a couple, then lose, and things would get back to normal...

PLAYERS PLAYING "FLIP" PEPPER like kids.

ANNIE (V.O.)
But it didn't happen like that... and for one extraordinary June and July, the Durham Bulls, for whatever perverse reason, began playing baseball with joy and verve and poetry --

NUKE WARMING UP in the bullpen, listening to Crash.

ANNIE (V.O.)
The two sides of my own brain were all jumbled up and cross-wired... while one side was being neglected, the other was in paradise watching our Bulls play like Big Leaguers...

MICKEY RIPS A TRIPLE UP THE ALLEY -- Slides into third.

DEKE AND TOMMY TURN A SPECTACULAR DOUBLE PLAY

ANNIE (V.O.)
We swept a four game series with Kingston, back to back doubleheaders with Winston-Salem, and kicked the holy shit out of Greensboro in a three game series...

SEVERAL PLAYERS SIGNING AUTOGRAPHS at a local mall. A line of kids to meet them. A banner -- MEET YOUR BULLS!

ANNIE (V.O.)
They were in demand all over town -- and Crash, who kept hitting dingers, was approaching the minor league record... though I told nobody.

CRASH BLASTS ANOTHER HOME RUN -- Another win.

JULY 4 PROMOTION -- LARRY, DEKE, TOMMY, AND JOSE dressed as the "Spirit of 176 Drum and Fife Corps" at home plate, surrounded by a Boy Scout Troop.

ANNIE (V.O.)
After sweeping a July 4 doubleheader, the Durham Bulls were tied for first.

THE WIVES, THE GROUPIES, AND MILLIE WAIT for the players outside the clubhouse following a game.

ANNIE SITS ALONE IN HER BOX SEAT as the stadium empties.

ANNIE (V.O.)
But beautiful as the winning streak was, I was getting damn lonely.
(beat)
Something had to be done. I needed a man...

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TEAM BUS ON THE ROAD BACK --DAY

The sounds of Diana Ross and the Supremes.

INT. THE BUS -- DAY

LARRY, DEKE, TOMMY AND MICKEY as the Supremes, singing "Stop in the Name of Love" at the front of the bus.

NUKE
I love winning, Crash, you hear me? I love it. Teach me everything.

CRASH
It's time you started working on your interviews.

NUKE
What do I gotta do?

CRASH
Learn your clichés. Study them. Know them. They're your friends.

Crash hands Nuke a small pad and pen.

CRASH
Write this down.
(beat)
"We gotta play 'em one day at a time."

NUKE
Boring.

CRASH

Of course. That's the point.
(beat)
"I'm just happy to be here and hope
I can help the ballclub."

NUKE
Jesus.

CRASH
Write, write -- "I just wanta give
It my best shot and, Good Lord
willing, things'll work out."

NUKE STARTS WRITING them down.

NUKE
"...Good Lord willing, things'll
work out."

CRASH
Yep. So how's Annie?

Nuke looks up from his clichés, startled.

NUKE
She's getting steamed 'cause I'm
still re-channeling my sexual energy --
maybe I should cave in and sleep
with her once just to calm her down.
What'ya think?

CRASH
You outta your mind? If you give in
now you might start losing.
(beat)
Never fuck with a winning streak.

Nuke nods seriously, listening to the master.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STADIUM PARKING LOT -- DAY

THE BUS PULLS IN -- Wives and girlfriends are waiting.

The players get off, greet their women.

ANNIE GREETS NUKE -- They head for her Volvo..

JIMMY STARTS ACROSS THE LOT on foot, dragging his luggage,
when Millie pulls up in her car.

MILLIE
Hi, Jimmy. Want a ride?

JIMMY
(nervously)
Have you accepted Jesus Christ as
your personal savior?

MILLIE
No.

JIMMY
Can I give you my testimony?

MILLIE
You can do anything you want.
(a tiny grin)
Hop in.

JIMMY NERVOUSLY GETS IN WITH MILLIE They roar away.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S KITCHEN -- DAY

NUKE SITS AT THE TABLE -- He's just finished eating.

Annie circles him. A pot of soup on the stove.

ANNIE
I'm so proud of you and all the guys.
Want some more soup?

NUKE
No, no, it was great.

ANNIE
How 'bout a back rub?

NUKE
No, that's okay. All I need's a little
nap.

ANNIE
I'll tuck you in.

NUKE
(nervously)
You can't seduce me.

ANNIE
I'm not gonna try to seduce you,
sweetie...

ANNIE STRETCHES OUT HER LEG and lays it an the table.

NUKE
What's that?

She pulls back her skirt slightly, exposing her garter snaps attached to her stockings.

ANNIE
That's my leg.

NUKE
I know what it is.

ANNIE
I figure we could work on some fundamentals even if we don't make love.

She strokes her leg. Nuke stares fearfully.

NUKE
Fundamentals?

ANNIE
Sure.
(beat)
Unsnap my stockings.

Nuke squirms, then reaches for her garter snaps. And stops.

NUKE
Crash once called a woman's, uh -- pussy -- y'know how the hair kinda makes a "V" shape? --

ANNIE
Yes I do...

NUKE
Well -- he calls it the Bermuda Triangle. He said a man can get lost in there and never be heard from again.

ANNIE
What a nasty thing to say.

NUKE
He didn't mean it nasty. He said that gettin' lost and disappearing from the face of the earth was sometimes a good thing to do -- especially like that.

ANNIE
Oh...
(beat)
Crash is a very smart man. Now c'mon, honey, give it a try.

NUKE REACHES FOR THE GARTER SNAPS with two hands. He fumbles, groping awkwardly. Annie stops him gently.

ANNIE
Watch... one hand --

WITH A SINGLE HAND ANNIE FLICKS each snap. Flick, flick, flick. Magic. The snaps open effortlessly.

NUKE
oh.

ANNIE RE-SNAPS THEM QUICKLY, offering her leg to Nuke.

ANNIE
Now you try.

NUKE TRIES AGAIN -- One handed. Awkwardly again, but --

ANNIE
(sighing sexually)
Mmmmmmm... oh yes...

BUT NUKE LEAPS TO HIS FEET -- Reacting vigorously, nervously, desperately. The soup crashes on the floor.

NUKE
No! You're playing with my mind!

ANNIE
I'm trying to play with your body!

NUKE
I knew it -- you're seducing me!

ANNIE
Of course I'm seducing you for Godsakes, and I'm doing a damn poor job of it --
(beat)
Aren't I pretty?

NUKE
I think you're real cute.

ANNIE
Cute?! I hate cute! Baby ducks are cute! I wanta be exotic and mysterious!

NUKE
You're exotic and mysterious and cute -- that's why I better leave.

Nuke starts to leave.

ANNIE
Nuke! You got things all wrong! There's no relation between sex and baseball. Ask Crash.

NUKE
I did.

ANNIE
What'd he say?

NUKE
He said if I gave in to you I'd start losing again.

ANNIE
He did?

NUKE
I'll be back when we lose.

NUKE HURRIES OUT THE DOOR -- Annie just stares.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DOWNTOWNER MOTEL -- DURHAM -- DAY

A run of the mill cheap modern motel.

INT. CRASH'S ROOM AT THE MOTEL -- DAY

CRASH WORKS ON HIS SWING in front of a mirror.

A knock at the door.

CRASH
Come in.

ANNIE ENTERS the room. Crash stays with his stance.

ANNIE
Crash... I want you.

CRASH
Nuke won't go to bed with you, eh?

ANNIE
He's confused --

CRASH
Aren't we all?

ANNIE
Don't you think I'm pretty?

Crash puts down the bat, and looks directly at her. As he does he picks up two spring loaded hand exercisers and begins pumping them an he talks.

CRASH
You're gorgeous, God damn it! From the moment I first saw you I knew I had to have you. I had to have you!

ANNIE
I want to be had.

CRASH
I think of you and the "boy" all the time.

ANNIE
He won't make love to me anymore.

CRASH
And he's right! A ballplayer on a streak has to respect the streak.

They don't happen very often.
(beat)
You know how hard this game is? If you believe you're playing well because you're getting laid or because you're not getting laid or because you wore red silk panties -- then you are!
(beat)
And I still think Thomas Pynchon is full of shit.

ANNIE
I want you desperately!

Crash can hardly keep up. So he slows her down --

CRASH
Who are you? Do you have a job?

ANNIE
I teach part time at the Junior College. What if I told you I was through with Nuke? He learned his lessons quickly and left me.

CRASH
And now you wanta teach me?

ANNIE
I don't imagine there's much I could teach you.

CRASH
I doubt that.

ANNIE
Crash, I get wet just thinking about you.

CRASH
I thought you wanted an "uncomplicated" boy?

ANNIE
I'm ready for a complicated man.

CRASH
-- and as soon as we lose a game, he'll be back in your arms.

ANNIE
I said when I think about you, I get wet.

CRASH
Annie, I think you should leave.

Annie launches into a tirade without orchestration or self-awareness. She's frustrated, confused, angry and...

ANNIE
God damn you -- what is happening?
Is there no man who'll have me?
(beat)
This is the weirdest season I ever
saw -- the Durham Bulls can't lose
and I can't get laid!

CRASH
(softly)
You okay?

Annie slides against the wall down to the floor. Tears flow. Her makeup runs. Her eyes are red.

ANNIE
(shakily)
I need a drink.

Crash gingerly helps her to her feet.

CUT TO:

INT. MAXWELL'S BAR -- DAY

ANNIE AND CRASH SIT IN THE CORNER of the empty bar.

CRASH
Why baseball?

ANNIE
(sighs)
I was raised in a Baptist church got
dipped in the water when I was 5 --
born again before kindergarten... by
the time I was 10 I knew it was
bullshit and at 15 I ran away from
home...

SHE SMILES at the most painful memories.

ANNIE
pregnant, had an abortion, got
pregnant again, had an abortion
again... gave up men. Tried women.
Missed men. My mother died.
(beat)
I bought a car for $200 and drove to
Ft. Lauderdale to bury her.
(beat)
And after we'd sung some hymns in
some wretched Florida funeral home,
I went outside and something happened --

Her tone becomes wistful, nostalgic.

ANNIE
The smell of cut grass in the warm
March air overwhelmed me and I heard

a noise --
(makes the sound))
-- tok, tok, tok -- and some men shouting... then tok, tok, tok.

Crash smiles slightly. He knows.

ANNIE
I crossed the street -- it was the New York Yankees spring training field -- tok, tok, tok, was the sound of a ball hitting a bat -- and I sat in the warm bleachers to think about my mother...
(beat)
And I saw him.

CRASH
Who?

ANNIE
Thurman Munson.
(beat)
He was covered with dirt and he was fighting with everybody -- it was beautiful...
(beat)
And he called the ump a cocksucker and got thrown out of the game even though it was an exhibition!
(beat)
So I stayed in the bleachers all spring and gradually came to understand what's so great about baseball.

CRASH
What's so great about baseball?

ANNIE
If you know where home plate is, then you know where 1st base is, and 2nd, and everything else -- 'cause they're always in the same place in relation to home.
(beat)
Don't you see? If you know where home plate is, then you know where everything else in the universe is!

Silence.

CRASH
I don't know if I'd go that far.

ANNIE
It's true, It's true!
(beat, down)
Least it used to be true. It ain't possible that baseball's not enough

anymore, is it, Crash?

CRASH
It's possible.

ANNIE
No.

CRASH
Are you gonna be waking up next to 20 year old ballplayers when you're 60?

ANNIE
Well... I used to think that wasn't the worst thing in the world to look forward to. Lately I'm not so sure.

CRASH
Why not?

ANNIE
(angrily)
Whatta you mean "why not"? Are you gonna play forever?!

Before Crash can answer --

SUDDENLY A VOICE interrupts. They both turn to see:

MILLIE EXCITEDLY DRAGGING JIMMY into the nearly empty bar.

She leads him by the hand.

MILLIE
Annie, Annie! There she is -- we've been looking all over for ya. Hi Crash.

MILLIE LEADS JIMMY right up to their table. And as they hold hands. Jimmy stands there shyly.

MILLIE
Well tell 'em, honey.

JIMMY
(nervously)
We're getting married.

MILLIE STICKS OUT HER LEFT HAND Displays a huge ring.

ANNIE
Omigawd, honey, I'm so happy for you.

MILLIE
He's a virgin.

Jimmy squirms defensively.

JIMMY
Well, yeah...
(to Annie and Crash)
I guess that probably seems pretty corny to people like you.

ANNIE
Oh Jimmy, honey, I think it sounds wonderful!

MILLIE
Annie, will you be the bride's maid?

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM STADIUM -- LATER -- NIGHT

GAME IN PROGRESS -- Nuke on the mound.

NUKE WINDS AND DELIVERS -- Very high. Ball three.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE DUGOUT -- Skip and Larry spitting tobacco.

SKIP
Nuke's overthrowing tonight, he don't look loose. Anything bothering him?

LARRY
He said his chakras were jammed and he was breathing out of the wrong nostril.

SKIP
(spitting tobacco)
Okay...

CUT TO:

BACK TO THE MOUND

NUKE WINDS AND DELIVERS AGAIN -- Very high. Ball four.

CRASH IS QUICKLY to the mound.

CRASH
What's wrong?

NUKE
I'm nervous -- my old man's here.

NUKE MOTIONS -- They both look.

-- P.O.V. NUKE'S FATHER SITTING in a special box seat. The man is 45, and is operating a home video camera taking pictures of his son.

CRASH
Hey, he's just your father, man --

he's as full of shit as anybody.

TOMMY AND DEKE JOIN THEM at the mound.

DEKE
What the hell's going on?

TOMMY
You breathing through the wrong fucking nostril again?

DEKE
Hey, you guys hear Jimmy and Millie are engaged?! Wait'll I tell him she's gone down on half the Carolina League --

CRASH
(threatening)
Anybody says anything bad about Millie, I'll break his neck.

NUKE
Hey, guys, I got a game to pitch.

JOSE THE FIRST BASEMAN JOINS THEM ALL at the mound.

JOSE
Don't throw anything to me -- my girlfriend put a curse on my glove.

NUKE
I'll take the curse off the son of a bitch!

JOSE
Then you got to cut the head off a live rooster.

NUKE
Shit.

MICKEY JOINS THE CROWD from third base.

MICKEY
Don't worry, man, this umpire's a God damn racist.

P.O.V. THE UMPIRE -- He's black.

CUT TO:

THE DUGOUT -- SKIP AND LARRY watch the growing meeting.

SKIP
What the hell's going on out there?

LARRY
It's a damn convention.

SKIP
Check it out.

CUT TO:

THE MOUND -- Larry joins the convention.

LARRY
What the hell's going on out here?

CRASH
Nuke's scared cause his nostrils are jammed and his old man's here, we need a live rooster to take the curse off Jose's glove, and nobody knows what to get Jimmy and Millie for their wedding present -- there's a whole lotta shit we're trying to deal with --

LARRY
Oh. I thought there was a problem.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE NIGHT

ANNIE IS HELPING MILLIE make her WEDDING DRESS.

The game can be heard on the radio in the b.g.

MILLIE
You should be at the game.

ANNIE
No, no -- I'm fine. Millie, how much time did you and Jimmy spend together before he proposed?

Annie holds the dress up to Millie.

MILLIE
Five hours. We both just know.
(studying the dress)
Do you think I deserve to wear white?

ANNIE
We all deserve to wear white.

BOTH WOMEN TURN THEIR HEADS to the radio to listen.

TEDDY THE RADIO MAN
...line drive up the alley's gonna score at least two, here comes the relay --

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM BALLPARK THE GAME NIGHT

CRASH FLIPS HIS MASK -- A runner rounds third heading for home. Here comes the throw, on a line. It hits once on the infield grass, takes a long hop --

AS THE RUNNER BARRELS TOWARD THE PLATE -- Crash takes the throw.

THE RUNNER SLIDES -- Crash blocks the plate. A cloud of dust. A close play.

THE UMPIRE SIGNALS "SAFE" -- And Crash flips out. In a second he is nose to nose with the UMPIRE.

CRASH
I got him on the knee!

UMPIRE
You missed him!

CRASH
God damn It, Jack, he still ain't touched the plate.

THEIR FACES ARE INCHES APART -- Screaming face to face.

UMPIRE
Don't bump me.

CRASH
It was a cocksucking call!

UMPIRE
Did you call me a cocksucker?

CRASH
No! I said It was a cock-sucking call and you can't run me for that!

UMPIRE
You missed the tag!

CRASH
You spit on me!

UMPIRE
I didn't spit on you!

CRASH
You're in the wrong business, Jack -- you're Sears-Roebuck material!

UMPIRE
You're close, Crash, you want me to run you? I'll run you!

CRASH
You want me to call you a cocksucker?!

UMPIRE
Try it! Go ahead. Call me a

cocksucker!

CRASH
Beg me!

UMPIRE
Call me a cocksucker and you're outta here!

CRASH
Beg me again!

UMPIRE
Call me a cocksucker and you're outta here!

CRASH
You're a cocksucker!

UMPIRE
You're outta here!

THE UMP THEATRICALLY THROWS CRASH out of the game.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE -- SIMULTANEOUS

ANNIE AND MILLIE STARE at the radio.

TEDDY ON THE RADIO
...I've never seen Crash so angry and frankly, Bull fans, he used a certain word that's a "no-no" with umpires...

MILLIE
Crash musta called the guy a cocksucker

ANNIE
God, he's so romantic...

CUT TO:

INT. THE SHOWERS NIGHT

CRASH STANDS AGAINST the water, letting it stream across him. He raises a can of beer to his lips, drinks it slowly in the shower.

As the water runs over Crash...

ANNIE
When Crash got throwed out, the game got out of hand...
(beat)
...Jose made three errors with his cursed mitt...

JOSE BOOTS A GROUND BALL -- A runner scores.

ANNIE
Nuke never quite got in the groove though he didn't pitch bad...

NUKE JUST MISSES WITH A PITCH -- Ball four.

ANNIE
...and the winning streak came to an end with a 3-2 loss...
(beat)
The good news was that a man was about to come calling... the bad news was -- it was the wrong guy.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ANNIE'S LIVING ROOM NIGHT

AS PIAF PLAYS on the stereo -- A knock at the door.

ANNIE GOES TO THE DOOR -- Then refuses to answer it at first. She hides in a corner. Bites her fist.

NUKE'S VOICE
Annie! You gotta be in there -- I can hear that crazy Mexican singer!

Annie smiles slightly, and opens the door.

NUKE
We lost.

ANNIE
It's okay...

She opens the door fully. Nuke's father stands there.

NUKE
I'd like you to meet my father.

ANNIE
(surprised)
Oh -- won't YOU come in?

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE

AS THEY ENTER -- She leads them into the kitchen.

NUKE'S FATHER
Ebby's told me a lot about you.

ANNIE
Uh oh...
(beat)
Can I offer you some coffee?

THE KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS -- NIGHT

She puts a pot of water with a swirl of graciousness.

NUKE'S FATHER
Yeah... Ebby tells me you're a very spiritual woman. He tells me you've taught him a lot about discipline and self-control.

Annie and Nuke exchange glances. Nuke smiles.

ANNIE
He's a good student.

NUKE'S FATHER
We were worried that Ebby might get involved with the wrong crowd in professional baseball -- we're so pleased, he met a Christian woman.

ANNIE
Praise the Lord, eh?

The Piaf record begins skipping in the next room.

ANNIE
Oh my -- I better fix that. Ebby will you help me? I'm no good with mechanical things

Nuke picks up his cue and follows her to:

THE LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS -- NIGHT

Annie fixes the record.

NUKE
I couldn't dump my old man but maybe later I can sneak away from him...

ANNIE
You don't have to...

NUKE
I'm starting to understand what you're teaching me. I mean the panties and the nostrils and all that shit... I mean I'm getting it --

ANNIE
So am I. Nuke, honey, we need to talk --

Nuke gets very aggressive and playful, pinning her.

NUKE
Aw hell, let's have a quickie right here --

ANNIE
-- but you're father's in there!

NUKE
Crash says I gotta quit worrying about him -- c'mon, honey, we got a lotta catching up to do --

He pins her to the wall, she squirms away.

ANNIE
Nuke -- we do need to talk!

CUT TO:

BACK IN THE KITCHEN

Nuke's father is studying pictures on Annie's wall.

CLOSE ON A HELMUT NEWTON PHOTO -- A nude woman, two afghans, and a toilet.

CLOSE ON A PHOTO OF SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA YOGANDA

CLOSE ON A POSTER OF A MARIJUANA LEAF with the inscription "Better Living Through Mexican Agriculture".

Nuke's father is a bit unsettled by all this, when:

The phone rings.

ANNIE SWEEPS BACK into the kitchen -- saved by the bell -- to answer the phone. Nuke trails.

ANNIE
(on phone)
Hello? Skip? Yeah, as a matter of fact, he is here.

She hands the phone to Nuke.

ANNIE
It's Skip, for you.

NUKE (ON PHONE)
Yeah, Skip, it's me.
(several beats)
Jeez... Jeez... God... Jeez...

Nuke hangs up the phone. Looks at Annie and his father.

NUKE
I'm going to the Show.
(beat)
They're sending me up to finish out the season with the Big Club. I'm going to the Show!

NUKE'S FATHER LEAPS TO HIS FEET and embraces his son.

NUKE'S FATHER
Let's have a quick word of prayer, right here, to thank the Lord for all this --

ANNIE
Oh let's not...

NUKE
I gotta leave first thing in the morning.

ANNIE
That's great!

NUKE
How can I possibly thank you?

He embraces her rather formally.

ANNIE
Just pitch well and do good.

Nuke hustles his father out of the house.

NUKE
I will, I will -- C'mon, Dad, I'll dump you off. I gotta find Crash.

As they exit, Nuke's father turns to Annie:

NUKE'S FATHER
God bless you.

ANNIE
(to herself)
She will, Mr. LaLoosh, she will...

ANNIE SITS DOWN in a kitchen chair. An enormous sigh.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DOWNTOWNER MOTEL -- NIGHT

Nuke knocks on Crash's door. Nobody home. Tony is arriving with his GROUPIE GIRLFRIEND to the next room.

TONY
Crash ain't there. He never gets back till four or five --

NUKE
Where does he go?

TONY
Well, I'd rather not say.

NUKE
They called me up to the Show and I wanta tell Crash goodbye.

TONY COMES OVER AND GIVES NUKE a heartfelt "five".

TONY
Goddamn, that's great! Jesus!
(beat)
Listen, Crash don't like anybody to know it but --
(beat)
Most nights he goes down to, you know, down to Niggertown. To Sandy's... the whorehouse.

NUKE
He goes to a whorehouse every night?

TONY
Don't tell him I told you -- he'd break my neck.

CLOSE ON NUKE -- Disturbed.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BLACK SECTION OF DURHAM -- NIGHT

A CAB MOVES SLOWLY through a poor neighborhood. Stops at:

AN OLD HOUSE -- Decades of ad hoc add-ons.

BLACK CABBIE
That's Sandy's. Keep your extra cash In your shoes.

NUKE GETS OUT and goes to the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. SANDY'S WHOREHOUSE -- NIGHT

NUKE KNOCKS AT THE DOOR -- A small barred window opens.

A face appears -- a TOUGH BLACK, SANDY, 50.

SANDY
What'you want, kid?

NUKE
I'm looking for somebody.

SANDY
Who ain't?

NUKE
Looking for Crash Davis.

SANDY
Ain't here.

NUKE

I'm Nuke LaLoosh. With the Bulls.

SANDY
(studying him)
Your breaking ball's getting better
but ya need a change up.

The door opens. Nuke enters.

CUT TO:

INT. SANDY'S WHOREHOUSE -- NIGHT

NUKE ENTERS TENTATIVELY -- Another world. Grim. Sleazy.

The Doorman leads him down a hallway full of doors. A BLACK PROSTITUTE enters a room with a HUGE REDNECK. As they go down the hallway, and as they do:

We begin hearing singing -- raucous, soulful, drunk.

NUKE STOPS IN A DOORWAY -- Looks into the "waiting room".

-- P.O.V. SEVERAL HOOKERS in various stages of undress, sit on couches and chairs. Bored, smoking, ancient. The ONE WHITE HOOKER, a skinny 25 year old, accompanies on a guitar, struggling to keep up. And a couple HOOKERS are hanging around a piano that --

CRASH IS PLAYING and singing. He doesn't look up. Crash is dressed but barefoot. A cigarette dangles from his mouth as he accompanies himself with decent cocktail lounge chords.

Two Hookers at the piano hum along.

CRASH
(singing and playing)
But when she does get weary -- Try a
little tenderness...

NUKE STEPS INTO THE ROOM -- All the Hookers rise in anticipation of a new customer. Crash keeps playing, never looking up.

CRASH
(singing)
You know she's waiting, just
anticipating, the things that she'll
never possess...
(beat)
While she's there waiting -- Try a
little tenderness...

Nuke interrupts the instrumental passage:

NUKE
Crash. I'm going to the Show.

Crash Ignores him, keeps playing.

NUKE
Club's expanding its roster to finish the season --

CRASH
Shut up. I'm playing.
(singing last 8 bars)
Oh you won't regret it, young girls don't forget it, lost in their own wilderness...
(beat)
But it's all so easy -- Just try a little tenderness...

As Crash plays on --

NUKE
I'm going to the Show.

CRASH
Then go.

NUKE GRABS CRASH by the hair and jerks him to his feet. The two men are face to face.

NUKE
I'm trying to thank you.

CRASH
Let go of me!

NUKE LETS HIM GO and Crash staggers drunkenly against the piano, regaining his balance as:

SANDY RUSHES IN WITH A GUN to break it up.

SANDY
He makin' trouble for you, Mr. Davis?

CRASH
No, no, Sandy, put it down.
(drunkenly, to Nuke)
Nuke, you know Sandy Grimes? Hit .367 at Louisville in 155.

SANDY
I hit .371.

CRASH
He hit .371 -- C'mon, Nuke -- you and me, let's step outside and settle this.

NUKE
Settle what?

CRASH
C'mon!

NUKE

I don't wanta fight you, I wanta thank you. Let's have a drink and forget this --

CRASH
God damn it, you fucking virgin prick -- step outside.

Crash drunkenly heads out the back door in his underwear. Nuke reluctantly follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ALLEY BEHIND THE WHOREHOUSE -- NIGHT

Several of the Hookers follow to watch. Crash is drunk and lost. Nuke in control.

NUKE
C'mon, we got nothin' to fight about.

CRASH
You fuck!

NUKE
Why am I a fuck?

CRASH
Why are you a fuck?
(beat)
'Cause you got talent. I got brains. But you got talent! You're God damn left arm is worth a million dollars a year.
(drunken insight)
All my limbs put together are worth 7 cents a pound -- and that's for science and dog meat.

NUKE
You're a great catcher.

CRASH
Come over here into the light so I can kick your ass.

NUKE
No.

CRASH
Okay, I'll kick your ass there.

Crash takes a step toward Nuke. Pulls up his bare feet quickly, stepping on a sharp stone.

CRASH
...God damn... I forgot my fucking shoes. Honey, go get my shoes.

One of the Hookers goes inside for his shoes.

NUKE
I'll take you back to the hotel.

CRASH
(drunken, mad)
You know what the difference is between hitting .250 and hitting .300? I got it figured out.
(beat)
Twenty-five hits a year in 500 at bats is 50 points. Okay? There's 6 months in a season, that's about 25 weeks -- you get one extra flare a week -- just one -- a gork, a ground ball with eyes, a dying quail -- just one more dying quail a week and you're in Yankee Stadium!

CUT TO:

INT. THE WHOREHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

THE HOOKER FINDS CRASH'S SHOES -- Starts to bring them out to him when... she notices cash in one of them. The Hooker takes a few bills for herself, and continues out --

CUT TO:

BACK IN THE ALLEY -- Crash finishes his tirade as:

THE HOOKER COMES OUT WITH CRASH'S SHOES

He struggles drunkenly to put them on.

NUKE
Forget it. You ain't worth thanking --

NUKE STARTS TO WALK AWAY -- Crash fires his one free shoe at Nuke hitting him in the back of the head.

NUKE WHIRLS -- Comes after Crash.

CRASH
Come on, Meat...

CRASH SWINGS WILDLY -- Nuke ducks it and levels Crash with a short right hand.

CRASH CRASHES INTO SOME GARBAGE CANS -- Lies there on his back for several beats. Nuke stares.

CLOSE ON CRASH -- Blood trickles from his mouth.

CRASH
Nuke... tell me something. Did you hit me with your right or your left?

NUKE
My right.

Silence. Crash's next line is both drunk and sober and we don't know if he's just being clever or if, somehow, he's staged It all. Maybe even he doesn't know.

CRASH
Good. Good. That's terrific...

NUKE
What?

CRASH
If ya get in a fight with some asshole, never hit his with your pitching hand. Ya might get injured.
(smiles)
That's another lesson for ya -- now quit fucking around and help me up.

CRASH REACHES UP A HAND FOR HELP -- Nuke stares back.

AND FINALLY NUKE REACHES DOWN AND HELPS CRASH to his feet.

NUKE
Ya look like shit.

The two men head inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM STADIUM -- NEXT MORNING -- EARLY

NUKE'S PORSCHE -- The Clubhouse Boy drags Nuke's out to the car and loads the trunk. Annie, Larry and a COUPLE KIDS AND DOGS are watching.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM -- CONTINUOUS -- DAY

NUKE CLEANS OUT HIS LOCKER -- Filling his travel bag.

Crash sits on a stool next to him. Sober.

CRASH
Sorry about last night.

NUKE
Forget it.

CRASH
I have been known, on occasion, to howl at the moon. D'you understand that?

NUKE
No.

CRASH
You will.

(beat)
Look, Nuke -- these Big League hitters are gonna light you up like a pin ball machine for awhile -- don't worry about it. Be cocky and arrogant even when you're getting beat. That's the secret.
(beat)
You gotta play this game with fear and arrogance.

NUKE
Fear and ignorance.

CRASH
(raging)
No. Fear and arrogance, you, hayseed, not ignorance!

NUKE
(smiles calmly)
I know. I just like to see you get all worked up.

Crash calms down. Sighs. Nuke nods and picks up his bags.

NUKE
(knows it's not true)
Well, I got Annie all warmed up for ya...
(knows it is true)
She's just waiting for you to show up, y'know...

CRASH
I don't need a crazy woman in my life.

NUKE
Maybe you do.
(quick beat)
Y'know I'm starting to like this game -- baseball's a helluva good way to make a living.

Crash speaks with quiet passion, from his soul.

CRASH
It's the best, Nuke... the absolute fucking best.

NUKE
Yeah, thanks for everything.

They shake hands, and Nuke heads out the door.

CRASH
Nuke --
(Nuke stops)
Good luck.

NUKE
You too... Meat.

Nuke smiles. A little arrogance and fear.

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM STADIUM -- CONTINUOUS DAY

NUKE TOSSES HIS BAG in the Porsche and motions to Annie. They step away from the others.

ANNIE
Well I guess this is it.

NUKE
(smiles)
I won't be needing these anymore.

NUKE PULLS ANNIE'S RED PANTIES from his jacket pocket.

The frilly, silk lace is tattered. The panties have been through the mill. She accepts them graciously.

ANNIE
Neither will I.

NUKE
I think I'm ready for the Show.

ANNIE
Ebby Calvin Nuke LaLoosh -- don't think too much.

NUKE
Don't worry.

They look at each other awkwardly, sweetly, and:

NUKE KISSES ANNIE GENTLY ON THE LIPS -- They hesitate, and Nuke heads for his Porsche.

CRASH ARRIVES IN THE DOORWAY to watch. Nuke bids farewell to his father and climbs into his car.

NUKE
I gotta go now, Dad.

FATHER
I was thinking I could fly up and spend a week in the Big Leagues with you -- help you get comfortable.

NUKE
No. If I screw up, I wanta do it alone. I'll call.

FATHER
We'll be praying for you.

NUKE
Dad -- if my curveball is hanging,
God ain't gonna help me.

FATHER
We'll pray anyway.

NUKE
(kindly)
If it makes you and mom feel better,
go for it. I gotta run --

They shake hands, and:

CRASH'S P.O.V. -- NUKE ROARS AWAY in his Porsche, leaving a trail of dust in the Stadium parking lot.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DURHAM STADIUM -- DUSK

MILLIE AND JIMMY'S WEDDING -- A formal wedding on the pitcher's mound. Millie in white. Jimmy in his uniform. Skip is the best man, also in uniform, and several players and groupies are the attendants, Annie as the Bride's Maid.

Organ music plays the wedding march.

JIMMY LIFTS MILLIE'S VEIL and kisses her. The stands are full of fans.

JIMMY LEADS MILLIE DOWN THE "AISLE" towards home plate.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DURHAM STADIUM -- GAME IN PROGRESS -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON SCOREBOARD -- Ninth inning. Durham is leading by a score of 1 to 0. Two outs.

JIMMY IS PITCHING -- He delivers. The batter rockets a line drive up the alley. A PENINSULA RUNNER races from first, rounding third, trying to score. A relay.

CRASH WAITS AT THE PLATE -- Here comes the runner. Here comes the throw. A close play. A terrible collision.

Crash goes rolling. The umpire waits -- and in a cloud of dust, Crash holds up the ball.

THE CROWD ROARS -- Jimmy jumps victoriously in the air.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM -- NIGHT

The air of victory. The mood is up and goofy. Beer cans are squirted at Jimmy, the groom.

JIMMY
I wanta thank everybody and the Lord for the victory, it's a wonderful way to celebrate my marriage -- and I guess we're all back on a winning streak, he? A few raucous "Fuckin A's" from the team.

TONY
Hey, Jimmy -- we chipped in and kind got a little gift for ya of a special wedding cake from the Durham Bulls.

DEKE CARRIES OUT AN WEDDING CAKE -- It's X-Rated. The decorative Bride and Groom are fucking. Jimmy's embarrassed but it's all good natured.

CUT TO:

CRASH COMING OUT OF THE SHOWER -- Toweling off, watching the innocent, vulgar fun. He sits down in front of his locker, drying his hair, when the CLUBHOUSE BOY approaches:

CLUBHOUSE BOY
Hey, Crash -- Skip wants to see ya.

CRASH RISES AND HEADS FOR SKIP'S CUBICLE -- Wearing only a towel and his shower shoes.

CUT TO:

INSIDE SKIP'S OFFICE -- Skip and Larry sit in postgame routine, checking charts, smoking, half dressed.

CRASH ENTERS as he's still drying off.

CRASH
Yeah, Skip, you wanted to see me?

SKIP
Crash, shut the door.

And it hits him. Crash looks at Skip, who looks down at the floor, unwilling to face Crash who then looks at Larry, who also looks away nervously.

CRASH SHUTS THE DOOR -- The party rages beyond.

SKIP
(heartfelt)
This is the toughest job a manager has...

CLOSE ON CRASH -- He's been in the game too long to be surprised; nonetheless, he's surprised. And hurt. His stoicism is professional.

SKIP
The organization wants to make a change... now that Nuke's gone they

wanta bring up some young catcher...

LARRY
Some kid hittin' .300 in Lynchburg... probably a bust.

SKIP
I put in a word for you with the organization -- told 'em I thought you'd make a fine minor league manager someday... Might be an opening at Salem next year --

EXTREME CLOSE UP ON CRASH -- His eyes are moist.

SKIP
Helluva year, Crash -- you know how it is.

Silence.

Crash stands there nearly nude. He just nods slightly. Without rancor or bitterness, he turns and re-enters the raucous locker room.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF DURHAM -- NIGHT

CRASH WALKS THE STREETS ALONE -- Crash stops in front of a window and takes his batting stroke, studying the reflection.

AND HE KEEPS WALKING INTO:

CUT TO:

EXT/INT. CHEAP BAR IN DOWNTOWN DURHAM -- NIGHT

CRASH DRINKING ALONE at the end of a bar.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF DURHAM -- NIGHT

CRASH WANDERS ALONG into the residential neighborhoods.

HE STARTS ACROSS A QUIET INTERSECTION Stops. Looks at the street signs. He CHANGES DIRECTION, walks on.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANNIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The windows glow. After midnight.

CRASH STARES AT THE HOUSE -- Hesitates, then walks up the porch stairs. Knocks at the door. Moments later:

ANNIE OPENS THE DOOR -- She looks beautiful. Almost as if she was expecting him. At first, silence. Then:

CRASH
I got released.

ANNIE
I heard already.

SHE OPENS THE DOOR -- Crash enters Annie's house.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

ANNIE PUTS ON her favorite Piaf record.

ANNIE POURS A DRINK for both of them.

CRASH PUTS A HAND ON HER HIP -- Annie closes her eyes, a tiny gasp. He kisses her forehead. She kisses his neck. A tiny smile from Crash. The same from Annie.

SHE KISSES HIM on the corner of his mouth. Her hand finds the back of his head and she runs her fingers through his hair.

CRASH RESPONDS -- They kiss slowly, deeply. As --

HIS HAND ON HER HIP PULLS UP HER SKIRT -- By degrees, the skirt is raised up her stocking covered leg. At last exposing the beloved BLACK GARTER SNAPS -- Crash's hand expertly holds up the skirt and effortlessly UNSNAPS THE GARTER with a minimum of effort.

FLICK, FLICK, FLICK -- The garter snaps are free.

ANNIE
Oh my...

DISSOLVE TO:

THE BEDROOM -- Crash carries Annie to the bed.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANNIE'S FOOT KICKS OVER A LAMP onto the floor.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANNIE'S BLOUSE FRONT -- Flick, flick, flick. Crash unbuttons it with one hand in seconds. Even Annie is startled with the speed and ease of Crash's hand.

DISSOLVE TO:

HER HAND SLIDES UNDER THE WAISTBAND of his underwear

DISSOLVE TO:

HIS HAND SLIDES UP UNDER HER panties.

DISSOLVE TO:

A FULL EMBRACE ON THE EDGE OF THE BED -- Remnants of clothes cover parts of their bodies. They tumble out of control to the floor.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANNIE'S HAND GRABS ONTO A DRESSER LEG -- A carved oak antique, her hand holds on tight and shakes the dresser.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE DRESSER TOP SHAKES -- Makeup bottles and pictures and dozens of Annie's special things rattle and fall

DISSOLVE TO:

ANNIE'S READ RESTS ON CRASH'S STOMACH -- Post coital, they lie on the floor blissfully as Piaf finishes.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANNIE CHANGES THE RECORD to Hank Williams.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE KITCHEN -- ANNIE AND CRASH eat an after mid after sex snack. Crash eats a bowl of Wheaties. They each wear one of her robes.

DISSOLVE TO:

Annie sits, munching a carrot and rolling a joint of marijuana she keeps in a Victorian jewel box.

ANNIE
...so you see in a former lifetime
I'm sure that I was Alexandria, the
Czarette of Russia? What do you think?

CRASH
How come in former lifetimes,
everybody was someone famous?
(beat)
How come nobody ever says they were
Joe Schmo?

ANNIE
It doesn't work like that.
(stares at him)
God, you're gorgeous. Want to dance?

THEY KISS AGAIN -- And fall gradually onto the table top.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANNIE SITS ON TOP OF CRASH lying on the kitchen table.

He stretches out a leg and:

KICKS THE BOWL OF CEREAL to the floor. It smashes -- ceramics, milk, cereal go everywhere. As:

THEY START MAKING LOVE AGAIN in the glaring kitchen light.

DISSOLVE TO:

CRASH AND ANNIE DANCE in her living room.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE BEDROOM -- Crash is handcuffed to the bed. He seems perfectly happy as Annie reads Walt Whitman.

ANNIE
...mouth, tongue, lips, teeth, roof of the mouth, jaws, and the jaw hinges...

DISSOLVE TO:

ANNIE HANDCUFFED TO THE BED -- Crash reads.

CRASH
...wrist and wrist joints, hand, palm, knuckles, thumb, fore-finger, finger-joints, finger-nail...

DISSOLVE TO:

CRASH AT ANNIE'S RECORD COLLECTION -- He thumbs through it quickly, puts on a new record.

The Dominoes sing "Sixty Minute Man". And...

DISSOLVE TO:

THE BATHROOM -- Candlelight around the bathtub. All we can make out is two heads, two bodies, sloshing wildly In the dim glow. Water splashes, dowses some candles.

DISSOLVE TO:

CRASH AND ANNIE IN BED READING -- Each with a copy of a Thomas Pynchon novel. Crash tosses it aside. And disappears under the sheets, playing with her as she struggles to keep reading. She puts down the book.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANNIE APPLYING EYE MAKEUP TO CRASH -- Who doesn't resist, seems even amused. He kisses her deeply, slowly. She kisses him back. They fall onto the bed.

DISSOLVE TO:

P.O.V. OUT THE KITCHEN WINDOW -- Dawn. A bird chirps.

And we hear a record skipping, repeating endlessly.

PAN ACROSS THE KITCHEN -- Overturned chairs, spilled and broken cereal bowls, liquor bottles.

PAN ACROSS THE BEDROOM -- A disaster. Clothes scattered across the floor, overturned lamps, the bed lies at a cockeyed angle. Annie and Crash lie face down -- asleep, utterly spent.

CRASH WAKES UP SLOWLY -- Reaches up and pulls his underwear off of a lampshade, pulls them on, and gets slowly out of bed. He staggers across the bedroom floor, stumbling a bit, into:

THE LIVING ROOM -- He stumbles across the trashed room. Record album covers, more liquor bottles, pillows, cushions, pictures hanging crookedly on the wall.

CRASH TAKES THE SKIPPING RECORD off the player and breathes a sigh of relief. He sees his pants lying on the floor and pulls them on.

CRASH OPENS A DRAWER -- Pulls out a piece of paper and a pencil. He starts writing...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE BEDROOM -- LATER

Sun streams in. Annie opens her eyes. Rubs them. Reaches over for Crash. Her hand hits a note. She whirls. He's gone. Only a note.

SHE SITS UP WITH A START and reads the note.

ANNIE (V.O.)
Crash said he had to get an early start to drive to Asheville in the South Atlantic League where he heard they might need a catcher to finish out the season...

ZOOM IN EXTREME CLOSE UP OF NOTE -- "Love, Crash".

CUT TO:

EXT. GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS -- DAY

CRASH IN HIS CAR heading for Asheville.

CUT TO:

EXT. ASHEVILLE BASEBALL PARK -- DAY

CRASH KNOCKING ON THE BASEBALL OFFICE DOOR -- Looking for work.

CUT TO:

INT. ASHEVILLE LOCKER ROOM -- DAY

CRASH UNLOADING HIS GEAR into yet another locker.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S KITCHEN -- DAY

ANNIE SCRUBBING HER KITCHEN FLOOR -- Down on her hands and knees, picking up the broken cereal bowl.

ANNIE (V.O.)
The house smelled like sex for days. It was wonderful. The only real cleaning I did was on the kitchen floor 'cause who likes to walk on spilt cereal?

SHE FINDS A BIT OF A JOINT on the floor as she's cleaning. She picks it up, sits on the floor under the table, and lights the tiny joint.

ANNIE (V.O.)
The funny thing is, I stopped worrying about Nuke. Somehow I knew nothing would stop him. Crash was right -- Nuke had a gift.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. INSIDE A MAJOR LEAGUE STADIUM (ATLANTA) -- DAY

NUKE IN STREET CLOTHES IN THE DUGOUT of an empty stadium. 50,000 seats. Slick. Awesome. He's being interviewed by a BIG LEAGUE REPORTER, who has a small tape deck and has stuck mike in Nuke's face.

NUKE
(like a big leaguer)
Y'know, I'm just happy to be here and hope I can help the ballclub. I just want to give it my best shot and good Lord willing, things'll work out... gotta play 'em one day at a time, Y'know...

THE BIG LEAGUE REPORTER nods attentively as Nuke knowingly delivers the clichés like a veteran.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ASHEVILLE STADIUM -- DAY

In sharpest contrast to the Big League stadium, a rickety old wooden grandstand, carved into the pine covered hillside.

CRASH STEPS TO THE PLATE -- In a uniform we've never seen him in, of course. The Asheville Tourists. He picks up some dirt, rubs it on his hands. He's as intense as ever. Still playing for keeps.

CRASH

(at the plate)
C'mon, Meat, throw me that weak ass shit -- c'mon, bring the heat, bring it, bring it...

CRASH'S P.O.V. -- SLO-MO AS THE PITCHER WINDS AND delivers a fastball right down the pipe.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM -- AFTERNOON

ANNIE LIES IN BED READING -- She suddenly jerks up.

ANNIE (V.O.)
I was reading in bed when Crash hit his 247th home run. I knew the moment it happened...

CUT TO:

EXT. ASHEVILLE STADIUM -- DAY

CRASH UNLOADS A MONSTROUS HOME RUN deep into the trees. He stands at home plate watching it... like Reggie or the Babe.

And doesn't move. For several seconds he indulges himself uncharacteristically -- until...

THE OPPOSING CATCHER SHOVES HIM toward first.

CATCHER
Get your ass in gear...

CRASH SMILES and takes the home run trot slowly. As he heads toward first, HE RAISES A CLINCHED FIST for a brief moment, a tiny gesture of triumph. And then, routinely, he just circles the bases.

A HUNDRED FANS APPLAUD ROUTINELY as he circles the bases.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

SHE LIGHTS A CANDLE for the home run. Above the candles, displayed in the shrine, are her RED PANTIES.

ANNIE (V.O.)
I lit a candle for Crash's dinger... and tried to root the Durham Bulls home to a pennant.

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM STADIUM -- DAY

ANNIE AND JACKSON OPEN AN UMBRELLA in her familiar place in the stadium. Umbrellas go up all around, as:

THE RAINS COME -- The players huddle-in the dugouts.

IN THE DUGOUT Skip and Larry reading copies of "The Tantric Yoga of Sex". And spitting tobacco.

ANNIE (V.O.)
The Kid from Lynchburg wasn't good enough to hold Crash's jockstrap if ya ask me, and Nuke's replacement had a fastball that I coulda hit
(beat)
We had a three game lead with two weeks to go when the rains came.

THE GROUND CREW DRAGS TARPS over the mound and the plate.

ANNIE (V.O.)
It rained and rained and I thought of driving down to Asheville to see Crash but then I thought "No, what you pursue, eludes you". I had to trust Quantum Physics and the Church of Baseball.
(beat)
It ain't always easy being this religious...

ANNIE AND JACKSON POP OPEN THEIR UMBRELLAS and walk out of the ballpark towards home.

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM NEIGHBORHOOD -- DAY

ANNIE AND JACKSON UNDER UMBRELLAS -- He turns down one street, she heads toward home.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANNIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

AS SHE APPROACHES -- She stops. Looks up. Crash's beat up car in the driveway.

P.O.V. CRASH SITTING ON THE PORCH SWING Still raining.

CLOSE ON ANNIE -- She hesitates, and smiles.

ANNIE
Oh my...

ANNIE SITS DOWN on the porch owing next to Crash.

ANNIE
What happened?

CRASH
I quit. Hit my dinger and hung 'em up.

A moment of silence over the significance of him quitting.

ANNIE
I'm quitting too. Boys, not baseball.

CRASH
There might be an opening for a manager at Salem next spring.

ANNIE
Salem, Massachusetts? Where all the witches were?

CRASH
Yeah... you a witch?

ANNIE
Not yet. It takes years of practice...

He smiles slightly and takes her hand.

CRASH
You think I could make it to the Show as a manager?

ANNIE
You'd be great, just great...
(rattling quickly)
'Cause you understand non-linear thinking even though it seems like baseball is a linear game 'cause of the lines and the box scores an' all -- but the fact is that there's a spacious-"non-time kind of time" to it...

CRASH
(interrupting)
Annie --

ANNIE
What?

CRASH
I got a lotta time to hear your theories and I wanta hear every damn one of 'em... but right now I'm tired and I don't wanta think about baseball and I don't wanta think about Quantum Physics... I don't wanta think about nothing...
(beat)
I just wanta be.

ANNIE
I can do that, too.

He rises, takes her hand, and they head inside.

And as the rains fall on Durham...

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

THE SHRINE GLOWS -- Candles everywhere. Rain pours down on the windows outside. And...

ANNIE AND CRASH SIT ON THE COUCH together, in silence.

ANNIE
Walt Whitman once said -- "I see great things in baseball. It's our game -- the American game
(beat)
He said "it will repair our losses and be a blessing to us"...
(beat)
You could look it up....

The music -- Dave Frishberg sings "Van Lingle Mungo".

THE END