

FADE IN:

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

A catcher sets up behind home plate. Only his focused eyes are visible through the worn mask.

MAN (V.O.)
I've heard that baseball is a
metaphor for life.

Catcher throws it back to an out of view pitcher.

MAN (V.O.)
Never was to me. Baseball was my
life. At least I can say that now.

A wild pitch goes into the dirt. The catcher runs to the backstop. Angrily hurls the ball back toward the mound, upset with his own lack of blocking technique.

MAN (V.O.)
It's so hard for a catcher to have to
sit back and wait for a pitch. What
could be more helpless than being
inches away from catching a strike to
end the game, only to see a piece of
wood directly in front of you pop
that horsehide out of the park? If
only you could have been just two
feet closer, you would have caught it
before that Louisville Slugger ever
had a chance.

Smack. A hard strike is thrown into the mitt. Dirt sprays from the webbing.

We see the pitcher. He's young, gritty and determined. Throws over the top and grins with another strike.

MAN (V.O.)
Donnie Moore was a respected reliever
of the game. Could close the door on
you most times. Dave Henderson was a
hitter with some pop. Not exactly
Henry Aaron, but nothing to sneeze at
either. Eighteen years old, a fresh-
faced high school ballplayer, I was
watching them do battle on TV in
1986. It was the ninth inning, two
outs. The Angels were leading by a
run with one man on for the Red Sox.

(MORE)

MAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Donnie Moore was within one strike of ending Gene Mauch's shame -- 26 seasons as a major league manager without even a single World Series appearance. The Angels had never been there either. Big-time stuff. The wind-up.

Our pitcher's hands come together, glove over his head.

MAN (V.O.)

The delivery.

Pitcher throws. The ball moves closer, closer and...FREEZE
FRAME two feet from the catcher's mitt.

MAN (V.O.)

The catcher was that close. So close to reaching out and pulling in a trip to the World Series. Dave Henderson had other ideas though. It was a bullet. Two of them. One killed him, the other took his wife.

BACK to REAL TIME, the ball POPS in the glove. The catcher and pitcher nod to each other and quit for the day. They step off the field, leaving empty grass and a lonely mound.

MAN (V.O.)

Donnie Moore was once a great pitcher, but with one mighty swing, he became a trivia question. And a suicide.

From this somber tone, we hear laughter. It grows louder...and louder...and...

INT. OFFICE – CAR DEALERSHIP – DAY

A CAR SALESMAN, 38, faded suit, lifeless expression, takes a check from a CUSTOMER. It's a small office in a second-rate used car dealership.

CUSTOMER

Harold Williams! I wasn't even gonna buy a car today. But I saw you standing on the lot and I just had to come in.

(whistles)

Harold Williams.

The salesman, who we now know as Harold, nods quietly.

HAROLD

I hope you enjoy your new Honda.

And we recognize the salesman's voice as that of the narrator. The customer tosses the car keys up in the air then snatches it back in his palm.

CUSTOMER

Do a lot of people buy cars from you?
Bet you reel in some great deals.

Harold manages a smile.

HAROLD

I'm not bad.

CUSTOMER

(elbows him "good-naturedly")
Well, we're all better at some things
than others.

The customer laughs and walks out of the office. He can be heard making VROOM-VROOM noises as he heads off for his car.

Harold's eyes fall on the dealership owner, JERRY, 70's, staring through his office window. Harold glances away.

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP – NIGHT

Harold exits the dealership, crosses to his own car. He regards his sullen reflection in the side mirror. Then he's stopped by Jerry. The old man's speech is slightly slurred and a bottle of whiskey dangles between his fingers.

JERRY

Nice sale today.

HAROLD

Thanks.

Jerry offers up his bottle.

JERRY

Want a drink?

HAROLD

I'm driving, Jerry.

JERRY

Right.

(a beat)

I was thinking we might have
autograph day here.

(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)
 You know, "Come meet Harold Williams
 the baseball player!"

Harold doesn't say anything. Jerry puts a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

JERRY
 Is it okay?

Harold looks him over.

HAROLD
 Are we having a bad month?

JERRY
 You know I wouldn't ask if we
 weren't.

Harold considers this.

JERRY
 Please Harold?

HONKING.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Harold hits the car horn as he pulls into the driveway of a middle-class house. His wife, CARRIE, comes out quickly -- but his sons, MIKE, 10, and KEVIN, 11, beat her to it. They're in their little league uniforms.

MIKE
 The car broke down. Again.

KEVIN
 We're gonna be late for our game,
 Dad.

Harold grimaces at their baseball gloves.

HAROLD
 Sure, get in. We can put a few more
 miles on her.

He opens the door for Carrie.

CARRIE
 At least there was one good thing
 about having kids so close in age.

As we see the two boys violently playing "two for flinching" with each other, Harold ponders what Carrie means.

CARRIE
Only one game to take them to.

Harold doesn't say anything. Carrie just shakes her head and gets in.

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD – NIGHT

A little league game in progress. In the paint-chipped stands, Carrie's arm dips around Harold's.

CARRIE
Harold?

HAROLD
Yeah?

CARRIE
I could've driven your car.

HAROLD
Why?

Harold studies his wife.

HAROLD
No, I feel badly that I don't come to more of these.

A DAD in the pack spots him. Harold recognizes that look.

DAD
You're Harold Williams.

Harold reluctantly nods.

DAD
I think it's terrible how much flak you take. It was just one ball game and you really had a lot of potential.

HAROLD
Thanks.

DAD
What was that one stupid joke those jerks used to say? Harold Williams tried to commit suicide by stepping in front of a train, but it went through his legs?

HAROLD
That was Bill Buckner.

DAD
Oh.

HAROLD
(to Carrie)
I'm gonna take a little walk.

Harold jumps down from the stands and walks off. The dad looks regretful as his wife gives him a disapproving smack to the arm. Carrie gives him the evil eye.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD – HOURS LATER – NIGHT

Harold walks aimlessly through town. It's near midnight and he passes meager silent houses.

HAROLD (V.O.)
Bill Buckner had 2700-plus hits, just short of the Hall of Fame. If not for one ball that went between his legs in that same fateful year of 1986, he probably plays long enough to get 3000. As any fan will tell you, 3000 hits is a ticket to the Hall of Fame that doesn't cost a penny. The bat seemed so light on ol' Billy Buck's shoulders. Buckner didn't kill himself. Bet he felt like it though.

Harold kicks at a mailbox post. He holds a bottle of whiskey to his mouth.

HAROLD (V.O.)
1986. Two men's lives ruined in a matter of weeks.

INT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

Harold watches TV, flipping through channels aimlessly. His mind is elsewhere. The door opens, and Kevin and Mike enter in their uniforms.

HAROLD
How'd you do, guys?

KEVIN
I got two hits.

MIKE
But I got a home run. Kevin's never hit one.

KEVIN
Shut up.

Harold flips off the tube, rubs his eyes.

HAROLD
You hit a home run? Inside-the-park or over the fence?

Carrie steps in.

CARRIE
Over the fence. Coach said no one's done that all year!

Mike sneers at Kevin boastfully.

CARRIE
(keeping Mike's ego in line)
But Kevin's double with the bases loaded won the game.

Kevin smiles. Carrie makes a SNIFFING SOUND.

CARRIE
You two stink. Go hit the showers and make sure those uniforms find the hamper.

The boys race each other up the stairs, elbowing each other all the way.

HAROLD
He hit a home run, huh?

CARRIE
Hummed the theme to "The Natural" all the way around the bases. Just like you used to do. Saw a broken bottle of whiskey near the garbage cans.

Harold hides another bottle behind his feet.

HAROLD
Jerry's.

INSERT - "HAROLD WILLIAMS DAY" BANNER

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

Kids line up for an autograph with Harold. All the salesman make deals with the parents.

Harold pulls at the old baseball uniform he wears. Looks uncomfortable.

INT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Harold walks in, still in his uniform.

HAROLD

Carrie?

No answer.

INT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

He walks in and sees Carrie sitting in a chair. She has tears in her eyes. At first he doesn't notice this.

HAROLD

Where's Mike and Kevin?

CARRIE

They're at my dad's.

HAROLD

Why?

CARRIE

Because...

Harold steps into the light.

HAROLD

Why are you crying, Care?

CARRIE

I've tried to make this work for a long time. You know that.

Harold pieces it together.

HAROLD

Yeah. I know it hasn't been easy. But I'm getting better... Learning to deal with it...

CARRIE

You have gotten better. A little bit. You know, it's my birthday today. I'm 36.

HAROLD

Man. I forgot your birthday.

CARRIE

Yes, but that's not it. I just realized I'm 36 years old. It's time for a change.

HAROLD

I don't understand.

CARRIE

Well, I'm 36.

HAROLD

You keep saying that. Because you're 36? Isn't it usually 40? Some kind of number that ends in a zero when people reevaluate over a birthday?

CARRIE

I want a divorce. It's time.

Harold is silent.

HAROLD

You want to divorce me because you're 36? What's so special about 36? Why is 36 so damn important to you?!

CARRIE

Because I don't want it to turn into 37. My mom died at 39. Every year's precious, Harold. If you'd ever understand that you could throw away this thing that happened to you.

Carrie goes over to him. And cups her hands around his cheeks.

CARRIE

I'm gonna miss you. But it's time.

She slowly lets go of his face and walks out of the house. Harold just stands there. Motionless.

INT. JERRY'S OFFICE – NIGHT

Jerry is counting up the receipts and looks pleased. A KNOCK. He glances up, smiles. Harold stands in the doorway, again in his baseball uniform.

JERRY
Come in, Harold.

Harold inches over. Then, something drops from his hand -- car keys.

Jerry jumps up, excitedly.

JERRY
Holy crap, another trade-in? Did you manage to make another deal today? I knew having an encore of Autograph Day would work!

HAROLD
Those are the keys to my company car. I quit.

Harold starts for the door, taking off his cleats and depositing them in the trash as he leaves. Jerry can't believe it.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD – NIGHT

Harold finds himself strolling down the middle of the street again, hasn't stripped the baseball uniform yet or put on any shoes. His socks are blackened with dirt. Some neighbors gawk, but he doesn't care.

A car drives up. Harold just keeps walking. It pulls up alongside. Carrie sticks her head out.

CARRIE
Harold, what are you doing?

HAROLD
Playing Shoelless Joe Jackson.

He eyes Carrie's car.

HAROLD
The car's working? I'll tell my lawyer to ask for it in the divorce settlement.

CARRIE
Your boss called. He said he'd give
you your job back.

HAROLD
I don't want to work there anymore.
And why's he calling you?

CARRIE
He knows I'm concerned about you.

Harold stops. So does the car.

HAROLD
You're divorcing me and you're
concerned about me?

CARRIE
Of course I am.

HAROLD
Is there any way you'd ever give me
another chance?

Carrie shakes her head.

HAROLD
Then don't be concerned about me. Do
me that favor, okay?

Harold starts walking away. Then he stops and walks back.

HAROLD
You didn't exactly marry me just
'cause you loved me!

She's taken aback by this.

HAROLD
What? You think I didn't know how you
gave your friends that "I'm going out
with a baseball player" look. That
had just as much to do with it. And
don't tell me you didn't miss it. You
weren't exactly Miss Perky for the
first year after our little tragedy
happened.

Carrie takes this in.

CARRIE
You make a good point.

HAROLD
Terri fic.

Harold starts walking away again.

EXT. DOWN THE ROAD - NIGHT

Carrie drives after him.

CARRIE
There's one way.

Harold stops.

HAROLD
What?

CARRIE
There's one way that I might take you
back.

HAROLD
Anything.

Harold motions for her to continue.

CARRIE
Okay. If somehow you agreed to do
this and showed unbelievable
progress, then maybe I'd have to
think about it.

HAROLD
I'll do it. Whatever it is, baby. But
what do you mean, progress?

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Harold steps in, almost tiptoe-ish. Pictured frames of
puppies, cats, inspiring sayings. A man in a conservative
shirt, MARK, 40's, exits his office, looks at him.

MARK
Are you Harold Williams?

Harold pauses -- is this another heckler taking his turn?

HAROLD
You recognize me?

MARK
(nods strangely)
You're my next appointment, right?

Harold blinks at this, exhales.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE – DAY

Mark is seated, calm. Harold is stumbling around, still fidgety, looking at the different objects. Psych books, a degree, a stitchery that reads "Do you mind your mind?"

MARK

Where do you want to start?

HAROLD

I don't have any experience in this.

MARK

Neither do I.

Harold says nothing.

MARK

Bad joke. My brother says I'm a collector of bad jokes.

HAROLD

Hmm.

MARK

Have a seat.

Reluctantly, Harold does.

MARK

Okay. Why don't you tell me why you think you're here and what you hope to accomplish in our sessions.

HAROLD

I'm trying to save my marriage.

MARK

Uh-huh. You feel there's reason to think it's in trouble?

HAROLD

She served me divorce papers.

MARK

Oh.

HAROLD

But she said she might give me a second chance if I do well here.

MARK

What do you think she means by that?

HAROLD

I guess I've, uh, been depressed for the last few years. Not exactly the happiest guy in the world.

MARK

Why?

HAROLD

I don't like to talk about it.

MARK

Well, that might present a problem. My psychic just quit on me.

HAROLD

I don't... believe in whining about things.

They sit there in a long silence. It becomes strained. Harold jumps up.

HAROLD

I've gotta go.

MARK

Is something wrong?

HAROLD

I really wanted to try and do something. But I can't. This just isn't for me.

MARK

Maybe it's not.

HAROLD

What do you mean?

MARK

Look, Harold, maybe you'll find the answer in therapy or maybe you'll find it driving home one day. Sometimes it works like that. I don't pretend to know everything. But, hey, if you ever want to come back, just call. If you think I can help...

Harold shakes his hand.

HAROLD
Thanks Dr. Pekton.

MARK
Mark.

EXT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE - DAY

A U-haul pulls away from the Williams house. Harold feebly waves at the trailer as it disappears in the distance.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Harold sits at the dimly lit town bar. The bartender, GEOFF, pours him a shot and then pours himself one.

GEOFF
Real sorry about your wife, Harold.
Salud.

They clink glasses and down them.

HAROLD
How's your kids?

JIFF
Real good. Ben got good grades. You know, he's in one of those special schools.
(Lowers his voice)
For slow kids. But we're proud of him.

Harold smiles.

HAROLD
That's great.

The door opens. Harold turns and sees Jerry. Doesn't say a word. Jerry sits beside him.

JERRY
What shot was that?

HAROLD
Tennessee.

JERRY
Sounds good. One for me, Geoff.

HAROLD
I hope you didn't follow me thinking I'd take my old job back.

JERRY

Yeah, 'cause it couldn't be
coincidental that an old Irish guy
would come to a bar on his own.

As if telling the punchline on an old joke between them...

HAROLD

You're not Irish, you're just a
drunk.

JERRY

Oh yeah. I keep forgetting.

Jerry takes the shot and downs it.

JERRY

So what are you gonna do?

HAROLD

I don't know.

Harold stares ahead. A sad look in his eye. Jerry takes it
in.

JERRY

Maybe you want to be alone tonight.

Jerry gets up. Harold stops him. They exchange a look and
Jerry sits back down. Harold motions two fingers at Geoff. As
two glasses are poured...

EXT. PARK - DAY

Harold sits on rusty swings with his sons.

HAROLD

You guys have enough to eat?

MIKE

It was a Big Mac. How much can we
eat?

HAROLD

That's true.

Everything goes quiet.

HAROLD

Guys, I... I wish this had turned out
differently.

KEVIN
Are you and Mom really getting a divorce?

HAROLD
Looks like it, pal.

KEVIN
Why?

HAROLD
Because sometimes people love each other, like me and Mom, but we just have too many things we fight about.

KEVIN
So why did you get married in the first place?

HAROLD
Well, we didn't always fight.

MIKE
Can't you just shake hands?

HAROLD
Shake hands?

MIKE
That's what you make Kevin and me do when we have a fight.

Harold thinks about it. A small smile.

HAROLD
I guess it's harder to make women do things.

INT. MARK'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

Harold quietly enters the waiting room. The secretary has her face down in her work. He waits. She doesn't notice him. He turns to leave.

MARK (O.S.)
Harold!

Harold turns around and sees Mark coming out of his office.

HAROLD
I was just...

MARK
Leaving?

HAROLD
Thought I'd come back later.

Mark taps the secretary's shoulder. She jumps, startled. Mark takes a pair of headphones out of her ears, hidden beneath her hair.

MARK
Ready Harold?

HAROLD
Hmm.

MARK
I've got some time now.

HAROLD
Oh. Um. I was gonna make the appointment for next week.

MARK
Sure, I understand. You're probably on your lunch hour.

HAROLD
Actually... I quit.

INT. MARK'S PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY

Harold is seated across from Mark who smiles. Silence.

MARK
We could just make conversation, ease into the heavy stuff.

HAROLD
That might be good.

MARK
So what have you been doing with your free time?

HAROLD
Drinking some.

MARK
Does it help?

HAROLD
I don't need a lecture.

MARK
Wasn't giving you one. Hey, I drink
sometimes too. Sometimes it helps.

HAROLD
You're married?

MARK
There are other reasons to drink.

Harold nods.

MARK
But that's the main reason.

Harold starts laughing. Mark joins him.

MARK
See. I knew I'd get you one of these
times.

The laughter slowly dies down. Harold looks at Mark squarely.

HAROLD
I lost the World Series.

MARK
Pardon.

HAROLD
Do you know what catcher's
interference is?

MARK
A catcher is the guy the pitcher
throws to, right?

HAROLD
Not a baseball fan?

Mark shakes his head.

HAROLD
Catcher's interference is what
happens when a catcher sticks his
glove out too far. When it gets hit
by the bat when the batter swings.

MARK
This happened to you?

HAROLD

Yeah. I was a pro ball player once. The bases were loaded. There were two outs, and we're one strike away from getting to the next inning, extra innings in the deciding game of the World Series. See, I was going to be first up. I was just sitting there, dreaming of the big home run I was gonna hit. I was so excited that I stuck my glove out to catch that ball. Couldn't wait. But I was just so eager I...

Harold trails off. His face is pure darkness.

MARK

Never got the chance. And ended the game. Yeah, I think I remember now. Happened like five years ago?

HAROLD

Thought you weren't a baseball fan.

MARK

I'm not. Not really.

HAROLD

Guess you didn't have to be. It was the lead story on enough newscasts. Guy gets into the Hall of Fame and it's a brief mention. Guy does what I did? He's front page news. He's done.

MARK

That's how you feel?

HAROLD

I don't know.

MARK

I think you do.

HAROLD

I don't know...

MARK

Yeah, you do. Just say what comes to mind. Don't hold back.

A beat.

HAROLD
I think God hates me.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Harold sits at the counter of a greasy spoon diner. A waitress, STACY, puts a burger in front of him.

STACY
Here ya go.

Harold looks at the burger.

HAROLD
Is this medium rare?

STACY
Shoot. Thought you said well done.

Stacy moves for the plate but he waves her off.

HAROLD
No. It's okay.

STACY
On the house then.

HAROLD
It's okay, Stacy.

Harold starts eating. Almost ravenously. Stacy subtly fixes her hair in the mirror.

STACY
So heard about Carrie and the kids.

INT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is in darkness. We hear a woman's laughter. The door opens and the lights are turned on. Stacy is linked around Harold's arm. He looks uneasy.

HAROLD
Guess I should get us a drink.

STACY
Sounds good.

Stacy sits on the couch. Sound of some glasses being mixed.

STACY
House looks nice.

HAROLD (O.S.)
Carrie's quite the interior
decorator.

STACY
(under her breath)
Wouldn't have chosen those pillows.

Harold comes in and hands her a drink.

STACY
(imitates Harold's voice)
Is this medium rare?

Harold smiles. Clinks glasses with her. He stands and drinks.

STACY
Aren't you gonna sit down?

He looks embarrassed.

HAROLD
Oh. Uh, yeah.

He sits. After a moment, he puts his hand on her knee. Then he slowly returns it to his side.

STACY
What time do your folks get home?

Harold looks confused. Then gets the joke.

HAROLD
Ha. Yeah.

STACY
You're not doing anything wrong.

HAROLD
I know.

STACY
Okay if I put on some music?

HAROLD
Sure.

Stacy fingers through the CD collection. Puts on something soft. Returns to the couch.

HAROLD
Can I ask you something?

STACY

Shoot.

HAROLD

Why didn't you ever get married?

STACY

I don't know. I got asked a few times. Just never by anyone I really felt that way about.

HAROLD

I never could get why you weren't married.

STACY

Gave it a lotta thought, huh?

Harold smiles. Relaxes more.

HAROLD

I know this will sound stupid. But when I'd get into a fight with Carrie I'd come by the diner. Seeing you made me feel better.

STACY

Must have had a pretty good marriage. I didn't see you very much.

Harold looks at her. His eyes gaze off.

STACY

I'm sorry. Look, maybe it's not the best thing for us to talk about her. She's off doing her thing, we're doing ours.

Harold nods.

STACY

Heck, we could get run over by a bus tomorrow. We should enjoy the moment.

(a long beat)

How about we just listen to the music for a bit? Just sit here and relax.

Then you take me home?

They sit and listen to the music. Stacy closes her eyes, moving her head in time to it. Harold watches her. Then, he slowly closes his eyes too.

HAROLD
Thanks for understanding, Stace.

INT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Harold is on the phone with Mike.

MIKE (V.O.)
I miss you, Dad.

HAROLD
Miss you too, Mike. But I'll see you Saturday.

MIKE (V.O.)
Kevin said to bring his bat. He left it in the garage.

HAROLD
No problem.

MIKE (V.O.)
Hey Dad?

HAROLD
Yeah?

MIKE (V.O.)
I'm thinking of quitting.

HAROLD
What do you mean?

MIKE (V.O.)
I don't want to play baseball anymore.

HAROLD
But you're good.

MIKE (V.O.)
I just don't feel like it.

HAROLD
Hey, Mike, I know what's going on between Mom and I is tough, but...

MIKE (V.O.)
Whatever. I have to go.

HAROLD
Don't talk to me that way!

Harold is taken aback by the anger in his voice.

MIKE (V.O.)

Sorry.

HAROLD

It's okay. I'll see you Saturday.

Harold hangs up the phone.

INT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE - GARAGE - DAY

Harold steps into the dark dirty garage. Through the shadows we make out some trophies. A couple of framed newspaper clippings of Harold's accomplishments sit on the floor collecting dust. In the corner, Kevin's baseball bat leans up against a wall. Harold goes over and looks at it.

After a moment, he walks back out.

INT. HAROLD'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Harold drives in front of Carrie's dad's house. BEEPS the horn. Mike and Kevin get in the car.

INT. HAROLD'S CAR - MOVING - LATER DAY

MIKE

So what are we going to do?

HAROLD

Thought we'd go to the batting cages.

MIKE

Nah, I don't feel like it.

HAROLD

We're going to the batting cages.

INT. BATTING CAGES - DAY

Harold, Mike and Kevin walk in. Softball teams practice in a few cages. A few bored teenagers just hang out.

MIKE

Do I have to hit?

HAROLD

No. You can just watch me.

Mike and Kevin look at him like he's crazy.

KEVIN

What are you talking about?

Harold puts on a batting helmet. A couple guys whisper to each other, obviously talking about him. Harold looks for a bat. Mike and Kevin glance at each other in disbelief.

KEVIN

Dad, are you serious?

HAROLD

What? I'm not allowed to have fun?

KEVIN

But you never want to bat.

Harold picks out a bat and grips it. He gives a smile, but it's an uneasy one. Hands Kevin some money.

HAROLD

Go get your dad a few tokens.

Kevin grins and goes over to the token machine. Mike just looks at him, skeptical.

INT. BATTING CAGE - DAY

Harold gets into the cage, slips in a token and steps to the plate. Sees a few people walking over to watch.

KEVIN

Sure you want to start with the hard cage?

HAROLD

It's just fastballs, Kev. Not like I'm starting off with curves.

First pitch. Swing. Harold misses by a mile. Some of the adults hold back laughter.

Harold taps his helmet and digs in. Second pitch. Harold swings and misses even worse.

HECKLING ADULT

Strike two! Hey, maybe you'll get lucky and the catcher will stick his glove out too far.

Mike shakes his head.

MIKE

Jerk.

HAROLD

Don't worry about it, Mike.

Harold smiles encouragingly at him. Then Harold looks in, really focuses, and...SMACK!!!! He looks back at the guy who was razzing him.

SEQUENCE OF PITCHES

SMACK...SMACK...SMACK... With every successful swing, Harold grins a little more. The crowd's getting into it. That same heckling guy begrudgingly says to a buddy:

HECKLER

Still got it.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Harold and his boys walk to the car.

MIKE

That was so great, Dad! I couldn't believe how well you hit!

HAROLD

Thanks, but it's a lot easier than when they're throwing from a mound.

MIKE

What's that like?

HAROLD

What?

MIKE

When you step in against a pitcher in the majors.

Harold stops. Thinks about it.

HAROLD

I remember one time I stepped in against Nolan Ryan. Hardest thrower there was. It was near the end of his career, but still. He stared me down. What a stare that man had. Anyway, I dug in and I remember thinking how bad I suddenly had to go to the bathroom. He starts his windup, the catcher's already laughing because he thinks I'm going down for sure. But then I instantly start seeing images of the games I saw him pitch.

(MORE)

HAROLD (CONT'D)
Somebody hitting a home run off him.
Him walking a batter that he
should've struck out. And then big
Nolan Ryan was just a guy. Then I
felt relaxed.

MIKE
Did you hit a home run off him?

HAROLD
Nah, struck out on three pitches.
Made me look like a freakin' idiot.

KEVIN
But I thought you were relaxed.

HAROLD
I was. But that's the point, even
when you're feeling good up there,
anything can happen.

They put the bats in the trunk of the car.

MIKE
You know what was the best part of
watching you hit?

HAROLD
What?

MIKE
When you made those dads that were
making fun of you shut up.

Mike smiles and gets in the car. As Harold shuts the trunk,
his face glows.

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

Harold is back on Jerry's lot selling cars.

CUSTOMER
You sure this gets good mileage?

HAROLD
25 to the gallon.

Carrie's car pulls up. Mike and Kevin are in the back.

CARRIE
Heard you were back at the
dealership.

HAROLD
 Yep.

CARRIE
 What made you change your mind?

HAROLD
 Boredom.

A MAN comes over.

MAN
 Would you autograph this?

The man hands him a baseball card. Harold signs it and hands it back.

MAN
 Hey, what did it feel like after the game was over?

HAROLD
 I don't want to talk about it.

MAN
 C'mon, it's just a question.

Harold looks at him.

HAROLD
 I autographed your card. I'm talking to my wife.

MAN
 Must have been tough.

Harold ignores him. He trades a glance with Mike.

HAROLD
 No, it wasn't tough. It actually was just a game. Like the other 1000 games I played -- except nobody remembers any of those.

MAN
 (mumbles)
 I'm sorry.

HAROLD
 What?!

MAN
 ... sorry.

Harold is almost embarrassed by what he said. The man starts away.

HAROLD
That's the wrong way to the exit.

MAN
Uh...uh...I thought I'd buy the car.

HAROLD
Oh. Then keep going.

The man disappears inside.

CARRIE
Interesting sales technique.

Harold grins. But Mike is quiet. Harold thinks a moment.

HAROLD
Hey Mike?

MIKE
What?

HAROLD
How would you like to see your dad
play ball again?

Mike and Kevin jump up in their seats.

MIKE
Really?

HAROLD
I'd have to start in the minors and
there's no guarantees, but I'd like
to try. Think your mom might let you
visit Quakesha, Mississipi?

Carrie takes the whole thing in.

EXT. BACKYARD - CARRIE'S DAD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Harold and Carrie stand in the backyard.

CARRIE
Why are you doing this?

HAROLD
I don't know.

CARRIE
Harold Williams' answer for
everything.

HAROLD
Well, why do I have to have a reason?
I'm just doing it.

CARRIE
Don't do it, okay?

HAROLD
What do you care? You're divorcing
me.

CARRIE
You're still their father. I don't
want them to see you be any more
bitter than you already are.

HAROLD
I don't know. Maybe you're right. But
if I could prove people wrong... Maybe
I could take something back that I
lost.

CARRIE
So it's about stupid pride.

A silent beat.

CARRIE
I want you to know I started dating.

HAROLD
Who?

CARRIE
Doesn't matter.

HAROLD
Who?

CARRIE
Just some dentist in the next town.

HAROLD
Good. Kevin'll be needing braces.

CARRIE
That's an orthodontist.

HAROLD
I have to go.

Harold starts for his car.

CARRIE
You really think you can play after
all these years?

Harold turns around.

HAROLD
What do you think?

CARRIE
I think you're gonna make a fool of
yourself.

HAROLD
Make sure to floss before your date.

He gets in his car and SLAMS the door.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Harold's car speeds off, passes a sign, "Leaving Deer Run,
Pennsylvania. Home of Football Legend Hank Piring." Harold
flicks the sign off.

INT. HAROLD'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Harold flips through the radio, can't find a song he likes.
He starts to get a ballgame but it's full of static. Keeps
adjusting the dial. Doesn't help. He's about to give up then
tries one more time. Suddenly, it's crystal clear. Harold
smiles, enjoying the sounds of baseball.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Two-two ballgame between the
Cardinals and Lions.

Harold hesitates then pulls something from the back seat.
It's a worn major league hat of the New York Lions. He looks
at it a moment and then puts it on.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
There's a base hit for Gentry and the
Lions have the lead-off man aboard.

Harold whistles and claps his hands.

EXT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - DAY

An old rickety stadium. The grass is thick and unkempt.

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Harold sits in front of the manager, DAVE MCCULLEN, 50's, tired face. He runs his fingers through what's left of his hair.

HAROLD

I'm excited to play for you, Mr. McCullen.

MCCULLEN

You're, what, 40? You can just call me Dave.

HAROLD

I'm 38. Dave.

McCullen starts to laugh with a touch of anger.

MCCULLEN

Harold, do you know why you're here?

HAROLD

Probably because I can bring in a few more people to watch games.

MCCULLEN

Do you know why?

HAROLD

Honestly, I really don't care.

MCCULLEN

Well, let me tell you why --

HAROLD

Look, I know you're not happy that I'm here and I don't blame you. But I can still play. I don't want to start off on the wrong foot, okay? I'm just here to play ball and hopefully earn my way back to the majors.

MCCULLEN

You're kidding, right?

HAROLD

No, I'm not.

MCCULLEN

Can I give you a piece of advice?

HAROLD

About baseball? I'll take all the help I can get. But I have a feeling that's not what you want to tell me. If it's cool with you, can I just go get my uniform?

McCullen gives him a look.

MCCULLEN

Okay.

Harold gets up and walks out. McCullen just watches him go.

EXT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - DAY

There's a faded painting of a Walrus by the dugout. Out in the field, the Quakesha Walruses, a minor league team comprised mostly of young men in their early 20's.

Batting practice is going on. JOHN, a arrogant pitcher with a strong fastball pitches into a 19-year-old lanky kid named TIM. He swings and misses.

TIM

Hey, slow it down. It's just batting practice.

JOHN

Looked like strike one to me!

Some of the other players laugh and watch. Behind the backstop, Harold appears. Another pitch comes in at top speed. Tim swings and misses. Practically falls over from the effort. Harold admires the skill of the pitch.

JOHN

Looking good! You might as well go home now, Rookie!

Suddenly all admiration leaves Harold's face. Tim steps out of the batter's box, looks beaten. Harold whispers to him.

HAROLD

Open your stance two inches and shorten up your swing. Just let the barrel hit it. The barrel will supply the power.

Tim nods in appreciation.

TIM
Who are you?

HAROLD
Just do it. And when he puts his
glove up high that's a tell that he's
going to the change-up.

Tim shrugs and steps back in. He opens his stance a little by
moving his lead foot away from his body.

HAROLD
A little more.

Tim opens his stance more.

HAROLD
Good.

JOHN
Ready for strike three?

HAROLD
Go get 'em.

John winds up glove high, throws and... Tim shortens his swing
and rifles a fastball at the shortstop who was talking to
another player -- He ducks just before he would have been
nailed in the face. John looks on in disbelief. So does Tim.
But when he looks back at the backstop, Harold's gone.

INT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - CLUBHOUSE - DAY

Harold walks over to the equipment room. The door is open but
no one's there. He knocks. Hears nothing.

HAROLD
Anyone here? I was supposed to get a
uniform like an hour ago?

He starts pounding on the door. A VOICE comes from behind
him.

VOICE
What the hell are you doing? Can't a
man take a goddamn lunch break?!

Harold turns around. He breaks into a smile. Before him is
WILLIS, 60's, a squat man with lively eyes.

HAROLD
Willis?

WILLIS

Holy...

INT. EQUIPMENT ROOM - DAY

Willis sits in the corner while Harold is in a changing room

WILLIS

Unbelievable. Did you meet the manager?

A uniform top goes flying on top of the changing room door.

HAROLD (O.S.)

Yeah.

WILLIS

Bet he was thrilled.

HAROLD (O.S.)

Yeah.

Willis laughs.

WILLIS

Guess you know you can't expect much sympathy from the players either.

HAROLD (O.S.)

I always hated the old guys. Hanger-ons, all of 'em.

WILLIS

So is that what you're trying to do, hang on?

HAROLD (O.S.)

Nah, I'm giving myself a month. If I can't play, I'm going home.

Harold comes out of the changing room. The uniform's a little tight but fits well enough.

WILLIS

Boy, you look like you never stepped off the field.

HAROLD

Still blind as a bat?

Willis grins.

WILLIS
One that flies? Or one of these?

Willis pulls out a baseball bat and laughs.

HAROLD
Still with the lame jokes, huh?

Willis takes a few phantom swings. Harold watches him. His voice softens.

HAROLD
Willis, I'm sorry I cost you the World Series money. I know that extra cash was pretty important to the clubhouse attendants.

Willis stops swinging.

WILLIS
Well, I'm a clubhouse manager now, even if it is for a double-A team. And like I always said, win or lose together.

Willis puts out his hand. Harold nods at the gesture. They shake hands.

WILLIS
Welcome back, Houseboat.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Harold emerges from the dugout. He takes in the ball field and beams. As he starts out for his position...

MCCULLEN
That's it for today!

Harold stops in his tracks. Looks back. McCullen just grins and cracks his gum.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Harold sits in front of his locker. Tim undresses quietly. John comes up to Harold.

JOHN
Nice practice, Rookie.

HAROLD
You're funny.

John sits down next to him.

JOHN
Can I ask you something?

HAROLD
Okay, but I don't want to talk about
the goddamn World Series...

JOHN
No, it's cool. I saw it on TV. I
wanted to know how many women you
bagged on the road.

HAROLD
What?

JOHN
Girls. How many? I just always hear
the stories about the majors and I
want to know if it's true.

Harold smiles.

HAROLD
Get there and find out for yourself.

TIM
Yeah? Is it really that good?

JOHN
(to Tim)
Man, you'll be in the Hall of Fame
before you get any action.

Tim quiets, trying to think of a comeback.

JOHN
You sure told me!

John walks off. Harold regards Tim.

HAROLD
You've never been with a woman
before?

TIM
...no.

HAROLD
Oh. Well, that's good. Means you're
choosy.

TIM

Yeah.

HAROLD

No, it does. You want the first time to be with somebody special, believe me.

TIM

You mean, like when you meet your wife?

HAROLD

Maybe not that special. The wife thing can take a while.

TIM

There was a girl who wanted to not that long ago. She was a little overweight.

The third baseman, COLLINS, passes by. He makes a gesture around his stomach.

HAROLD

She was pregnant?

Collins can be heard laughing as he enters the shower.

TIM

... Yeah.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Harold unpacks his suitcase. Tim lies on one of the two cheap motel beds.

HAROLD

You unpacked fast.

TIM

It's easy when you fold your clothes right.

Harold takes out a balled-up shirt and puts it in a drawer.

HAROLD

A decade on the road and I never could figure out how to pack.

TIM

Bet you're not close to your mother.

Harold laughs.

HAROLD
I guess you're close to yours?

Tim nods. A KNOCK on the door.

HAROLD
Yes?

John enters, starts laughing.

JOHN
I didn't know they put you two
together. Classic.

John hands Tim a comic book.

JOHN
Thanks Timber.

HAROLD
Why do they call you Timber?

TIM
They don't. John's just an ass.

JOHN
At least I get ass.
(to Harold)
Hey, Rookie, you gonna party with us
tonight?

HAROLD
(to Tim)
You gonna go?

TIM
I don't think I was invited.

JOHN
Tim, you know we'd take ya except
you've got a babyface. Not even that
Fake ID is gonna get you in.

Tim just flops on his bed.

JOHN
So Rookie?

Harold glances back at Tim, who just stares at the ceiling.

HAROLD
Gotta finish packing.

JOHN
All right. Next time then.

John takes off. After the door closes...

HAROLD
What kind of beer do you like?

INT. MOTEL - LATER NIGHT

Harold and Tim are drunk off their minds.

TIM
I don't think I can drink anymore.

Tim pops open a new can and starts drinking. Harold laughs, lying back on his bed sipping a bottle.

HAROLD
I probably shouldn't have bought it for you.

TIM
Why...

Tim stands up and holds onto the bed for balance.

TIM
...I'm fine.

Harold laughs louder. Tim lies back on the bed.

TIM
If I don't remember to say it, thanks Harold.

HAROLD
For what?

But Tim is already passed out. His can is tipped slightly and beer trickles down on his shirt. Harold takes the can out of his hand and puts it on the table. Turns off the light.

EXT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

John is goofing around on the sidelines. Puts his fingertips on the ball and throws a knuckleball. It dances all over the place and lands in the catcher's glove for a strike.

CATCHER
All right. Quit screwing around and
give me the hard stuff.

John laughs.

JOHN
That's what she said.

Harold watches from the outfield with interest.

SCOREBOARD

says Visitors 5, Walruses 4.

INT. DUGOUT - DAY

McCullen looks down his lineup. Harold looks at him, trying
to get his attention.

MCCULLEN
Bowers, you're pinch-hitting.

Harold hangs his head.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Harold and Tim are sitting at a table. John is sweet talking
some women in the corner.

HAROLD
You could do that.

TIM
No, I couldn't.

HAROLD
You're a ballplayer. Women love
ballplayers.

Tim watches John take the woman outside.

TIM
They love that one, anyway.

Harold looks at another woman at the bar.

HAROLD
What about...

INT. BAR - BATHROOM HALLWAY - LATER NIGHT

Harold is giving Tim a pep talk in the bathroom hallway.

TIM
I don't think I can talk to her.

HAROLD
What's the big deal?

TIM
No, I'm starting to sweat something
fierce.

HAROLD
(Looks at his sweat)
God, I thought it was the lighting.
Let me ask you something. If you went
to Vegas and the casino manager hands
you free poker chips, do you care if
you lose them at the table?

TIM
Um. No?

HAROLD
That high school education is really
paying off. Look, it's the same thing
here. All she can do is say no.
Nothing to lose. Just like the
casino.

TIM
But the dealer can't make you feel
like you're ugly.

HAROLD
Just make a joke about what a crappy
bar this is. But make it fun-loving,
not negative.

TIM
Fun-loving, not negative. Okay.

HAROLD
Do you know what I mean?

TIM
No. Not really.

Tim sits down at the bar next to the WOMAN.

TIM
This bar kinda, uh, sucks, huh?

The woman turns to him.

WOMAN
What?

TIM
The bar. I've seen better.

WOMAN
It's not nearly as good as this one I
went to last week! The Burlap, it's
called. Went there and got completely
hammered! Ended up dancing on the
bar. You ever get that drunk?

Tim can't think of anything to say.

TIM
... Yeah.

INT. BAR - LATER NIGHT

The woman shakes hands with Tim and leaves. Tim sits down by
Harold at a table.

HAROLD
Did you get her number?

TIM
I didn't ask.

HAROLD
Why not?

TIM
She kept telling me she had a
boyfriend. I think that's code for
she wanted me to know she didn't like
me that way.

HAROLD
Maybe she had one.

TIM
She sleeps with half the guys on the
team. So she's not exactly letting
that hold her back.

HAROLD
Then why were you talking to her?
Thought you wanted someone special.

TIM

I just figured it would take me a few times for your tips to set in, so better to waste it on women I didn't care about. Women like jerks, anyway. I know that much. It's gonna take me a little bit to find my "inner asshole." You know what they say... Nice guys finish last.

HAROLD

Not true.

TIM

But they say it...

HAROLD

Listen, Tim. It's not really nice guys who finish last. It's boring guys. But nice guys...well, just have more of a tendency to be boring. You need confidence. Take a woman in your arms, kiss her like you've got something to give her. You do that and you could be nice and there wouldn't be any jerk who could compete with that. Women like nice, they just don't like weak.

TIM

You swear?

HAROLD

On Babe Ruth's butt.

Tim gestures toward a couple women sitting at a table.

TIM

Then why don't you show me how it's done?

HAROLD

Because...I guess I'm still in love with my wife.

TIM

Didn't you say you're getting a divorce?

Harold nods.

TIM

That's not good.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The reflection of the TV plays on Tim's sleeping face. Harold sits up watching the news in the darkness.

SPORTS ANCHOR

...and Mississippi State pulls off the win 7-5. If you didn't hear, the Quakesha Walruses made an addition to their team last week. Harold Williams, infamous for costing his team the World Series. Here's what some fans think about the signing.

ON TV

A FAN with a beer belly.

FAN

Well, it was a long time ago. Maybe he'll play well.

Another FAN.

FAN #2

Nobody will ever forget that play.
(chuckles)
Nobody.

SPORTS ANCHOR

For those who didn't see the World Series game, Williams was part of a catcher's interference play that forced in the winning run to give the Los Angeles Mustangs the championship.

HAROLD IN HOTEL ROOM

Sits there, completely still.

Here's how the play unfolded nine years ago.

VIDEOTAPE ON TV

A younger Harold crouches behind the plate and the batter steps in.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Bases loaded. 0-2 on Benish.

HAROLD IN HOTEL ROOM

He's grabbing the sheets, holding them tightly. But he can't turn away from the TV.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Dan Votner is one strike away from sending this game to extras. And here's the pitch...

Harold suddenly turns the TV off and breathes deep.

EXT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Practice. Harold and Tim watch pitch after pitch hit the catcher's legs. Despite the shinguards, it's starting to hurt. The catcher scowls and yells with every ball that hits him.

HAROLD

You ever think of throwing that knuckler I see you playing around with?

JOHN

That's just for fun.

HAROLD

I think it's your best chance to make the majors. It's got some dance on it.

John thinks hard on this, shakes it off.

JOHN

Knuckleballs are for turd arms that can't throw a ball by a hitter.

HAROLD

You haven't thrown a ball by a hitter yet. In order for it be thrown by a hitter, it actually has to cross the plate.

JOHN

Catcher's interference guy, I'm not throwing a knuckleball. It's not real pitching.

Another pitch. Bounce and hits the catcher in the knee. He's on the ground, writhing. John winces at this.

JOHN

Ooh. Sorry there.

Tim whispers to Harold.

TIM
He takes a few more pitches on the
knee like that and you'll be a
starting catcher again.

Harold studies the catcher who's very slow to get up.

HAROLD
(hides a smile)
Just keep following your heart, John.

SERIES OF CUTS

CLASSICAL OPERA plays OVER as we watch pitch after pitch hit
the catcher, and he gets up slower and slower.

Now Harold can't even look.

We go to SLO-MO and it's now DURING A GAME. John
hurls...and...it's low...and...hits the catcher in the
toe...and we hear a FORCEFUL CRUNCHHHH. The catcher's down
and he's not getting up.

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

Harold just watches the whole thing. Tries not to smile.

HAROLD
(turns to a bench player)
Think he's okay?

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

And the catcher is carried off the field. The crowd gives him
an ovation, part heartfelt, part mockery. OPERA MUSIC ENDS.

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

McCullen examines his bench players. Harold's eyebrows raise.
The manager ignores this and holds the catcher's mitt near
the player next to him.

MCCULLEN
Podri guez, you ever caught?

Podri guez, a quiet Domini can, shakes his head.

PODRI GUEZ
No.

MCCULLEN
But I want you to. Can you do that
for me?

PODRIGUEZ
No.

McCullen stares at Harold then back at Podriguez.

MCCULLEN
Okay. Just give yourself a few
moments to think about it, Podriguez.
Just relax. Now what do you say?

PODRIGUEZ
(yells)
No!!!

Podriguez runs away, defiantly. Tim scooches over.

TIM
He doesn't speak any English.

MCCULLEN
He just said "No."

TIM
No means no in Spanish too.

McCullen scratches his head in confusion. Then scratches his
groin in further befuddlement.

MCCULLEN
Then how did he know what I wanted
him to do? He ran away.

TIM
He saw bandages. He saw pain. He saw
catcher's glove.

Harold has continued staring down McCullen the whole time.
McCullen thinks, curses to himself.

P. A. ANNOUNCER (V. O.)
Now catching for the Quakesha
Walruses -- Harold Williams.

The crowd roars. We hear screams of "There's the sideshow"
and "Here comes the choke." One fan even holds an oversized
catcher's mitt while another fan hits it with a bat to replay
Harold's infamous moment.

INT. DUGOUT - LATER NIGHT

Willis walks over with the catcher's gear and a glove. Harold waves it off.

HAROLD
I've got my own stuff.

And Harold pulls out HIS GEAR -- gleaming shinguards, sturdy chest protector, and a freshly oiled glove. The players look at the last item closely. The second basemen, DRAPER, 10-year career minor leaguer, can't believe it.

DRAPER
You have "Brown Babbette?"

HAROLD
The unlucky lady herself.

John regards it with a snicker.

JOHN
Doesn't that belong in Cooperstown or something?

Snap by snap, Harold straps on the shinguards. Then gives the chest protector a hard slam after slides it on, like a gorilla reclaiming his jungle. A journeyman outfielder named WICKER comes over.

WICKER
(re: glove)
You sure you don't want to lose that thing? I'm not real superstitious or nothing, but I had a 15-game hitting streak last year 'cause I wore no underwear.

Everyone gestures for more information.

WICKER
It was 'cause one day I didn't wear them to a game and that was the day that started the streak.

HAROLD
But why weren't you wearing underwear?

Wicker beams at the thought.

WICKER
Somebody wanted them as a souvenir.

HAROLD'S POV

Through the catcher's mask, Harold sees the umpire and then takes in the merciless jeering crowd.

UMPIRE

Play ball!

Harold smiles as if hearing words of gospel. Crouches down, gives the sign. John shakes it off. Gives another. John shakes it off again. Yet another sign. John is too mad to shake again. Motions for Harold to come over. Meeting at the

EXT. PITCHER'S MOUND - NIGHT

JOHN

I pitch what I pitch.

HAROLD

Sorry, kid, you throw what I signal.

JOHN

I've never seen four fingers before.

HAROLD

Bet you've seen one finger a lot.
Four fingers is for knuckleball.

JOHN

I'm not throwing it. If you can't handle my heat, get out of the living room.

HAROLD

Kitchen, kid. Because there's stoves in a kitchen. Think about it, when would it be hot in the living room?

JOHN

Last night when I screwed your...

EXT. FIELD - LATER NIGHT

UMPIRE

Play ball!

Harold reluctantly offers one finger, the middle one. This makes John even angrier, throwing his pitch five feet short of home. But Harold makes a cat-like athletic stop, using his protector to corral the ball.

The crowd applauds Harold's quickness.

Harold tosses back to John, who sneers at the fickle crowd. And, soon enough, it's...

BASES LOADED

McCullen comes out to the mound. Harold joins him. All three are mad as hell.

MCCULLEN
(to John)
I hate the way you pitch.

JOHN
I hate the way you manage.
(to Harold)
And I hate the way you catch.

MCCULLEN
Hell, I'm not even botherin'.

McCullen just goes back to the dugout, frustrated.

JOHN
I'm not throwing a knuckler.

HAROLD
One more crap pitch and you're out of this game. He can't visit you twice and not take you out.

JOHN
Not throwing it!

Harold pats him on the back.

HAROLD
Don't use up all the hot water.

Harold trots back behind the plate. Shows four fingers, but John shakes it off. The stretch, and the pitch, and...

INT. CLUBHOUSE SHOWERS - NIGHT

John stands, catatonic, as water runs down his still head.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Harold's glove squeezes a pitch.

UMPIRE
Strike three!

And Harold strolls toward the bench, nodding to the reliever who pitched them out of the inning.

INT. DUGOUT - LATER NIGHT

Willis comes through the dugout while Harold is up at bat. Tim moves by Willis.

JOHN

Hey, Willis, do you know how Harold got the nickname Houseboat?

WILLIS

You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

TIM

Yeah, I would.

Third baseman Collins moves close.

COLLINS

Tim, you'd believe blondes lay golden eggs. C'mon, Willis, tell us.

Willis sits down.

WILLIS

Triple-A, 'bout 17 years ago. Harold's a top prospect and he's smelling the big leagues.

EXT. ANOTHER MINOR LEAGUE PARK - 17 YEARS AGO

A younger Harold steps to the plate. So sure of himself.

WILLIS (V.O.)

We're playing a minor league club where the stadium's near a river -- maybe only once a year a home run ball would hit the water.

Harold digs in, his eyes focused.

WILLIS (V.O.)

Harold was trying to make an impression. And, man, did he!

THWACK! Harold makes contact and drives the ball deep.

WILLIS (V.O.)

He hit that ball and it just kept going... and going... and...

A houseboat is coming down the river and the ball goes through the window. After a moment, a man peers out of the window's hole, half-asleep.

WILLIS (V.O.)
 Hit somebody's goddamn houseboat!

INT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - DUGOUT - NIGHT - PRESENT

Collins looks at him skeptically.

WILLIS
 Told ya you wouldn't believe me.

Willis gets up.

TIM
 He really do that?

WILLIS
 Ever try paying for a new window on a
 minor league salary?

Willis winks and keep on walking. Collins and Tim trade a stare.

STANDINGS

Walruses move up in the standings from fourth... to third... to second.

SCOREBOARD

Walruses have put a bunch of runs on the board, the visiting team has zeroes.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Harold is writing at a desk. Tim comes in.

TIM
 Hey Harold

HAROLD
 Hey Tim.

TIM
 Whatcha doing?

HAROLD
 It's my son Kevin's birthday. Just
 writing something in his card. You
 want to go get some beers in a bit?

TIM
 I got called up to the majors.

Harold turns around. He doesn't look happy.

HAROLD

You got called up to the majors? But you're only batting .260.

TIM

Guess they feel I'm making progress. I was hitting .220 a month ago. Then I started opening my stance two feet.

Harold nods.

TIM

I'm kind of scared.

HAROLD

Well, just remember they take your bags from under the bus. Don't ask if someone stole them when they're not there.

TIM

Huh?

HAROLD

You know how we always have to get our luggage from under the bus?

TIM

Yeah?

HAROLD

The hotel bellhops in the majors unload it before you're even off the Greyhound.

Tim is genuinely blown away by this.

TIM

Wow...

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Tim waves goodbye as he boards the plane. John and Harold wave back.

JOHN

Bye Buddy. Good Luck.

As he disappears from sight...

JOHN
That little shit!

Harold laughs.

JOHN
Shall we get plastered?

HAROLD
Big time.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Harold and John wait outside a nightclub. Young women dressed in thigh high boots and short skirts.

JOHN
Old enough to be your daughters?

HAROLD
Try nieces.

JOHN
(in a female voice)
Oh, Uncle Harold, can I sit on your lap?
(pause)
How do you think Tim's gonna do?

HAROLD
I think he'll struggle for a while, but I think he'll make it. Hope so anyway.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Harold and John stands with a couple women. Strobe lights flash everywhere. John is very drunk but Harold looks sober and bored.

JOHN
Damn kid gets to the majors. Where's the justice? Let's go get these girls some more drinks.

John and Harold go to the bar.

JOHN
(re: the girls)
You trying here?

HAROLD
Sorry. I'll get more on my game.

JOHN
You're divorced, aren't you?

HAROLD
Yep. But there's this waitress I sort of like.

JOHN
The redhead or the blonde?

John motions at a few waitresses going by.

HAROLD
No, one from back home.

JOHN
Yeah, we've all got someone from back home, but they understand.

HAROLD
Do they?

JOHN
Well, they would if we told 'em.

John grins.

JOHN
You really think I should throw that knuckler?

Harold nods.

JOHN
Okay, how about I tell the girls you weren't feeling well?

HAROLD
Sounds good.

JOHN
(a beat)
Got any condoms?

EXT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

Harold is talking it up behind the plate.

HAROLD
That's it, Johnny, strike him out, kid.

Here comes the knuckleball and there goes the opposing batter with a swing and a miss. John pumps his fist.

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

McCullen applauds wildly.

MCCULLEN

Way to throw that...whatever crap you're throwing.

McCullen turns to a player.

MCCULLEN

What's he throwing?

Podriguez doesn't know and still doesn't know the language. McCullen scowls.

MCCULLEN

I know you speak English, you little liar.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

John looks for the sign, Harold flashes it. The wind-up, the pitch, it's...

UMPIRE

Strike three!

The batter has swung and missed at the knuckleball so hard that he lands on his butt. John starts walking off the field -- he could get used to this. The batter rises.

BATTER

Knuckler isn't real pitching.

John turns, and...STARTS AFTER THE BATTER -- maybe the first time a pitcher charged the plate. No one can catch him in time. John starts POUNDING PUNCHES on the guy again and again.

Harold tries to intervene, but...both benches clear.

HAROLD

C'mon, guys, let's break it up.

Then Harold takes a right cross...from the mascot -- a big lobster. It takes Harold a moment to fully take in what happened -- then he tackles the crustacean near first base!

The crowd is loving it: John is throwing punches everywhere, accidentally hits the ump who literally doesn't know what hit him. McCullen is even getting into it with the other manager, belly to belly. Harold hits the lobster again, and we know he's knocked out as his claws clump to the ground.

When the haze of dirt clears, the ump holds his bruised cheek and calls the game over.

EXT. STANDS - NIGHT

A SCOUT with a radar gun sits, rolls his eyes at the whole thing. Gnaws on some grapes.

SCOUT

Bush.

EXT. FOREST PRESERVE - DAY

Harold and Stacy sit near a lake, feeding the ducks.

STACY

It's beautiful out here.

HAROLD

Not exactly easy to find a romantic spot in Quakesha, Mississippi.

A silent beat.

STACY

I got a new job.

HAROLD

Yeah?

STACY

Working over at that office supply store on Gentry. It's better money and I don't smell of bacon when I get home.

HAROLD

That's great, hon.

STACY

You just called me hon.

HAROLD

I did?

STACY

Yeah.

HAROLD
Did it make you uncomfortable?

STACY
Uncomfortable? No. I liked it.

HAROLD
I'm thinking about quitting. What do you think of that?

STACY
Wouldn't bother me if it's what you wanted. Hey, maybe we could go on vacation somewhere. I saved up some money.

HAROLD
Where would we go?

STACY
I always heard great things about Cape Cod.

Another silent beat.

STACY
You want to hear something really stupid?

HAROLD
Sure.

STACY
Sometimes I buy Cape Cod potato chips and imagine I'm there.

She starts laughing. Harold cracks up.

HAROLD
You're really...weird. But I like that about you.

She punches him lovingly on the arm.

STACY
Thanks.

HAROLD
Stacy, you really wouldn't care if I wasn't a baseball player?

STACY

You weren't a player for years and I
always served you extra eggs.

Harold holds her hand close.

EXT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

An ump calls strike three. Catching, Harold calls time, goes
out to the mound.

JOHN

What is it? I'm pitching great. Don't
you think I'm pitching good?

HAROLD

I don't want to talk about it.

JOHN

What's with you guys? You don't talk
to me while I'm on the bench. I'm
pitching fan-freaking-tastic and you
won't say a word to me.

Harold furrows his dirt-caked brow.

HAROLD

You don't know?

Harold laughs. John is getting upset.

JOHN

What don't I know?

HAROLD

No, it's bad luck.

JOHN

Tell me now.

Harold shakes "no."

JOHN

Tell me!

Harold starts back. John blurts out in anger.

JOHN

Maybe you can stick your glove out
too far twenty times and we can lose
the game like you lost the goddamn
World Series!

As soon as John says it, he knows he made a mistake. Harold is frozen. He storms back toward John.

HAROLD
Even if I did that your no-hitter
would still be intact!

All the color leaves John's face.

JOHN
A no-no?

HAROLD
A no-no! Know what else is a no-no?!

JOHN
(just realizes)
Talking to the pitcher about his no-
hitter before he's finished throwing
it. Usually screws him up from
getting it.

Harold lowers his voice. Sees John shaking now.

HAROLD
That's right. And don't let this
influence you, but a major league
scout is here and he's had his gun
pointed at you the whole night.

EXT. STANDS - NIGHT

Looking on with a confused look, like the rest of the crowd, is that scout from the other night. He quietly munches on his grapes.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The ump comes to the mound.

UMPIRE
What the hell you guys discussing?
What advice do you need to give a kid
who's one out away from a no-hitter?

And just as the ump says it, he puts his hands over his mouth, mortified.

UMP
Crap... Bad luck! Bad luck! I'm sorry,
uh, take as much time as you need.
Crap.

And the ump scurries back behind the plate. Harold gives John a pat on the butt.

HAROLD
Good luck.

JOHN
Harold?

HAROLD
Yeah?

JOHN
(nervously)
Think maybe the scout's here to see you?

Harold just slides the mask back on and heads back to the plate.

John, determined but nervous, looks in at the sign. The stretch... the pitch... called strike one.

The crowd, significantly larger than the first game we saw, cheers vociferously. John seems to notice all eyes on him. Blows into his hand. The pitch... strike two.

Everyone on their feet now, anticipating the no-hitter. Even John feels is starting to feel it now.

JOHN
That's right! I got it! I think so...

John stares in, the stretch, and... ball one in the dirt. He shakes it off. Calls for the ball, just quickly winds and... ball two, bouncing to the backstop. The fans cheer a little less. And the next two pitches... result in a walk.

HAROLD
That's all right, Johnny.
(exchanges a look with
skeptical McCullen)
...s' all right.

And John keeps throwing wild. More walks. After a while, runs are being forced in. McCullen goes from folding his arms... to spitting incessantly... to dropkicking a glove into the wall.

SCOREBOARD

Walks 4, Hawks 2.

EXT. FIELD - LATER NIGHT

Another walk forced in a run. McCullen reluctantly comes to the mound. Harold come to the mound also.

JOHN

I know I can get this guy.

But McCullen only turns to Harold.

MCCULLEN

We've got a chance at first place.

McCullen stares at Harold, who looks to his pitcher. Harold reluctantly gestures that John is done. McCullen signals to the bullpen. John just hands the ball to McCullen and glares at Harold, pissed.

And he walks off. The relief pitcher comes on and one...two...three strikes later...Game over.

The crowd goes crazy at a little slice of Walrus history.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

A no-hitter. Ugly, but still a no-no.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

John is packing intently. Harold comes in, stops. John turns a second to look at him, goes back to what he was doing.

HAROLD

Kid, I had to.

John just keeps packing.

HAROLD

We just creeped within a half game of first place.

JOHN

Of a Double-A division. These games don't count. The minors is about one thing -- getting to the majors.

HAROLD

I was always taught that wins come first.

John shuts his suitcase closed and pushes past Harold for the door.

HAROLD
 You're just gonna quit, kid? Because
 you lost a little face out there?
 That's crap.

John turns.

JOHN
 That scout met with me after the
 game. I'm going.

HAROLD
 Going where?

JOHN
 To the big leagues. I'll say hello to
 Timmy for you.

Harold just stands there, quietly furious.

HAROLD
 Happy for you.

JOHN
 You've got the highest batting
 average on the team by far. Happy, my
 fucking glove.

EXT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - BULLPEN - DAY

Harold warms up a pitcher during practice. Willis comes over.

WILLIS
 Harold, you got a phone call.

HAROLD
 Tell whichever reporter it is that I
 don't want to talk about the World
 Series anymore.

WILLIS
 It's your wife.

INT. MCCULLEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Harold goes over to McCullen's office. He looks up from
 scouting reports.

MCCULLEN
 Something I can do for you?

HAROLD
 One of my kids is sick.

MCCULLEN
Sorry to hear that, Williams.

HAROLD
I was curious if it would be okay if I went home to see him. It's just a virus, but...

MCCULLEN
Take as much time as you need.

HAROLD
Really? That's nice of you. Thanks.

MCCULLEN
Harold? Can I be honest with you?

HAROLD
You're not gonna try to give me that advice, are you?

MCCULLEN
No. I was pissed at you then.

HAROLD
You're not pissed now?

MCCULLEN
Not really. Sit down, okay?

Harold sits in his office.

MCCULLEN
You're a good ballplayer, Harold. And you've been a real good influence over the players. Anyone could see that.

HAROLD
Thank you.

MCCULLEN
But you're making a fool out of yourself.

HAROLD
I just want another shot.

McCullen leans back in his chair, sighs.

MCCULLEN
Two call-ups and I heard they were coming way beforehand.
(MORE)

MCCULLEN (CONT' D)

But, and I'm just being honest,
nobody even hinted at them being you.

HAROLD

Can I go now?

MCCULLEN

You know, sometimes we only get one
shot in this life. Hell, I waited in
the minors for years for mine. It
never came. And I was a good
ballplayer, too. You think I never
wonder about what might have been?
Just one call-up, a hot hitting
streak and who knows what. But that's
the way it goes. That's life. So can
I give you a different piece of
advice?

HAROLD

... Okay.

MCCULLEN

Go home and think about if this thing
is really worth it to you. You got
kids, I'm sure you could do something
else with your life. There's a lot of
former major leaguers who opened up
drycleaners, things like that. Just
be honest with yourself and ask
yourself if this is really where you
should be. Look, I got a kid in
single-A who needs to move up. No
room in triple-A, but I think if he
comes to Quakesha he could be in the
majors, maybe next year. You're
selling a few tickets, so I'm sure
our owner will let you play till your
60. But you think that's really fair
to that kid in single-A?

Harold clenches his jaw tightly.

HAROLD

I'll be back in a few days.

EXT. ROAD - TWILIGHT

Harold drives past the "Welcome to Deer Run" sign. He starts
to raise his hand to flick it off then thinks better of it.
Comes up on the car dealership and watches it pass by.

INT. CARRIE'S DAD'S HOUSE - GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

Harold walks into the guest bedroom. Mike lies in bed. Harold stops upon noticing he's asleep. As he gets near the door...

MIKE (O.S.)

Dad?

Harold walks back over to him.

HAROLD

Hi buddy. Thought you were asleep.

MIKE

I was. You woke me up.

HAROLD

Oh. Sorry.

MIKE

It's okay. I slept all day.

HAROLD

How are you feeling?

MIKE

Pretty good. What's your batting average at?

HAROLD

About .360.

MIKE

That's awesome.

HAROLD

Yeah...

MIKE

You think you'll get called up?

HAROLD

You want to know the truth?

Mike nods.

HAROLD

I don't think so, buddy.

MIKE

But why not? .360...

HAROLD

There was another player hitting .260 and he got called up. I just don't think it matters what I do at this point.

MIKE

Was he one of the coach's sons?

HAROLD

Huh?

MIKE

Last year I hit 200 points better than this other kid who got picked for the All-Star team. Our coach got to pick who went. Picked his son.

HAROLD

I didn't know that.

MIKE

Yeah, well you didn't come to any of our games. Almost quit the team, I was so pissed.

HAROLD

Glad you didn't.

MIKE

Me either. 'Cause I got the game-winning hit that won the championship.

Mike puts his arms in the air, makes crowd noises to replay the event.

HAROLD

That was a heck of a hit.

MIKE

How would you know?

HAROLD

I might have driven by.

Mike smiles.

HAROLD

Get some rest, okay?

Mike goes back under the covers and closes his eyes. Harold stands over him, watching his son fall back to sleep.

EXT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

McCullen is instructing a shortstop on fielding. A ball is hit to him and he makes the play.

MCCULLEN
That's better, Chad. Better.

CHAD
Hey Harold!

Harold is walking on the field with his gear bag over his shoulder. McCullen just stares.

MCCULLEN
So I guess you didn't take my advice?

HAROLD
Nope.

MCCULLEN
That single-A kid drove his motorcycle into a wall doing tricks. Broken pelvis.

HAROLD
Never tried playing with a broken pelvis before.

MCCULLEN
Have a feeling it's tough.
(grins)
Get the gear on and let's go!

SERIES OF CUTS FROM GAME

Harold beats a play at first. Throws out a runner. Slides for third and gets called out.

SCOREBOARD

Final Score: Visitors 12, Walruses 1.

INT. DUGOUT - DAY

Harold and McCullen sit alone, the fans filling out.

MCCULLEN
How am I ever supposed to make the playoffs if my players keep on getting called up?

HAROLD
Gotta let them grow up some time.

MCCULLEN
True.

EXT. NEW YORK LIONS STADIUM – FIELD - DAY

John is doing some stretching near veteran players who won't give him the time of day.

In the b.g., we see Tim doing a sprint on the field. But it's not a drill -- Tim's shoes have been set on fire, a victim of the ol' hotfoot trick.

EXT. QUAKESHA STADIUM – FIELD - DAY

Harold signs through a long line of autograph seekers.

EXT. NEW YORK LIONS STADIUM – FIELD - DAY

The fans wait. They implore millionaire players to come over. Only half do.

John does warm-up tosses in the bullpen, chatting back and forth with the bullpen catcher as he does.

BULLPEN CATCHER
Your stuff looks great, John. That knuckle has some dance.

JOHN
Key is to keep the fingernails long and filed. The baseball loves it -- so do the women.

The catcher just shakes his head.

INT. QUAKESHA STADIUM – DUGOUT - DAY

Harold sits alone, sweating, breathing heavy. The wear and tear of the game is becoming evident, on his body and his spirit.

EXT. NEW YORK LIONS STADIUM – BULLPEN – DAY

Still pitch and catch between John and the BP catcher.

JOHN
When do you think Williams will get the call-up?

BULLPEN CATCHER

Still got a couple years. He's got some raw power, but no eye at the plate.

JOHN

He's walked 50 times and struck out like 10.

BULLPEN CATCHER

Kid, Dave Williams' is a freeswinging fool.

JOHN

Don't call me Kid. I meant Harold Williams. Guy's batting .370, for chrissakes.

BULLPEN CATCHER

Look kid...

John gives him a look that implies blood. The catcher backs off.

BULLPEN CATCHER

John. Williams'll never make the majors. The guy's like bad luck to bad luck. You think a team wants a guy like that? Hell, it's fine as a joke to bring fans to bush league games...

John thinks it over.

JOHN

So what are you saying? He might as well just pack it in now?

The catcher shrugs. John stirs a long beat. Then...he winds and the pitch

BOUNCES

ten feet short. The catcher can't handle it.

BULLPEN CATCHER

Keep your control there, buddy.

The next pitch is even wilder. The bullpen catcher is getting annoyed.

Then another wild pitch. This appears to be epidemic. The coaches come over.

PITCHING COACH

What's going on? This guy's supposed to pitch tomorrow.

BULLPEN CATCHER

Who can understand rookies?

INT. QUAKESHA STADIUM - TRAINING ROOM - NIGHT

Harold has both legs in ice, postgame. The grape-eating scout comes by. He sees the ice.

SCOUT

That's not a good sign.

HAROLD

Sign of age, Grapes.

The scout grins. These two definitely know each other, former teammates maybe. The scout spits out a grape seed.

SCOUT

Thanks for the tips on the prospects.

HAROLD

Yeah, I said they'd be good. Some day. You could have at least let them go to Triple-A for a month. Needed more seasoning.

SCOUT

We're in a pennant race. We need everybody.

HAROLD

Yeah, well my skip's never been to the playoffs. You're pissin' him off.

Harold sees McCullen clipping his toenails in his office. Harold winces in disgust.

HAROLD

If you can, try to leave the rest of his roster, okay? Anyone else you take probably just rides the bench with the big club anyway.

SCOUT

Just got a call. Have to take one more.

Harold leaps out of the ice.

HAROLD

Who the hell you want now?!

The scout puts his hand on Harold's shoulder. After a moment, Harold's face glows.

DARKNESS

with a light at the end of the tunnel. V.O. of phone conversation.

HAROLD (V.O.)

Carrie, can you bring the kids out to see me play?

CARRIE (V.O.)

I'm not taking them out of school just to see their father in some hick minor league town. Sorry Harold.

HAROLD (V.O.)

I got the call to the majors.

Silence on the other end.

CARRIE

...yeah, they'll be there.

The darkness is no more, and we see the dugout point of view of

EXT. NEW YORK LIONS STADIUM - DAY

The grass, the players, the perfectly green infield grass.

But before Harold can take this moment in too much, the manager comes over -- HOWARD THORN, team program says he's 72 but that may be kind. A lifer of the game and his World Series rings say he's a winner.

THORN

We need you to go work with John. He's pitching tonight.

Harold hears the roar of batting practice.

HAROLD

But shouldn't I take some swings?

THORN

That's not why you're up here. Go out to the bullpen.

Harold looks confused, but the old man has already jogged away.

EXT. BULLPEN - DAY

Harold strolls over to the bullpen, still taking it all in. He's come a long way. But the thrill is ended by the sound of baseball on shinguard. John is throwing even more wild to the bullpen catcher, who gets up upon seeing Harold. Quickly hands his equipment over.

BULLPEN CATCHER

Good -- You can get bruised for a while.

John stares at Harold from the mound.

HAROLD

(to John)

I know you don't like me exactly, but the fact is we have to work together, kid.

John just toes the rubber. The wind-up, the pitch, the knuckle dances like Baryshnikov into Harold's waiting glove. It's perfect. The bullpen catcher shakes his head.

HAROLD

Heard you were having control problems?

John winds and throws another perfect strike.

JOHN

I was. Some pitchers just feel comfortable throwing to certain catchers.

Harold smiles warmly. Starts to put it together.

HAROLD

Especially when the catcher's leading his team in hitting, huh?

John allows a small smile to cross his lips. Rears back and throws another strike.

INT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

Carrie and the kids are running frantically through the airport.

CARRIE
C' mon, guys, we're gonna miss the flight.

They knock over other children.

CARRIE
Excuse me.

Elderly people.

CARRIE
Sorry.

Heavy people.

CARRIE
Sorry, big guy.

And we hear...

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Here's the starting lineup for your New York Lions.

The Williams family jumps into the back of a

INT. CAB - NIGHT

MIKE
I want to sit next to mom.

KEVIN
No, I do.

CARRIE
That's why they invented the middle kids.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
In right field, Billy Langdon...

EXT. LIONS STADIUM - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The cab pulls up. The Williams family gets out. Carrie literally tosses money through the cabby's window.

CARRIE
Air conditioning next time.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Batting seventh, the shortstop...

EXT. LIONS STADIUM - TICKET GATE - NIGHT

The Williams family squeezes through the turnstiles.

EXT. LIONS STADIUM - STANDS - NIGHT

They find their seats, cramming in.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And batting eighth, Harold Williams.

Every knowledgeable fan looks at their scorecard and then the scoreboard in disbelief.

FAN
I thought he committed suicide. I
would've.

Carrie looks to see if the boys heard. They didn't.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

John stands behind the rubber, his first major league pitch impending.

Harold scans the crowd, awed by all of this, stopping on the seats he reserved. His sons give him the thumbs up. Carrie gives him a nod.

Harold smiles and slides on the mask. He heads to the plate for warm-up tosses.

John looks nervous, his first few pitches landing in the dirt. Manager Thorn grimaces.

THORN
Got him his private catcher. Does he
want his own buttwiiper too?

Harold throws out some positivity.

HAROLD
Kid, that's all right. The knuckle's
supposed to be a little
unpredictable. Just hit the mitt, let
'er go.
(as much to himself as to John)
Let everything go.

John nods, looks and delivers... the baseball flutters perfectly into Harold's mitt. No one's hitting that sucker.

The umpire signals for the game to begin. And the opposing batter for the Blackbirds steps to the plate. John gazes in, eyes the catcher...and...Ball one. One major league career begins and another resumes. Harold lets out a breath, so does John.

HAROLD
Keep it cool, kid.

Second pitch -- dances, dances, swing and a miss!

UMPIRE
Strike one.

John grins. Confidence grows. Next pitch...called strike two.

John just eyes the target, it's getting fun. A little kid in the stands has a "K" sign (stands for strikeout), ready to tape it to the grandstand with strike three. And the pitch...in the dirt, swing and a miss -- the batter can try for first on a wild third strike. Harold pounces on the ball, fires.

UMPIRE
Out!

And the kid joyfully tapes the "K" to the rafters.

More swings that miss. Three outs. John and Harold nod as they head back in.

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

John and Harold relax on the bench.

HAROLD
Keep that up and you'll break the
strikeout record.

JOHN
I'm just trying to keep from pissing
myself.

Harold laughs. They share a look. Harold pats John's leg with the glove.

HAROLD
You're doing great.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

And a Lions rally is starting. A base hit to right, bringing in two with the bases loaded.

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

And moving towards Harold and John is Tim.

TIM
Hey guys. All right if I sit here?

JOHN
No.

After a beat, John laughs and throws an arm around him.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

A strikeout, bringing John on deck.

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

TIM
How you feeling?

HAROLD
Why does everyone keep asking me that?

A beat.

TIM
Want to know how I'm feeling?

HAROLD
Sure.

TIM
Feeling like a man who's no longer a virgin.

Harold grins.

HAROLD
The pregnant woman?

TIM
Well, she had the kid.

SHARP CRACK of the bat.

HAROLD
Way to go, Johnny!
(to Tim)
He kinda runs like a girl, doesn't he?

Tim snickers then suddenly grows quiet. He looks around then sits just a little closer.

TIM
What was it like after the World Series?

Harold turns to him, thrown off.

HAROLD
What do you mean?

TIM
You don't have to tell me if you don't want to.

Harold gives him a long look.

HAROLD
I was always the hometown hero, ya know? I didn't realize you could go from being a hero to being a nothing so quick. I haven't even been able to watch the play since it happened...

Tim looks at Harold silently.

HAROLD
Bet you thought it was pretty funny when you were watching the game.

TIM
I was too young to stay up that late.

Another CRACK of the bat. Everyone claps except Harold and Tim.

EXT. LIONS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Batting practice before the game. Harold comes across a sportswriter, DAVID, in the stands. They shake hands.

HAROLD
Hey David.

DAVID
Been looking good, Harold.

HAROLD
Still need to take the ball the opposite way more.

DAVID
Maybe a little.

HAROLD
Hey Dave, I always wanted to thank you for something.

DAVID
Yeah? What?

HAROLD
After the World Series, you wrote a real nice column about me. You didn't cut me down. Really, you were the only sportswriter who did that for me.

DAVID
Didn't do a whole lotta good, did it?

HAROLD
Nah. Guess not.

DAVID
You ever read my column on Donnie Moore back in '86?

HAROLD
No.

DAVID
It was called "No Moore." Ripped that guy a you-know-what just because he gave up that damn home run. I said he shouldn't even be allowed to throw a baseball. Man, did I let fly on him.
(pause)
Then one day I see over the wire that he killed himself and his wife. All my colleagues wrote how sad it was, that he shouldn't have been criticized so much. The same guys who did the criticizing. I wish to God I could take back what I wrote in '86.

Harold takes this in

HAROLD
If it makes you feel better, it's never one person. It's all of them.

David nods.

DAVID

Try dragging one up the first base line. This new first baseman Vardoff never charges aggressively.

Harold gives a small smile and walks away.

EXT. LIONS STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

Harold stands in the batter's box. The catcher offers up a warm smile.

CATCHER

Second highest batting average for the week, huh?

HAROLD

Yep.

CATCHER

How high was your average the year you screwed your team out of the World Series?

The catcher sticks his glove out as far as he can and laughs.

Here comes the pitch... Harold lays down a bunt towards first. The first baseman comes in late and the catcher goes out. They both go for the ball and end up getting in each other's way. Harold runs through first with a hit. As he walks back toward the base, he gestures toward the press box. David smiles and pumps his fist.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Microphones in Harold's face, towel around his middle, just out of the shower.

REPORTER

The team's three games out of first place. Do you think the pressure will mount for you if you make the playoffs?

HAROLD

Well, there's always more pressure in the postseason.

REPORTER

I meant, because last time you were in the playoffs you...

HAROLD
LAST TIME IN THE PLAYOFFS I WHAT?

Harold gets in the reporter's face.

REPORTER
Hey, take it easy.

HAROLD
Why should I?

REPORTER
It was just a question.

HAROLD
What if I asked you how come your
breath stinks?

REPORTER
What?

HAROLD
Your breath. It stinks. How come? You
make good money, you can't buy a
toothbrush?

REPORTER
It doesn't...

HAROLD
Yeah, it does. That's why everyone
calls you Garlic behind your back,
Garlic!

REPORTER
Nobody calls me...

The reporter looks at the other writers. They just look away.
The reporter reddens, puts his hand near his face for a
breath check.

EXT. LIONS STADIUM - EXIT - NIGHT

Harold walks out and is immediately mobbed by fans. He tries
to sign all their programs, hats, etc. Hands just keep moving
towards him and he tries to keep up. Someone sticks an empty
whiskey bottle in his hand. Harold starts to sign it then
stops, realizing what it is.

He looks up. Standing in front of him is Jerry.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Jerry and Harold walk down a side street. Some fans yell encouragement at Harold. Another yells "don't stick your glove out too far!"

JERRY
Looks like you've got some fans.

HAROLD
Yeah. So which bar looks good?
There's a bunch up the street.

More fans wave at Harold. Jerry watches the admiration.

JERRY
How about a cup of coffee?

Harold looks at him with surprise.

INT. COFFEE SHOP- NIGHT

Jerry and Harold drink coffee at a corner booth.

HAROLD
I'm glad you came down.

JERRY
I see you on TV, but I just don't believe it.

HAROLD
I know. It's...hell, it's crazy.

JERRY
I quit drinking.

Harold's face registers disbelief.

JERRY
Three weeks without a drink.

HAROLD
That a record?

JERRY
I think there was a month in my first three years when I was somewhat sober.

Harold laughs.

HAROLD
So why did you quit?

Jerry doesn't say anything. Gets a little choked up.

HAROLD
Are you all right?

JERRY
Yeah, I'm good. Think you'll make the playoffs?

HAROLD
Don't know. Might.

They trade stares.

JERRY
You did something nobody thought was possible. Nobody, man... I'm proud of you, Harold.

NEWSPAPER

Headline: TWO GAMES OUT OF FIRST, THREE GAMES LEFT!

EXT. LIONS STADIUM - FIELD - SERIES OF CUTS

Hits flying everywhere for the Lions. Harold slides safe into second. A pitch... Harold catches it and raises his arm in victory.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
The Lions are one game behind the Hens with two games left to play.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Stacy comes through the gate. She hugs Harold tightly.

INT. HAROLD'S NEW YORK APARTMENT - NIGHT

Harold and Stacy sit on the couch. They're silent.

STACY
What time do your folks get home?

HAROLD
Not for a while.

Harold kisses her deeply.

STACY
You nervous about tomorrow's game?

HAROLD
No.

STACY
Harold?

HAROLD
Maybe a little. I don't know.

STACY
Yeah, you do.

HAROLD
I'm terrified.

STACY
It's a big game, but you'll be fine.

HAROLD
How do you know?

STACY
'Cause you got me.

Harold smiles. Holds her hand.

HAROLD
Still terrified.

INT. INTERNET CAFE - DAY

Harold walks up to the counter.

CLERK
Can I help you?

HAROLD
I'd like to buy 10 minutes of
Internet time.

INTERNET TERMINAL

Harold sits in front of the screen. It's on "Google.com." He taps at the computer nervously. He types in: "Harold Williams World Series Game 7." Up pops "Clip of Harold Williams' Catcher Interference."

Harold sits there and thinks. He clicks on the site. It's a freeze-frame of a Younger Harold in the catcher's position. A button says "Play."

Harold looks around. He finally clicks.

COMPUTER VIDEOTAPE

A younger Harold crouches behind the plate and the batter steps in.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Bases loaded. 0-2 on Benish.

HAROLD AT THE INTERNET TERMINAL

He sits there, eyes transfixed on the screen.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Dan Votner is one strike away from
sending this game to extras.

Harold moves the arrow to "X" to turn the screen off.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And here's the pitch...

Harold's hand is on the mouse to click it off. But it stays there.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And the batter swings and misses!
We're going to extras!
(a beat)
Wait, the umpire is signaling... IT'S
A CATCHER'S INTERFERENCE! I DON'T
BELIEVE IT! THE MUSTANGS HAVE WON THE
WORLD SERIES!!! THE MUSTANGS HAVE WON
THE WORLD SERIES!!!

Harold is fighting back tears. His face slightly shakes,

VIDEO ON COMPUTER SCREEN

The younger Harold's mask comes off. He stares at the dirt, crying.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! YOU COULD GO A
WHOLE SEASON AND NOT SEE ONE OF
THOSE. HAROLD WILLIAMS STUCK HIS
GLOVE OUT TOO FAR. THE MUSTANGS ARE
PILING ON TOP OF EACH OTHER IN
CELEBRATION! LET'S LOOK AT THE
REPLAY.

Instant replay on screen freezes on the bat just before making contact with the glove.

ANOTHER ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
It's clear from the replay. The glove got out just a little too far. It barely made contact, but...

The replay now plays in SLO-MO to show the bat hitting the glove.

ANOTHER ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Yep, there's the contact.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
No one in America feels worse right now than Harold Williams. His manager goes out to argue the call. But Williams just walks off the field hanging his head.

We see younger Harold slowly walking to the dugout alone, head bent. The manager argues with the umpire who won't even listen.

HAROLD AT THE INTERNET TERMINAL

He sits there with the sounds of the game. He clicks it off and stares straight ahead.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY

Carrie opens the door to her hotel room.

HAROLD
Hi...The boys ready for breakfast?

CARRIE
Kevin's just jumping out of the shower. And Mike's...
(Looks back)
...making a mess. Stop that, Mike.

They stand there awkwardly.

HAROLD
Uh, how's the dentist?

CARRIE
It didn't work out.

HAROLD
Oh.

CARRIE
Hey Harold?

HAROLD
Yeah?

CARRIE
I was thinking. You think maybe we
should give it another shot?

A long silence.

HAROLD
You know that waitress who works at
Ben's Diner?

CARRIE
The fat one?

HAROLD
No, not the fat one.

CARRIE
The skinny one.

HAROLD
Yeah.

Carrie regards him.

CARRIE
You and her?

Harold nods.

CARRIE
Oh.

HAROLD
I'm sorry.

CARRIE
Did you ever...with her during our
marriage.

HAROLD
No. No, I'd never do that.

CARRIE
Oh. Good.

HAROLD
You didn't with the dentist, did you?

CARRIE

No. He did my cleanings sometimes...

The boys come to the door.

KEVIN

Hey Dad.

Carrie looks at Harold then slowly turns away.

CARRIE

...have a good time.

INT. LIONS STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The Lions players dress without a sound. They exchange glances. They look stiff. Harold scans their faces and sees the fear. Finally, he kneels on the dressing bench.

HAROLD

Hey guys?

Nobody hears him, too caught up in their own thoughts.

HAROLD

HEY GUYS?!

Everyone slowly listens up.

HAROLD

I just wanted to say something.
No matter what happens, remember one thing.

All eyes are on him. Absolute silence.

HAROLD

If you play catcher, don't stick your glove out too far.

Silence... then everyone busts out laughing. Harold smiles despite himself. The players are all grins. Harold knocks fists with players and high-fives. Someone turns on a radio playing dance music. They're loose and ready now.

INT. LIONS STADIUM - TUNNEL - NIGHT

David the sportswriter is talking with another reporter. Harold walks by.

HAROLD

Any strategic tips this time?

David shrugs.

DAVID
This team's a little tougher.

Harold smiles and continues on.

DAVID
Harold?

Harold turns around.

DAVID
Go get 'em, Houseboat.

EXT. LIONS STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

The Lions take the field.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
If the Lions can win this game,
they'll pull even with one game to go
-- the closest they've been to first
place since opening week of the
season.

Harold and John warm up.

JOHN
How are my pitches?

HAROLD
You actually want my opinion on
something?

JOHN
Yeah.

HAROLD
Decent movement. But you're a little
tense.

JOHN
No shit.

EXT. FIELD - LATER NIGHT

Harold steps into the batter's box. Checks the runner on first and sees the hole between first and second. THWACK. Hits it in the hole, the runner advancing to third. Harold smiles at his kids in the stands then at Stacy. Carrie notices this.

The pitch...batter pops out shallow. A few pitches later, a batter strikes out. Then another strike out. Just like that, a promising inning is over. Harold tries to hide his anger.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

After four innings, Blackbirds 1,
Lions 0.

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

Harold gets in. Thorn is kicking at bats.

THORN

What's wrong with you guys? Can't get the run home? What the hell's your problem. Bunch a' losers!

HAROLD

Pitcher's throwing some good stuff, Thorn. Give 'em a break.

THORN

You wanna manage this team?

HAROLD

No.

THORN

Then why are you opening your mouth?

HAROLD

...sorry.

THORN

You think I've managed all these years to get second place?

Thorn shows him his hand. Two World Series rings are on it.

THORN

Two World Series wins as a player and none as a manager. You know what second place is?

HAROLD

I said I was sorry.

THORN

I asked you a question!

HAROLD

Second place is the first place loser.

THORN
So you heard that one before!

HAROLD
Yes.

THORN
Say it again.

HAROLD
No.

THORN
You want to play the rest of this
game then say it again!

Harold looks at Tim and John. Both of them are silent.

HAROLD
Second place is the first place
loser.

THORN
Thank you!

Thorn storms off to the end of the dugout and watches the
field alone.

COMPUTER VIDEOTAPE OF WORLD SERIES SEEN EARLIER

We get a closer look at the manager arguing about Harold's
infamous play. It's Thorn.

INT. LIONS STADIUM - DUGOUT - PRESENT

Harold just sits in the dugout silently.

TIM
Hey Harold?

HAROLD
Now now, kid.

Harold quietly chews his gum.

SCOREBOARD

Inning after inning goes by. Zeroes up on the board. Finally,
we're in the ninth inning.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Bottom of the ninth, Lions trail 1-0,
 trying to win to keep their playoff
 hopes alive.

First player strikes out. Harold steps in.

EXT. STANDS - NIGHT

MIKE
 Let's go, Dad! How good's this
 pitcher.

KEVIN
 ERA below two.

MIKE
 Damn it.

Carrie looks at him disapprovingly.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The pitch. Harold takes the ball the other way -- it's a fair
 ball into the corner. Harold tries for second base. The
 throw...he's safe.

Thorn makes a move. Tim is put in to pinch-run for Harold.
 Harold hits the top step of the dugout. Thorn gives him a
 look then turns away. Harold just continues on.

Another batter strikes out.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Adler steps in. Last chance for the
 Lions.

The pitch...there's a sharp base hit into center. Tim rounds
 third and is held up by the third base coach. But he decides
 to go anyway. Here comes the throw to the plate...this would
 tie the game...

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

THORN
 HE'S GONNA BEAT THE PLAY!

HAROLD
 BEAT IT, KID!

And...

UMPIRE

OUT!

Tim just looks up. He shakes his head in despair. The opposing team comes out and celebrates the win. They doggy pile on top of each other. Tim walks back to the bench. His shirt is pulled over his eyes so no one can see his face. Harold walks over. He hugs Tim, who sobs in his arms. A photographer flashes a picture. Harold waves him off.

HAROLD

Real nice. Give the kid a break, okay? It's okay, Timmy. You hear me? It's all right...

INT. CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT

Mike sits by Harold as he dresses in the somber clubhouse.

MIKE

So think you'll play for them next year or try to leverage a contract somewhere else?

HAROLD

Leverage? Nah, this is it, Mike.

MIKE

What do you mean?

HAROLD

I'm not playing anymore.

MIKE

But how come? You could play at least a few more years.

Harold sits down and looks Mike in the eye.

HAROLD

See all these guys, Mike? They work every day. Weekends, holidays. Remember when we watched the fireworks together on the 4th of July? Remember how much fun we had? I wouldn't have been around for that. None of these guys ever see their kids. That's the price they pay to play ball.

MIKE

Couldn't you just be with a team part-time? Like 50 days out of the year or something?

HAROLD

Nah. Either you're a part of the team or you're not. Even Willie Mays had to show up every day.

MIKE

Yeah, guess that's true.

HAROLD

Let me ask you something. And be honest. Would you rather have me around all the time or would you rather I kept playing?

MIKE

Would you be the way you've been or the guy who just watched TV and acted like blah?

Harold laughs.

HAROLD

Well, I might have an occasional blah day, but for the most part I'll be in pretty good spirits.

Mike thinks about it.

MIKE

Uh... I'd rather have you home.

He hugs Mike. His eyes fill with joy.

HAROLD

You don't have to get me anything for my birthday. That was it, right there!

MIKE

You're still getting me something for mine, right?

Harold grins and taps Mike's hat.

INT. HAROLD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Harold lies on his bed, watching TV. Stacy exits the bathroom, towels wrapped around her from showering.

STACY
Whatcha doing?

HAROLD
Watching the replay of our loss.

Stacy sits beside Harold on the bed.

STACY
You okay?

Harold nods.

HAROLD
Almost forgot... I got us something.

He hands her an envelope. She gives him a look and opens it up.

STACY
Two tickets to Cape Cod?!

She attacks him in kisses.

HAROLD
Woah! Woah! I'm supposed to be depressed here.

STACY
I know. Just kiss me a little in between the boo-hoos.
(kisses him)
Kiss. Boo-hoo. Kiss. Boo-hoo.

HAROLD
You're really warped.

STACY
I know.

She hugs him.

STACY
Hey, you've still got one more game though.

HAROLD
(smiles)
Walk me to the ballpark?

INT. LIONS STADIUM - TUNNEL - DAY

For the last time, Harold walks from the darkness of the stadium tunnel into the light. He takes in the field, smells the grass. Takes it all in. Tim and John wave from the outfield where they play catch. Harold turns and sees Jerry standing in the first row.

HAROLD
Hey!

Harold comes over.

HAROLD
What are you doing here?

JERRY
I kind of thought of today as Harold Williams Day. Stacy told me you were hanging it up. I didn't want to miss your last game.

HAROLD
Thanks Jerry. Really means a lot.
How's the drinking been?

Jerry opens his jacket. His flask is in a pocket.

HAROLD
Sorry to hear that.

JERRY
I'll try again next week.

Harold gives him a hug.

HAROLD
Really good to see you.

HAROLD (V.O.)
The game went on like most.

EXT. LIONS STADIUM - SERIES OF CUTS - LATER DAY

A base hit up the middle.

HAROLD (V.O.)
Of course, since it didn't matter in the standings, we killed them. Every ball we hit seemed to find a hole. Every curveball to us hung.

Tim hits a ball well out of the ballpark.

HAROLD (V.O.)

I had three hits. Would've finished third in the batting race with about a hundred million more plate appearances.

Harold whacks a ball to the gap. He rounds first, going for second...he's safe! The crowd goes nuts.

The coach signals for Tim to pinch-run Harold.

HAROLD (V.O.)

I didn't need a pinch-runner that game. But the manager called for one so I could end my career the right way.

The crowd gets to his feet. They applaud wildly. It's electric. Harold tries to leave the field, but the crowd implores him to stay. Harold tips his cap. Then he turns and nods at Tim to do the same. He does. Tim, the goat of yesterday, gets an ovation from the crowd as well. Tim is overcome by it all.

HAROLD

It's your game now, kid.

And Harold walks off into the dugout. Gets slaps on the back from his teammates. He looks at Manager Thorn. Ever so subtly, Thorn tips his cap. THE ROAR OF THE CROWD TURNS INTO...

EXT. CAPE COD - DAY

A SILENT STEADY STREAM. Harold and Stacy fish off a wooden pier. The view is quiet and beautiful. A LOUD CHOMP. Stacy eats from a bag of Cape Cod potato chips.

STACY

It's just like what I pictured.

Harold grins and puts his arm around her. A fellow fisherman comes over. He stares at Harold.

FISHERMAN

I thought it was you! You're Harold Williams, right?

Harold reluctantly nods.

FISHERMAN

I don't want to bother you. Just
wanted to say you had a heck of a
season.

The fisherman walks back to his party, excited over who he
met. Harold casts his fishing line out further and smiles.

FADE OUT.

