

HOMER
by
Jim Malone

A baseball story
about how everyone
just wants to get home safe.

Inspired by *The Odyssey*
by Homer

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TEASER

FADE IN

EXT. RESERVOIR - UPSTATE NY - DAY

An AZURE SKY fills the screen for a moment as we hear the hiss of an oxygen tank. Then we TIP BACKWARD, plunging--

EXT. UNDERWATER - SAME

--into the reservoir. As bubbles rise we hear the voice of THINA PALACE.

THINA (V.O.)

In 1941, a town in the Catskill Mountain region of upstate New York was abandoned, so the valley could be flooded to create a reservoir for New York City's growing population. Ironically, the town that was flooded, and the body of water that came to cover it, was called Neversink.

We descend with the divers toward a

CHURCH STEEPLE,

its giant bell silent and still.

Light from a HEADLAMP traces the bell's rusty edges.

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

Eighty years later, two students from Oneonta were completing their deep water certification before heading off for spring break in Aruba. Their instructor brought them on a salvage dive of the flooded town.

A SECOND and THIRD HEADLAMP join the first to cut the brackish darkness. The trio moves DOWNWARD, their headlamps revealing the rooftop of the church.

The divers turn on additional handheld lights as they continue their descent. It's like a weird kind of flight, swimming slowly down from above.

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

They found all sorts of things from the past.

As their descent continues, the foundations and stone walls of other buildings appear.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Pot bellied stoves. Hand-propelled
lawn mowers. Old iceboxes.

One of the divers comes around a building, and STOPS, staring.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
What they didn't expect to find--

A LUXURY BUS sits upright on the bottom, rusted and overgrown with underwater plant life.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--was a missing charter bus--

Two of the divers struggle with the luggage compartment underneath. Equipment bags are yanked out. They fall apart from all the tugging--

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--with a luggage area filled with
baseball equipment--

--spilling BATS, GLOVES and HELMETS to the bottom of the reservoir.

The two divers continue to plumb the depths of the luggage hold--

--while the third gives up on his attempts to open the door and swims around to the front.

THIRD DIVER'S POV: THE WINDSHIELD.

The bus driver's SKELETON with a patch over one empty eye-socket.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--and a one-eyed driver at the wheel.

ACT I

EXT. CALYPSO'S ROADSIDE FUEL'N'FLOP - NIGHT

Calypso's place is a truck stop and service station with a small tavern in front, and several dingy motel rooms in the rear.

SUPER: SIX MONTHS LATER...

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

A broad-shouldered, glassy-eyed BEARDED MAN (early 40s) gulps the last few ounces of beer from his mug, then leans over the bar to refill it himself from the tap.

He notices a young TRUCKER watching him from a few barstools away.

BEARDED MAN

(re: beer)

Want one?

TRUCKER

Free? Shit yeah.

The Trucker grabs the TV remote -- might as well make himself at home, free beer and all -- and switches to a BALL GAME.

ANNOUNCER (ON TV)

--bottom of the eighth, with two on,
two out, a slim lead in the balance--

TRUCKER

Looka that. They're winning. 'Bout
time.

The Bearded Man gives a dubious grunt.

TRUCKER (CONT'D)

What? Santos is the best reliever they
got. You don't like Santos?

Before the Bearded Man can answer, CALYPSO "CALI" JORDAN (40s) comes out of the kitchen. A beauty in her day, Cali still wields a killer smile and piercing eyes. She's sweet as can be. *Unless.*

She slides a burger-and-fries deal in front of the Trucker and snatches the remote from him. She changes the channel and drops the remote back on the bar.

CALI
 (scowling at Trucker)
 We don't like baseball.
 (she grabs a couple singles from
 the bills in front of him)
 And there ain't no 'free' here.
 (smiling at Bearded Man)
 Hey Danny, that sink in number five?

The bearded man, DANNY, nods and drains his mug, then grabs the handle of a TOOL BUCKET on the floor beside him.

As he heads out, Cali grabs another dollar from the trucker.

CALI (CONT'D)
 Tip.

INT. DELIVERY VAN - UPSTATE NY - NIGHT

Headlights pierce the otherwise dark sea of pine-lined foothills of the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York.

As we crest the next rise, the darkness is interrupted by an island of neon light, telling us we've arrived at Calypso's Fuel'n'Flop.

The DRIVER kills the engine, grabs a BOX and a LARGE MANILA ENVELOPE from the seat beside him and turns on the overhead light to double-check the address before opening his door.

EXT. PARKING LOT - SAME

We get a glimpse of the van's logo -- *Hermes' Messenger Service* -- as the driver makes his way to another neon sign that says "OFFICE."

As he gets closer, the sound of a pipe wrench dropping into a tool bucket makes him turn.

Danny is coming out of number five, locking the door behind him. He sees the packages and smiles.

DANNY
 You're working late! Is that my rebuilt?

DRIVER
 (looks at sender's address on the box)
 Box says "Carb-o-Nation."

DANNY

Oh yeah!

DRIVER

Sign right here, you can have 'em
both.

Danny signs, then takes the box and the manila envelope.

INT. TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

The Trucker is half-asleep now, head propped on his hand.

Cali puts a tray of just-cleaned glasses on the bar as Danny comes in CELEBRATING.

DANNY

HEEE-yah! My CARBURETOR'S HERE!
(looks at the manila envelope)
Hey Cali, do we know anybody in
Ithaca?

Cali's eyes flicker toward the envelope as he approaches the bar. She shrugs, lifts a plastic garbage bin from behind the bar.

CALI

Probably just junk. Throw it in here.

He rips the envelope open instead, letting some PAPERS slide out onto the bar--

CALI (CONT'D)

(aggressively)
Hey! Don't open my mail!

The trucker JERKS AWAKE at the outburst.

DANNY

(to Cali)
You just said it's junk. What the big
deal?
(glances at the papers)
Just some old newspaper articles.

He pushes them aside and starts to open the box.

She turns back to the tray of glasses, but her posture has stiffened.

The TRUCKER leans over and looks at the top clipping.

Something there rouses him.

CLOSE UP: The headline says ITHACA ROCKIES CAPTURE REGIONAL TITLE.

TRUCKER

Man, what a team that was! "*Screw-It-All-Baseball!*" Damn shame 'bout that team. I still remember this one play--

CALI

(abrupt)

Yo, Mr. Nostalgia! Closing time.

The trucker scowls back, looks at the clock.

TRUCKER

Ain't even ten yet.

CALI

My place. My hours.

TRUCKER

Yeah. Right. Great freakin' service.

DANNY

Easy, man.

(holds up the carburetor)

Ain't she a beauty? Last piece of the puzzle for my girl out back.

TRUCKER

Shit, 'easy.' Can't watch the game, try to make some friendly conversation and...

(his eyes fall on a photo in the clipping)

Hey wait a minute, dude. Holy shit. I *thought* you looked familiar...

Danny looks at the trucker, realizes what he's saying. He moves closer to see.

Cali's eyes, darting around, land on the COFFEE POT.

She grabs it and spins quickly around, hot coffee SLOSHING OUT OF THE POT--

--onto the front of both men's shirts--

TRUCKER (CONT'D)

God damn!

DANNY

Cali! What the hell?

--and all over the NEWS CLIPPINGS.

CALI

Oh shit, I'm so sorry.

She goes to hand the Trucker a bar towel and SPILLS THE REST OF THE COFFEE onto the bar as well.

CALI (CONT'D)

--Sorry, sorry, sorry--

She grabs a bunch of bar rags, throws them on top of the mess, scoops it all up and drops the coffee-stained-and-dripping pile into the trash can behind the bar.

Then she slams two shot glasses on the bar--

CALI (CONT'D)

On the house! Top shelf!

--and fills them with her best whiskey.

The two men are still wiping coffee off their arms, but both begin to chuckle.

TRUCKER

So there are free drinks!

EXT. CALYPSO'S ROADSIDE FUEL'N'FLOP - SAME

Their laughter rises and falls...and finally gives way to crickets.

FADE OUT

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cali is sound asleep.

Danny turns over. His eyes are closed, but beneath the lids they move rapidly as a RHYTHMIC SOUND begins to rise...

SOUND FX:

A CROWD. STOMPING. CLAPPING.

LET'S GO WARRIORS!

Stomp-Stomp, Clap-Clap-Clap.

LET'S GO WARRIORS!

Stomp-Stomp, Clap-Clap-Clap.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT

DREAM SEQUENCE

The crowd grows louder as the barrel of a bat knocks dirt from a pair of CLEATED FEET that begin their journey from the on-deck circle to the batter's box--

ANNOUNCER #1 (O.S.)

You're right, letting Stevens bat to keep him on the mound in case they go extra innings is the safe play. It's just sad to see the Rockies abandoning their reckless brand of screw-it-all-baseball--

ANNOUNCER #2 (O.S.)

(a la battle cry)

Screw-It-All-Baseball!

The BASE RUNNERS at first and third clap their encouragement, as the Warriors' catcher CALLS TIME to trot out to the mound.

ANNOUNCER #1 (O.S.)

--that got them here tonight. Daring decisions are what brought them to this point. Not playing it safe! This is like...surrender!

LET'S GO WARRIORS!

Stomp-Stomp, Clap-Clap-Clap.

LET'S GO WARRIORS!

Stomp-Stomp, Clap-Clap-Clap.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny rolls over, eyes still closed.

DANNY
(mumbling)
No surrender.

He awakens.

Beside him, Cali stirs.

CALI
-whudjasay?-

DANNY
Nothing. I gotta take a leak.

He gets up.

INT. TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

The TRASH CAN is pulled out.

The mess of wet towels and coffee-and-beer-stained clippings are dumped onto the bar.

Danny tries to un-crumple and flatten the clippings, but they fall apart.

The photo is unrecognizable.

His eyes fall on a corner of the coffee-stained page:

CLOSEUP: - THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2014

He scoops up the mess, tosses it back in the trash, wipes the counter.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny slides back under the covers, closes his eyes. Sighs.

Beside him, Cali opens her eyes. She bites her lip.

INT. BRUSH-BACK DINER - MORNING

The Brush-Back Diner is a greasy spoon consisting of a double-wide trailer for dining, with a built-on shed in the back for cooking.

Baseball paraphernalia covers the walls, and the menu has items like the "Double Play Omelette" and "Pick-Off Potato Skins."

The short order cook (BRIAN, 60s) trims a giant pancake into the shape of a baseball field--

BRIAN
(whispers)
Didja hear about the pirate?

--then lays a smaller, square waffle on top, positioning it like the infield diamond.

The waitress, LUNA (early 20s), a college kid with a quick smile, turns from the counter.

LUNA
(whispers back)
The pirate?

BRIAN
Shh!
(he jerks his head toward the dining area)
The bus driver.
(Luna knits her brow)
The *bus*.
(she shakes her head)
The team bus that disappeared in 2014?
The one they found last year at the bottom of the Neversink Reservoir?

Luna turns and looks at a young man (TELLY NESTOR, 18) who is sitting alone in a booth, looking out the front windows.

LUNA
(whispers to Brian)
Oh, right. The bus.

She slides an order ticket aside so she can see Brian better through the serving shelves, but he looks down, intent on his creation, so she's talking to the top of his head.

BRIAN
So...it wasn't the driver.

LUNA
Wait--what? The driver *wasn't* the driver?

Brian garnishes the center of the waffle with a pitcher's mound of whip cream--

BRIAN

The guy they found in the driver's seat wasn't the guy who usually drove the bus.

LUNA (O.S.)

Then who was it?

BRIAN

They don't know yet.

--then adds four strawberry slices as a "base" on each of the corners.

Brian puts the plate up on the serving shelf. Luna takes it--
--and brings it to Telly in the booth.

Up close, we get a better look at Telly. His slender body slumps in a weary curve. Eyes baggy from lack of sleep. But when he looks up at Luna, there's something behind those eyes: the resolve of a young man who's made a hard choice.

LUNA

Here ya go.

TELLY

(whispers)

They did forensic analysis.

LUNA

I'm sorry?

TELLY

(whispers)

On the pirate who wasn't the driver.

LUNA

Oh.

TELLY

(theatrically loud whisper)

Tell Brian he sucks at whispering.

BRIAN (O.S.)

Sorry, Tell! I just thought, you know.
Your folks and all.

TELLY

No worries, Bri. Whole damn town is
talking about it anyways.

As he digs into the masterpiece in front of him, we see
through the window a late model sedan pulling into a spot
between two old pickup trucks.

LUNA

You want a candle?

TELLY

What?

LUNA

Happy birthday by the way.

TELLY

Thanks.

(considers)

Nah. No candle.

He looks out the window, watches PHIL SHEPHERD (60s) get out
of the Mercedes. Shepherd's dressed professionally, and he's
carrying a briefcase.

Shepherd comes in, nods and smiles at Brian and Luna, and
slides into the booth across from Telly.

SHEPHERD

Happy eighteen.

TELLY

Thanks.

Shepherd opens the briefcase, takes out a sheaf of papers,
lays out several in front of Telly.

Telly clicks a pen, ready.

SHEPHERD

(pointing)

Here. And here. And here.

Telly starts signing, talking as he does.

TELLY

Did you see Aunt Penny this morning?

SHEPHERD

I did.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 (points again)
 Here too.
 (looks out the window)
 She thinks this is going to go very differently.

TELLY
 (signing)
 We always believe what we need to believe.

Telly takes out his phone, punches up a photo, and finger scrolls through so Shepherd can see--

--A SERIES OF PHOTOS--

--of DANNY at Calypso's Fuel'n'Flop, and from the angle of the photos they were obviously taken surreptitiously.

SHEPHERD
 I still can't believe you found him.

TELLY
 I didn't. That reporter did.

SHEPHERD
 (he searches Telly's face)
 You sure that you're sure about this?

TELLY
 Don't you tire of asking the same questions?

SHEPHERD
 It's the answers that are exhausting.
 (a beat)
 You know -- he might not come.

TELLY
 He'll come.
 (a beat)
 He'll come.

EXT. BRIDGE OVER THE NEVERSINK RESERVOIR - DAY

SUPER: SIX MONTHS EARLIER...

The SUNKEN BUS is being extracted by a giant cable spooling onto an enormous tow truck.

A STATE TROOPER stands beside his prowler, lights flashing, parked alongside the tow truck.

WATER POURS from the open windows as the bus breaks the surface.

A small group of ONLOOKERS point and watch, angling their phone cameras for a better shot.

A professional PHOTOGRAPHER with a zoom lens also takes aim.

ZOOM LENS POV: The DRIVER'S SEAT comes into view. It's empty.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Hey, where's the pirate we heard about?

STATE TROOPER

Divers for the county coroner removed the body this morning.

THINA PALACE, early 30s, is scribbling on a note pad a few feet from the photographer.

She's dressed professionally, so she stands out from the upstate denim-and-sweats garb of the onlookers.

THINA

(to State Trooper)

Can you give me the name of the diving instructor who was with the students when they discov--

The GROAN and CREAK of metal makes everyone wince. They turn to look just in time to see--

--the REAR AXLE of the bus snapping in half.

The bus PLUNGES BACK into the water.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER

I told them rescue divers to attach the chains to the frame! Ya try lifting a mother this size by the axle and you're just asking for trouble.

THINA

So why didn't they listen?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER

Partly 'cause they ain't got any
(MORE)

TOW TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)
sense. Mostly 'cause it's easier than
finding the right points on a frame.
And the axle will usually hold, unless
it's already been compromised.
(yells to State Trooper)
Gonna need those divers back here!

INT. MUNICIPAL GARAGE - LATER THAT DAY

The Tow Truck Driver is trying to eat a baloney sandwich.

THINA (O.S.)
Why would an axle be compromised?

Thina is in the doorway, notebook in one hand and a pen in
the other. A laptop shoulder bag hangs by her side.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
You sure ask a lot of questions.

THINA
(holds up notepad)
Reporter.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Right.

INT. MUNICIPAL GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Thina's LAPTOP SCREEN displays a photo of the underside of
the bus as it hangs from the crane.

THINA
My photographer took this just before
the axle snapped. So...were you right?
Was the axle compromised?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
(peers closely)
That's a pretty good photo.

THINA
Want me to enlarge it?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
No need. Got the real thing out back.

EXT. MUNICIPAL GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The bus is up on a lift. Police tape surrounds it.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER

The most common reason is someone already tried towing or lifting it that way. See?

(he points at the axle)

There's scoring from another chain.

Thina is eating half of the baloney sandwich.

THINA

Couldn't that be from your chain?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER

Only if I was an idiot. Those marks were made by G60 chain. G70 tops. That's enough for towing, not enough for lifting. My crane has multiple G100 lines. Enough to lift three times that bus.

THINA

So someone else was out here trying to lift this sucker out?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER

No - I think somebody lowered it in. This thing disappeared in September 2014, right? No accidents were reported that month on or around that bridge. Hell, the bridge was under construction from 2013-2015. Jersey curb end to end, both sides.

THINA

Jersey curb?

TOW TRUCK DRIVER

Those low concrete wall sections they use to direct traffic. Near as I can figure, someone had to move a few of those mothers, lower the bus in, and put them back.

THINA

What kind of equipment would that take? And who around here has it?

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING - PRESENT

A PHOTO on the bedside table shows Cali riding piggy back on Danny, laughing it up at some cheap resort in Mexico.

Outside a DIESEL ENGINE roars to life.

Danny stirs beneath the covers.

Cali comes in, wearing a reflective vest over a hooded sweatshirt. She sits on the side of the bed to lace up a well-worn pair of workbooks.

CALI

Hey. Got a broken-down semi needs
towing out on 88. I'll make breakfast
when I get back.

DANNY

Okay.

He rolls away from her, eyes still open.

He listens to her receding footsteps, the door of the semi-cab, the roar of the engine as it drops into gear and rolls away. As soon as he's sure she's gone--

INT. TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

He opens a laptop. The early morning sun hasn't hit this side of the building yet, so it's dark and quiet, except for the bubble of light created by the screen.

He hunts and pecks his way around the keyboard, face lit by the screen's bluish tint.

DANNY

(as he types)

September...twenty-ninth...twenty
...fourteen...Ithaca...Times.

He hits ENTER. The WHITE LIGHT of a news article lights up his face.

He reads.

His face changes. Confusion. Then something else. Something darker.

DANNY (CONT'D)

What the hell...

ACT II

INT. OWNER'S BOX - VOLANTES' STADIUM - PRESENT

PENELOPE "PENNY" VOLANTES, early 40s, sits at a small desk in the shadowy depths of the space, scrolling through a spreadsheet on her laptop and writing out checks.

At the opposite end of the room is a large window overlooking the stadium, but from her spot in the back of the room we can't see the field -- just a slice of the bright sky, the tip of the scoreboard looming over right-center field, and Cayuga Lake stretching northward.

Penny tears a check from the book just as Phil Shepherd comes in wearing the same clothes he was wearing with Telly at the Brush Back Diner.

PENNY

A bit early.

Shepherd nods, gestures towards the high-back swivel stools at the counter near the big window overlooking the field.

PENNY (CONT'D)

I'll join you in a minute. Just taking care of a few suppliers.

SHEPHERD

The CEO of Volantes' International handling accounts payable. Signs and wonders.

PENNY

Well, if the economy hadn't tanked with the pandemic--

SHEPHERD

And if you didn't let go of half your staff, including yours truly--

PENNY

And if the university hadn't gone remote and cost the whole town cheap labor and reliable spenders--

SHEPHERD

And if trucking hadn't slowed to a trickle last summer--

PENNY
--then we'd be fine!

They smile at what is obviously an ongoing joke between them, and it's the weary-but-warm smile of two people who've been through a lot of shit together.

She goes back to writing checks.

PENNY (CONT'D)
I thought he'd be with you.

SHEPHERD
He is. He's just sitting in the dugout for a few.

PENNY
Saying his goodbyes?

Shepherd doesn't answer. Penny doesn't notice.

PENNY (CONT'D)
Remember that first spring, after?

EXT. VOLANTES' STADIUM - HOME DUGOUT - SAME

Telly sits with his eyes closed and his head back against the concrete wall.

We continue to hear the conversation upstairs between Penny and Shepherd as we move in slowly to Telly's calm face.

PENNY (OVER)
He kept insisting we keep the grounds crew going, keep the grass cut and the infield raked. Ten years old, and he's telling me if he has to, he'll spend every dime my sister and his dad left him on grounds maintenance.

And just as we're super close to Telly's face, his eyes OPEN and we TURN SLOWLY toward the field, entering Telly's

MEMORY

where a man on a RIDING MOWER trims the outfield grass--

SHEPHERD (OVER)
And you gave in.

PENNY (OVER)
What else could I do?

SHEPHERD
You could have refused.

PENNY
His grandfather left him the stadium.

--and we continue our pan to where the grounds crew is RAKING
the infield--

SHEPHERD (OVER)
With you as custodian of the trust.
You could have told him it was crazy.

PENNY (OVER)
It was crazy.

--and then to where a crewman is CHALKING the batter's box--

SHEPHERD (OVER)
But you didn't tell him that.

PENNY (OVER)
No. No, I didn't.

--until we come full circle back to Telly, but HE'S TEN now,
and he's watching the field--

PENNY (OVER) (CONT'D)
The following year he came to the same
understanding on his own--

--and we PUSH IN SLOWLY again to ten-year-old Telly's young,
watchful eyes--

SHEPHERD (OVER)
You knew he would.

--before TURNING SLOWLY AGAIN--

PENNY (OVER)
--so he didn't push for keeping the
grounds crew on payroll, but he didn't
give up either.

--and this time it is--

TEN-YEAR-OLD TELLY

--mowing the outfield grass.

SHEPHERD (OVER)
That seems to be a family trait.
Changing your mind without looking
like you've changed your mind.

THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD TELLY

--raking the infield.

PENNY (OVER)
Six years. Every day after school from
opening day--

SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD TELLY

--chalking the lines.

PENNY (OVER) (CONT'D)
--through the summer, and into the
fall.

--and this time when we come back full circle to the dugout,
we see Telly and Penny sitting together on the bench, more
recently. Autumn leaves blow about their feet.

Penny reaches out, puts her hand on Telly's shoulder.

PENNY (OVER) (CONT'D)
--until finally, he saw on his own
what had to happen.

Telly nods.

INT. OWNER'S BOX - PRESENT

Penny lets out a deep breath, and this time we slowly TURN
FROM HER, panning past Shepherd standing next to her, then
moving on to the

STADIUM

--which is now OVERGROWN with weeds, the infield dirt packed
hard by rain, chalk lines obliterated--

--until we come full circle back to PENNY.

PENNY
(looking down at the dugout)
He's coming up.

PENNY (CONT'D)
(checks her watch)
Alex should be here any minute, too.

INT. CALI'S TAVERN - DAY

Cali comes in still wearing the reflective vest. She pulls off a pair of heavy work gloves and drops them on the bar as she moves around behind it, reaching for the coffee pot--

--and YELPS--

--as she spots Danny sitting at one of the tables with the laptop.

CALI
Jesus, Danny! I thought you were still sleeping.

DANNY
I'm up.
(he thinks for a moment)
Hey, what was the name of that resort we stayed at in Tijuana?

CALI
La Casa de Playa. What made you think of that?

She grabs a bottle of tequila and two shot glasses, and joins him at the table, putting the glasses SIDE-BY-SIDE and filling them both.

DANNY
Just trying to remember some stuff. We were there for three blissful nights, right? Isn't that what you always say?

CALI
(sing-songy)
Three blissful nights of full moons
and no empty glasses--

DANNY
--and the only appetite we worried about--

CALI
--was our hunger for each other. See?
You do remember!

She slides his shot toward him and raises hers as a toast.
He doesn't pick his up.

DANNY
I remember you telling me about it
over and over.
(a beat)
I still don't remember being there.

CALI
I know, Danny. I know. That accident
in 2014 messed up your head, baby. I
tell you things over and over so maybe
someday you can--

As she's talking, Danny clicks on a video. A WOMAN'S VOICE
starts talking. He spins the laptop around so Cali can see.

It is definitely NOT Cali talking. This woman is older,
heavier, and has a twangy southern accent.

WOMAN
(filtered)
"And Luis and I spent three nights at
the Casa de Playa in Tijuana. Three
blissful nights of full moons and no
empty glasses, and the only appetite
we worried about was our hunger for
each other."

Cali closes her eyes. Lets out a shaky breath. Then she
tosses her head back as she downs her shot.

DANNY
I found the URL for this in your
browsing history when I searched the
date from that article that was in the
package you got last night.
(he clicks on the computer again)
And I found this too.

An online version of the NEWS STORY that arrived in the
manila envelope the night before appears on the screen.

He clicks on the team photo, and ZOOMS IN on the guy in the
center.

It's Danny, younger -- and without the beard.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Who the hell is Yul Roikos?

She downs his still untouched shot of tequila too--

CALI
(a long beat)
You.

--then puts it down near the other empty shot glass on the table.

Danny/ROIKOS looks down at the shot glasses, and the space between them.

INT. OWNER'S BOX - VOLANTES' STADIUM - DAY

ALEX KOLAKEV (40s) adjusts a cufflink and restrains his about-to-boil-over anger. A vein throbs in the thick neck sticking out of his Armani suit.

ALEX
You're an idiot.

He's facing Telly, who stares out the big window to the overgrown field below.

ALEX (CONT'D)
This broken down shithole loses value every second. I should actually pull out; you're lucky I haven't already. My offer--

He gives up on Telly, turns to Penny, who looks a bit stunned herself.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Is this your idea of good investor relations? You call me here to finalize a deal we've spent months on, then you let this boy--

PENNY
(to Kolakev)
Please.

She turns to Telly.

PENNY (CONT'D)
Honey, help me understand. Everyone knows how much this place means to
(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)

you. That's why my dad left it to you. And when you begged me not to sell it before you were eighteen so you could be a full participant in this process, I made that promise even when it meant losing money on this place. But selling now means any tuition you're gonna need next year--

TELLY

I'm not going to college.

PENNY

Wha--

(she gathers herself)

Okay. Then it'll be a nest egg for when you're ready to move out, a down-payment for a house someday, or--

TELLY

I'm not selling the stadium.

ALEX

(boiling over)

What are you planning then, Mr. Whiz Kid? Do you think just because you're the silver-spoon grandson of Albert Volantes you somehow inherited some great business instinct? Is that your current delusion, you twisted little--

(to Penny)

Look, maybe you want to continue humoring this insanity, but--

TELLY

(still looking at the field)

Mr. Shepherd?

Phil Shepherd is standing quietly off to the side.

SHEPHERD

Yes sir.

TELLY

I am now the sole owner of this property, with full legal authority, correct?

SHEPHERD

(nods)

Your aunt's role as custodian of the trust established by your grandfather expired the moment you turned eighteen at 12:01AM this morning.

PENNY

(dawning, to Telly)

No. Telly. I waited to do this because I thought--

TELLY

(turning to Kolakev)

Mr. Kolakev, I've watched you for years. I've seen your displays of charm and guile as you've taken over dozens of businesses here in Ithaca. And I've watched you try to weasel your way into our family's assets--

ALEX

(apoplectic)

'Weasel?' You little shit--

TELLY

We know about the casino deal you've been hiding behind your bullshit proposal to build a nursing home on this spot. So it is with the deepest pleasure that I finally get to say this to you: *Get the hell off my property.*

He tuns back toward the window. Kolakev steps up close.

ALEX

(low)

This isn't finished.

Telly smiles, eyes still on the field.

Kolakev leaves.

Penny watches him go. Stares for a moment at the floor. Then she looks daggers at Shepherd.

PENNY

You knew this was happening.

SHEPHERD

Your nephew hired me when you dropped
my retainer last year.

PENNY

How--

(she turns to Telly)

How could you hide this from me?

TELLY

(gently)

How could you not see it coming?

Penny swallows that. Tries another tack.

PENNY

You realize taxes will need to be
paid. I've covered it until now so you
could have your inheritance, but--

Telly steps close, kisses her on the cheek.

TELLY

I'll take care of the taxes from now
on.

PENNY

How? By sitting in the dugout, pining
for the past?

TELLY

No. By putting a new team together.
It's time we had baseball in Ithaca
again.

He leaves.

Penny looks at Shepherd. Baffled. Terrified.

BLACKOUT

FADE IN

INT. ANNOUNCERS' BOOTH - TROJAN WARRIORS' STADIUM - NIGHT

SUPER: SEPTEMBER 29, 2014 - TROY, NY

A chanting, stomping, clapping crowd can be heard as CHUCK
DYKEMAN, lead announcer for ASCN (All Sports Cable Network),
adjusts his headset and smiles at the camera.

Seated beside him is another announcer, BOBBY MATHERS.

DYKEMAN

What an evening we have ahead of us,
folks. I'm Chuck Dykeman--

MATHERS

--and I'm Bobby Mathers.

EXT. TROJAN WARRIORS' STADIUM - SAME

As Dykeman and Mathers continue talking, we watch the crowd settling into their seats.

It's a minor league stadium, so the seating capacity is typically a quarter of what the big league stadiums can hold, but every seat in the house tonight looks like it's filled.

TICKET TAKERS smile in greeting at the river of people pouring in.

T-SHIRT CANNONS fling commemorative shirts into the crowd.

The SCOREBOARD displays a trivia question about the on-base percentage of one of the Warriors' star players.

DYKEMAN (OVER)

We're thrilled to bring you this live
broadcast of the defending champion
Trojan Warriors vs. the Ithaca
Rockies.

A younger-looking Penny is helping KEIRA NESTOR (30s), her very pregnant sister, ease herself into one of the box seats near their father, ALBERT VOLANTES (60s).

Volantes, a silver-haired gentleman in a sports jacket, flags down a vendor and orders a few hotdogs.

DYKEMAN (OVER) (CONT'D)

After winning the first game of the
series here in Troy, the Warriors
dropped the second game in Ithaca,
necessitating a third and final game
for the 2014 Eastern Regional
Championship of Triple-A baseball back
here in Troy.

TONY NESTOR, one of the Rockies' players, climbs on top of the dugout to rub and kiss the oversized Rockies' sweatshirt covering his wife's belly, drawing laughter and applause from

fans that see him doing it.

TONY
(yelling to the fans)
FOR LUCK!!

MATHERS (OVER)
And what a season it's been too! No surprise to have the Warriors here again, after capturing their fifth division title in six years, but to see the journey the Ithaca Rockies have taken from the bottom of their division for three years straight to their incredible first place finish this year--

The Rockies' mascot, a clown in a GIANT RACCOON suit, climbs up on the dugout and starts trying to rub and kiss Tony Nestor's belly.

The fans crack up, and then ROAR with approval as Nestor rolls onto his back, welcoming the mascot's goofiness.

From the Rockies' dugout, a younger, clean-shaven YUL ROIKOS watches the shenanigans. Everyone around him is smiling or laughing. He's deadly serious.

Until his eyes fall on PENNY.

She's smiling too at her sister and brother-in-law having fun with the mascot, until she sees YUL--

He's looking at her like a boat looks at water.

She catches herself. Gives him a small nod, and then a fist raised so slightly no one else notices. *Do this. Win.*

He nods back, grateful for the blessing.

INT. NESTOR'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

On a FLATSCREEN TV the Raccoon Mascot is still rubbing Tony Nestor's belly, then gesturing for Keira to join in. She does so, laughing, and then notices the TV CAMERA aimed at them.

She nudges Tony, who see the camera and yells something to Penny and Albert.

Everyone looks up and WAVES to the camera.

Keira holds up a HAND MADE SIGN and the TV camera obligingly zooms in to read it:

SIGN: WE LOVE YOU TELLY!!!

On the couch, YOUNG TELLY (10) shifts uncomfortably, stuck at home thanks to one arm and one leg immobilized in plaster casts.

Phil Shepherd, several years younger than when we first met him, plops down beside Telly and cracks a beer.

YOUNG TELLY

My baby brother gets to go, but I'm stuck here.

SHEPHERD

Your baby brother is still inside your momma.

YOUNG TELLY

Whatever. I still say I could have gone.

SHEPHERD

You had x-rays and an MRI this morning.

YOUNG TELLY

Could have been rescheduled.

SHEPHERD

How about this: you could have not tried to "glide" your skateboard down the railing of the stadium steps.

YOUNG TELLY

Grind, not glide.

(a beat)

And I almost made it.

SHEPHERD

True. But if we assert our right to take causal actions, we must be prepared to take responsibility for those actions.

YOUNG TELLY

You ever just speak English?

SHEPHERD
 (sips his beer, smiles)
 Only to the dull and the ignorant.

On the TV the announcers are still talking.

MATHERS (OVER)
 --it's been such an amazing Cinderella
 story that we just have to take a
 moment to talk about how the Rockies
 came to be here.

DYKEMAN (OVER)
 And any conversation on that topic is
 going to center on this man right
 here, Ulysses "Yul" Roikos--

The shot of the pre-game festivities is replaced with a
 close-up PR style shot of Roikos in his Manager's uniform.

YOUNG TELLY
 (to Shepherd)
 They're gonna do it, aren't they.

DYKEMAN (FILTERED)
 --who has certainly had his own trash-
 to-treasure journey--

PHOTO ON TV: A one-car accident involving a sports car and a
 dumpster.

SHEPHERD
 Of course they are.

DYKEMAN (FILTERED)
 --tanking his own promising career as
 a catcher with a string of drunk
 driving arrests in the late 90s--

PHOTOS ON TV: Several shots of Roikos in handcuffs.

MATHERS (FILTERED)
 --followed by a string of rehabs--

PHOTOS ON TV: Several shots of Roikos leaving different
 facilities, each time wearing dark glasses, or a turned-up
 collar, or a pulled-down cap.

DYKEMAN (FILTERED)
 --before finally being released by the
 Nebraska Cubs in 2001. How he ended up
 (MORE)

DYKEMAN (FILTERED) (CONT'D)
 getting hired by Albert Volantes,
 owner of the Ithaca Rockies, is still
 a mystery, but the short version is
 that Roikos got sober, Roikos got
 hired, and then Roikos got himself and
 this team catapulted into the national
 Triple-A spotlight...

Telly shakes his head.

YOUNG TELLY
 The guy brings a last place team to
 the regional championships, and this
 is what they bring up?

SHEPHERD
 It's showbiz, kid. Drama sells.

SOUND FX: RISING DRUMS...

EXT. TROJAN WARRIORS' STADIUM - AS BEFORE

SOUND FX: MORE DRUMS...

...and we're not talking some candy-assed snare drums coaxing
 the Red Coats to march uniformly in skirmish lines during the
 American Revolution.

We're talking about DEEP DRUMS beaten by batons and hammers.
 TOM drums. BASS drums. KETTLE drums.

The kinds of drums that will fire your heart to charge the
 formidable walls of Troy alongside Achilles and Agamemnon.

The drums start slowly and build steadily, and they're the
 only thing we hear as we watch the umpire's mouth form the
 words "PLAY BALL," leading us into a

MONTAGE

of images familiar to anyone who loves the game of baseball:

SLOW MOTION

--the end of a bat TAPPING the center of home plate--

--a cleat DIGGING IN--

--the FINGER FLASH of a catcher calling for a fastball--

--the tension-spring coiling of a FULL WINDUP--

--and as the pitch is RELEASED to an EXPLOSION OF DRUMS we leap to

HYPER SPEED

--as the bat makes CONTACT--

--and the crowd TRACKS the ball like a HYDRA WITH A THOUSAND HEADS.

--the racing FEET of an outfielder--

--an amazing CATCH--

--a canon-like THROW--

--a low-angle view of SECOND BASE with a runner barreling toward it and SLIDING IN, DIRT SPRAYING INTO OUR FACE as the DRUMS CONTINUE TO BUILD--

BLACKOUT

DRUMBEAT CONTINUES, but begins to slow and soften as we

FADE IN--

EXT. TROJAN WARRIORS' STADIUM - A BIT LATER

--on the SCOREBOARD showing the score is 6-5 in the TOP OF THE NINTH.

And the DRUMS slowly give way to the chanting, stomping, clapping crowd, growing louder--

--as the barrel of a bat knocks dirt from a pair of CLEATED FEET--

DYKEMAN (OVER)

Top of the ninth, the Trojan Warriors trying to hold a one run lead.

--before beginning their journey from the on-deck circle--

DYKEMAN (OVER) (CONT'D)

With one out the Rockies have runners at the corners and the question on everyone's mind is...wait a second... yes, he is--

--to the batter's box where we move up the lanky torso of twenty-year-old DALE STEVENS, holding his bat like a frightened grandma might wield a flyswatter.

DYKEMAN (OVER) (CONT'D)
Roikos is letting Stevens bat!

The Warriors' catcher calls TIME and trots out to the mound.

INT. ANNOUNCERS BOOTH - TROJAN WARRIORS' STADIUM - SAME

Different shots of the field are visible on several monitors:

--JIMMY MASOTTI, the Rockie's baserunner at first, shakes his head as he confers with the first base coach--

--the other baserunner, DAVE HAGGERTY, stands with one foot on third, confused, gesturing toward the plate during his conversation with the third base coach.

Mathers and Dykeman shake their heads too, and turn to each other.

MATHERS
It is the safe play. If the Rockies only score one run here, they'll need Stevens on the mound in the bottom of the ninth to hold off the heart of the Warrior's batting order to send us into extra innings.

INT. NESTOR'S LIVING ROOM - AS BEFORE

Young Telly RISES from the couch, hobbles toward the TV on one crutch.

The screen shows ROIKOS. Silent. Still. Watching.

YOUNG TELLY
What the hell's he doing?
(yelling at the TV)
Put in a pinch hitter!

Shepherd stands up too, and joins Telly in front of the screen.

SHEPHERD
He knows what he's doing.

YOUNG TELLY
How can you say that?

SHEPHERD

Because he always knows what he's doing.

YOUNG TELLY

But what if Stevens hits into a double play? Or they force Masotti at second, and hold Haggerty at third and then we're first and third with two outs?

DYKEMAN (FILTERED)

It's just sad to see Roikos taking the safe road now, and abandoning his reckless brand of screw-it-all-baseball--

MATHERS (FILTERED)

(a la battle cry)

Screw-it-all-baseball!

DYKEMAN

--that's been the lynchpin of the Warrior's success this year--

(the crowd starts to stir)

--uh oh, wait a minute. Looks like Roikos may have a mutiny on his hands.

EXT. TROJAN WARRIORS STADIUM - SAME

PRITCHARD, the Warriors' left handed pitcher, works the resin bag behind the mound as he looks at--

--Masotti at first.

Masotti is LIVID, and is YELLING toward Roikos in the Rockies' dugout.

MASOTTI

C'mon, Yul! Get somebody up there who can hit!

Roikos shakes his head, yells to the FIRST BASE COACH.

ROIKOS

Keep him close! Nothing stupid!

FIRST BASE COACH

(to Masotti)

Settle down. Just take it easy.

MASOTTI

(to the coach, re: Stevens)
He'll pop up the bunt, just like he
does in practice every week.

On the mound, Pritchard hears all this as he toes the rubber
and looks from Masotti to Roikos.

Roikos has turned his attention to the batter at the plate.

Masotti, realizing he's been dismissed, scowls and shakes his
head.

MASOTTI (CONT'D)

(loud enough for Pritchard to hear)
Screw this.

He starts taking a healthy lead off first.

FIRST BASE COACH

Masotti. Masotti.

MASOTTI

We're not going down this way.

Pritchard prepares to pitch from the stretch. From this
position, as a lefty, he is FACING first base.

PRITCHARD'S POV: Directly in his line of vision, Masotti,
arms extended like a tightrope walker, stretches his lead
just a bit more...a bit more...trying to anticipate the
moment when Pritchard will begin his windup--

--but Masotti STARTS TO GO TOO SOON and SLIPS AND FALLS a
good fifteen feet from first base--

--and the CROWD ROARS, coming to its feet--

--and Pritchard SEES THE EASY OUT and fires the ball to first
before he realizes--

--the first baseman is shaking his head NO! He catches
Pritchard's throw but instead of tagging Masotti he FIRES IT
HOME--

--but it's TOO LATE.

Pritchard SPINS to look toward home--

--just as HAGGERTY SLIDES ACROSS THE PLATE to score the
tying run!

The stadium ERUPTS as Pritchard looks around, baffled for a moment until his eyes fall on YUL ROIKOS--

Roikos is smiling. Directly at Pritchard.

PRITCHARD

Son of a--

But he's drowned out as the impossibly loud cheering gets EVEN LOUDER.

INT. ANNOUNCERS BOOTH - TROJAN WARRIORS' STADIUM - SAME

Mathers and Dykeman are both on their feet, watching the crowd below, the energy still pulsating.

MATHERS

THAT'S the Rockies we know! THAT is
Yul Roikos' brand of baseball--

DYKEMAN

It's not over yet, of course. That run
just tied it up.

MATHERS

But the balance of momentum has
shifted. We've got a tie score now,
and listen to that: Pritchard's own
home crowd is booing him!

Pritchard is stewing on the mound. The catcher comes out to him.

CATCHER

Look, take a breath, we've still got
the bottom of the ninth--

PRITCHARD

Just give me the damn ball.

INT. NESTOR'S LIVING ROOM - AS BEFORE

Shepherd is standing three feet from the TV, his eyes glowing.

On the floor, Telly lies spread eagle, giggling to himself.

YOUNG TELLY

Did you see that? Nobody saw that
coming.

On the screen, they're running a slow motion instant replay from a field-level angle near third base, so we can see

DYKEMAN (FILTERED)

The amazing thing here is the coordination and timing. Haggerty on third breaks for home the instant Masotti slips and falls. He doesn't even wait for Pritchard to throw to first. It's like he knew Masotti was going to slip and fall. Like it was choreographed!

Another angle comes on the TV, this one showing a CLOSEUP of Masotti as he takes his lead.

MATHERS (FILTERED)

That's exactly right, Chuck. Look at the closeup replay here of Masotti at first. He's appears to be angry at Roikos, yelling some final words at the dugout, taking his lead, and then....look right here, just before he slips and falls--

They FREEZE FRAME the shot the clip just as Masotti falls, then roll it back frame by frame. Something CHANGES in Masotti's face--

DYKEMAN (FILTERED)

Is that...is that a *smirk*?

MATHERS (FILTERED)

I think that's a smirk.

Telly, sitting up on the living room floor, looks at the screen.

TELLY

That's definitely a smirk.

EXT. TROJAN WARRIORS STADIUM - AS BEFORE

Pritchard, still pitching from the stretch, checks Masotti as he takes a lead off second--

MATHERS (OVER)

Baseball rallies are all about momentum, folks! And Yul Roikos and the Ithaca Rockies have been the masters of momentum this season,

(MORE)

MATHERS (OVER) (CONT'D)
 sparking late-inning rallies like this
 one--

DYKEMAN (OVER)
 I wouldn't call this a rally.
 Pritchard isn't out of the inning yet,
 but he should be able to finish off
 Stevens for the second out--

--Pritchard DEALS to home--

--and Stevens SLAPS THE BALL UP THE MIDDLE--

--and Masotti SCORES the go-ahead run--

--as the crowd goes wild and the Rockies' bench goes NUTS!

But after a moment the roar becomes muffled, and the action
 goes back to

SLOW MOTION again

as we hear the voice of THINA PALACE.

THINA (V.O.)
 Mathers was right. Baseball is
 momentum.

Tony Nestor STEPS IN to the batter's box.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 A team can be outgunned and
 outclassed--

Pritchard DEALS--

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 --it can have stats at the plate that
 are outright laughable--

--and Nestor takes him DEEP over the left center wall.

INT. NESTOR'S LIVING ROOM - AS BEFORE

Telly is SCREAMING WITH JOY as he watches his father get
 MOBBED AT HOME PLATE.

THINA (V.O.)
 --it can lose ten games in a row--

EXT. TROJAN WARRIORS' STADIUM - AS BEFORE

Pritchard DROPS THE BALL into the hand of the Warriors' manager--

THINA (V.O.)

--but give that same team momentum--

--and a reliever is waved in from the bullpen.

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

--and suddenly, your worst hitter is Ty Cobb.

ANOTHER MONTAGE

The NEW PITCHER hurls--

--and the crowd watches ANOTHER LINE DRIVE--

--and a TRIPLE deep into the right field corner--

--and a SEEING-EYE SINGLE to left--

--and another HOME RUN--

--and the ball is dropped into the manager's hand again as we

DISSOLVE TO

The SCOREBOARD. The final score is 16-6.

In the stands, Penny and Albert are HUGGING--

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

The Trojan Warriors went through three more pitchers in the top of the ninth inning--

--while Tony climbs back to the dugout roof to kiss Keira.

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

--while the Ithaca Rockies scored eleven runs on September 29, 2014.

A REPORTER sticks a microphone in Dale Stevens' champagne-drenched face.

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

Dale Stevens only had to throw five pitches in the bottom of the ninth.

(MORE)

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Two grounders. A pop up.

Roikos closes his eyes as a GIANT GATORADE COOLER is dumped on him by Masotti and Haggerty.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And just like that, the Ithaca Rockies
were the 2014 Eastern Regional champs.

The Rockies' locker room is the bright center of the universe. Corks pop. Jerseys are whirled overhead. Teammates embrace.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Roikos comes out of the bathroom, a towel wrapped around his waist while he dries his hair with another.

There's a knock on the door.

He looks through the security peephole, then opens it, standing mostly behind the door.

It's Penny.

PENNY
Hey.

ROIKOS
Hey.

PENNY
Get all the Gatorade out?

ROIKOS
Think so.

She nods. Then she steps into the room. Close.

ROIKOS (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

PENNY
What's it look like?

ROIKOS
It looks like, um, you're breaking
your own policy?

PENNY
I never break policy.

ROIKOS
You never date employees, remember? I recall you were very clear on that point when I asked you last spring if you'd like to--

She KISSES him. And it's not a long kiss or a deep kiss, but it's a kiss with months of restraint and desire behind it, and a split second of screw-it-all within it.

Roikos is stunned.

ROIKOS (CONT'D)
Okay. So I'm guessing there's a new policy?

PENNY
Nope. Same policy.

ROIKOS
But I'm--

PENNY
(kissing his neck)
Your contract expired...at the end... of the season...which was about...an hour ago.

ROIKOS
(totally enjoying)
Okay...but Phil Shepherd...already sent me...a renewal contract.

PENNY
(she stops)
Oh.
(a beat)
And you signed it?

ROIKOS
Well no, not yet, but--

She kisses his neck some more.

PENNY
(whispers)
Not yet.

He pulls back a bit. Looks at her. He gets it.

ROIKOS

Not yet.

They start kissing again - this time without restraint.

ACT III

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - LATER

Roikos and Penny come out of the elevator into a THRONG OF PLAYERS AND LOVED ONES gathered in the lobby--

--listening to Albert Volantes, who is in the middle of a SPEECH--

ALBERT

--when I saw Stevens going up to the plate, I thought Roikos had lost his mind too!

(he sees ROIKOS)

Here he is!

Everyone turns, smiles, applauds.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

(to Roikos)

We were getting worried about you.

(sees Penny)

Ah, and my missing daughter too.

Penny blushes, looks at Roikos. *Screw policy*. She links her arm in his.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Well now that we have everyone here, I've got a bit of news. Your fearless leader--

(he nods at Roikos)

--isn't just cunning on the ball field. When we negotiated his contract last winter, he insisted on a special clause that would come into force if this team won the Regional Championship. Forgive my lack of faith, boys, but I readily agreed to the clause because I thought it highly unlikely we'd take the honor this year. It is a pleasure to have been so, so wrong. Anyway, as part of that clause, we'll be returning home tonight for the heroes' welcome we all know awaits you in Ithaca.

Grumbling arises. Masotti speaks up.

MASOTTI

Mr. Volantes, I think we're all looking forward to the celebration back home, but we're also all pretty wiped out! None of us are packed, and even if we were, we'd still have a four-hour bus ride ahead of us. Now if Coach wants to haul his own ass back home tonight, and try to hog all the glory to himself--

(laughter)

--then I guess we'd have to go too so folks know who the real heroes are--

(more laughter)

--but maybe we can persuade him to waive this "clause" you speak of, and we can all spend the night here, the way we planned, then have the long drive and our big hoo-ray tomorrow? Together? After a few more drinks and some sleep?

Many ballplayers murmur their assent.

VOLANTES

Coach Roikos must have known you'd feel this way. That's why the other part of the clause requires me to spring for a private charter flight. With an open bar and VIP service for everyone, of course. Which will arrive in Ithaca forty minutes after takeoff. The flight is booked and is waiting at Albany Airport. What do you say to that?

Masotti's jaw drops along with everyone else's.

MASOTTI

What do I say to a forty minute flight and an open bar instead of a four hour bus ride? I say, "See you in ten minutes -- I gotta go pack!"

Everyone laughs and people start heading for the elevators.

Roikos and Penny make their way to Volantes.

PENNY

(to her father)

Have a safe flight. Maybe we can do a

(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)
late dinner tomorrow night when I get
back?

ROIKOS
You're not coming with us?

ALBERT
Penny won't leave until she's settled
up with the Warrior's front office
about concession sales.

Penny kisses her father on the cheek.

PENNY
(to Roikos)
It'll take a few hours tomorrow
morning. I could have insisted we do
it tonight, but I think it's a good
idea to let the losers lick their
wounds a bit. *Somebody* taught me that
good business is always personal.
(to Albert)
So - dinner tomorrow?

ALBERT
A late dinner. But not too late.
(kisses her, turns to Roikos)
Well, go get your bags! The bus'll
drop us at the airport.

He heads toward the front doors.

Roikos and Penny head back toward the elevators. Players and
families are already arriving with their suitcases.

ROIKOS
(low)
I could stay too.

PENNY
(low)
Don't be silly. It's just one night.

He nods. They both smile.

EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

The charter bus pulls up near a private jet on the
tarmac. PETE (late 60s), the old bus driver, gets out.

Roikos gets out next with Albert. They step aside to let the players get off the bus and head toward the plane.

Tony Nestor and his wife Keira are the first ones out. Tony goggles at the plane.

TONY

Woo-hoo! High society, baby!

(to Roikos)

Can the plane take all our gear too?

Roikos looks at Albert.

ALBERT

It can, but it's probably easier to just take your suitcases and leave the baseball gear on the bus.

(turning to the driver, Pete, who just opened up the luggage compartment)

Pete, you don't mind getting the team's stuff home, do you?

Pete gives a faithful thumbs up.

ROIKOS

Wait a second. This good man has hauled our asses up and down the eastern seaboard since last April. And you've been doing that how many years?

PETE

Well you know, I've lost count.

ROIKOS

You're flying tonight, brother.

ALBERT

What about the bus? All the gear?

ROIKOS

(decides)

I've got my CDL. I'll drive her home.

Several players, including Masotti and Haggerty, overhear this.

MASOTTI

Coach, you kidding?

HAGGERTY

No way you're missing this party!

ALBERT

We can't let you do that, Yul.
Everybody back home--

ROIKOS

Fellas, this is my call. I've made
decisions for us all season and it
looks like that's been working, so
shut the hell up and get on the plane.
Haggerty, I'm sure you'll still be
partying when I get there. I'll see
you guys in a bit.

(to Pete)

We good?

PETE

No argument here! Key is still in the
ignition!

Masotti, Haggerty and the others don't like it, but they
don't argue.

ALBERT

(laughing)

Okay, okay. You're a good man, Yul. No
wonder these boys love you.

They shake hands, and a few more players clap Roikos on the
back as they pass.

INT. BUS - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Through the windshield we see the plane rolling out to the
runway--

--as Roikos drops the bus into gear and heads in the opposite
direction.

EXT. INTERSTATE - NIGHT

Traffic is at a dead stop.

The BUS comes up from behind, slows to a stop.

INT. BUS - SAME

Roikos frowns, his face bathed in red from the brake lights.

ROIKO'S POV:

An EXIT SIGN about fifty yards up the road, says "ONEONTA / ROUTE 30."

EXT. INTERSTATE - SAME

The bus takes the shoulder, gets off the exit.

EXT. BACK ROAD - MINUTES LATER

Roikos navigates the bus through a winding secondary road, when suddenly--

--A DEER jumps out.

Roikos tries to avoid it, YANKING the wheel to one side--

--and CRASHING into a guardrail.

He SLAMS HIS HEAD into the windshield.

He gets out, disoriented. Blood dripping down his face from a nasty gash on his temple.

It's dark, but a purple glow can be seen ahead. He stumbles in that direction.

INT. CALI'S TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

The place seems empty, even though music on an old JUKEBOX is playing pretty loud.

Roikos comes in. He yells "Hello" a few times, but no one answers.

He goes to the bar, reaches over, wraps some ice in a bar rag, holds it to his bleeding forehead.

A somewhat younger CALI emerges from the kitchen, coming through the swinging doors backwards, her phone in her hand.

She turns, disheveled and distracted, a bleeding lip of her own beneath what looks like the beginning of a nasty black eye.

She sees Roikos--

CALI

Oh!

(sees his face)

(MORE)

CALI (CONT'D)

Oh shit!

ROIKOS

Had a bit of a wreck up the road--

He almost keels over. She catches him, helps him back onto his stool.

CALI

Okay. Look. Just, um, stay put. Here, put the TV on if you want.

(she grabs the remote)

I'm, uh...dealing with something. Can I get you a drink?

ROIKOS

Got any coffee?

CALI

This is a bar. We've got way better stuff than coffee.

ROIKOS

Yeah, I'm quite familiar with what bars have -- but coffee is fine.

On the TV, a reporter is covering a fire or something.

CALI

Let the man with the bloody face pick his own drink, that's my motto. I'll put on a fresh pot.

(she starts to do so)

So - wanna tell me who your face got into an argument with?

ROIKOS

A deershield. I mean a windshield.

CALI

Boy, you scrambled your eggs pretty good!

(she sets out a coffee cup, creamer, etc.)

I've got a tow truck that can haul your rig here, no problem. I'll take a look at 'er in the morning. Got a little motel in the back. Nobody else here tonight so you got your pick of the fanciest accommodations this side

(MORE)

CALI (CONT'D)
of the Neversink Reservoir.

ROIKOS
No, thanks, I've gotta...I've gotta...

He tries to get off the stool, but he's woozier than ever and she barely gets back around the bar before he collapses.

Cali gets him into a booth.

CALI
What you've 'gotta' do is slow down.

He notices her face.

ROIKOS
What happened to you?

CALI
Walk-in freezer door. Gotta learn to look where I'm going. Last month I was working on my old Nova and the wrench slipped and--

But Roikos isn't listening. The song on the jukebox has ended, so now he can hear--

--the REPORTER ON THE TV--

--who is standing in front of a squadron of firefighters and emergency workers battling a blaze in a stretch of forest.

REPORTER
We just learned that the private charter plane had the entire Ithaca Rockies baseball team on board, and was on its way home. We're still waiting for official word, but eyewitness accounts say the plane exploded on impact--

Roikos and Cali look at each other. His face is horror-struck.

ROIKOS
You know what? I think I will have something besides the coffee.

CALI
Sure. Yeah. I could use something too.

She reaches over the bar, grabs two shot glasses and a bottle, and pours them both a shot.

They toss them back -- and then Roikos slumps over onto the table.

Cali slides her shot glass up against his. They clink -- TOGETHER -- softly.

She leaves the TWO SHOT GLASSES together on the table, as she gets his arm around his shoulder and slides him out of the booth.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CALYPSO'S FUEL'N'FLOP - MORNING - **PRESENT**

TWO SHOT GLASSES. But these aren't touching.

Roikos and Cali are sitting across from each other. The laptop is open to the article with his photo from 2014.

Cali is talking. We don't hear her, we just see a tense desperation in her face.

What we hear is the voice of THINA PALACE.

As she speaks, Cali REACHES halfway across the table, pleading.

THINA (V.O.)
Sometimes the truth is like a well-placed bunt.

Roikos pulls back, and as he does, the--

SCREEN SPLITS

--so we've got Roikos on the LEFT SIDE--

--while on the RIGHT we see footage of a beautiful BUNT rolling up the third base line--

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
There's no play to be made.

--as the third baseman, catcher and pitcher all converge--

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The batter's already got you beat.

--but none of them scoop it up.

LEFT: Roikos, incredulous.

RIGHT: Pitcher, catcher and third baseman trying to "will" the ball over the foul line.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So you just watch it.

And the ball keeps rolling as the right side of the split screen pushes into the LEFT SIDE, displacing Roikos and creating space on the RIGHT SIDE for Cali.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And you hope it rolls foul. That maybe it's not true. But it is. So it stays in play.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. KITCHEN - CALI'S TAVERN - NIGHT (2014)

Cali, one eye already puffy and swollen, is getting knocked around by an old paunchy guy in an apron and a patch over one eye.

THINA (V.O.)
Cali told him everything. How her dad was beating the hell out of her right before Roikos came in that night.

A vicious BACKHAND splits her lip.

Her father, veins sticking out of his forehead above a beet red face, raises a metal spatula--

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Just the usual ass-kicking she'd been getting since forever.

--then DROPS TO ONE KNEE, clutching his chest.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Only this time, he went too far--

Cali WATCHES as he slumps to the floor. She reaches into her own apron and pulls out--

HER PHONE

--and dials 9-1-...

But then she stops, watching him.

He reaches for her.

She steps back, phone still in her hand, through the swinging doors into the bar area, where she finds--

--ROIKOS, sitting there, bleeding, holding a towel full of ice cubes to his head.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 She told him she believed from the
 start that fate brought them together
 that night--

And now we see the same events as earlier, but this time from Cali's perspective as Roikos almost keels over.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 --ending one chapter of their separate
 lives--

She catches him, helps him back onto his stool--

--then she LOOKS back toward the SWINGING DOORS to the kitchen.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Roikos wakes up to sunlight filtered through lacy curtains.

THINA (V.O.)
 --and offering them a fresh start.
 Together.

Roikos sits up--

--looks around, confused--

--looks at Cali, not recognizing her--

--looks in the vanity mirror, not recognizing himself--

Cali sits by his side, dabbing at the nasty gash on Roikos temple with a washcloth--

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 The next morning he didn't remember
 anything. The bus. His name. And that
 (MORE)

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
was when she realized that since
neither of them had a past they wanted
to remember--

Roikos, asleep in the bed again even though it's full
daylight now.

Cali sits nearby, watching him.

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--maybe she could invent a new one for
both of them? A nice one.

INT. BEDROOM - SHORT WHILE LATER.

Cali brings Roikos breakfast in bed. His head is bandaged
crudely.

THINA (V.O.)
So she started calling him Danny,
because that's a nice name for a nice
guy.

She pours some vodka into a glass of orange juice on the tray
next to his eggs. He drains it in a few gulps, holds it up
for another--

THINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He was troubled at first that he
couldn't remember anything before the
morning of September 30, 2014, but she
told him there wasn't much to remember
anyway--

INT. BAR - MORNING

Cali grabs the OJ bottle behind the bar. It's almost empty.
She sighs.

KITCHEN - MORNING

Cali stops in front of the door to a big WALK-IN COOLER. She
takes a deep breath, opens the door and we follow her in.

THINA (V.O.)
She told him he'd been abandoned as a
baby and raised by abusive assholes in
foster homes.

She grabs a fresh bottle of OJ from a shelf and leaves with

it--

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

She told him they'd loved each other since high school, and they both liked to drink but didn't like to socialize with anyone else.

--walking past the stiffening, bluish body of her father propped up on the floor.

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

She told him they'd been restoring an old Chevy Nova together, and they took care of each other--

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Roikos sleeps. Cali sits up in bed with her laptop open--

THINA (V.O.)

--and even went to Tijuana once.

--using photo-editing software to put their heads on the bodies of a couple at an oceanside resort.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Cali buckles her dad's body into the driver's seat--

THINA (V.O.)

She told him how the next night she gave her dad a burial that was better than the sonuvabitch deserved.

EXT. WINDING ROAD - NIGHT

Cali tows the bus to the Route 30 bridge--

THINA (V.O.)

And how the whole time she was doing it she knew it was crazy and she'd probably get caught.

--and uses the winch and cable rig on her truck to move several of the Jersey curb sections--

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

But what if she didn't? Maybe that meant the gods were okay with it all?

--and then lowers the bus over the side--

--replaces the Jersey curb--

--and then STANDS THERE near her rig, looking down the dark road, her fat lip and blossoming black eye gleaming in the moonlight, as if daring the universe to hit her again, goddammit.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CALYPSO'S FUEL'N'FLOP - MORNING - PRESENT

The shot glasses aren't touching.

Cali is numb, wooden-faced.

Roikos is stunned.

ROIKOS

What kind of psycho are you?

CALI

Call me whatever you want. But I know this: nobody fools anybody who doesn't want to be fooled.

She gets up, leaving a set of CAR KEYS on the table.

CALI (CONT'D)

You needed the lie as much as me.

EXT. WINDING ROADS

Roikos drives on county roads through pine forests.

THINA (V.O.)

And Roikos heard her and maybe he even understood. Because even though she didn't know it, she was speaking his old language. One he'd almost forgotten. The language of long-shots and comebacks and late-inning rallies.

Roikos crests the final hill and stops, overlooking the city of Ithaca.

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

A language based on the oldest truth we know.

And then he begins his drive down into the city, toward whatever future -- and whatever past -- it might hold.

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

That everyone just wants to get home
safe.

FADE OUT.