

The Edge of Greatness

FADE IN:

FINCH BASEBALL FIELD 1980: EXT DAY

The once majestic stadium is showing it's age. The outfield fence is leaning badly. Other sections are missing completely. The wooden bleachers are cracked and showing signs of rotting. Joe Stewart is busy scrounging over the old field with a metal detector. He looks around suddenly reminded of it's past glory and the golden age of baseball.

Flashback Cut: Stadium comes to life, roaring crowded stands, 1950's era game in place. A shadowy figure strikes out the final batter of the game, and can be seen walking in the direction of where Joe is standing. Stadium returns to its present state of decay as the metal detector begins buzzing. He paws at the red dirt with the prospectors shovel.

Speaking to himself:

JOE STEWART
1955 Championship, Memphis Chicks?

Joe picks away at the dirty gold ring he has found. Inscribed in ring.

JOE STEWART (CONT'D)
Jack Swift?

Joe places the ring in his pocket and walks away from the field, glancing back like he has seen a ghost.

RETIREMENT HOME 2010: INT DAY

Nina is sitting in a present day retirement home. She intently reads a newspaper when her son and grandson enter for a visit.

DAVID
Hey Mom, how's it going?

NINA
Hey sweetheart, and there's my grandson.
What you been up to?

TIM
Hey grandma.

NINA

David, do you remember your uncle Jack?

DAVID

Just vaguely, I was only five. Why?

NINA

I was just reading an article in the paper about him. Someone found his 1955 Championship ring thirty years ago.

David takes the newspaper from his mother.

DAVID

No kidding let me see that.

TIM

Who's uncle Jack?

NINA

Your Dad never told you about your great uncle Jack?

TIM

No.

NINA

Jack was an Incredible baseball pitcher. Still holds the minor league records for wins and strikeouts in a single season.

Tim leans in intently listening to the story. The scene shifts to a rural tobacco farm. A young Jack Swift can be seen in the foreground picking tobacco.

RURAL TOBACCO FARM MID 1930'S ERA: EXT DAY

Nina <VO>

Kelly Jack Swift was born in 1920. His mother and father had settled into the hills of Surry county North Carolina where they share cropped land. It was the time of the Great Depression and times were hard on everyone. The only source of income would be from toiling the soil and harvesting the crops of corn and tobacco. Jack's thin and lanky frame disguised his powerful arms that he developed from years of hand plowing the fields with a mule. He was tall and handsome, but weathered from years of plowing in the hot North Carolina sun.

(MORE)

Nina <VO> (CONT'D)

Jack had a few friends to play with. Occasionally he would ride into town to see Shorty Reinhardt's string band. But he mostly entertained himself by throwing a baseball against the side of the barn. By age twelve he could throw harder than most grown men.

The hot midday sun beats down, baking the little bit of moisture that remains out of the red clay soil. The jagged rows of tobacco are wilting from the heat. Seventeen year old Kelly Jack Swift surveys the remaining rows that still have to be primed, before his father will call it a day. The stifling heat makes the final few plants seem to waver in the air.

Pholia

Kelly!

Jack turns to see his father walking up the freshly primed row.

PHOLIA (CONT'D)

It's about time to take a lunch break.

Jack lays the pile of tobacco onto the sled. His hands and arms are covered in the thick sticky tar that oozed from the plants.

PHOLIA (CONT'D)

Here, one of the men from town wanted you to have this.

Pholia Swift reaches into his overalls and produces a slightly weathered baseball.

PHOLIA (CONT'D)

Make sure you thank Mr. Boles next time you see him.

Jack excitedly accepts the new ball. The tobacco tar on his fingers helps him get a solid grip as he plucks the ball out of the air. Jack looks at his father grinning.

Jack

I will, sir.

PHOLIA

Your Momma sure will be happy you got that ball. She was about to run out of thread trying to sew up that old one.

Walking toward the house. Jack and his father are talking.

PHOLIA (CONT'D)

After lunch, I want you to go over to the Cline's house and get the cow.

JACK

Dad, why do we have to share the cow?

PHOLIA

Times are tough. Let's just be thankful we got a cow to share.

PHOLIA SWIFT HOUSE: INT DAY

Etta Swift is hurriedly preparing lunch, when Pholia steps into the small kitchen.

ETTA SWIFT

Where's Jack?

PHOLIA

Where else.

He points outside. Glancing out the window at Kelly, who has started tossing the new ball at the side of the barn. The crack of the ball becomes louder with each successive throw.

ETTA SWIFT

I wish he wouldn't do that, it scares the chickens.

PHOLIA

It gives him a break from all the work. He throws pretty hard don't he?

Pholia continues to stare out the window at Kelly as he begins hurling the new ball with ever increasing velocity at the barn. The thunderous crack becoming even louder.

ETTA SWIFT

Well call him in, it's time to eat.

Etta is pressing her hands into the small of her back, and then wipes at a small bead of sweat, rolling down her brow. The Carolina mid day is sweltering and the tiny kitchen is even hotter. The smell of freshly baked biscuits and gravy fills the room, and hides the fragrance of nature coming from the small farms backyard.

Pholia opens the poorly hung screen door and yells.

PHOLIA

Kelly!

ETTA SWIFT

I don't know why you insist on calling him Kelly. You know he prefers Jack.

Etta finishes setting the table and begins serving lunch.

PHOLIA

The Holt family is building a new barn next week.

ETTA SWIFT

I don't like going to those things Pholia.

PHOLIA

We should ride over and help them. We hardly see any of the neighbors. And Shorty's string band will be there. I might even dance a jig with you.

Pholia starts dancing in clogging fashion. Pholia wraps his strong lean arms around Etta's tiny waist, and puckers up for a big kiss. She pushes him away quickly, and pulls her hair back behind her ear, as she sees Jack entering the kitchen door. Slightly embarrassed that Jack may have seen them flirting with each other. Jack enters the kitchen, and begins eating.

ETTA SWIFT

Jack, what do you think about helping the Holt's build a new barn next week?

Jack nods in approval as he sops up the gravy on his plate with a warm biscuit.

JACK

Yes Mama. I bet we can get a real game going after the barn is up.

Etta sits at the table and shakes her fork at Jack.

ETTA SWIFT

You just be careful you don't hit no one Kelly Jack Swift, you might kill someone out there.

Jack stands up and mimics his big windup.

JACK

I'll strike everyone of them out. POW. Nobody even gets on base.

ETTA SWIFT

You just keep on dreaming. Last time you tried pitching a real game, you were all over the place. They took you off the mound and put you in the outfield. Remember that Pholia?

PHOLIA

Them boys was pretty scared. You sent a couple whizzing by their heads. And I seem to remember them putting a whallop on that lazy curve of yours.

JACK

I'm finished. Can I throw a little before I go get the cow?

Pholia nods. Jack runs out the door excitedly. Pholia hollers at Jack as he runs outside.

PHOLIA

Not too long. You hear?

OLD TOBACCO BARN: EXT DAY

Jack is throwing at the barn. Talking to himself as he throws.

JACK

See if you can hit my curve.

Jack throws a curve, but it does not break at all.

NINA <VO>

Jack's curve was awful. It broke almost before leaving his hand, and seemed to hover over the plate. Hitters had no problem picking up on the lazy curve, and would send it flying deep into the fields.

JACK

Well I bet they can't hit my change up.

Jack holds the ball deep in his hand. He slows his delivery, and the ball hits the dirt and bounces onto the barn wall.

NINA <VO>

His change up was even worse. When Jack threw the change you could see it coming a mile away. He would slow his delivery to a crawl.

(MORE)

NINA <VO> (CONT'D)

He tried throwing the palm ball as his change up pitch. But he could never get the hang of a ball held deep in his hand. His poor control became even more evident when he tried to throw it.

Jack shakes his head in disgust while he retrieves the ball. And starts throwing the heat again.

JACK

I best just stick with the heat.

NINA <VO>

As bad as the curve and change up were, his fastball more than made up for. It was pure searing heat, with plenty of movement up and down in the strike zone.

HOLT FARM: EXT DAY

Summer Day. Jack's family arrives at the Holt house almost everyone from miles around has already arrived. Hammers ring loudly as the walls of the new barn begin taking shape.

PHOLIA

Let's get to work.

They jump off the wagon. Jack takes care of the team of horses and makes his way over to where the other men are working. The smell of apple pies, and chocolate cake fills the air, as the women began laying out the feast that would be the days reward for the hard work. There are ham biscuits, chicken, and collard greens, beans, squash, and okra. All kinds of canned goods and jelly. Mr. Mann has brought a sack of hard candy. It is a feast fit for a king.

MAN 1

Kelly you sure growed up since last I seen ya. You gonna throw a little for us later on?

The two are nailing boards. Standing up the barn wall.

JACK

Yes sir, right after I get some of Mrs. Millikan's cake.

MAN 1

Lala's about the best cook in the county, I reckon. Cliff sure is a lucky one to have to eat her cooking everyday.

Man 1 points at Cliff, busy hammering.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Remember Kelly, always marry a woman
that can cook.

Barn complete, Shorty's string band begins playing fiddle tunes like "Cripple Creek" and "Saint Annes Reel". Jack is talking with his friends as they begin tossing the ball around.

JACK

That Shorty sure can draw a crowd.

Loud pop as Jack throws to boy 1

BOY 1

Jeeeeezz Jack, you're going to rip my
hand off.

Baseball game in progress, mostly adult men and a few youngsters playing. Jack grins as he begins to hurl yet another strike. < POW > Jack is in the zone. Perfect control that day. Strike after strike. Batters frozen by his wicked fastball, or bailing out when one sails just a little too far inside. Thunderous cracks of the catchers mitt can be heard echoing off the house and newly built barn, as Jack is pouring on the heat. The younger boys have gathered to watch Jack rip off strike after strike, and three teenage girls giggle when Jack shoots a smile their way as he rings up another batter to the call of "Strike Three"

Cut to Holt Farmhouse: Ext Day Festive picnic scene with a few couples dancing to the sounds of the string band. Pholia and Etta have just finished dancing a waltz together, and head to a table for lemonade.

MR. MANN

Kelly is bringing the heat today.

The two shake hands

PHOLIA

How's things at the mill Mr. Mann?

MR. MANN

Doing the best we can. I'd sure like
Kelly to pitch a game for my team next
week. We got a double header, and a
couple of my boys got sore arms.

Jack's father looks over just in time to see him throw his first wild pitch of the day.

PHOLIA

He's got a lot of work at home to do.

MR. MANN

I'll pay him. How does three dollars sound?

Cut to Jack Pitching in foreground.

NINA <VO>

It was getting late into tobacco priming season, and there really was a lot of work to be done. Priming tobacco, stringing it, and hanging it in the barns was enough to test the strength of any man. But three dollars was a lot of money, and the Swift's needed the money badly.

PHOLIA

If Kelly has his work done, I reckon it'd be alright.

MR. MANN

Oh that's real fine then Mr. Swift. Tell Kelly to be looking out for me Friday afternoon.

WAGON RIDE: EXT LATE AFTERNOON

The Swifts are headed home from the barn raising. Etta rests her head on Pholia. Happy that she decided to go to the barn raising.

ETTA SWIFT

I haven't danced that much in years. I'm glad we went.

PHOLIA

See I told ya' we'd have a good time. Kelly did you have a good day?

Jack has a mouthful of Lala's cake. He is mumbling between bites.

JACK

Umm. Yes sir. I got to pitch the whole game. And mama I didn't hit nobody.

PHOLIA

Kelly, Mr. Mann wanted to know if you'd be willing to pitch a game for his team on Friday.

JACK

Pitch for Mr. Mann?

PHOLIA

He was pretty impressed with that fastball of yours. I told him it would be alright by me. That is if you get your three acres primed, before he picks you up.

ETTA SWIFT

Said he'd pay ya three dollars Jack. But you gotta get your work done first. Understand?

JACK

Yes ma'am.

SWIFT FARM : EXT DAY.

Cut to Swift farm: Jack sweating profusely as he works. Jack primes a row of tobacco as fast as he can. By noon he has picked the last of his rows, and is rapidly stringing and hanging tobacco in the barn, when his dad appears.

PHOLIA

Jack, why don't you knock off early today.

Jack is hurriedly hanging the tobacco. Out of breath.

JACK

Dad, I ain't never gonna let baseball get in the way of farming. I'll git my work done today.

PHOLIA

Give them a good game...will ya son.

JACK

I will. Hey Dad, I believe that's the first time you ever called me Jack.

Cut to Swift House: Jack is washing his hands, near the well.

The stubborn tobacco gum is starting to melt away with the help of a little turpentine, and some strong soap and water, when he hears a car coming up the narrow dirt road that leads to their house.

MR. MANN

Kelly you ready to go?

JACK

Yes sir.

Jack climbs into the front seat of the car.

MR. MANN

Well let's see if I got a shirt that'll fit ya.

Mr. Mann hands Jack a tattered wool jersey. Jack smiles with pride as he pulls it on.

JACK

I sure hope I can give you you're money's worth today.

Driving off.

MR. MANN

I'm sure you'll do just fine Kelly. It looks like you got a fine crop this year.

JACK

I sure hope so.

MR. MANN

I saw those young ladies checking you out at the barn raising the other day.

Bashfully.

JACK

Aw, they was just watching the game.

BASEBALL FIELD: EXT DAY

Cut to small town baseball field: Dirt parking lot. Jack and Mr. Mann are parking the car. Jack's stomach is growling. Embarrassed he clutches his stomach.

JACK

Mr. Mann I plumb worked right through lunch. You think I could get a small advance on that three dollars?

MR. MANN

How about a soda and a moon pie?
We sell them right over there.

Points to snack bar < small shack > He reaches into his jacket wallet and hands Jack some money.

MR. MANN (CONT'D)

I'll meet up with you in the dugout.

Jack heads over to the makeshift concession stand. It is really just a little shack behind the few rows of bleachers that make up the stadium. Some of Jack's friends are waiting as he walks up.

JACK

Moon Pie and soda pop please.

Jack studies the chalkboard prices.

SALESMAN

Orange or grape?

JACK

Grape.

SALESMAN

That'll be ten cents.

Jack looks confused.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

Players eat half price.

TOMMY BOLES

Hey Jack, I heard you might be pitching today.

JACK

Yeah, I think so. He might want me to go in if one of the starters gets in some trouble or something.

Tommy laughs.

TOMMY BOLES

Not what I heard. Mr. Mann has been telling everyone all week he got a new man coming out. Throws the ball harder than anyone else in the county. That's why all these people are here.

Jack looks around to see the stands quickly filling.

TOMMY BOLES (CONT'D)

We just knew it was going to be you.

Jack heads over to the players bench. The team of men is much older than Jack in age. The grape soda and moon pie seem to be churning in his stomach.

MR. MANN

Kelly...Get out there and warm up a little. Joe go and have a catch with Kelly will ya.

The two toss the ball for awhile. Jack's tosses quickly gain velocity, and his stomach is feeling better.

MR. MANN (CONT'D)

Alright men, here we go. Leading off is Cliff, Ronnie 2nd.....

Jack sits on the bench, secretly hoping that Tommy is wrong.

MR. MANN (CONT'D)

Swift batting ninth, you got the mound kid.

The sickness Jack felt just moments ago returns full force. He jogs out to the mound and finds a ball waiting there. It is well used, but still much better than the ball he has been slinging at the back of the barn.

JOE

Throw it in here Kelly.

It is Joe, the guy he has been warming up with, and he pounds his mitt as he crouches behind home plate. Joe looks like a giant, with all the equipment he has on. Plus he is about five years older than Jack.

JOE (CONT'D)

Throw it in. Show me the pepper.

Joe pounds the mitt again. Jack gathers his wits rears back and lets it fly. Right over Joe's head into the wooden backstop. Blamm...the sound reverberates forever. Joe retrieves the ball tosses it back to Jack, but says nothing.

NINA <VO>

Jack would have high tailed it home right then. If he hadn't already spent some of the money.

Joe pounds the mitt, and once again Jack cuts loose. This time missing the plate by a good foot, but at least Joe reels it in.

JOE
Couple More.

Jack fires a few strikes.

JOE (CONT'D)
There it is.

Joe tosses back Jacks 1st decent pitch.

UMP
Play Ball!

Jack throws a perfect strike for his first pitch.

UMP (CONT'D)
Steerike one.

NINA <VO>
Jack had thrown the first of many strikes that day. He did get into a little trouble, walking consecutive batters a couple of times. It was a solid effort and Jack earned his first win a 2-0 shutout.

The players walk up to congratulate Jack on his win, as he heads back to the dugout. Mr Mann is busy getting the scorecard ready for game 2 of the doubleheader. Jack sits on the bench glowing with satisfaction, as Mr. Mann calls out the roster.

MR. MANN
Kelly...you feel like pitching another one?

Jack feels good and is happy to have another go.

JACK
Sure.

Second game in progress.

NINA <VO>
Jack went on to record a second victory that night 2-1. I guess it would be safe to say Jack made quite an impression.

MR. MANN'S CAR: INT NIGHT

Mr. Mann drives Jack back to the Swift Farm. The two are talking excitedly, and laughing.

MR. MANN

So, how ya feeling Kelly? Arm a little sore?

JACK

It was a lot of pitching.

MR. MANN

Want to do it again?

JACK

Yes sir!

The two are laughing as they continue their drive. Jack is basking in the setting sun, remembering his every pitch. Mr. Mann pokes Jack in the side teasing him.

MR. MANN

I saw those girls checking you out, while you were pitching...

FADE OUT:

SWIFT FARM: EXT NIGHT

The trip back home is quickly over, and Jack runs into the house excitedly recalling every detail of the games he had pitched earlier. Jack's father goes outside to thank Mr. Mann.

PHOLIA

I hope Jack gave you a good game.

Mr. Mann is surprised to hear the name Jack.

MR. MANN

Jack?...Oh, Kelly. He did just fine. Real fine.

Mr. Mann pulls at his chin, deep in thought.

MR. MANN (CONT'D)

Got us two wins today.

Mr. Mann pulls harder at his chin. As if there is an imaginary beard.

MR. MANN (CONT'D)

Mr. Swift that boy is a natural. Throws
as hard as anyone I ever seen.

Jack's father kicks at the dirt, seeming only slightly interested. He knows where Mr. Mann is going with the conversation. Mr. Mann can see the distress in Mr. Swifts face.

MR. MANN (CONT'D)

Well, I'm sure Kelly will tell you all
about it.

He rubs his chin one final time and extends his hand.

MR. MANN (CONT'D)

Looks like your crop is doing well this
year. I guess I'll be seeing ya.

SWIFT HOUSE: INT NIGHT

Inside the house Jack is telling his mother and brother all about the games, and how he got a moon pie and grape pop for only 10 cents.

JACK

They Let the players eat half price.

The light from the kerosene lantern bounced off the walls of the dimly lit room, from the slight breeze as Mr. Swift enters the room.

PHOLIA

Looks like we might get a little rain.

Jack is happy to see his father and begins retelling the events of the day.

JACK

Dad, I stuck out eleven men. I got..

PHOLIA

Mr. Mann told me all about it.

Jack stops talking, realizing that his father does not wish to hear anymore about baseball. There is a long silence, and the only sounds are that of a distant thunderstorm.

PHOLIA (CONT'D)

You did good Jack...Real Good. I'll see
you in the morning.

ETTA SWIFT

Aren't you going to have supper?

Pholia is heading to the bedroom.

PHOLIA

Not real hungry tonight.

FEED AND SEED STORE: EXT DAY

Jack and his father go into town the next day to pick up some supplies for the farm. At the store entrance men are loading supplies into a truck.

MAN 1

How the hell are ya Pholia?

PHOLIA

Doing well Sam. How's the farm this year?

MAN 1

Looks like I'll make out okay. Kelly you sure pitched a couple of beauties last night.

JACK

Thank you, I tried my best. Got a little scared a few times. Especially when I walked two men in a row. I thought Mr. Mann might give me the hook.

MAN 1

Well you pitched yourself out of trouble. Takes a real winner to handle pressure like that.

FEED AND SEED STORE: INT DAY

Int Bags of seed and fertilizer stacked on the floor along with various hoes and shovels.

SALESMAN

Hey Pholia, Kelly.

The feed store owner pulls down a jar full of giant sized gum balls from one of the shelves behind the counter.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

How bout a gumball Kelly?

Jack looks at his father for approval prior to accepting it.

PHOLIA

So what's the news?

SALESMAN

Here I just finished reading today's paper. Not looking good. Hitler's got Europe all stirred up. I don't know how much longer we'll be able to sit this one out. So what can I get for ya today?

PHOLIA

I need a new pump handle for the well. And two bags of feed for the horse.

SALESMAN

You want that on your tab?

Pholia reaches into the top pocket of his overalls.

PHOLIA

Here, let me pay ya a few dollars on my bill.

Jack fumbles around in his pockets.

JACK

Dad, I got enough. We can pay cash if you want to.

Pholia rubs his sons head in appreciation.

PHOLIA

You might want to save that for a rainy day.

Jack looks at the store keeper as he tallies the bill, then back at his father. Jack knows that money is tight.

JACK

Well, we ain't had no rain here for quite a while.

Pholia and the store keeper laugh at the humor in the remark.

PHOLIA

You're right son. How about we pay Mr. Stevens half.

Jack places a couple of dollars on the counter along with the change he has left from the night before.

JACK

Here ya go Mr. Stevens.

SALESMAN

Is that your baseball money?

Jack nods proudly.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

You sure gave them a show last night. Pholia that boy struck out eleven hitters between the two games. You should have seen it. Had'em shaking in their shoes, he was throwing so hard.

Pholia rubs Jack's head again, and picks up a sack of feed. He is not sure exactly how he feels about Jack pitching.

PHOLIA

Well if Mr. Mann asks Jack to pitch again, I might try to make it into town to watch.

Jack and his father go outside with the supplies.

PHOLIA (CONT'D)

Jack, you're blessed with the ability to throw hard. What ever you decide to do with it is up to you. I mean that.

TOWN BASEBALL FIELD: EXT DAY

Cut to Jack pitching:

NINA <VO>

Jack continued to play ball with Mr. Mann's semi-pro team. Word quickly spread about his amazing fastball. The stands were filled on days that he was pitching.

FANS

That Kelly sure can pitch. Never seen anybody throw that hard.

Ball field ticket window:

FANS (CONT'D)

Kelly pitching today?

CASHIER

No. Not today.

Some of the fans walk away disappointedly.

NINA <VO>

People would ask if Kelly was pitching, and if the answer was no they would go home. Money was tighter than ever, and the situation in Europe was growing ever worse.

SCHOOL YARD: EXT DAY

Jack and a few of his friends are discussing baseball. A couple of girls approach, nervously discussing the threat of war.

TOMMY BOLES

The Yankees look like a sure bet.

BOY 1

I still like Brooklyn.

TOMMY BOLES

Brooklyn? They might have a chance if Kelly was pitching for 'em.

GIRL 1

Did you guys hear? We just cut off the supply of oil to Japan.

GIRL 2

You don't think we'll be going to war, do you Jack?

Jack shrugs as the group continues talking.

NINA <VO>

Tensions were high. The US wanted to remain neutral. But everyone knew that the threat of war was becoming increasingly clear. To Jack the war seemed to be a world away. Insulated by the small town he was growing up in. Jack's life consisted of farming, school and baseball. Soon he would be out of school. And he thought that he would continue farming like his father. But by early fall of 1939, Jack's fastball had caught the eye of several scouts who were always on the prowl.

TOWN BASEBALL FIELD: EXT DAY

The team is finishing up with a practice when Jack is approached by a baseball scout.

HOMER COX

Kelly Swift?

Jack turns to see a short stocky man rolling an unlit cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

JACK

Yes sir.

Jack is a bit skeptical. This is a man he has not met before, and he does not look like anyone from town.

HOMER COX

I'm Homer Cox I scout games for the Philadelphia A's.

Homer rolls the cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

HOMER COX (CONT'D)

That's a pretty strong arm you got.

He strikes a match but does not lite the cigar immediately with it. Holding it while the flame burns down the wooden stick. It is as if he does not know whether to smoke or not.

HOMER COX (CONT'D)

You ever thought about playing pro baseball?

JACK

Well... Mr. Mann pays me three dollars a game.

Laughing loudly.

HOMER COX

Well...I think we might be able to do a little better than that. So, what do you think?

JACK

I gotta help my dad with the farm.

Jack stares at the red dirt underneath his feet and scrapes little circles with the toe of his shoe.

JACK (CONT'D)

Ya see, we gotta get the tobacco out to the market in Winston. And I gotta clear the barns and stuff.

HOMER COX

Look here Kelly.

He strikes another match. This time lighting the cigar.

HOMER COX (CONT'D)

I want you to think about going down to Savannah to play ball next spring. Connie needs some new pitchers pretty bad, and I think you could be his man.

JACK

Connie?

The strange man looks Jack straight in the eyes, as if he understands Jack not understanding.

HOMER COX

Connie Mack the manager and owner of the Philadelphia A's.

He takes a long draw off the cigar.

HOMER COX (CONT'D)

Kid, Savannah is where Connie gets all his talent from. You think about it and let me know.

He hands Jack his card. Homer takes a last look at Jack as he opens his car door.

HOMER COX (CONT'D)

Let me know kid.

Jacks hands are shaking as he looks alternately at the card he was handed, and the man driving off. "Let me know kid, let me know" keeps echoing in his head.

DIRT ROAD: EXT DAY

Jack is walking home, talking to himself. Throwing rocks he picks up from the side of the road.

JACK

I never thought about playing professional baseball. I don't think Mom and Dad will think much about it. Dad don't even like me playing for Mr. Mann.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

Now what if I get down to Savannah, and they don't like me. How am I supposed to get back home. You ain't got no place to stay at in Savannah anyhow. Plus how would Mom and Dad handle the farm without me. I bet I could strike out some of them boys though.

Jack stops in his tracks and goes into his long windup. Throwing a rock hard into the field.

JACK (CONT'D)

But what if they do like me. I could make the major leagues.

SWIFT HOUSE: INT MORNING

Jack's bedroom. Jack has just fallen asleep when he is startled by the crow of a rooster. Jack lies in bed longer than usual. He can smell the aroma of bacon and eggs coming from the kitchen.

JACK

What am I supposed to do.

Etta walks past Jack's room.

ETTA SWIFT

What's that Jack?

JACK

Oh never mind.

Jack enters the kitchen, and plays with the eggs on his plate.

ETTA SWIFT

Jack, you hardly touched your food.

His mother is busy cleaning a heavy black skillet.

ETTA SWIFT (CONT'D)

Are you alright?

Etta wipes the skillet clean, and walks over to where Jack is sitting.

ETTA SWIFT (CONT'D)

You don't have any fever.

She places her hand on his forehead.

ETTA SWIFT (CONT'D)

Jack what's wrong?

Jack shakes his head, while she goes back to cleaning.

ETTA SWIFT (CONT'D)

Well your dad needs you to help him with the pump.

She points out the window to the well, where his dad is busy changing out the broken handle. Jack walks out the door to where his dad is working.

SWIFT HOUSE: EXT DAY

JACK

Dad, what if I weren't here to help you with that pump? What would you do?

PHOLIA

I expect I'd manage.

Jacks father does not even consider the question as he continues working. He pauses from his work.

PHOLIA (CONT'D)

You got something on your mind Kelly?

He returns immediately to his work.

JACK

No, just asking.

Jack picks up the handle and helps his father with mounting it. Pholia gets the handle in place, while Jack attempts to position the screws.

JACK (CONT'D)

Slide it down just a little more.

SWIFT HOUSE: INT DAY

Etta is reading over a telegram intended for Jack and starts crying. Jack and Pholia enter kitchen.

PHOLIA

What's wrong? Etta what's wrong?

Etta hands the telegram to Pholia. Pholia reads the telegram and slumps down at the kitchen table.

JACK
What's going on dad?

PHOLIA
You've been drafted.

ELKIN DOWNTOWN: EXT DAY

Jack is preparing to board a bus. Etta is in tears. She is fussing over his clothes. Smoothing his shirt out. Trying to hang onto her child.

NINA <VO>
Any thoughts Jack had of farming, or baseball would have to wait. He had been drafted into the Army. WWII was looming ever closer, and his mother and father would have to get along without him.

ETTA SWIFT
Jack you come back home. You hear me.

JACK
I will mama. I promise. I'll send some money as soon as I get paid. Where's Dad?

Etta points in the direction of the general store. Pholia is walking toward them.

JACK (CONT'D)
Dad.

PHOLIA
Jack. Be safe, do what they tell ya.

JACK
I will sir.

PHOLIA
Here, I got you something.

Pholia hands Jack a large paper bag with a new baseball glove and ball in it.

JACK
Dad, you can't afford this.

Pholia hugs Jack, and motions toward the waiting bus.

PHOLIA

You don't worry about it. Maybe you'll get some time now and then to use it. I love you boy. Now you go on and make us proud. You hear.

Jack boards the bus. He hangs out one of the windows, waving goodbye as the bus pulls away.

ARMY BASE: EXT DAY

Nina speaks in V.O as the scene shifts from the bus to the Army base. Various shots of a typical Army base day. The men are doing PT drills. The Sargent can be heard yelling commands in the background.

NINA <VO>

Jack boarded the bus headed to (fort). He was surrounded by men who came from all over the nation. There were guys like Johnny Forthman from Boston. Eric Williams who was from some small town in Arkansas. Some were farmers like himself, others were bankers, or business men, teachers and salesmen. They all had one thing in common, they were now soldiers. Jack got to play a little baseball in basic training, and the men were all immediately impressed with his blazing fastball. The tough farm boy, was made even tougher by the constant PT workouts. He was still thin though, and his Army buddies would jokingly call him String Bean. Like it or not the nickname stuck.

ARMY BASE BALL FIELD: EXT DAY

Jack is pitching. He is striking out batter after batter.

SOLDIER

Let me see what you got, String Bean.

Jack hurls another fastball.

CATCHER

String Bean's got some heat don't he.

His squad challenges other squads to a game.
They roar loudly when Jack strikes out batter after
batter, throwing nothing but heat.

SOLDIER 2

What's wrong, can't you get a hit off
the old string bean?

SOLDIER 3

Let's see what you can do smart ass.

The games end up not being a game at all, but more or
less a challenge to see who can get a hit off Jack.

SOLDIER 2

Shit the damn ball looks like a seed
when he throws it.

Captain walks up on game and speaks with Sgt. As soldiers
Howl.

CAPTAIN

What's going on here Sargent?

SARGENT

Nobody's got more than a foul ball off
Kelly for over an hour now.

CAPTAIN

I bet I can hit him.

Walks to home plate picking up a bat. The Captain is
very comfortable with a bat in his hand. There is
confidence in his manner.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

It's been awhile.

Starts swinging bat, loosens up. A few soldiers walk up
to the Sargent, questioning what is taking place.

SOLDIER

Hey Sarge, what's up?

SARGENT

Capt. used to be a pretty good
ballplayer. Word is he was about to go
to the majors before he got drafted.

SOLDIERS

No shit. Damn army. This ought to be
good.

The Army catcher takes off his mask and salutes, as the Captain approaches home plate.

ARMY CATCHER

Captain.

CAPTAIN

At ease, soldier. So this guys thinks he has a fastball does he.

Practice swings. Yells at Jack.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Let's see what you got.

The catcher gets back into his squat, shakes his head and mumbles.

ARMY CATCHER

Well he's eating me up back here.

CAPTAIN

Just like yesterday.

He gives the catcher a wink. The catcher shakes his head again. Jack rocks and fires.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Whoa, whoa, whoa he is fast.

The bat never gets into motion.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Let's see that again.

Jack goes into his long windup and again POW right down the middle. The Capt. had swung way too late to make any contact with the ball. The Capt. digs deeper into the box.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Okay, here we go. Here we go.

Squad screaming wildly.

SOLDIERS

Two dollars he doesn't get a hit. Three says he'll strike out. You're on. Hey, hey, hey I'll take that bet.

(CLANG) The next pitch sails high and tight, and hits the chain link fence with fury.

There is dead silence as the men who had been so boisterous and loud just a second before, are now focused on the Capt. as he picks himself up from the ground, and begins dusting himself off.

SOLDIER

Oh man are we going to get it now.

(WHISTLE)

The captain laughs.

CAPTAIN

Careful you'll go to the brig for hitting an officer.

JACK

I never miss my target Captain. You just happened to be standing in front of it.

The men who were stunned, all begin laughing as well.

SOLDIERS

Strike him out Kelly. Come on Cap.

Jack grins, and lets another beauty fly. There is a dull click as the captain sends a slow roller in the direction of 2nd base.

CAPTAIN

Man, that was fantastic, did you play any pro ball?

Jack shakes his head no.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

You should have.

ARMY BASE: EXT MORNING

Ext Army barracks morning 06:00 Reveille. The men are in line for the morning details.

CAPTAIN

Men pack your gear. You'll have twenty four hour liberty. Report here at 08:00 tomorrow morning. We're shipping out to New Guinea. Dismissed.

The men are breaking out of ranks. Talking among themselves.

SOLDIER
Where's New Guinea?

SOLDIER 2
Somewhere near Australia.

SARGENT
It's in the Phillipines, dumb ass. We're
going to be fighting the Japs.

TOWN BAR: INT NIGHT

Cut to a small town bar. The bar is a real dump, popular with the Army base soldiers. Jack and a few from his squadron enter the bar. Jack looks around uneasily. There are a few regular patrons. A couple of women sit at the end of the bar. They are not unattractive, but worn down over the years. A few younger women at the other end of the bar seem destined to take their place, hoping for a way out of the lonely lifestyle. Jack and his friends take a place at a small table.

SARGENT
Couple of beers... Thanks.

SOLDIER
What do you think Sarge?

SARGENT
About what.

SOLDIER
About New Guinea.

SARGENT
I might try to work on my tan.

He stops short, when a couple of ladies walk up to the table.

SARGENT (CONT'D)
Well hello ladies.

GIRL 1
Mind if we join you boys.

She eyes Jack while she speaks, giving him the come and get me kind of signal. Jack is a bit uneasy. He appears uncomfortably comfortable.

SARGENT

I'm Bill, this is Nick, and that there is Kelly. The man with the best fastball in the Army.

The Sargent tips his bottle of beer at Jack, hoping that the ladies might be impressed.

SARGENT (CONT'D)

And who might you be.

Off in the corner, previously unnoticed is a pool table with a few men having a game.

CAPTAIN

Kelly, hey Kelly.

The captain is motioning for Jack to join him.

JACK

It's the captain. Excuse me.

Jack walks over to the pool table, his new friend joins him taking his arm in her own.

JACK (CONT'D)

Sir.

CAPTAIN

Shoot any pool Kelly?

JACK

No Sir.

The Captain takes his shot. It is obvious that he is a talented pool player.

CAPTAIN

Just like pitching. Just aim and shoot.

The Captain walks around the table to line up his next shot.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

I was headed up to the majors, .367
batting average, 30 home runs.

The captain easily drops another ball into the pocket.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Spent four years in the minors. Double
A, Triple A. I never seen a fastball
like the one you got.

The Captain gently places his cue on the table, as he drops the last ball into the corner pocket.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Do yourself a favor kid. When we get back home, go find yourself a team to play for. Promise me you'll do that.

The captain tips his beer at Jack. Sets his empty beer bottle on a table, puts his cap on to leave the bar.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Enjoy your night.

The Captain tips his cap at Jack's new friend.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Miss.

JACK

Good night Sir.

NEW GUINEA AIR BASE: EXT DAY RAIN AND HOT

Jack and a few other men are piling sandbags. Guns and ammo are being distributed.

JACK

If I have to lift another sandbag, my arms are going to fall off.

RON

You don't have much arms to begin with Stringbean. You look like one of those stick figures in the cartoons.

CAPTAIN

Make sure you get those bags stacked high and tight. I don't want to see anyone get their butt shot by some Jap fighter. Hyler, get that 30 stationed over by that rise.

The captain shouts orders while the men obey his every command. Tensions mount by the second in anticipation of the battles they are destined to be a part of.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Kelly you and Peters get a string of wire down on that beach line.

JACK/RON

Yes Sir.

The men pick up a bale of barbed wire and head for the beach.

RON

You ever notice the captain always calls you by first name?

JACK

I hadn't thought about it, but I guess you're right.

RON

Most guys would never call their men by their first name.

JACK

Makes things a lot more personal. Somehow it makes me have a lot more respect for him. Or maybe he saw me running one day, and he just can't in good conscience call me Swift.

Laughing.

RON

You might be right. You run like a stick man too. So what did you do before the war Kelly?

Puts on heavy gloves.

JACK

I worked on my dad's farm. How 'bout you?

Unrolling wire.

RON

I was planning to work in one of the ports back home.

JACK

Where's home?

RON

Savannah, Georgia.

JACK

No kidding, I was about to play ball in Savannah before I was drafted.

RON

Oh yeah, what position.

JACK

Pitcher.

RON

Savannah could use a pitcher. Those boys could hit. Awful on the mound though. Maybe after we win this thing, I'll come see you play.

Jack stops unrolling the wire and stretches his back.

JACK

They might not need me anymore. Besides all I want to do right now is get back home.

Ron looks at rainy beach.

RON

I don't think I ever seen so much damn rain. Parker went out on a patrol the other night and the mud sucked his boot right off his foot.

Laughing.

JACK

Yeah I heard he went to his sargent, and said "Sarge I have a good excuse for being out of uniform" and he pointed to the mud and...

The conversation ends abruptly to the sound of Air Raid siren blasts, both run to battle stations. Glancing back to see approaching enemy aircraft.

JACK (CONT'D)

Shit.

The Captain is shouting orders. Shoving men.

CAPTAIN

Get that 50 cal manned! Get in your hole. Move, go, go, go! Giv'em hell boys.

Jack fires his machine gun, at the flock of planes that buzz quickly overhead. Bombs drop and machine gun fire fills the skies. The first of three waves of airstrikes, is quickly over. The Japanese bomb run causes significant damage, to the airfield. Medics race to help wounded. Jack reloads the .30 cal terrified to move from the sandbag fortified escarpment he has built, and terrified of not moving.

Later that night the Captain sends Jack on patrol with a small squad.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Kelly, Meyer, grab your gear.

JACK

Sir.

CAPTAIN

I know you had a tough day, but I got another patrol mission for you. We're short on personnel, so I'm sending you two out with Peters and that new medic. Jenkins, I think his name is. I need you to cover this area, about three miles out from base.

The men look over a map of the patrol area. Jack is uneasy about the mission.

JACK

Jenkins is pretty raw sir.

CAPTAIN

Just be careful. After that raid today, I'm sure you can expect the Jap ground forces will be scouting our position, and looking to advance.

SARGENT

Hell of a mission.

JACK

They always are.

JUNGLE ROAD: EXT TWILIGHT

Jack, Ron Peters, and Sgt. Bob Meyer take a jeep with the new medic on board.

RON

This your first patrol Jenkins?

MEDIC

Yes.

JACK

Relax. Just stay close and try not to make any noise once we get on foot.

MEDIC

We have to walk, sir?

RON

Not a good idea to let the enemy hear us driving right into their playground. Besides you couldn't get the jeep to where we're going.

Ron leans forward talking to the Sgt. but making sure that the new medic can hear.

RON (CONT'D)

Hey Sarge, can I ask you a question?

SARGENT

Shoot.

RON

What were you trying to do today.

SARGENT

What do you mean?

JACK

What the hell were you doing? During the air raid.

Jack gives the Sarge a wink. Pointing with his head at the new medic, who is nervously checking his gear in the back of the jeep.

SARGENT

Drawing their fire. Ain't that what your supposed to do.

JACK

I thought we only use the newer men for that.

The medic is obviously disturbed to hear this. He drops some of his supplies into the floor of the jeep.

RON

Wrong Kelly. That was last week. Remember we got that new memo. It was in the new field manual.

JACK

I don't remember seeing it. Jenkins, you got a field manual on you?

Jenkins looks terrified. The three veterans start laughing.

SARGENT

We had ya going.
End of the road.

JACK

Get your gear.

The group walks quietly into the jungle, and spot a small group of enemy foot soldiers about one hundred yards away.

SARGENT

Jenkins you and I go up the left flank.
Stay close. Don't get more than thirty yards away.

RON

You want the end run, or up the middle?

JACK

The map shows a ridge behind them.

RON

You think there could be more behind the ridge?

JACK

It's a good bet. I'll take the right and scout ahead, try to move in behind them. If there's nothing behind them I'll open up and try to flush them toward you.

MEDIC

What do we do if there's more of them?

SARGENT

If there's more of them, you can always volunteer to draw their fire. Let's go.

Jack and Ron grin, shaking their heads at each other as the Sgt. and the medic slither away to their position.

Jack moves in behind the enemy squad, and begins firing. Ron, Sarge, and Jenkins fire and the skirmish is quickly over. Running back toward the squad Jack is slashed across the abdomen by a lone Japanese fighter. Jack kills his enemy while falling to the ground.

Screaming.

RON

Kelly, Kelly oh god.
Medic! Medic, damn it. Kelly look at me, look at me.

MEDIC

Let's get him out of here.

They pick Jack up and load him into the front seat. Ron and the medic are killed by enemy fire as they drive off. Sarge climbs into driver seat and is able to drive back to the airfield with Jack holding his intestines in.

NINA <VO>

Jack would never talk much about his time in the Army. I suppose that no one wants to relive the horrible things they witnessed during the war.

CUT TO ARMY HOSPITAL:

Jack is about to be given a pain shot.

NURSE

How do you feel today corporal?

Jack looks around at the men in the ward in various stages of pain and injury.

JACK

I'm ready to get my butt out of here.

NURSE

It won't be much longer. There that didn't hurt did it.

The Army doctor walks up and looks over Jack's chart.

JACK

Doc. How much longer do I have to stay in this shithole?

Jack is uneasy as he sees another patient in far worse condition than himself rolled in beside him.

DOCTOR

It won't be long. Probably tomorrow. You okay?

JACK

How would you feel? How do you deal with this crap every day?

DOCTOR

Hang in there. You'll be home soon.

The doctor walks off. Jack kicks the foot of the bed, in disgust. He lies in misery, seeing the injured men around him.

NINA <VO>

Jack was quickly sent back to Pearl Harbor. The physical part was only half the battle. His emotional state was equally important. Some days he could feel his health improving, other days he felt like dying.

PEARL HARBOR BAR: INT

Cut to scenes of Jack in bars at Pearl. Drinking, shooting pool, always alone. He looks worn down and haggard.

JACK

Bring me another.

WAITRESS

Don't you think you had enough?

Jack grabs his jacket and cap, and leaves the bar. Angry at the waitress, the bar, the war. Everything.

NINA <VO>

Jack was drinking heavily to try to escape his pain. I can't say I blame him though. Every man has to deal with pain in his own way. Jack would spend the next couple of months in and out of the VA hospitals. Slowly, he started to heal, and he returned home to Surry County, North Carolina.

MILLIKAN FARM: EXT DAY

Cut to Millikan Farm house: Int Morning. The Millikan house is very nice for a farm house of it's time.

JACK

Mr. Millikan, I was wondering if you had any plans for the old farm house down the road there?

CLIFF

You Kelly Swift, Pholia's boy?

JACK

Yes sir.

CLIFF

How's your daddy?

JACK
He's just fine sir.

Cliff shakes a match that he used to lite his cigarette.
Takes deep inhale, shakes the match again < burns finger>

CLIFF
I saw you play ball once. Took
the kids with me.

Jack seems a bit nervous, recalling his ball playing
days.

JACK
I guess that was a long time ago.

CLIFF
I reckon it was five or six years ago. So
what were you thinking about for that
house?

JACK
Well, I thought about getting me a
garden, and maybe a few acres of corn and
tobacco.

CLIFF
That land over there hasn't been touched
in years. I could pay you a fair split
for sharecropping the land.

JACK
That sure would be nice of you Mr.
Millikan. I'm sure we can turn a good
profit out of that land. I'll be seeing
you soon.

Jack turns to where he has tied his horse. Betty Millikan
is standing close to Jack's horse. She is only
seventeen, but Jack is enthralled by her. She is rather
tall, and has the same auburn color hair as his mother.
Betty is feeding the chickens when Jack walks up.

JACK (CONT'D)
Hi there young lady, what's your name?

BETTY
Betty, what's your horse's name?

JACK
Well my name is Kelly Swift, but my
friends call me Jack. And this here is
old Bucky. You want to ride him?

BETTY

Naw.

JACK

You sure, he's real gentle.

Feisty

BETTY

I don't want to ride your stinky old horse. So you just jump on and old Bucky off. Besides I got chores. Here chick, here chick.

JACK

You ain't stinky, are ya Bucky.

Jack rides off, talking to his horse as they ride.

JACK (CONT'D)

She sure was a feisty little thing. Wasn't she Bucky. And you ain't stinky at all. Who does she think she is calling you stinky.

Jack pats Bucky on the neck.

JACK (CONT'D)

She sure was a pretty little thing though. Acting all high and mighty.

Jack leans down close to Bucky and takes a big whiff.

JACK (CONT'D)

Well, a good bath might do ya some good. I'm going to clean ya up real good when we get home.

A few days later Jack is riding up to the Millikan house. Wayne and Charles are tossing a ball in front of the house.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hey there, is your Daddy home?

WAYNE

Daddy went into town, he'll be back in about an hour or so.

JACK

I'm Jack Swift, I'm going to be farming
some of your dad's land.
I used to pitch a little.

WAYNE

I heard you went into the Army.

Jack looks skyward. He is very uncomfortable being
reminded of his Army past.

JACK

Yeah...that was a real bad time for me.
Real bad time. It weren't the Army so
much. It's the damn war that went with
it. I got busted up pretty bad.

WAYNE

You want to play some catch?

JACK

I might be a little rusty. Mind if I
just sit on the porch there and wait
a while.

Wayne shrugs, and tosses the ball back to
Charles. Mrs. Lala Millikan comes out on the porch,
startled to see Jack sitting there. Jack removes his cap
and politely introduces himself.

JACK (CONT'D)

I was just waiting here for Mr. Millikan
ma'am. I'm going to be farming at the
old house.

LALA

Well Kelly Swift, I ain't seen your
mamma or pa in awhile. They doing good?

JACK

Just fine.

Lala Millikan sits down in her rocking chair on porch,
and pulls out a tiny can of snuff.

LALA

Cliff told me, ya'll was going in
together on a few acres over there.
That land ain't been farmed in awhile.

JACK

Yes ma'am I was hoping to rent a tractor
and start tilling soon.

Lala Millikan spits into a can she has nearby.

LALA

I think Cliff might let you use his
tiller, if you don't mind doing it by
hand. He don't use it much anyhow.
Betty, did you get the water?

BETTY

No Mom, not yet. I'm just about to.

LALA

Jack you'll stay and have a little
supper with us won't you.

JACK

Now how can I turn down a meal from the
finest cook in Surry county. But, only
if you'll let me fetch that water for
you.

LALA

The bucket's in the kitchen.

Follow Jack into Millikan house: Jack enters kitchen,
sees Betty exiting kitchen screen door with water bucket.
Jack runs out the door. Takes the bucket from Betty, and
Heads toward the well.

NINA <VO>

Jack like most area residents would
never be accused of bad manners.
That's the way our people were raised.
If someone offered you something, you
gave a little something in return. It
didn't matter much what you offered, just
that you did. It was peoples way of
saying thanks. And more importantly it
was a way of keeping your pride intact.

JACK

I told your mama I'd get that for her.

BETTY

There's the pump.

Betty goes back into the house but stops once inside
looking out the screen door at Jack who is pumping the
water. Making sure not to be caught by Jack.

JACK

That girl sure is a pistol Jack Swift.

Cut to Millikan dinner table.

JACK (CONT'D)

Mrs. Millikan that was the finest meal I ever had.

CLIFF

Lala sure can cook can't she Kelly. Betty is getting to be a fine cook herself.

They step out onto the porch.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Come by tomorrow and you can borrow that tiller, if it'll help ya any.

JACK

Yes sir it sure will. I sure appreciate that. Well I best be gittin home, old Bucky is likely getting hungry hiself.

OLD MILLIKAN HOME: EXT DAY

The house is in need of repairs. Jack is seen working at the Millikan old home.

NINA <VO>

Over the next few weeks Jack would spend most of his time tilling the fields, And cleaning the old house. There was a ton of work to be done. Jack would have to do some patching to the tin roof. The barns were usable, but that was about the best that could be said of them. Jack never shied away from hard work, but he was still having some lingering issues brought on by his injuries.

Jack is hard at work repairing a heavy wooden barn door. He talks to his beagle, while he works.

JACK

God I'm wore out Duke. The work just goes on nonstop.

Jack stops hammering on the barn doors. He surveys the remaining work to be done. Scratches the dogs ear.

JACK (CONT'D)

You ain't much for conversation are ya boy? Let's call it a day and get some dinner.

JACK'S BEDROOM: INT NIGHT THUNDERSTORM

Jack is sleeping uncomfortably. Duke is lying on the floor next to the bed, and is startled by a sudden shout from Jack, caused by a nightmare.

JACK

Oh god no!

Jack wakes abruptly. He is holding his hands over his stomach. Jack peels back the sheets, and gently rubs his hand over the long scar across his abdomen.

Follow Jack into the kitchen where he pulls down a mason jar from the cabinet. He takes a big gulp. Sits down at the kitchen table and sobs.

NINA <VO>

Stress is a funny thing. Everyone deals with it in their own way. Moonshine was plentiful and cheap in the Carolina hills. It was those lonely nights that Jack would try to find relief in the way of a jug of Mountain Dew.

TOBACCO FIELD: EXT DAY

Jack is slowly planting the field by hand, and is pleasantly surprised to see Wayne and Charles coming up the row.

WAYNE

Mr. Swift. I was hoping you might be needing a little help with the planting.

JACK

I expect that'd be just fine. I can't pay ya much. Not till I get the crop to market anyhow. You boys be okay with that?

Wayne and Charles nod in agreement, and pitch in to help with the planting. By the end of the day most of the field is planted.

NINA <VO>

My brothers and Jack spent the better part of the day planting the fields. It was back breaking work, and it would be months before they would be rewarded for the effort.

Betty and Nina are walking up the field. They have a couple of bags in their arms.

NINA

We brought you some lunch.

Betty hands a bag to Wayne and Charles, while Nina hands a bag to Jack.

JACK

Is that for me young lady. Well thank you. Did you make this yourself?

NINA

My mom and Betty helped me.

JACK

Well I'll bet it's delicious.

Jack unwraps a sandwich and takes a big bite. He keeps giving Betty the eye, but is flirty with Nina.

JACK (CONT'D)

Ummm. Ummmm. Ummmm. Delicious.

BETTY

Looks like you'll be done before much longer.

Betty obviously has something to ask, but she is having trouble finding the courage.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Well we got to get back home.

Nina talking with Betty as they walk away.

NINA

Aern't you going to ask him?

BETTY

I'm not going to ask. You ask.

NINA

Mom told you.

BETTY

I'm not going to. You do it.

NINA

Mr. Swift, mom wanted to know if you'd like to have supper with us tomorrow after church?

Jack breaks into a big smile, and he is already savoring the fried chicken, that Mrs. Millikan will be serving.

JACK

I expect I can do that.

Jack crouches down thanking the young lady for the invitation, but his eyes are on Betty.

JACK (CONT'D)

Thank you for asking young lady.

COUNTRY CHURCH: INT DAY

Singing in background while Nina speaks. Jack takes his place among the congregation. A few rows in front of him is the Millikan family.

Nina <vo>

Going to church on Sundays was not exactly Jack's favorite thing to do. He was a God fearing man, but the war had hardened him to a small extent. He would grudgingly go, but most likely to catch a glimpse of my sister more so than the actual sermon. To Jack Betty was a absolute angel. He sat in church not taking in any of the words of the days fiery sermon, he had his mind on Betty. She sat quietly a few pews in front of Him looking stunning in her Sunday dress and hat. It would be fair to say that Jack had been bitten, by my sister.

MILLIKAN HOUSE: INT DAY

Cut to Millikan house. Everyone is finishing up another of Lala's fine meals.

LALA

Did you get enough to eat?

JACK

Yes ma'am. Thank you for having me over.

The men go outside while the ladies are clearing the table. Wayne and Charles play a little pepper in the front yard, leaving Cliff and Jack on the porch.

JACK (CONT'D)

I think we are going to have a fine crop this year Mr. Millikan. The boys really helped me out. They're hard workers.

Mr. Millikan is pre-occupied watching the boys playing ball.

CLIFF

Kelly, why don't you go out there and show Wayne how to throw a fastball.

JACK

Oh, I haven't thrown the ball in quite some time now.

Jack rubs the back of his neck. He seems nervous at the proposal.

JACK (CONT'D)

I guess maybe I could show him how to hold the seams.

Jack leans forward and eases himself out of the rocker, still nervous about the idea.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hey Wayne, lemme show you the grip I used for my fastball.

Jack is explaining how to hold the ball to Wayne when the ladies came out onto the porch. Lala seems particularly nervous.

LALA

Cliff, somebodys going to get hurt.

CLIFF

Aw he'll be fine, he's just showing the boys a few things.

LALA

Cliff remember Kelly got hurt in the war. And he throws the ball faster than a freight train.

The smoke from the pipe circles Cliff's head as he stands up and leans, against one of the porch columns.

Lala sits down in the rocker. Betty and her sister Nina, rock ever higher on the porch swing.

JACK

Take the ball and hold it with two of the seams like this. Not too deep in your hand. Try to keep it out of your palm. That's right, now take your stance and let me see what you got.

Jack picks up a glove and trots to an imaginary home plate.

JACK (CONT'D)

Okay, send it to me.

Wayne throws to Jack.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hey that's pretty good.
Now give Charles a try.

Charles throws the ball with much less force than his older brother, but Jack yells with exaggeration.

JACK (CONT'D)

Whewww, that one got me. My hand is stinging.

Jack slings the glove down, acting like he was stung by a bee.

JACK (CONT'D)

Come down here Wayne. Lemme help your brother a little bit.

Wayne and Jack exchange places. Charles throws the ball at Wayne with his full force, with only slightly more power.

WAYNE

He ain't got nothing.

JACK

He just didn't get into that one. Here Charles let me show you how to get a little more power.

Jack winks at Charles, as he takes the glove from him.

JACK (CONT'D)

You gotta use your back and legs to get full power.

LALA

Cliff!

Cliff is getting irritated at Lala's nagging and replies snappily.

CLIFF

They'll be fine Wayne's a big boy.

LALA

It's not Wayne I'm worried about. You know about that boys war injuries.

CLIFF

I reckon if he can plow thirty acres, he can throw a baseball!

Jack goes into his lumbering wind up and without even thinking sends a sizzling fastball at Wayne. <Pow>

WAYNE

Damn!

CLIFF

Wayne, you watch your mouth out there. I'll get the belt if I have to.

Betty stops swinging, and approaches her dad.

BETTY

He sure is fast, ain't he daddy?

Cliff nods, as he empties the pipe he has been smoking.

CLIFF

Kelly used to pitch a little semi pro baseball.

Betty hesitates, not sure whether to ask or not.

BETTY

You think it'd be alright if I ride Jacks horse?

Cliff eyes Betty suspiciously.

CLIFF

I reckon, if it's alright with Kelly.

Betty jumps off the porch and runs over to where the boys are playing.

LALA

Cliff, Kelly's a might bit older than Betty.

Cliff sits on the porch swing with Nina.

CLIFF

Yep.

Same afternoon dirt road: Ext Jack leading Betty on horse

JACK

I didn't think you wanted to ride an old stinky horse?

BETTY

A girl can change her mind can't she. Anyhow it seems like you cleaned Bucky up a bit since I last saw him. Daddy said you used to pitch professional baseball.

Jack laughs at the thought.

JACK

I pitched alright. Mr. Mann used to pay me three dollars a game to pitch for him. I did get an offer to pitch in the minors, but that was before the war.

BETTY

Jack, why don't you try pitching again.

JACK

I think the Army got the best years I had. Besides baseball don't leave much time for courting.

Jack stops walking, takes Betty's hand.

JACK (CONT'D)

So how would I ever make you my wife.

Jack climbs onto Bucky and wraps his arms around Betty's waist.

JACK (CONT'D)

Get up Bucky.

COUNTRY CHURCH: EXT DAY

Cut to wedding scene, reception party. Shorty's string band is playing. Jack and Betty are dancing, when they are approached by the preacher.

PREACHER

Kelly, there is a small problem, with the marriage license.

BETTY

What kind of problem.

PREACHER

Seems like your new husband filed for marriage in Yadkin County.

BETTY

So.

JACK

Yeah, so what's the problem.

PREACHER

Well, if you hadn't noticed we're standing in Surry County.

BETTY

So what do we do?

PREACHER

I'm authorized to perform weddings in Yadkin. But we're going to have to go across the creek to make things official.

Jack looks over at a small creek, and points.

JACK

That creek right there.

PREACHER

That creek right there.

Jack takes off his shoes and socks. He rolls up his pant legs, picks Betty up and the two wade across the creek, laughing and giggling.

BETTY

Jack what are you doing?

JACK

I ain't gonna let no creek stand in the way of the nuptials.

The preacher follows along, and makes things official. Coming back across the creek Jack slips, and the two plunge into the water.

BETTY

Jack I'm soaked. I gotta get out of this dress.

Jack and Betty are laughing.

JACK

Now you're the one in a hurry to start the nuptials.

NINA <VO>

It was a brief honeymoon. The spring planting season would soon be upon them.

MILLIKAN OLD HOME: EXT DAY

NINA <VO>

Jack spent the days tending the farm, and Betty spent the days turning the house into a home. The old home place was getting back into shape quickly.

Loud popping noise, Betty stops washing dishes, and looks out the window at Jack throwing a ball against the barn.

BETTY

Jack Swift what in the heck do you think you're doing?

JACK

I thought I'd just warm up a little. See if I got anything left in the arm.

BETTY

Well I better get a glove and catch for you, else you send one of them balls right through the side of the barn.

Jack and Betty pitching.

NINA <VO>

Now Jack still had a little zip, left in his once powerful right arm. In fact he had quite a bit of zip left. Betty did her best to try to catch for Jack, and he knocked her on her butt more than a time
(MORE)

NINA <VO> (CONT'D)

or two. Especially when he let one get away from him, as he often did.

BETTY

Jack you're gonna kill somebody if you ain't careful.

JACK

Well just as long as that somebody ain't you.

BETTY

You're gonna pitch again, aren't you?

JACK

It'd be nice to have a few extra dollars, wouldn't it? I might ride into town tomorrow. Mr. Mann might know someone that could use a pitcher for a game or two.

NINA <VO>

Partly it was because he needed the money. Mostly, though, it was because he couldn't give up the dream.

ELKIN TOWN: EXT DAY

MR. MANN

The team broke up during the war. Never got it up and running again. I sure do miss those days. You sure drew a crowd for us.

JACK

So, Mr. Mann you think I might be able to talk with that scout?

MR. MANN

Homer Cox? He picked up a few of the boys for his team down in Lexington. It's D league ball. As low as it gets for pro ball. I got his number here somewhere.

Mr. Mann looks in his wallet for the number.

MR. MANN (CONT'D)

Kelly I got that scout Homer Cox's number. Here. Give him a call.

Small town phone booth.

JACK

Mr. Cox?
Kelly Swift here.

The phone is silent.

JACK (CONT'D)

Mr. Cox I'm not sure you remember me,
we met several years ago.

Again Silence.

JACK (CONT'D)

I played for Mr. Mann's semi pro team. I
was a pitcher.

HOMER COX

Yeah Kelly Swift, I remember you.
Kelly you had the greatest arm I ever
saw. What can I do for you?

JACK

Well sir I was hoping you might still be
looking for a pitcher.

HOMER COX

That was a while back Kelly. The
leagues are loaded with top young
talent. How old are ya Kelly?

JACK

Twenty four.

HOMER COX

Twenty four huh? You know Kelly, I got a
team down in Lexington that might be
willing to take a look at you. One of the
boys down there is moving up to Savannah
next week. I tell you what, if you can
come down to Lexington on the sixth of
next month, I can set you up to practice
with the team. Maybe throw a little in
batting practice.

JACK

I'll see you on the sixth.

LEXINGTON BALL PARK: EXT DAY

Jack strides onto the field.

NINA <VO>

Jack lied about his age. There wasn't a Scout in the state that would give a twenty six year old pitcher a chance. At least not in D league ball.

JACK

Where can I find Mr. Cox?

LOU

Right behind home plate.

Jack looks at the catcher, puzzled.

JACK

I thought Mr. Cox was a scout?

LOU

He is, and the manager, and still a pretty darn good player. He's got a batting average well over three hundred.

Mr. Cox approaching.

HOMER COX

Take over for me here will ya Roddy?
I see you've met Lou.

LOU

Lou Limmer nice to meet you.

Lou runs to 1st base, Mr. Cox put his hand on Jack's shoulder as they walk into the dugout.

HOMER COX

So Kelly, you want to try pitching again. I never heard from you after we met last. What happened?

JACK

Got Drafted.

Jack realizes his mistake giving away his age by the remark.

JACK (CONT'D)

Mr. Cox I can still throw. Just give me a chance.

HOMER COX

Kelly look most of these boys are in their early twenties. The few older players we got are guys that moved up the ladder, and now heading back down. These

(MORE)

HOMER COX (CONT'D)

old boys still fill the seats though, myself included. We walk out on the field, wave our caps at the crowd. Fathers tell their children about how this guy, or that guy played in the big leagues.

JACK

I see, thank you for your time Mr. Cox.

Jack disappointed walking off.

HOMER COX

Kelly, you came here for a reason didn't ya? Well let's get out there and show 'em what us old boys got left. Hell, I don't give a damn if you're fifteen or fifty as long as you can throw.

Mr.Cox grabs his mask and walks with Jack out to the bullpen. Jack tosses the ball gently for a while, then motions for Mr. Cox to get into the catchers squat. Jack takes a deep breath, as he begins his windup.

JACK

Okay here we go Jack.

<POP>

HOMER COX

Not bad Kelly, not bad at all.

NINA <VO>

After a few more bullets, Mr. Cox held down two fingers asking for a curve. Jack had never mastered the pitch. His curve ball broke early, flattened out and seemed to almost hover over the plate.

HOMER COX

Don't worry Kelly we'll work on it.

Jack pounds the ball into his mitt. Suddenly Mr. Cox's words dawn on Jack.

JACK

Mr. Cox you said we'd work on it.

HOMER COX

I'm not going to let my best fire baller get away from me again, am I? WE can talk about your contract over dinner.

JACK
I, I don't know what to say.

HOMER COX
Go get on the mound already.

Jack is throwing for batting practice during VO.

NINA <VO>
Jack pitched beautifully that afternoon,
only giving up one would be hit. A short
Fly ball that landed gently over the
first baseman.

CATCHER
You bring the heat, out there.
Ball was damn near invisible.

JACK
Thanks, it's been awhile since I pitched
any. I can't wait to tell my wife.

DINER: INT NIGHT

Jack deposits money into phone.

JACK
Operator I'd like to call Elkin N.C
please. Clifford Millikan. Yes.
Hello Mr. Millikan, yeah it's Jack. Yes,
tell Betty I'll be home tomorrow night.
I've got some great news for her. I'm
going to be playing ball for Lexington.
Yes, yes, tell her I love her. Thanks.

LEXINGTON BASEBALL FIELD: EXT DAY

Cut to Jack playing baseball while Nina speaks. Jack is
coming off the mound after a 0-2 loss.

NINA <VO>
Jack went seven and nine with a three
point five E R A that year. In most of
the losses Jack surrendered only a few
runs. But the team lacked the ability to
score runs consistently. Lexington was
having difficulty drawing fans. Jack was
frustrated.

Baseball field in dugout.

JACK

Mr. Cox. Could I talk with you for just a minute?

HOMER COX

Sure, what's on your mind Kelly.

JACK

Mr. Cox I don't think I'll be playing ball next year.

HOMER COX

You sure about that? You had a pretty good year.

JACK

Well thank you, but I think I'd be better off at home tending the farm full time. I spent most of my baseball money on extra farm help, and with the travel and stuff. It's just a lot going on. Plus I got a baby on the way.

HOMER COX

Do you love it.

JACK

Farming?

HOMER COX

No, baseball. Do you love it.

JACK

I guess so. Not sure I understand.

HOMER COX

Kelly, I look at you out on that mound, and I see it in your eyes. You love it. Striking out a tough hitter. How fired up you get when you give up a hit. How mad you get at yourself when you hang a curve ball. You think about it. Take a year off. See how much you miss it come next spring. You'll see what I'm talking about.

Homer leaves Jack sitting on the bench.

NINA <VO>

In 1948 Jack quit baseball and went back to the farm. He had a wife and was expecting their first child soon. But in 1949 life would throw Kelly Jack Swift a curve ball of it's own.

OLD MILLIKAN HOME: EXT DAY

Jack is greeting a man with a telegram.

MAN 1

Got a telegram for you Kelly. Sign right here please.

JACK

Dear Mr. Swift, It is with a great deal of pride that I invite you to join The Savannah Indians. We urgently await your favorable reply.

Jacks runs into the house. Betty is mopping the floors when Jack breaks the news.

JACK (CONT'D)

Betty, Betty, Betty what would you think about me playing ball again.

BETTY

Why I would not think much at all about it. It nearly killed you last time, trying to run the farm and play baseball.

JACK

No, no, no Honey listen to me. They want me to come down to Savannah. They want us to move down there. It's the Savannah Indians. Real baseball.

Betty gazes out the window looking at the bare fields that would have to be planted in a few weeks.

BETTY

So what are we going to do Jack. You gonna run off to Savannah and play ball. Leave me here to run the farm, with a newborn baby. Jack I can't do it.

JACK

Honey this could be my big chance? I'll make more money than working this old farm. I have to try, I have to.

Betty swept back her hair, and tried to hold back the tears.

BETTY

I don't know Jack, Savannah?

JACK

Look let's think about it for a day or two. The fields won't have to be planted for another couple of weeks, but I can't put this off long. But if I go to Savannah you go with me. Okay?

FEED AND SEED STORE: INT DAY

Jack is trying to decide whether or not to start buying seed. He really wants to play baseball, but is not sure how that can happen.

SALESMAN

Hey Kelly, I heard about the telegram. So you're going to be playing for Savannah. Long way from home isn't it?

JACK

Not sure what I'm going to do. Hard to up and leave, especially with the baby.

SALESMAN

Yeah, how is that girl of yours doing.

JACK

Mary's great.

SALESMAN

Must be a hard decision. Picking up and moving so far from home. Money's probably good though.

TOMMY BOLES

Hey Kelly, is it true? That you might be going down to Savannah to play ball.

JACK

Maybe, I don't really think so though. I gotta get the crops planted in a few weeks. I can't run a farm and play baseball for Savannah now can I. Plus it would be a difficult move with the baby and all.

TOMMY BOLES

Kelly, listen I was thinking that maybe I'd be willing to take over the farm for you this summer. I got a nice crop last year, and I could hire on some extra help, and keep the farm going for ya.

JACK

You'd do that?

TOMMY BOLES

It's about time for you to do something with that arm or yours. How does seventy thirty sound. Seventy for me of course.

JACK

You got a deal Tommy.

SAVANNAH APARTMENT: INT NIGHT

Cut to Small Apartment in Savannah. Jack and Betty are unpacking. Betty is not comfortable in the new city.

NINA <VO>

Jack and Betty arrived in Savannah a few weeks later. They rented a small apartment the team had reserved for them. Savannah was a big bustling port town. Everything moved much faster than it did back home. People and stores everywhere. Ships arriving daily. It was overwhelming, especially for Betty. She was homesick from the minute they arrived.

JACK

Look there Betty.

Jack takes her by the waist and points out the window, interrupting her from unpacking the boxes of clothes. He kisses her gently on the side of the neck.

JACK (CONT'D)

Why don't we eat at that diner tonight.

BETTY

Jack I'm not too sure about this.

She returns to unpacking the clothes.

BETTY (CONT'D)

It's awfully big here. I have never felt so alone.

Betty wipes a tear from her eye.

JACK

Honey, let's give it a chance.

BETTY

Jack, I never been so far away from home.
I'm scared. I don't know anybody here.
It's just too fast for me.

Jack looks longingly into Betty's eyes.

JACK

You'll make some friends soon, and it'll
be just like home. As a matter of fact,
some of the boys from the team and their
wives are going to see the Delmore
Brothers tomorrow night. They asked if
we'd like to go along with them.

Jack dancing, as he sings the words to their hit
song. "Blues, Stay away from me."

JACK (CONT'D)

Bluuues, stay away from meee.

Betty swipes at Jack with a dish towel.

BETTY

You're gonna have the blues alright if
you don't help me with this unpacking.

Betty gives Jack a long loving kiss and embrace.

BETTY (CONT'D)

You think they have those foot longs at
that diner?

SAVANNAH BASEBALL FIELD: EXT NIGHT

Outside Night shots of Jack pitching and hitting while
Nina speaks. Jack is pitching exceptionally well. He is
not so good at hitting. He fails to get a bunt attempt
down, striking out in the process. Frank Skaff the
manager is furious.

NINA <VO>

Jack took the mound two days later. It
was a warm Saturday night, perfect for
baseball. Jack made the most of his
first outing. A 3-0 shutout, recording
12 strikeouts. He was just wild enough
to keep batters from digging in too deep
and honing in on his fastball.

UMP

Strike Three.

Jack strikes out and walks disgustedly back to the dugout.

NINA <VO>

He did not however make a good impression with the bat. Hitting was not one of Jack's strengths by any stretch of the imagination. He failed to make contact on any of his three at bats. And Couldn't get a bunt down, at a critical point in the game.

FRANK SKAFF

God your hitting stinks. Kelly your going to need to work on your batting. A monkey could swing better than that. Who taught you how to hit?

Jack spits a big mouthful of tobacco juice onto the field. And replies in dumb hick fashion.

JACK

Well coach you taught me everything I know about hitting.

The players on the bench are laughing.

FRANK SKAFF

Well at least your sense of humor is better than your damn bat.

JACK

Well it ought to be you didn't teach me nothing about my sense of humor.

The players are now laughing hysterically.

FRANK SKAFF

Get out of here.

SAVANNAH APARTMENT: INT NIGHT RAINING.

Betty is ironing. Jack is sitting on the bed reading the newspaper. The rain reminds Betty of home.

BETTY

Jack, I was thinking that maybe we could invite my sister Nina, to come down and stay with us for a few weeks.

Jack takes long swig of Schlitz beer.

JACK

Sure, I don't have a problem with that.

Betty unplugs the iron, and curls up in Jack's lap.

BETTY

Jack do you ever think about the farm?
Remember how we used to lie in bed, and
listen to the rain, while it pinged on
the tin roof.

Jack nods again. Betty pulls him closer, and puckers her lips.

BETTY (CONT'D)

I love you.

JACK

I love you.

(love scene directors discretion)

SAVANNAH BASEBALL FIELD: EXT NIGHT

Night last game of season. Connie Mack has made a trip down from Philly to see his new fireballer. He hopes to bring Jack up to the major league soon.

UMP

Strike Three!

In the dugout Connie is talking with Frank about bringing Jack up to Philly.

CONNIE MACK

The kid's got it.

FRANK SKAFF

Had a great year. I think he's ready.

Jack has just sent another sizzling fastball past an unbelieving opponent.

ANNOUNCER

And that's the game folks. The Indians win 4-2 another complete game by Kelly Swift who improves his record to 10-3. Savannah finishes the year..

FRANK SKAFF

Kelly, Come over here. Someone I want you to meet.

CONNIE MACK

Nice Game Swift. I'm Connie Mack. You throw pretty hard. Frank here tells me you been working on a curve to go with that heater.

JACK

Yeah, I been trying to get a little more hook.

CONNIE MACK

I think it's about time to give you a shot at the bigs. What say we talk about it over dinner.

JACK

My wife is a fine cook Mr. Mack. How about a nice home cooked meal?

SAVANNAH APARTMENT: INT NIGHT

Betty is getting dinner ready.

JACK

Honey, we got company.

CONNIE MACK

Hello Mrs. Swift, Connie Mack.

Betty wipes her hands on her apron.

BETTY

Yes, yes it's a real pleasure to meet you. I hope you like fried chicken.

Connie takes in a big whiff.

CONNIE MACK

It smells delicious, Mrs. Swift.

Betty returns to the kitchen.

BETTY

You best call me Betty. I've got home made biscuits, gravy, squash and onions.

CONNIE MACK

Fine, fine.

Connie turns to Jack, who points to his favorite chair.

CONNIE MACK (CONT'D)

Jack listen I want you to be my man,
up in Philly, but I need you to work on
that curve, and try to get a little more
batting practice.

Connie leans forward to make sure he has Jack's full
attention.

CONNIE MACK (CONT'D)

Work on getting those bunts down. It
might be the difference in a game.
Listen Kelly, you got a great arm.
Maybe the best I ever seen. But in the
big league you gotta do whatever it takes
to help the team get a win.

JACK

I will, I will.

Betty enters the room with iced tea.

BETTY

Here you are Mr. Mack, I hope you like
sweet tea.

CONNIE MACK

I can't get sweet tea up there in
Philly. I can't wait to get ahold of
that fried chicken either. Judging by
the smell from the kitchen, I can tell
you are a marvelous cook.

JACK

She gets that from her mother, best cook
in North Carolina.

CONNIE MACK

Well when Kelly gets up to Philly, I
might be inviting myself to dinner.

Betty is both elated and nervous upon hearing this.

BETTY

Philly?

CONNIE MACK

Yes ma'am, Kelly Swift is going to be my
man. Now look Kelly I want you to
spend next year working on what we just
talked about. I promise you, if you do
that I'll give you a chance in Philly.

SAVANNAH BASEBALL FIELD: EXT NIGHT

Jack has just finished a game. Frank calls Jack over.

NINA <VO>

Jack was elated, but fate would again turn for the worse, and dampen Jack's dream. Jack spent the next year working on the curve ball, and his hitting. The result of his effort was an ERA that climbed to 3.77 and his record dipped to 11-8. It was the end of the season when he heard the bad news.

FRANK SKAFF

Thanks for a great season. They don't have room for you in the big club. If it were up to me, you would be with the big-league team in the majors this season.

Frank pats Jack on the back and heads to the locker room. Jack throws his glove full force at the dugout wall. Then sits on the bench head in his hands.

NINA <VO>

Jack felt like he'd been punched in the gut. Still he would not give up. He worked harder in hopes of keeping the dream alive.

Cut to Jack following season back out on the mound. Getting a bunt down etc.

NINA <VO> (CONT'D)

The following season was not one of Jack's better years statistically, but his curve did improve slightly, and he was able to get a bunt down with a little more frequency. Connie Mack stayed true to his word, and told Jack to report to spring training with the big team come the spring of 1952.

OLD MILLIKAN HOME: INT NIGHT

Cut to Old Millikan house: Int Night. Jack sitting in chair, Betty has just put Mary to bed and flops down on couch. <pregnant with 2nd child>

BETTY

I'm wore out.

Betty feels the baby kicking.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Jack come here.

She places Jack's hand on her stomach.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Do you feel that.

JACK
He's kicking up a storm.

Jack gives her a light kiss and sits on the couch putting her legs across his lap.

BETTY
Jack I hope you won't be disappointed if it's another girl.

JACK (CONT'D)
Honey I wouldn't care either way. But I got a feeling this time. Our second child, and me going to the big leagues next spring.

BETTY
I've got to go into town tomorrow. Can you watch the baby? I'm getting my hair styled, and I need a few groceries.

JACK
I'll go with you honey. You don't need to carry anything heavy.

BETTY
I just need a few things, and I might be awhile at the beauty parlor.

Jack snuggles closer to Betty and lightly tickles her.

JACK
I don't think you'll be at that beauty shop long. There's not much they can do to improve on perfection.

Sarcastically.

BETTY
Uh huh, and if Betty Grable walked in that door right now, your jaw would hit the floor, and you'd be asking her for a date.

JACK

Betty Grable, next to you she looks like she got hit with an ugly stick. Twice. Course she might have trouble resisting my Clark Gable looks and charm.

Jack smoothes out an imaginary moustache.

GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT: EXT DAY

Betty is driving along and gets into a serious car accident. < steering wheel hits Betty directly in stomach.> a panic stricken man jumps out of his car and runs to Betty's car.

MAN 1

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I didn't see the light. Miss are you alright? Let's get you to the doctor.

OLD MILLIKAN HOME: INT DAY

Jack is playing with Mary, tossing her in the air catching her, making baby talk, when he hears a car pulling into the driveway. Cliff, Lala and Nina Millikan jump out of the car and run hurriedly to the front door.

CLIFF

Jack, Betty was in a car wreck. She's okay. She's over at the doctors office right now.

JACK

Can you take me there?

CLIFF

Come on. Lala and Nina will stay here with Mary.

DOCTORS OFFICE: INT DAY

Cut to Doctor office: Int examination room. Jack is sitting with Betty. A nurse is busy cleaning some minor cuts, when the doctor comes in.

DOCTOR

That was a bad crash Mrs. Swift, but I think you'll be fine. You'll have some aches and pains, so I'm going to write you a prescription. Do you have any questions.

BETTY

What about the baby?

DOCTOR

You have some stomach bruising but trauma to the womb appears to be minimal. If you start having abdominal pain, contractions, or vaginal bleeding get in here right away.

HOSPITAL: INT DAY

Cut to hospital: Int 2 month later. Jack nervously pacing in waiting room.

DOCTOR

Mr. Swift?

JACK

Yes, right here.

DOCTOR

Mr. Swift, I'm Dr. Richardson. Let's have a seat.

JACK

Is Betty alright?

DOCTOR

Betty's recovering nicely. Mr. Swift there were some complications during delivery. The baby was delivered with the umbilical chord wrapped around his neck. We won't know the full extent of his condition for a while.

JACK

I don't understand.

DOCTOR

Mr. Swift, your son is likely going to have some major medical issues. The oxygen supply was cut off. He may have brain and organ damage. We'll do everything we can. Like I was saying

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
we'll do some testing, to verify the
extent of damage.

JACK
Can I see him?

DOCTOR
Come with me.

Jack is led to the nursery, where he gets the first look at his son. Jimmy is small and pale, he labors heavily to breathe. Jack tries to hold back the tears.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Would you like to see Betty now?

Jack nods yes. He takes a last look through the heavy pane of glass separating him and his new son.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
We have not yet told your wife about
your sons condition. It was a difficult
delivery, and we want to be exactly sure
what we are dealing with. I'll give
the two of you some time first, and then
come in and talk with the two of you.

JACK
No. I'll tell her.

Cut to Betty's hospital room.

BETTY
Oh god no, please god tell me it's not
true.

Jack holds Betty tightly.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Jack I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.

JACK
It will be alright, I promise.

Cut to hospital waiting room: Int day Betty and Jack are waiting nervously for the news of Jimmy's surgery.

BETTY
When will we know something?

JACK
They have to run all the tests.

Betty dabs her eyes and buries her head deep in Jack's chest. She get's up and paces around.

BETTY

I can't stand this waiting. How long has it been?

JACK

Almost four hours. Do you want me to find a nurse? See if I can find out anything.

Betty nods and Jack goes over to a small window at the nurses station. The nurse goes to get some news about Jimmy and returns.

NINA <VO>

Seeing your child almost die is the worst thing that can happen to a parent. Jimmy nearly died several times. You hope and pray, trying to convince yourself that everything will be okay. And you almost die yourself, waiting to hear the outcome.

NURSE

Mr. Swift the doctor will be right out.

DOCTOR

The operation went well. All the post-op scans were clean. It's still going to be awhile before you can see him. He's resting comfortably right now. There is still much more testing that will have to be done before we can send him home. It'll be a few weeks.

JACK

Thank you.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Swift we're setting up a room where you can stay with him until he's ready to go home. Nurse Fields will help you with that.

They walk down the hospital hallway.

NINA <VO>

Jack decided that his family needed him more than ever. He called the A's and gave them the news.

Cut to hospital phone booth. Alternating shots of Jack and Connie.

JACK
Mr. Mack, Kelly Swift here.

CONNIE MACK
Hello Kelly, what can I do for you?

JACK
I've got some bad news. My son,
My son was born with some medical
issues.

CONNIE MACK
Is it serious?

JACK
It's bad, it's real bad.

CONNIE MACK
Is there anything I can do?

Jack Kicks the phone booth door lightly in anguish.

JACK
Mr. Mack, my family needs me. It's
just too much to go out on the road. I
Can't leave Betty alone with the kids.
I'm going to stay at home this year.

CONNIE MACK
Kelly we were hoping to have you up in
Philly this spring.

Jack hits head lightly on booth door.

JACK
Yes sir, and I was hoping to be there
this season. It's just, Betty needs my
help, we need to be close to home, close
to our family. I hope you understand.

CONNIE MACK
Kelly I understand, I'll give you your
release. Kelly.

JACK
Yes sir.

CONNIE MACK
You take care of that boy, and give
Betty my love.

JACK

Yes sir I will.

CONNIE MACK

Kelly, you got the greatest arm I've seen. Ever.

Nina <VO> as Jack walks out of the hospital and reaches into coat for a flask he has hidden. Takes long sip. Gets into his car. He is almost crying and he takes another long pull from the flask.

NINA <VO>

For several nerve-racking months Jack wondered if Jimmy would get better. It was a tough road. The doctors were not sure if Jimmy, would live, and if he did survive, there would be virtually no chance of a normal life. The lack of oxygen during delivery, had severely hampered the development of brain, and organ function. The medical bills were staggering. Jack was at the end of his rope. Out of money, out of baseball and running out of hope Jack started drinking more heavily each day.

Cut to hospital billing office: Int

JACK

Sir I want to assure you that I have every intention of paying you. I'll send you what I can, and when the crop comes in this fall we should be able to pay off our debt.

MAN 1

Mr. Swift we understand this has been a huge burden. I'll set up a payment schedule for you. Come back down before you leave today.

JACK

Thank you, thank you for being so understanding.

Jack takes the hospital elevator to where Jimmy is being kept. Betty is sitting in the corner of the room rocking her son, while she feeds him.

BETTY

Look Jack he's eating.

Jack walks over to Betty and kisses her on the cheek.

JACK

I told you he was tough. Tough,
Aren't we son. Has the doctor been by?

BETTY

Not yet.

She places the bottle on a nearby table, continues rocking, and wrapping Jimmy in the baby blanket.

BETTY (CONT'D)

It's been hell these last two months.

She pauses abruptly as the doctor walks in.

DOCTOR

Well, let's see how our little man is doing today.

Dr. Phillips looks at Jimmy's chart then at the glass bottle on the table.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

He's eating well. Blood work looks good. Let's check his heart and lungs.

Pulls stethoscope from around his neck.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Much better, much better. I think this little fella can go home in another week. Now he's been through alot. We still need to keep monitoring his development. We know that there is some brain damage. His lungs are functioning much better, but his breathing will always be difficult. To be honest with you, I don't know how he has managed to survive.

JACK

You can never give up on us Swift men.

DOCTOR

We can talk about the kind of care he'll need at home once we get a little closer to his release. It's not going to be easy. Mr. Swift can I see you for a moment?

Hospital hallway:

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Mr. Swift you look a little tired, how are doing. Emotionally I mean.

JACK

I'm not sleeping real well. This has been one hell of an ordeal.

DOCTOR

Jimmy is doing much, much better. Just another week and you can take him home. Here let me prescribe you something that will help you sleep a little better.

Dr. Phillips leaves. Betty is talking with Jack.

BETTY

Did you talk to the business office?

JACK

Yes.

BETTY

How much?

JACK

Don't know yet. I talked to them about setting up payments.

BETTY

Jack, what about Philly?

Jack not wanting to tell Betty the exact truth.

JACK

I talked with Mr. Mack. He don't see much use for a righty with just one pitch, so they let me go.

BETTY

They did not. Of all the lowdown.

JACK

Now Honey I can't blame them. I'm almost thirty one now. Getting a little too old to be much of a prospect. Likely for the best anyway. I need to be at home, with you and the kids. Get the farm running again.

BETTY

Jack I don't want you to be the one
cryin' you never took a shot.
Here's your chance. I'll manage.

JACK

I've already taken my shot. Couldn't
make it. They don't need me.

BETTY

But Jack...

JACK

It's okay. I'm fine with it.

OLD MILLIKAN HOME: EXT DAY

Cut to Swift farm: 3 months later Int. late evening.
Betty in house with kids, nursing Jimmy. Mary playing
with dolls. Betty is startled by cracking noise in back.
Runs outside to see Jack throwing baseballs against barn.

BETTY

Mom, can you hold the baby?

Lala takes Jimmy from Betty and starts with the baby
talk.

LALA

Come here, Jimmy boy. Where's my grand
baby. There's my grand baby. There he
is. Coo, coo.

Betty runs outside. Jack is firing a baseball at the
barn.

BETTY

Kelly Jack Swift, what in gods name do
you think your doing.

JACK

I thought I might just warm up a little
that's all. I heard that Elkin has a
team together.

Jack stopped hurling balls.

JACK (CONT'D)

I figure I can work about three acres a
day, and still have time to get to the
ballpark in the afternoon. Besides we
could use the extra money.

BETTY

Jack you tried that before. It almost killed you.

JACK

We need the extra money.

BETTY

Jack Swift you are crazy, plain and simple. I'll get a job if we need money.

JACK

It's not something I can just walk away from. It's not just money. Throwing that ball is something. It's something I can't explain. It's the only thing I was ever any good at.

BETTY

Jack, you're good. Really good. But you're good at a lot of things. Not just baseball. Please don't do it.

Jack still throwing.

JACK

We need the money.

NINA <VO>

There was no denying it, Jack was going to work the farm, and play baseball.

TOBACCO FIELD: EXT DAY

Nina VO Jack farming.

NINA <VO>

Farming was demanding work, both mentally and physically. But Jack was determined that he could do both. It was an awful year for farming. Especially for tobacco. Each day of summer would bring more and more heat, and no rain. Jack was worried, it looked as though the crop would be one of the worst in history. Things would continue to get worse due to a tobacco fungus that was spreading throughout the county. Black Shank disease. Meanwhile the bills continued to accumulate.

WAYNE

Jack I think we got a problem. Look.

Jack eyes the base of the dying tobacco.

Yelling.

JACK

We've got the damn shank disease.

WAYNE

Only a few plants, but this stuff spreads fast. What do you want to do?

JACK

Start harvesting. Save what we can.

ELKIN BALL FIELD: EXT NIGHT

Jack is on the mound and throwing hard.

Nina< VO >

On the other hand Jack was red hot on the mound, winning six of his first eight games that season. His blazing fastball was still a drawing card, and the stands would fill quickly on days that Jack was pitching.

FANS

Sounds like a cannon going off.

He's still got that speed don't he.

NINA <VO>

Jack was the star of an otherwise awful team.

Cut to Jack in town in phone booth: Ext Day

JACK

If you can just wait until the fall, when we get the crops in, everything will be fine.

MAN 1

Mr. Swift you're way behind on the payments we agreed to.

JACK

I know I'm doing all I can. Can you please just work with me.

MAN 1

If you can send at least one of the past due payments we can hold off until this fall. But we have to get something in here. How does your crop look for the fall?

OLD MILLIKAN HOME: EXT DAY

Cut to Swift Farm: Ext Day Jack is looking at dry tobacco plants. Betty comes out with a sandwich and water for Jack.

BETTY

I brought you some lunch.

Jack says nothing looking at the dying plants.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Jack don't torture yourself.

JACK

I told your brother, we have to start priming.

BETTY

Jack it's too early.

Yelling:

JACK

Look, look at this crop. We ain't had no rain in a month. The plants are dying and we got a few down there with shank disease. Betty, we ain't got no choice.

Feisty:

BETTY

You've been drinking.

Yelling:

JACK

What do you expect. My nerves are shot. I can't make the payments to the hospital. Hell, I don't know how I'm going to pay the boys to help.

Feisty:

BETTY

By god Jack, I guess I can prime tobacco just as good as anybody. Mom will watch the kids. And there ain't nothing in that damn jar that's going to make it start raining or pay the damn bills. You better buck up old man, cause we ain't done yet.

Betty stomps off toward the house leaving Jack in the fields.

NINA <VO>

My sister was a tough old bird. But Farming and playing baseball was showing its signs of wear and tear on Jack. Many nights he would arrive home from a road game, lay down for a couple of hours, and rise at dawn to tend the fields.

Swift bedroom: Int. Morning

BETTY

Jack get back in bed.

JACK

I got work to do.

BETTY

Jack you're killing yourself, you can't keep doing this.

Betty throws herself into Jack's arms, and buries her head deep in his chest.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Jack please get back in bed, just for today. Please, you need some rest.

Jack fell across the bed, his head throbbing.

JACK

I could use one of those BC powders.

BETTY

I'll get it, you get back in bed.

Jack sits back up, still considering staying in bed or getting up for work.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Now.

Betty points at the bed, Jack realizes there is no point in arguing any further.

JACK

Maybe just for an hour or so.

Jack lay back across the bed. Betty returns with the aspirin and water. Sees Jack fast asleep.

Quietly to herself.

BETTY

Finally decided to listen to me.

ELKIN BALL FIELD: INT DAY

Later that afternoon at Ball field clubhouse.

TREACY

How's the old soupbone Kelly?

JACK

No interviews today Mr. Treacy.

TREACY

Everything okay Kelly?

Jack is shaking his head staring blankly at floor.

TREACY (CONT'D)

Kelly look you've always been straight with me. What's going on.

The emotions begin pouring out of Jack as he explains to the reporter.

JACK

It's my son, the doctors bills are killing me. I got to get a hundred dollars to them.

TREACY

What's wrong with your son?

NINA <VO>

Jack explained his problems while Treacy listened intently. JB Treacy had always respected Jack. Jack was always happy
(MORE)

NINA <VO> (CONT'D)
to give him an interview, even after the
team had suffered a loss.

TREACY
How much do you owe them Kelly?

JACK
Twelve hundred.

TREACY
Oh god.

JACK
I've been making payments you see, but I
can't keep up. I'm flat broke. The crop
is dying of thirst.

TREACY
Kelly you been real good for this town.
You give these people something to cheer
for. I got an idea that may help.

NINA <VO>
A few days later the newspaper released
the story of Kelly Swift and the
difficulty they were having trying to
keep up with the medical bills. Mr.
Treacy had come up with a plan. A Kelly
Swift appreciation day.

Cut to baseball dugout: Ext Day Team Practice.

TREACY
Great news Kelly. We got donations
coming in from all over the state.

JACK
Mr. Treacy I'm not sure I'm comfortable
accepting any charity.

TREACY
Kelly these people are planning to come
see you pitch. Don't think of it as
charity. Now the game is in a few weeks,
you just go out there and give them a
good game.

JACK
Mr. Treacy, I'm going to pitch like they
ain't never seen before.

OLD MILLIKAN HOME: INT DAY

Cut to Swift Farm: Jack runs in the door waving the newspaper at Betty and he excitedly explains how he is going to pitch the game of his life for the people who were kind enough to rally around him. Betty sobs deeply while she clings to Jack's neck.

JACK

I told you everything would work out.

Jack and Betty kiss deeply.

BETTY

Yes you did. You sure did.

At that very moment you could faintly hear the sound of a slight ping on the tin roof of the house. The pinging grows louder, and a crescendo of thunder is heard in the distance. The drought has ended. Jack and Betty walk out onto the porch. They stand arm in arm, happy to see the rain.

OLD MILLIKAN HOME: EXT DAY

Next day the rain is still pouring. Jack is seen coming out of the barn carrying a jar of moonshine. He walks through the fields carefully examining his plants. The water pours from the brim of his cap and he smiles in delight. Jack pours the moonshine on the group of plants with black shank.

JACK

Thank you lord. Thank you.

Jack lifts his eyes toward the heavens, stretching out his long arms.

JACK (CONT'D)

Thank You.

Baseball Field: Ext Night Jack Swift Appreciation day

NINA <VO>

By the day of the game the skies had cleared. The stands were filled to capacity. Jack stood on the mound and waved his cap at numerous fans who filled the stadium. The roar of the crowd growing ever louder, as Jack sent his first pitch of the day, soaring toward home plate.

Fill shots: Baseball game

UMP

Strike Three, You're Out.

NINA <VO>

Jack was a hero for an otherwise obscure town. The pride of Elkin was putting on a show. The glove thundered loudly, with each successive strike. The crash from the mitt pounding echoed from the bleachers and outfield walls. The fans screamed wildly with appreciation as Jack began to hurl his last pitch of the day.

UMP

Strike Three You're out.

The fans stormed the field, jumping with joy and congratulating Jack on his complete game victory.

FANS

Kelly that was a thing of beauty.

JACK

I can't tell you folks how much I appreciate what you done here.

FANS

Great job Kelly.

Scene shifts from the baseball field celebration to present day Nina.

NINA

It was a bittersweet win however. The next season would be the last for the Blanketeers. Television was becoming more mainstream. Fans started watching televised games instead of going to the local stadiums to watch the minors. The demise of the minor leagues had begun. Desperate to keep interest in minor league games, the leagues filled their rosters with top talent. Power hitters became a priority. Journeymen players found it more and more difficult to find teams they could play for. Jack would be a top signing for any team, even at the ripe old age of thirty two. Even if he only had a few more good years of baseball left in his aging arm. It was 1953 and Jack signed with the Marion Marauders.

MARION FIELD: EXT DAY

Team warm up prior to game.

BOBBY
How's the arm, Kelly?

Jack warming in bullpen.

JACK
Good, I feel real good.

Bobby Beal the manager kicks at the dirt and folds his arms across his chest, while keeping a steady eye on his aging superstar.

BOBBY
Kelly, I need a horse out there. Plan on getting a workout this season. We got loads of hitters but other than you and Elmer Thomas we're not much to talk about on the hill.

Jack rears back and lets another fastball rip, but the pitch sails wildly over the catchers head and clangs into the fence.

JACK
Well if I bean enough of the other teams batters, I guess you can get up here and pitch.

BOBBY
Kelly if you keep pitching like that, I might do just that.

Baseball Field: Ext. Night game in progress.

NINA <VO>
Jack was getting paid just over three thousand dollars for the season. More than enough to cover the medical expenses he had incurred. Marion would be getting every pennys worth. Beal had a simple strategy. Pitch Swift. At the end of the home opener Jack was the talk of the small town.

The game has ended the fans are talking to each other as they head toward the exits.

FANS

That Swift is something. Sixteen strikeouts. He throws harder than anybody I ever seen. Pure Heat.

VARIOUS GAMES SCENES WHILE NINA SPEAKS:

NINA <VO>

By the end of May Jack had established himself as the top pitcher on the team with his 8-1 record. A few weeks latter Jack was 13-2. Marion had fallen in love with the man, with the blazing fastball. In mid July Jack surpassed the twenty win mark. Something that only a few pitchers ever accomplish in a full season.

Cut to clubhouse:

REPORTERS

Do you think you can get to thirty Kelly?

JACK

I have to. If I win thirty I get the rest of the season off.

The reporters laugh. They eagerly try to get a word in with the hot pitcher.

REPORTERS

Seriously Kelly do you think you can make it to thirty wins?

JACK

Boys I gotta get home.

Jack waves the reporters off. Shakes his arm out and mumbles to himself.

JACK (CONT'D)

Thirty wins...in a single season...Now that would be something. Wouldn't it.

He grimaces a bit as he rubs his aching right shoulder.

Baseball fill scenes:

NINA <VO>

Despite the sore arm, Jack was pitching better than ever. It seemed as though the more he pitched the better he got. During one stretch Jack pitched six games
(MORE)

NINA <VO> (CONT'D)

straight in seven days. He got wins as a starter, wins in relief. Jack was hot, forty six innings without giving up a single run. Jack was firmly the league leader in wins and strikeouts, but the pressure was mounting. Thirty wins was within reach. But with only three games left in the season he was running out of chances.

MARION BALL FIELD: EXT DAY

Excited Fans filling stands. Loudspeakers blaring pregame announcements.

ANNOUNCER

It's a beautiful day for baseball folks. Temperature is seventy eight degrees. The home team Marion Marauders are clinging to a one game lead over Hickory. Coach Bobby Beal will be sending his ace hurler Kelly Swift to the mound today in hopes of securing the league crown.

Betty and friends taking seats behind home plate.

GIRL 1

Jack looks good, out there warming up.

Betty took a long glance down the first base side to see Jack warming up in the bullpen. She nodded and wrenched her hands, holding them close to her chin, as in prayer.

GIRL 1 (CONT'D)

He'll be fine Betty.

Betty clutches her friends hands. Smiling and praying

ANNOUNCER

And here come your Marion Marauders.
Batting first at second base...

The roar of the crowd grows impatiently louder while the announcer calls the lineup out.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

And on the mound today twenty nine
game winner Kelly Swift.

A loud roar from the stands goes up when Jack is announced.

NINA <VO>

Jack was throwing especially hard that day. Batter after batter went down swinging. The ball seemed to sear the air.

It is getting late into the evening. The stadium lights turn on. The excitement builds as Jack is getting closer to reaching his goal. Jack is cruising along. But he is starting to fatigue. He shakes his arm out between batters. The night air is cool, but Jack is sweating profusely. Jack has not given up a run, but the batters are starting to hit the ball hard.

Jack looks in for the sign, from his catcher. The fastball is quickly turned around by a Hickory batter. The ball sails high and deep over the center field wall.

ANNOUNCER

There's a deep shot to center. Home run for Hickory.

The catcher trots out to the mound, handing Jack the new ball to be put into play.

CATCHER

So, I was thinking about learning to play the banjo.

JACK

What! What are you talking about. He just crushed that ball, and you come out here to tell me you want to play the banjo.

CATCHER

Yeah, so what do you think?

JACK

Seems like this next guy likes the hard stuff, out over the plate.

CATCHER

No. About playing the banjo. It can't be that hard can it?

The catcher breaks into a big toothy grin. The two laugh quietly. The catcher jogs back toward home plate, still talking about banjos to Jack.

CATCHER (CONT'D)

I guess we can talk about it after you get these next four outs.

The Hickory batter is talking with Jack's catcher, while he digs in at home plate.

BATTER

Looks like your boy is getting a little scared.

CATCHER

I tried to give him some advice. But all he could talk about was learning how to play the banjo.

The batter steps out of the box, a bit puzzled. The catcher shrugs nonchalantly. He quickly hits a high infield fly for the last out of the inning.

Marion is finishing their turn at the plate.

ANNOUNCER

No hits nobody left, as we hit the bottom of the eighth.

Marion players pick up gloves and head to field.

BOBBY

Kelly. Win it.

Jack nods and takes his place on the mound. Warm up pitches.

ANNOUNCER

Top of the ninth folks, and the Marauders are firmly in command, eight to one. And let's hear it for Swift, he's pitched a gem today. Only one run on five hits while striking out eight.

First batter swings at first pitch.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Lined hard to first for out number one.

Jack throws a few balls.

UMP

Ball two. Two and 0

Jack's next pitch is hit sharply over the short stops head.

ANNOUNCER

There's a shot just over the short stop, holds the runner to a single.

JACK

Settle down.

The manager and catcher trot out to the mound.

BOBBY

You okay Kelly? Those last two were hit pretty hard.

The manager takes a look at Jack's bloody fingers.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Your fingers are blistered. You need a little help? I got Elmer ready.

JACK

I never needed any help to get through a game before. So don't even think about it. I got enough left to get two more.

The manager looks for an answer from his catcher.

BOBBY

So what do you think?

CATCHER

We got a big lead Skip. And he's still throwing hard.

BOBBY

We need this game. You keep your eye on him. You got it.

CATCHER

Got it.

Bobby trots back to the dugout. The catcher heads back to home plate. Jack can clearly hear the catcher humming banjo noises.

Jack gathers his wits and tries to settle down. Third batter hits infield fly.

ANNOUNCER

High infield fly third baseman Collins has it. Hickory is down to their final out.

The final batter rips a shot down the third base line, foul.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Foul ball for strike one.

Jack peers into his catcher for the sign. The next pitch is tipped into the catchers mitt for strike two.

JACK
Just one more Jack.

Jack kicks and throws toward home. <BAM> into the mitt. Time stands still in anticipation of the umpires call.

UMP
Strike Three.

ANNOUNCER
Kelly Swift has done it, thirty wins in a single season. Marion has done it they win the pennant.

The fans storm the field vying for a chance to share in the joy. The joyous celebration of an incredible end to an incredible season. Betty burst into tears.

BETTY
Oh, oh he did it. He did it.

She and her friend jump up and down with excitement. In the dugout, Jack's teammates applaud. A smile creeps into the corners of Jack's mouth, as he is mobbed by fans.

NINA <VO>
After everything Jack had gone through that could have ended his career, the old right hander had learned to take joy in the game when he could.

FRONT LAWN OF SWIFT HOME: EXT NIGHT

That evening Jack is sitting on the front lawn, gazing up at the stars. He leans against a tall oak tree. Betty has put the kids to bed, and joins him on the lawn. She snuggles close and stares at the stars that fill the night sky.

BETTY
That was something Jack. That was really something.

JACK
I'm really happy.

He gives her a warm kiss.

I'm really happy.

Smiling.

BETTY
You said that already.

Laughing.

JACK
Did I. I guess I did. Did I tell you
I'm really happy.

BETTY
Um hmm.

JACK
Hey what do you think about me playing
the banjo?

BETTY
The banjo...?

The couple continues to laugh and giggle looking up at
the stars.

NINA <VO>
Word of Jack's tremendous season quickly
spread. He was named North Carolina
athlete of the year. But word was that
the following year would be the final
season for Marion. Jack had intended to
hang up his cleats at the end of that
magical season, and return to farming
full time. He was way too old to be
considered a prospect. But once again
fate would shine brightly on Jack. Every
minor league team in the country was
considering Kelly Jack Swift. That
winter Jack was drafted by the Chicago
White Sox, and assigned to their AA
Team. The Memphis Chicks.

SWIFT HOME: INT NIGHT

Betty is angry with the conversation.

BETTY
Memphis, you have got to be kidding me.
No way Jack, absolutely not.

JACK
Honey it's Double A ball. Think of the
money.

BETTY

Bullshit Jack. You don't give a damn about the money. This is about you. It's always been about you. I have had enough damn baseball. I've stood by, and given you to the damn game. How many nights do I have to spend alone, with these kids while you're out on the road.

Baby crying in background, Betty runs over and picks up the youngest.

JACK

You don't understand.

BETTY

No I don't understand Jack. I never understood.

Betty softens her voice as she picks up the baby.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Jack, you're thirty two. Your arm was sore all last season.

JACK

I had a great season, sore arm and all.

BETTY

Jack I love you, I want you to be with me. I want you to see your children growing up. What is it with you and that damn baseball?

JACK

Betty this is my final run. My last shot at pitching in the big leagues.

Jack pulls her close, and smiles whimsically.

JACK (CONT'D)

I'll bet Betty Grable would go to Memphis with me.

Betty pulls quickly out of her huff and smiles.

BETTY

Damn you Jack Swift, I don't know why I put up with you.

Jack starts smoothing out the imaginary moustache.

JACK

It's because you can't resist my Clark Gable good looks.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Clark Gable my ass.
When do we leave?

MEMPHIS BASEBALL FIELD: EXT DAY AND NIGHT VARIOUS SHOTS

Cut to various baseball scenes. The team wins the championship in 1955.

NINA <VO>

The aging right hander would compile a record of 11-8 in his first season in Memphis. His fastball still blazing, but handcuffed by the curve ball that eluded him for his entire career. Jack would play two seasons in Memphis and was with the team when they won the minor league championship in 1955. He spent a few more seasons at AA ball with Oklahoma City and Houston where he earned yet another championship. But time was catching up to the seemingly ageless ballplayer. Jack was sent to B league High Point for the final year of his career.

FINCH FIELD 1958: EXT NIGHT

Grand Stadium for minor league field. Jack sitting on bench.

MANAGER

Jack I need three outs.

The manager hands Jack a ball. Jack puts the ball into his mitt, and sets it down on the bench. He looks at the heavy gold championship ring he won while in Memphis.

Zoom In to Close up of ring: Jack taking ring off and setting it on the bench. Get shot of Jack Swift inscription.

JACK

1955 Memphis Chicks.

Jack takes a last look at the ring. Then jogs down the first baseline to the bullpen to start warming up. Excitement fills the crowd when they hear the first of many loud pops of the catchers mitt.

FANS

Is that Kelly?

Yeah.

He's not as fast as he used to be.

Sounds like he still has some juice left in that arm.

Kelly's still got some heat.

He was practically unhittable a few years ago.

A young boy about ten years old watches from the stands while Jack is warming up, amazed at the speed at which the tall righty is throwing.

DAD

You know son he won thirty games, in a single season once.

FANS

Thirty seven counting the postseason.

I remember that.

Yeah that was about five years ago.

BOY 1

Thirty games in a single season?

DAD

Yeah, he could really pour it on back then.

The moment is interrupted by the sound of boos.

DAD (CONT'D)

Come on ump that ball missed by a mile.

Turning back to his son.

DAD (CONT'D)

Kelly had over three hundred strikeouts that year.

The young boy stopped watching the game, mesmerized by the tall thin right hander warming in the bullpen.

BOY 1

He still looks really fast. Did he play in the majors?

Dad takes a long look down at Jack as he continues to warm up.

DAD

No son, Kelly could just never catch his big break. Aw come on!

One of the High Point hitters just took a swing at a pitch in the dirt.

FANS

Yeah, the first time was right before World War II. He got hurt real bad.

DAD

When he got back from the war he worked his way back up again. But his son was born with some medical issues, so Kelly decided to stay at home.
Best arm to never make the big league.

The boys father dips his hand into his sons bag of popcorn.

BOY 1

Do you think he might still have a chance?

DAD

No son... He's almost forty years old now. He might have made it if he had a second pitch. Jack seemed on his way to greatness, but he was never able to master the curve. He's tough on the mound, getting by without the curve ball that most successful pitchers need.

FANS

Lot'sa people say that at one time he was faster than Bob Feller.

BOY 1

Thirty games.

DAD

It's a record that might be some time before it's broken.

UMP

Strike Three.

ANNOUNCER

That's the end of the eighth, the Hi-Toms leave one stranded.

BOY 1

Hey Dad look he's coming in!

Jack trots out to the mound, and continues to warm up. Throwing blue heat at his catcher. The opposing batter stands in the batters circle and shakes his head in astonishment.

ANNOUNCER

Taking the mound to try to save it for the Hi-Toms is number eight Kelly Swift.

The reserved crowd gives a hearty welcome for their hero.

FANS

Come On Kelly. Give him the heat
Kelly. Strike em out.

Jack begins his long windup and sends his first pitch toward home. It sails high and tight the catcher snags it and steps in between the batter and his pitcher to ensure that there will be no fights breaking out.

CATCHER

Take it easy Cooper.

The catcher tosses the ball back to Jack. Jack pounds the ball in his mitt, then throws a perfect strike.

UMP

Strike One!

MANAGER

That a boy Kelly!

The excitement from the small crowd grows.

UMP

Strike Two.

The cheers grow louder.

UMP (CONT'D)

Foul Ball.

The baseball curves harmlessly over the first base stands, and into the parking lot. The crowd moans upon hearing the sound of the ball striking a car hood. Jack pulls his cap to one side, and leans into another smoking hot fastball.

UMP (CONT'D)
Strike three. You're out.

The second batter digs into the box, and takes his first swing almost as soon as the ball leaves Jack's hand. An easy tapper that rolls into the dirt and curves foul. Jack frowns realizing that the batter was way out front of his fastball. Jack is talking to himself.

JACK
I never could throw a curve, but maybe I got him thinking all heat.

Jack deals a tight curve that hits the dirt just behind the plate. The batter swings crazily, loses his balance and ends up on the ground. The fans cackle in laughter.

JACK (CONT'D)
You finally decided to curve did ya.
If I had known the hitter would end up on his ass like that, I would have spent more time working on ya.

Jack is talking to the ball in his hand. He chuckles quietly.

JACK (CONT'D)
But you know me. I like to see you going as fast as possible.

<POP> A frozen rope right down the middle.

UMP
Strike Three.

The crowd that has been so quiet for most of the game now becomes an orchestra of screaming encouragement.

FANS
Get him Kelly!
Come on Jack just one more!

Jack kicks the dirt with his cleat while he prepares for the next batter.

JACK
Let's paint that outside corner.

Jack wheels and fires another blistering fastball.

UMP
Strike one.

Jack takes a deep breath and rubs the ball.

JACK

Okay, why don't we send a message.

Jack throws high and tight. The batter has already committed to his swing and is well underneath the pitch.

UMP

Strike Two.

JACK

And one right down the middle.
Just to let him know you can.

UMP

Strike Three.

ANNOUNCER

That's the game. Kelly Swift strikes out the side. The Hi-Toms win a thriller 3-2. Next game...

In the stands the young boy jumps up and down with glee, spilling the remaining popcorn into the rapidly emptying seats. Jack's teammates pour onto the field. In the melee Jack's ring is knocked off the bench, trampled into the damp soil in front of the dugout.

NINA <VO>

Jack would never see his ring again. He finished out the season knowing it would be his last in professional baseball. He continued to coach, and farm. But he spent most of his days making up for lost time with his family. It was the winter of 1964 and Jack was eagerly expecting the arrival of another addition to the Swift family. Betty would be giving birth to Jack's fifth and sixth child. Twins...

SWIFT HOUSE: INT DAY

Cut to Swift House. Betty walks by with a load of laundry. She sees that Jack is not feeling well.

BETTY

Jack are you alright?

Betty knows instantly that something is wrong with him. Jack has been complaining of severe headaches.

JACK

I got another headache. Get me some more of those BC powders.

BETTY

Jack you've had enough of those things.

Betty looks at her husband who had been so formidable for all those years, now appearing confused, and weak.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Jack get in the car. We're going to see the doctor.

Betty screams at Mary the oldest.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Watch the kids, I'm carrying your dad to the doctor.

HOSPITAL: INT DAY

Cut to Hospital. Betty is waiting for the news of her husband.

NINA <VO>

Jack's blood pressure was soaring. The family doctor sent Jack immediately to the hospital. The trip to High Point Memorial seemed to take forever, and the wait in the waiting room even longer. Jack was suffering from hypertension. Numerous tests and medication followed. The blood pressure medicine he was placed on begin to show some signs of relief. Two weeks later Jack was sent home.

High Point Memorial Hospital: Int Patient Room.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Swift we are going to send Jack home. His blood pressure is still high but he is responding to the medication. Make sure he takes his prescription daily. And I'll need to see him in a week to monitor his condition.

Betty held back the tears, she realized that it was still going to be awhile before Jack was back to his old self.

BETTY

What can we do for him at home?

DOCTOR

Make sure he gets plenty of rest.
No alcohol. If he complains of
headaches, or feels faint get him back
here immediately.

Betty wiped her eyes with the Kleenex she held in her
hand.

CUT TO SWIFT HOME. INT

Jack is holding and loving the new baby twins.

NINA <VO>

A few weeks later, Betty gave birth to
twins. Jack was happy to be a father
again and he spent the days loving his
newborns. But Jack realized something
was wrong. Each day worse than the one
before.

JACK

Honey come get the kids.

BETTY

Jack are you okay?

JACK

I'm pretty tired, I think I'm just
going to rest a little bit.

Jack collapses as he is walking to the bedroom.

HOSPITAL: INT NIGHT

Cut to Memorial Hospital.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Swift?

Betty could sense that it was bad news.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Jack is suffering from kidney failure.

The tears start streaming down her face, and she can no
longer keep her emotions under control.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

We need to get him on dialysis. We don't
have the equipment here to treat Jack.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

So we'll be transferring him to the
V A hospital in Durham.

Betty looks at Dr. Morgan and asks meekly.

BETTY

Will he be alright.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Swift it's serious, but the V A
hospital in Durham can give him the best
medical care in the nation.

Betty sits in the lobby and cries for hours. Durham is
only a hour and half drive from High Point. Jack's
family and friends visit regularly, but they can all tell
that the once powerful man is slipping away.

Feebly.

JACK

Nina, Roby. I'm glad you could come.

NINA

How you feeling?

JACK

I'm pretty tired. You just missed Wayne.
And Charles came by with your Mom and Dad
earlier.

ROBY

You about ready to get out of here? You
said you wanted a re-match from our last
game of pool.

JACK

Beginner's luck. I never seen a preacher
shoot pool like that.

NINA

Well how many preachers do you play pool
with.

JACK

I wasn't thinking when I invited you.
I'm sorry for that.

Jack lifts his hand weakly to shake hands.

ROBY

Nothing to be sorry about. I'd say it
was as good a place as any to recruit
some lost soul.

Nina is having difficulty keeping her composure. She wants to leave, not letting Jack see her breakdown. Her voice begins breaking up.

NINA

Roby I haven't had anything to eat.
Let's go down to the snack bar before
they close. I'll be back in a minute.

Nina gives Jack a peck on the cheek. Her and her husband step into the hallway. She sobs deeply while she hugs Roby.

JACK

Betty can you hand me a little water?

Betty gently lifts her husband's head to help Jack as he sips from the small paper cup. Jack lets out a heavy sigh, trying to control the pain in his body.

BETTY

Not as good as a Schlitz, is it?

Betty is making every effort to remain upbeat. Jack rolls his head on the pillow, trying to get comfortable.

JACK

I don't think I'll be having another Schlitz.

BETTY

Remember that time in Memphis, when you won the championship. They served that fancy champagne and you didn't like it. You grabbed a can of beer poured it into the champagne glass, stuck your pinky finger out and said "Now that's the good stuff."

Betty dabs at a little bit of water that is trickling down Jack's chin.

BETTY (CONT'D)

I see you didn't get shaved today.

Betty rubs the prickly stubble of beard on Jack.

BETTY (CONT'D)

You want me to get your razor?

Jack looks at Betty, his face pale and empty looking.

JACK

I think I'll just rest a bit.

Jack tilts his head toward his wife and closes his eyes. Betty takes his hand deep into her own, as she sits on the edge of the bed trying to hold back the tears. Jack opens his eyes only seconds later, and squeezes Betty's hand with the little bit of strength he has left.

JACK (CONT'D)

We had one hell of a ride, didn't we!

Jack closes his eyes for the final time, and releases his last dying breath.

2010 RETIREMENT HOME: INT NIGHT

Nina is finishing the story. Tim and David are firmly entrenched in the story. Tim wipes at a tear.

NINA

Your uncle Jack passed away at 8:25 PM on April 5th of 1965. He was only 44 years old. The twins were only a few months old when he died. The official cause of death was kidney failure due to hypertension.

PRESENT DAY CRACKER BARREL RESTAURANT: INT DAY

JOE STEWART

Ms. Pendleton? Hi, I'm Joe Stewart we spoke on the phone.

SUSAN

Please have a seat. This is my sister Mary.

JOE STEWART

It's a pleasure to meet you. I read your post online searching for information about your father.

Bob reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out a small box containing the 1955 Memphis ring.

JOE STEWART (CONT'D)

I found this ring in 1980 at Finch field in High Point. I've kept it all these years. I'm happy to give it to you.

Susan and Mary crying.

SUSAN

Dad played his last game there in 1958.
He passed away when we were still young.
We never really got to know him that
well. This is like getting back a piece
of our father.

Fade out as the three continue talking.

Epilogue Closing Shot: Mountain Park cemetery in Elkin
N.C Overlook grave of Kelly Swift.

Kelly Jack Swift still holds the minor league record for
wins and strikeouts in a single season. Chris Ballard
from Sports Illustrated is credited as saying "They stand
as records that may never be broken."

Betty Swift never remarried. She passed away in 2003 and
lies next to her husband, in Elkin N.C.

Jimmy is still alive and well at the age of 59.

All six of Jack's children have successful careers.

None of them play baseball.

THE END

