

The Barnstormers

by  
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COLD OPEN

HORSE HOOFS and SQUEALING TIRES break the silence around-

EXT. BASEBALL STADIUM- NIGHT

Hooded men with torches hang from the side-rails of Fords, Lincolns and Packards. Other klansmen circle the empty ball park. As they close in on the empty structure, we see a sign reading-

*This Saturday- Dizzy's All Stars versus Wild Bill's  
Barnstorming Baseball Giants*

*2:00 PM*

*tickets available at the gate*

The mob hurls Molotov cocktails into the building. At the gate, a car load of KKK members cut through the chains and break into the stadium. They return to their car and drive onto the field, mangling the carefully crafted green of the outfield and sending up clouds of dirt from the diamond.

INT. BASEBALL STADIUM- CONTINUOUS

The car finally comes to rest atop the pitcher's mound as the rest of the arsonists enter to complete the destruction. Torches and flaming bottles crash into the grandstands, setting them ablaze. Amid the fire and smoke, a final group enters.

Led by the GRAND WIZARD, mounted atop a white horse, the Klan's color guard carries a massive wooden cross. They plant it directly into home plate splintering the dish as they drive the stake into the ground.

The cross is lit up as the fire consumes the stadium around it.

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT I

TITLE-

Friday Morning, October 1938- Somewhere in Kentucky

EXT. GAS STATION- DAY

A rickety old bus sits outside a gas. Along the side, a painted banner reads "Wild Bill's Barnstorming Baseball Giants"

On the bus, a collection of rough-looking, young black men are sleeping, playing cards, or reading. A few of them have gotten out of the bus to stretch and get some fresh air.

At a phone booth beside the station, a lean middle aged white man impatiently waits for someone to answer his call. His own beat up on Ford sits near by. This is WILD BILL LEE. Next to him, a broad shouldered black man with a hard look looks on from the edge of the booth. This imposing figure is JIM "STONEWALL" ARMSTRONG, Bill's catcher and lieutenant.

WILD BILL  
 (to Stonewall, regarding  
 the phone)  
 Nothing.  
 (to himself)  
 Goddamn Klan!

Bill looks back over his shoulder at the men around the bus. A gas station attendant eyes them suspiciously.

WILD BILL  
 Finally, what the hell is going on  
 up there? It's Bill, calling for  
 the big lady-

The gas station attendant goes back into the station and calls someone, all the time, watching the men.

WILD BILL  
 Hi ya' Gloria, it's Bill- I'm at  
 some god-forsaken gas station  
 outside Louisville- That's right-  
 they burned the goddamned place  
 down! They put their damned burnin'  
 cross right through home plate. all  
 that promo money, all that travel  
 time and here we are on Friday  
 morning without a Saturday game-  
 (listening)  
 (MORE)

WILD BILL (cont'd)

You don't have to tell me that, you think I don't know what that costs- well, that is why I called you-

*(listens)*

Yeah in Lexington,

*(another pause)*

You got people there?- Hell, yes I know Slim, damn, ok! Ok then!-

Bill hangs up the phone-

WILD BILL

Everybody! Back on the bus! (to Stonewall, smiling) The big lady still has the pulse of things.

As they walk back to Bill's car, a Cadillac screams down the road past the station. Bill and Stonewall trade a smile.

STONEWALL

Legs!

BILL

I guess he heard.

EXT. KENTUCKY BALL FIELD- LATER THAT DAY

The bus pulls up beside a well-worn baseball field and stops. The Cadillac is already parked at the edge of the field and a lanky, young, black man in a tailored, three-piece suit is leaning up against it and flipping a bat in his hand. This is "LEGS" JOHNSON.

Wild Bill bounds off of the bus as the local kids look up from their lazy games of catch and run down and take notice of the bus.

LEGS

Well, you boys finally made it.

WILD BILL

Howdy, Legs, nice of you to join us again.

Bill walks around the perimeter of the field as the rest of his team slowly trickles out of the bus, stretching and shaking off the long road.

WILD BILL

Well, this is it, men. We have arrived!

Bill smiles broadly.

A tall handsome young man, a very light skinned black man, steps up next to him.

JOHNNY SPAIN

This place is a real hellhole,  
Bill.

WILD BILL

We'll do just fine here, Spanish  
Johnny. Just fine.

Stonewall surveys the field, looking over the batter boxes and then settles into the catcher's position behind the plate. He pops up and darts to the backstop, then retraces the last few steps, measuring their distance. Once he is there, he looks over the wood at the backstop carefully.

WILD BILL

How's it look, Stonewall?

STONEWALL

Hot and wild, some heat here fo'  
sure.

Most of the kids have abandoned their games to watch.

WILD BILL

Johnny, why don't you throw some  
B.P. for the guys while there is  
still daylight.

JOHNNY SPAIN

Alright, boss.

Johnny takes off his jacket and stretches out while Stonewall suits up.

WILD BILL

Batting practice, boys. Make 'em  
notice ya!

The position players scatter out onto the field and take up positions. More of the locals gather around and look on with wonder and indignation.

WILD BILL

You wanna do the honors, Legs?

Legs takes off his jacket and walks slowly up to the plate.

His first swing produces a violent CRACK of the bat and the ball lines hard to short, where the fleet-footed "NIGHTINGALE" LAYNE spears it out of the air in full stride.

Legs hits the next one harder and Night can't reach it. Legs grins and then sends the next one a country mile into the endless grass in center. Some of the local kids chase it into the distance. An audible murmur grows from the small crowd watching the players.

WILD BILL

Alright, outa there, Legs. Christ!  
We only got so many balls.

A police car pulls up right in front of the bus and a fat, balding SHERIFF emerges, followed by an athletic, young DEPUTY.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Who is responsible for this?

Bill smiles before he turns around.

WILD BILL

That would be me-

He bounds over to shake the sheriff's hand, grinning big.

WILD BILL

Wild Bill's the name, Left-handed ace pitcher, promoter and manager ex-traordi-nare. These men you see are my Barnstorming Baseball Giants- the best traveling club ever to grace God's green earth.

The sheriff looks out over the field, unimpressed.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

I got a complaint about a gang of negros gathering up on our field.

WILD BILL

No gang here, just one unbeatable ballclub. This town got any ballplayers?

The deputy gives a curt chuckle.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

This is Daviess County, Kentucky. We had our share of professionals come from here. Dang near everyone in this town plays baseball, but we don't play it with negros.

WILD BILL

Well, if your town can look past the color issue, we take all comers. I believe tomorrow is gonna be beautiful day for baseball.

CRACK! The sharp sound of the bat interrupts the conversation. Bill glances over his shoulder to see the ball clear his left fielder and trail off out of sight. He grimaces.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

We already have games here tomorrow-games for white folk. You're boys wanna game, they gotta find it across town with the rest of the colored folk.

WILD BILL

Well, I had heard this was a baseball town, sheriff, and I have learned a few things about baseball towns in my time. Now I would bet my handsome young ace there-  
*(he points back to Johnny)*  
 that we could come arrangement if your town's people was to understand the type of show they was liable to miss.

There is another loud CRACK of the bat, as if on cue. The make-shift audience cheers as the ball sails away.

WILD BILL

I would imagine there are some people already talking about this potential showdown.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

You wanna *try* to make some arrangement, you can talk to Mayor Eldridge. He'll be at Monty's, on Main and Sherman this evening, until then- you get your *boys* off my field.

Bill gives a loud WHISTLE.

WILD BILL

Bring it in!  
*(to the Sheriff)*  
 I guess I'd better speak with you mayor then.

The Sheriff and the deputy walk back to their car.

WILD BILL  
Your man there looks like he's  
gotta strong arm.

They stop and turn back to Bill.

WILD BILL  
You a pitcher, deputy?

DEPUTY  
Best in the county.

WILD BILL  
Not today, my friend.

Johnny Spain walks slowly off the mound.

TITLE SEQUENCE-

MUSIC- Robert Johnson's *Rambling on My Mind*

The wheels of the old bus roll down a dusty road. They clear  
frame leaving a cloud of dust.

When the dust clears we see Legs sliding under a tag at home  
and the umpire calling him safe.

Two worn black hands wrap tighter around the barrel of bat as  
they pump up.

Long, tan fingers roll over the top of a curveball.

The ball drops below the swing of a bat, into the safety of  
the oversized mitt.

A glove slaps down on the dirt ahead of a sliding leg. Dust  
fills the fame.

Dust clears and reveals the back of the bus rolling away

MAIN TITLE-

The Barnstormers

END OF ACT I

ACT II

INT. MONTY'S SALOON- A LITTLE LATER

Bill enters the busy town saloon. The appearance of a stranger briefly draws the attention from the locals from the stage show, a pretty light skinned black girl singing *Begin the Beguine*, as an old black man plays the piano. The singer, Ms. Ruby Slippers, watches Bill coolly as he walks through the crowd and up to bar. He takes notice of her as well.

WILD BILL  
(to himself) damn!

When the bartender, SLIM, sees him, his face lights up-

SLIM  
My god! Billy Lee is that really you? Ms. Devine called and told me you would be by, I didn't hardly believe her-

WILD BILL  
How ya been, Slim?

SLIM  
Oh, you know, streaks and slumps. The big lady told me you run a ball club now.

WILD BILL  
Yeah, well you mighta mentioned that goddamn Jim Crow sheriff to her-

SLIM  
I didn't know your team was ah-colored.

Bill gives him a suspicious eye.

WILD BILL  
You think Ms. Devine would be in business with a *white* team?

SLIM  
I try to not to think about what the big lady is involved in.

With that, Slim turns away and scans through the bottles. He selects one and pours Bill a generous glass of rye and one for himself.

SLIM

It's been a longtime, ain't it?

WILD BILL

Yeah, it seems like that was another lifetime.

They clink glass and drink.

SLIM

You know I thought you was the real thing Bill, man did I ever. How is it you never made the bigs? I'll never understand that one.

WILD BILL

Yeah, me either.

EXT. CORNFIELD DIAMOND- 1912 FLASHBACK

In a cow pasture that doubles as a field, a young Bill Lee shuffles about nervously on the bare patch of dirt that is the mound. He throws a few warm up pitches.

A group of several men in suits stand to the side watching him intently. Another man, nearly twice as big as the others, stands to the side in his undershirt swinging a massive bat. His broad upper body tapers down to strangely small feet and ankles, and in spite his size he has the round chubby face of baby. This is a familiar figure. The violent left handed swing is also familiar.

One of the men calls out-

MR. ADAMS

You loose kid?

WILD BILL

Yes, sir Mr. Adams. I'm ready.

One of the other men, a dark, sharp-eyed man, nods to the hitter.

TOMMY O'LEARY

Alright Georgie, see what this kid's got.

The big man steps in.

Bill sets and throws a blistering fastball that flies feet over the big man's head.

GEORGIE shoots a look at the scouts, then steps back in.

GEORGIE  
Careful there, wild man.

Bill sets and delivers a second pitch.

This one is on the mark. Georgie swings hard and misses.

Bill takes the ball back and sets again-

Another fastball jams Georgie who fouls it back.

GEORGIE  
(to Bill)  
That's not bad heat there kid.

Bill sets again, throws again.

This time a curve nearly buckles the hitter's knees. Still, Georgie manages to foul it off somehow.

GEORGIE  
(to the scouts)  
Decent curve.  
(to Bill)  
You just might be of some use kid.

Bill smiles at this, his nerves easing up. He sets again.

Once again he sails a pitch well clear of the catcher.

TOMMY O'LEARY  
Try an' relax, son.

Bill nods and takes a moment to compose himself. He readies himself once more and throws.

A vicious change up leaves the big man's violent swing wailing at thin air.

Georgie steps out and shakes his head. He gives the kid a long hard look, then steps back in.

GEORGIE  
Alright, kid keep 'em coming.

Bill catches the return throw and goes back to work.

TOMMY O'LEARY  
Get him a train ticket, Bobby.

MR. ADAMS  
Yes, sir.

MUSIC-

Ruby SINGS *"Nice Work If You Can Get It"*

INT. MARTY'S SALOON- LATER

Slim introduces Bill to Mayor Eldridge, a doughy "town father" type holding court at a large, corner table.

They shake hands.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

Slim tells me you play baseball.  
You aren't the same Bill Lee  
pitches for the Cubbies are ya?

WILD BILL

No, he's a righty. I used pitch in  
the Western League and the Smoky  
Mountain League.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

Aww, then you're the Bill Lee that  
shutout Knoxville for 12 innings in  
'26 then. That's how I know your  
face. Ha ha. You cost me a small  
fortune that day.

WILD BILL

Yeah, that was me.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

Welcome to Liberty, Mr. Lee. Please  
have a seat.

Bill slides into a chair across from the mayor.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

What can I do for you, sir?

WILD BILL

Well, since my heater ran outta  
gas, I have made way in this world  
running my own ballclub, a  
traveling club.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

That would be the club under Ms.  
Devine's care, I take it?

Bill nods.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

Excellent. So, you have come to town for an exhibition series?

WILD BILL

That's right. I- well, myself and Ms. Devine, have assembled the finest group of ballplayers outside of the major leagues-

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Group of colored ballplayers is what he's got.

McKinley and his deputy have emerged behind Bill, contemptuous.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

That so Clarence?

(to Bill)

Seems fairly obvious that should be the case. So, you are here looking for some exceptions to be made?

WILD BILL

That's it. If these were white men, you'd have to travel to Wrigley to see 'em. As things are, you can see them for considerable less playing against your town's finest tomorrow afternoon.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

Well, it's difficult I'm afraid. The county league has two games tomorrow. This is, after all, a baseball town.

WILD BILL

Now we have two games scheduled in K.C tomorrow, but I chose this little detour because I never like to pass up a town where the people know the game, if'n I can help it.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

(knowing) Is that why? Well, who saw this team when they were out there? Clarence you saw 'em, can they play?

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Well, for colored boys-

MAYOR ELDRIGE

You already told me they are colored, now can they play baseball?

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Well, they got some big ol' boys, that can hit the ball anyways, if they can get a bat on it.

DEPUTY

They look like they can field and run a bit, but you can't count on that type having the craft to pitch or the understanding of the finer points liken our men do.

WILD BILL

I'd be happy take a wager or two to that effect, should your honorable mayor see his way to let us hold this game.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Hell, I'd even give you odds.

WILD BILL

I'd take 'em, but it's your boys should be getting 'em.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

Well, I guess we can push a game to Monday if you think you can generate the interest. We'll give you one quarter of gate.

WILD BILL

A quarter? These men play for half.

The whole table laughs.

MAYOR ELDRIGE

Mr. Lee, white men get half the gate. Negroes and their umm, *employers* get a quarter.

WILD BILL

(taking this in stride) Well, I tell you what, you make it a third, I'll put it up on my boys.

DEPUTY  
 (leaning in)  
 You sure gotta lot faith to be  
 putting it on a pack of negros.

WILD BILL  
 One third of the gate goes up  
 against any team you put on the  
 field, just so long as we get to  
 play all nine.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY  
 You'll get all nine.

MAYOR ELDRIGE  
 Well, I guess you and your boys  
 have the second game.

WILD BILL  
 I can't wait, Mr. Mayor.  
 (tipping his hat)  
 Sheriff, Deputy.

Bill walks back to the bar before letting his contempt and frustration bubble up to the surface. Slim pours him another, as Ruby belts out the last lines of the song-

RUBY  
 (singing) )  
*Nice work if you can get it/ and  
 you can get it if you try-*

The music crescendos and ends and Ruby slips off stage and out a back door. Bill waits for a beat then follows her.

INT. COLORED FLOP HOUSE- CONTINUOUS

The team pours into a small shack that serves as the flophouse's office and Johnny approaches the desk.

The Desk clerk, the only person in the whole joint is caught off guard by the influx and obviously frightened by the large, mostly well-dressed men. He stumbles into unfocused action.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
 How many rooms are available?

DESK CLERK  
 (nervous) We have six rooms, mista.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
(disappointed) Six rooms, all  
doubles?

DESK CLERK  
Uh, no sir, one of 'em's a single.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
(annoyed) They got showers?

DESK CLERK  
No, there are two shower stalls  
'round the back.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
Damn it!

Johnny's curse shakes the nervous clerk and Johnny takes notice of his panic.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
(*calmly explaining*) We are a  
traveling ball club. There's  
sixteen of us that need to stay  
somewhere, just tonight. What can  
we do?

DESK CLERK  
Umm, Well, we can get some cots and  
squeeze three into the doubles, I  
guess. That's fifteen. Of course,  
if you aren't staying back in town,  
I'd, ahh, we'd be honored for you  
to take the single.

Johnny now understands.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
Put two cots in the single and add  
one to two more rooms, ok?

Johnny puts a five dollar bill on the counter.

EXT. BEHIND THE SALOON- CONTINUOUS

Bill and Ruby exit the tavern. Behind the tavern, a large black Studebaker is parked. Ruby opens the door for him and Bill gets in.

I/E STUDEBAKER- CONTINUOUS

Bill slides into the back seat next to a large, elegant looking black woman, MS. GLORIA DEVINE. She is at least 50 years old, but in spite of her age and weight it is easy to tell she was once a great beauty. Now it is just as easy to see that she is in charge.

In the front passenger's seat, a sinister figure sits in the shadows. As soon as Bill is in the car, he sees the man, registering the faintest hint of irritation. "MULE" BRADLEY, 34, has the kind of hard expression-less visage that makes it hard to imagine anyone ever being glad at the sight of it,

BILL

You're a long way from Chicago, My lady. I hope you didn't come all this way to bring me a second-rate backstop.

Bill motions at the man sitting in the front. The insult doesn't register.

BILL

When I saw Ruby and Floyd I guessed he might be in tow, but I'd have never guess that you'd be joining us personally.

MS. DEVINE

Yes, well, I have some business interests just across town

BILL

(amused) I bet you do. They need girls and numbers every where, eh Mule?

This, at least, registers an evil grin.

BILL

Seems the Mayor is a friend of yours.

MS. DEVINE

As long as I keep my business among my people and grease a few white palms along the way, it isn't hard for me to make friends in this world. This team we have built though, that is a trickier matter.

BILL

Tricky, but profitable, after all.

MS. DEVINE

Not nearly profitable enough for all the headaches it causes me.

WILD BILL

Look, I can't help it if the damn Klan burned down the stadium. That game woulda put us over two grand in the black, but what can you do. Tomorrow, we'll clean these hicks out and you'll feel better about it.

MS. DEVINE

Always a day late and a dollar short, aren't you Bill? You give your slips to Slim and he'll take care of that. You just care of the boys.

BILL

Don't I always, partner?

MS. DEVINE

Yeah, right. All that aside, there's another reason I had to meet up with you here, Bill

WILD BILL

I don't like the sound of that.

INT. TEAM OWNER'S OFFICE- FLASHBACK 1914

In a dimly lit office, a fat man in a three-piece suit smokes a large cigar.

TEAM OWNER

Well, Lee what is it?

Young Bill Lee stands in front of the owner's desk holding his hat. He shuffles his feet as begins to speak-

WILD BILL

Well, sir, I was hoping that we could discuss my contract for the coming year.

The fat man smiles.

TEAM OWNER

Alright, let's see.

He opens a drawer and pulls out a stack of papers.

TEAM OWNER

(searching) Lee, Lee... Here we are. You made \$600 dollars this season, that is no small sum, my boy.

WILD BILL

Umm, no sir it isn't.

TEAM OWNER

Well, we are no doubt going to renew that contract, son. You are having a mighty fine season for the club, mighty fine.

WILD BILL

That's what I mean, sir, I have heard, ah, talk that Georgie has been sold up to the club in Boston and well I have be thinking-

TEAM OWNER

You are thinking, no doubt, about the rumors of what I am receiving for that particular player. Thinking, Mr. Lee, is a dangerous habit for a ballplayer, especially for a pitcher. An athlete such as yourself needs strict focus, else he becomes careless, his performance suffers. You are paid well for your time and your abilities such as they are and thoughts should remain limited on the catcher's mitt.

WILD BILL

Sir, in two and a half seasons I have been the best man on your pitching staff, better then Georgie even. I have gotten more strikeouts, walked fewer men and permitted fewer hits and runs then any other man in this league. I feel that entitles me to be paid better than any man in this-

TEAM OWNER

Kid- you been here not even three years. There are men here, full grown men, who don't have the contract you have, you should remember that.

He rubs out his cigar.

TEAM OWNER

Still, I am not an unreasonable man, and in light of your performance, perhaps some additional compensation is in order. Now, what price does that mind of yours put on that arm?

WILD BILL

(without hesitation) twelve hundred.

The fat man laughs. Bill stirs.

TEAM OWNER

Mr. O'Leary often tells me that confidence, bordering on arrogance, is among the greatest virtues a player can possess. No, I think that a raise of one hundred dollars is appropriate-

WILD BILL

If you aren't gonna pay me sir, I think it's best you sell me up to one of the big clubs, where they will.

The owner erupts from his chair.

TEAM OWNER

This club does not exist to serve you and it does not exist to serve the so called *major* leagues.

WILD BILL

This ain't the only place to play ball-

TEAM OWNER

This is the only place you will play ball son, you have a contract and this is a land of law and order. No upstart-Federal-league or any other can violate a contract I hold. You will honor that contract before the law and before God! Now get out of my office!

Bill slams the door behind him.

EXT. FLOPHOUSE- 1938 AGAIN

Nightingale tosses a bottle of talcum powder to another player as he passes Leg's Caddy. The other player sneaks up to the car as Night walks up to one of the rooms.

INT. FLOPHOUSE ROOM- CONTINUOUS

Stonewall, Legs and Johnny enter their cramped little room, the light scares off a mouse and some bugs.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
(disgusted). God I can't wait until  
we make it out of the sticks.

Stonewall tosses his stuff on the bed and sits down.  
Nightingale appears in the door behind them.

NIGHTINGALE  
Well Mr. Legs Johnson finally  
returns. What could we have done to  
deserve such a treat?

JOHNNY SPAIN  
Cool it Night-

NIGHTINGALE  
Got yerself a fancy new automobile  
there, too. It must be nice to be  
such a celebrity. Tell me, who do  
you think is more famous, you or  
Louis Armstrong?

LEGS  
I don't care who's famous, Night, I  
just care that I get mine.

NIGHTINGALE  
Right, you jump the team for a  
dollar more here and there, go up  
to Wyoming and play with white  
boys, whatever it takes to get  
yours, right?

LEGS  
North Dakota and last I checked, I  
don't owe anyone here a thing.

Legs pushes past Nightingale, suddenly conscious of  
Stonewall's gaze.

EXT. FLOPHOUSE- CONTINUOUS

As Legs exits, the player with the powder is walking away from his car.

The Studebaker pulls up behind the team bus parked outside and Bill, Ms. Devine and her driver get out.

Stonewall starts toward them and Johnny starts to follow, but Stonewall stops him.

Stonewall approaches Bill and Ms. Devine.

STONEWALL

Cargo?

BILL

Yeah, why don't you make sure the guys aren't paying attention, ok?

Stonewall is angered by being sent away, but he goes.

The driver opens the trunk.

INSIDE THE TRUNK-

*There are several large cases. They pry one open and reveal cases of cigars.*

WILD BILL

They make cigars illegal now.

Ms. Devine opens up a box and removes a cylindrical cigar case and pulls off the top. She pours a fine white powder into her hand.

WILD BILL

What the hell is that?

MS. DEVINE

New product.

WILD BILL

It sure don't look like booze or grass.

MS. DEVINE

Booze is legal now-been legal for a while, if you haven't heard and grass ain't worth nothing. This is the future- heroin.

Bill watches intently as she pours the powder back into the case.

WILD BILL

Listen, booze was one thing, back during prohibition, most lawmen was fine with you running it, this ain't the same. People aren't gonna wanna be a-party to this.

MS. DEVINE

You mean, you don't want to be "a-party" to it.

WILD BILL

Me, my guys, no one- hell if the team knew we was fronting for this, I couldn't keep it together a day.

MS. DEVINE

I guess you better not let them know about it then, huh?

WILD BILL

I am saying it better not go on my bus.

MS. DEVINE

Your bus? That's cute. (to Mule)  
Load it on the bus. (to Bill) The bus is mine, I keep payroll going, I put out for the publicity- if you don't want to know all the dirty little details of how I make that happen for a colored team in this white world, you can go back bumming around the bush leagues, ok partner?

Bill looks on helplessly as the last crate is loaded into the saddle boxes of the bus.

Behind him Leg's starts his car and gets blasted with a face full of powder. The team roars with laughter.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - 1914 FLASHBACK

Bill is standing outside a train station at a Western Union window.

WILD BILL

(dictating) Dear Scooter, stop.  
Left the team, stop.

(MORE)

WILD BILL (cont'd)  
Heading out your way, stop. Looking  
for a place to play, stop.

INT. TRAIN CAR- 1914 FLASHBACK

Bill sits on the train as the conductor comes makes his  
announcements.

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)  
This is the 12:30 Baltimore-  
Nashville train making stops in  
Philadelphia, Harrisburg,  
Pittsburgh, Dayton, Cincinnati, and  
Nashville. All tickets please.

Two men in suits walk by.

1ST MAN  
You hear about that pitcher jumping  
the team.

Bill sinks low in his chair and lowers his hat.

2ND MAN  
Unbelievable, first they sell off  
Goergie, now they can't keep their  
other lefty in town. Heck of a ball  
club we got here.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

INT. ROADHOUSE BAR- NIGHT

Inside a ramshackle, old barn-turned-bar an old blind guitarist is playing blues as the town's black population drinks and dances. Nightingale and a young girl are there, grinding close to each other.

Legs, Stonewall, Johnny, Nightingale and a few other players enter.

The crowd parts uneasily as Johnny heads to the bar. He tries his best to shrink from their gaze.

The players all head for the bar. Nightingale eyes a pretty girl in the crowd and heads her way.

As Johnny approaches three men clear out from around him and the bartender drops what he is doing to attend to him.

BARTENDER

How can I help you sir?

JOHNNY SPAIN

Whiskey (pointing to Stonewall)  
two. Please.

Johnny watches as the bartender scrambles to find his finest bottle. He's annoyed.

JOHNNY SPAIN

The regular stuff is fine.

Johnny and Stonewall take a seat at the bar, while Legs and the others go off to look for girls.

JOHNNY SPAIN

I get goddman tired of it,  
Stonewall.

Stonewall gives Johnny an icy look, but doesn't respond.

JOHNNY SPAIN

You think you'd like it if people  
took you for being something you  
ain't.

Legs sits at the bar watching Nightingale intensely. He gets an idea and scribbles something down. When he is down, he pulls aside a young kid who is acting as the BAR BACK.

LEGS

Hey son, how would you like to make two dollars?

BARBACK

Would I?

LEGS

You see that man over there, dancing with that girl?

BARBACK

Oh, you mean the one with Ms. Charlotte? Yeah, I see him.

LEGS

Ok here's what-

INT. ROADHOUSE BAR- MINUTES LATER

The young barback approaches Nightingale and tugs on his sleeve.

BARBACK

'scuse me mista, mista you Kenny Davis, Nightingale Davis?

NIGHTINGALE

Yeah, I'm Nightingale Davis, what, kid? You want an autograph?

BARBACK

No sir, I'm from, they sent me from the boardinghouse sir, you're wife, she sent a telegram for you. Said it was important.

Nightingale sees he is caught.

NIGHTINGALE

You got the wrong guy, I ain't got no wife.

BARBACK

You said you was Kenny Davis, that's what they said, from Mrs. Davis.

Charlotte butts in.

CHARLOTTE

You're married. You been whisper  
all your sweet little promises in  
my ear and you's is married?!?

She throws a drink in his face. Legs busts up laughing.

Nightingale is left fuming.

Legs slips the kid his money and offers Nightingale a  
handkerchief.

LEGS

I suppose she musta heard about  
Mrs. Davis huh?

NIGHTINGALE

Screw you, Legs.

INT. SALOON- LATER

Bill is still drinking at the bar. The crowd has cleared out  
and only a few small groups remain. Bill looks at a group in  
the corner. Several men, including the sheriff and deputy are  
talking and looking over at him.

WILD BILL

Hey Slim-

Slim walks over to Bill.

WILD BILL

Slim, I can trust you, right?.

SLIM

Sure, of course, you and me go back  
to Smoky Mountain League, and Ms.  
Devine, well, she kept me and my Pa  
before me in business-

WILD BILL

I mean can I trust you to keep  
certain things from *her*?

SLIM

I don't like the sound of that-

WILD BILL

It's nothing major, I just need to  
keep a few bets to myself is all.  
You run her books like you always  
do, just keep a few slips off for  
my *personal* interest, no big deal

SLIM

Ok, I can do that. You should keep your eyes on those men there, though.

WILD BILL

I take it that's some kind of men's *social group*.

SLIM

Yeah, the Sheriff and Mayor Eldridge don't exactly see eye to eye on Ms. Devine and her interests in town, but he tows the line most times. You're game here, its pushing the envelope with him and his *associates* though. You be careful, if you're hearing me-

WILD BILL

Guess that's what I get for being this close to Indiana. I'll see you tomorrow, Slim.

Bill gets up from the bar and starts to exit. The sheriff cuts him off before the door.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

You got your game, Mister Lee, and I'll see it gets played and then you see that when that last out is recorded you take your boys and you move on, you understand?

WILD BILL

Yeah, I understand. Believe me, we aren't gonna hang around.

Bill pushes his way past the sheriff and out the door.

EXT. KENTUCKY BALL FIELD- 1914 FLASHBACK

Wild Bill is on the mound in the same Kentucky town twenty-four years earlier. A large crowd watches the lefty deal.

Bill throws vicious breaking ball to strike out the hitter.

As he catches the return throw, he sees a large black car pulling up to the field. Two large men in suits, obvious THUGS step out. Bill turns his concentration to the next hitter.

EXT. KENTUCKY BALL FIELD- 1914 FLASHBACK - THE END OF THE GAME

As the crowd disperses, Bill lingers long on the mound.

Everyone is heading off somewhere, except for Bill and the two thugs.

Finally after most of the crowd has left, Bill walks slowly from the mound to the two men.

WILD BILL

I take it you two gentlemen are from Baltimore.

One of the thugs nods.

WILD BILL

Let's go then.

INT. TRAIN CAR- 1914 FLASHBACK

Bill sits between the two men on a train headed back to Baltimore.

INT. BALTIMORE TRAIN STATION- 1914 FLASHBACK

Bill is greeted by the team owner and two state marshals.

TEAM OWNER

Mr. Lee. So nice to see you again. Now that you have been kind enough to return to the good state of Maryland, I'm happy to inform you, you are in violation of your contract. As such, I saw it fit to give you just what you asked for. I have indeed sold your contract.

Bill is baffled. Is he going to the show?

TEAM OWNER

These gentlemen are here to assure that your new team, the um, Portland Pioneers, I believe it is, receive their new stud southpaw in a timely fashion.

WILD BILL

Portland?

TEAM OWNER

Yes, Mr. Lee, Portland, as in Oregon, the western leagues. The end of world, as it were.

He chuckles at this.

WILD BILL

The western leagues? You sold my contract to the western leagues?!?

TEAM OWNER

That's right, son.

Bill tries to walk away, but the two men escorting him grab him. He struggles against them until the marshals cuff him.

STATE MARSHALL

Take it easy there, boy. You gotta catch a train.

INT. BILL'S HOTEL ROOM- NIGHT

Bill walks into the dark room. He flips on the light and heads for his bags.

Out of his suit case he pulls a bottle of whiskey. Out of the bat bag, he selects a beat-up old wood bat.

He tosses the bat on the bed and pries open a cap on the barrel. From inside the hollow tube, he removes a roll of papers and then a roll of cash.

He sits down on the bed and quickly counts through the cash. This sends a worried look through his face. When he is done, he tosses the cash on the desk and sits down.

He flips through the papers, old scouting notes, score sheets and betting slips until he finds several ledger pages. He flips to a blank one and starts writing.

Sipping a drink, alone in the room, Bill lists expenses like: gas, lodging, baseball, food against the cash he has and tries to figure out what he needs to get tomorrow. Next to the teams budget sits a carbon copy slip reading "player contract" his name is printed in the top line.

INT. ROADHOUSE BAR- NIGHT

Back at the roadhouse, Legs has taken to dancing with Charlotte as Night sulks in the corner.

He gets up and goes over to the bartender, obviously asking him about the girl.

Down the bar Johnny and Stonewall are still drinking in the same spot. Johnny is a bit drunk.

JOHNNY SPAIN

You think they'll ever let a black man play in the majors, Stone?

STONEWALL

Nope.

JOHNNY SPAIN

No, indeed.

STONEWALL

Just the way it is.

JOHNNY SPAIN

When I first joined up with you and Bill, what'd you take me for?

STONEWALL

a solid righty.

JOHNNY SPAIN

Well, at least I'm that.

Down the bar, Nightingale is laughing at something. He looks around and rushes over to the kid who is bar-backing.

After Night slips him a coin, he rushes off.

The old man playing the blues starts up a slow grinding number. Legs pulls the girl close up to him and they dance tight and low.

Nightingale looks on, watching close, jealous. His eyes bounce back between them and the door.

As the sound winds to a close, a massive middle aged black man bursts into the place and screams at the couple-

CHARLOTTE'S FATHER

You get your hands off of my baby girl!

He charges Legs and hits him square in the face. Legs is knocked back and Nightingale busts up laughing.

Charlotte's father continues after Legs as he gets to his feet, but the young athlete is too much for him.

Legs ducks another punch and throws the old man down. Then he goes after Night and a complete brawl breaks out.

Legs misses Night with a wild swing as Johnny and Stonewall jump in to pull him away.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
Goddamn it you two.

Stonewall tries to drag Legs out through the melee, but he breaks free and runs out. Johnny pulls Nightingale with him as the rest force their way out.

EXT. ROADHOUSE BAR- NIGHT

Leg's car peels out down the dark dirt road.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
Think he'll be alright?

Stonewall shrugs.

NIGHTINGALE  
To hell with him.

They start down the road to the flop house.

EXT. DIRT ROAD- A FEW MINUTES LATER

The players are walking back to town when they see Leg's car and another vehicle pulled over.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
Goddamn it.

Johnny runs toward the two cars as fast as he can.

When he gets there he sees Legs squaring off with a large REDNECK. Two other white men are standing behind the first one with a shotgun resting on his hip. All three men are from the "social group" Bill saw in the bar.

REDNECK  
Did you say something me, boy!

Legs is silent but refuses to back down.

REDNECK  
I asked you a question.

Johnny waves at the men.

JOHNNY SPAIN

Hey there guys! Hold up, hold up.

Johnny inserts himself between Legs and the angry redneck.

JOHNNY SPAIN

What's the problem here guys, is my friend here causing you men some trouble?

The Redneck gives Johnny a long look. So does Legs.

REDNECK

This boy here has a mouth on him, is what. Why you concerned with him?

The ballplayers emerge out of the darkness, alarming the others.

JOHNNY SPAIN

He plays with our team, we are ballplayers, maybe you heard of us? We got a game here tomorrow, Wild Bill's Barnstormers?

REDNECK

A baseball club. One of them traveling-Negro-baseball circus things?

The men laugh at them. Johnny just lets it go.

JOHNNY SPAIN

This is Legs Johnson, you might have heard of him? Hit two home runs off Dizzy Dean last winter. He's a big star.

REDNECK

Yeah, well that don't mean he gets a be mouthy, does it?

Legs lurches behind Johnny, but Stone and Night hold him back. The man with the shotgun shifts it in his hands purposefully.

Johnny just smiles coolly and takes the Redneck aside.

JOHNNY SPAIN

He gets that way, you know when he can't handle his liquor, you see? That's why we were so worried about him.

(MORE)

JOHNNY SPAIN (cont'd)  
 He runs off and finds himself a  
 bottle and my boss can't stop  
 worrying, you understand me. He's  
 really a sweet ol' boy when he's  
 good and sober.

The Redneck looks back at Legs, now cooling down behind  
 Stonewall's massive frame.

REDNECK  
 Your boy there needs to apologize  
 to me.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
 Of course, let me speak with him.

Johnny takes Legs aside.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
 Legs, I need you to apologize to  
 that man, I know it's bull, but  
 it's the only way everyone walks  
 away from here.

LEGS  
 I got another way.

Legs shows Johnny a pistol he has in his jacket pocket.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
 You know where that road goes,  
 Charlie. You just make nice, we all  
 walk away.

Legs bows his head, resigned. Johnny turns back to the  
 Klansmen.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
 You go ahead, now.

Legs shuffles forward, Johnny steers him toward the Redneck  
 who is now all puffed up. Johnny watches Legs closely,  
 scared.

LEGS  
*(as if rehearsed)* I am sorry,  
 mistah, I shouldn'ta a mouthed off  
 at youse.

The redneck smiles.

REDNECK

You're goddamn right! (laughs, then  
to Johnny) Take your *boys* back to  
their stables, 'for they get  
themselves in some real trouble.

Johnny nods.

He directs Legs back to the car and the four ballplayers get  
in.

Legs refuses to look at Johnny as they pull away.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

EXT. BALL FIELD- THE NEXT MORNING

The bus pulls up to the ball field early in the morning. The white teams are already warming up for the first game. Bill is watching the players intensely.

Johnny is the first one off the bus. He rushes up to Bill's side.

Bill turns back to Johnny.

WILD BILL

We have to have this one, Spanish Johnny. Got a sixth of the gate on us already, and we're only pulling a third.

JOHNNY SPAIN

I need to talk to you.

WILD BILL

What is it?

JOHNNY SPAIN

Legs. He nearly got himself lynched last night and he is smarting from it something bad.

WILD BILL

Goddamn it, Johnny, how'd that happen?

JOHNNY SPAIN

He and Nightingale got at it at a bar we was at and Legs took off himself, couple of guys got in his face. I got there in time though and they took me for white, thank god.

WILD BILL

So you think Legs'll show up today?

JOHNNY SPAIN

No idea, if he does, he ain't gonna be much for holding back.

WILD BILL

That's no good, we gotta get everything we can from this, I'm gonna take any side bet we can make, I need everyone on board.

INT. ARTHUR WEINSTEIN'S MANSION- 1919 FLASHBACK

Young Wild Bill wonders into the beautiful and extravagant home of ARTHUR WEINSTEIN, the short, balding, plump man of 60 who greets Bill genially.

ARTHUR

Bill, my boy, how are you? Hell of a game yesterday, hell of a game!

WILD BILL

Thank you, Mr. Weinstein.

ARTHUR

Please, call me Arthur. I have a feeling you and I are gonna be fast friends. What's your drink?

WILD BILL

Whiskey.

ARTHUR

Whiskey! Good man, good man.

Arthur pours two Whiskeys from an ornate Globe bar filled with crystal bottles.

ARTHUR

This isn't just that local moonshine, my boy, this is the "ol' mountain dew" as it were, true Irish Whiskey, not easy to come in these uncivilized times.

Bill gives the drink more of his attention.

ARTHUR

Time that you got accustomed to life's finer things, m'boy. I sense a sea-change coming your way.

Bill raises his glass-

WILD BILL

To the finer things then-

ARTHUR

And to new friendships.

They toast and drink. Bill takes a slow sip, but Arthur drains his glass.

ARTHUR

Now, let us discuss some hard details, shall we.

WILD BILL

I hope Rabbit told you, I have just one sticking point. I won't throw no games, not now and not ever. He said you didn't require that-

ARTHUR

Ahh, well, Billy. I was sorry to hear that. The odds are best against you, sure you know that.

WILD BILL

I've heard that, sure. You should understand, Mr. Weinstein, umm, Arthur, I'm not much on religion. In my mind, baseball's only got one deadly sin, and that's losing. I'll take my chances rigging some of my numbers, but I won't just lay down.

ARTHUR

Well, that's a fine point you make. And it is well heard. Fortunately, a man can bet on nearly anything that happens in a ball game. How many walks, how many hits, how many strikeouts, all these things can be made open to speculation and in that, there is opportunity, m'boy.

Arthur refills their drinks.

ARTHUR

Now, you start again Tuesday against Tacoma, is that right?

WILD BILL

Yes.

ARTHUR

Well, let's talk some numbers then.

Arthur leads Bill towards his office.

EXT. BALL FIELD- BACK IN 1938, LATER IN THE MORNING

The white teams are now playing the first game.

Bill, Johnny and Stonewall sit alone on the rickety, makeshift, "black's only" bleachers and watch. Stonewall keeps score.

On the field, the batter drives a ball sharply down the first base line.

Bill and company watch as the Deputy, playing right field races over to pick it up.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
Should be three.

WILD BILL  
We shall see.

The runner rounds second at full throttle.

The deputy picks up the ball in right and whips it hard to third.

The throw rockets past the cut off as the runner digs in hard, running at full tilt.

On a single sharp hop the throw reaches third, easily beating the man sliding into the bag.

WILD BILL  
Well, there's your opposing pitcher.

They watch as the deputy trots back into position, stretching his arm out as he goes.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
Ok, so we take the under at seven, if you can get it. Don't be too sure I can pitch though.

WILD BILL  
We'll get that. And you'll pitch it, Comprende, mi amigo?

Behind them, Leg's Caddy pulls up to the field. Legs jumps out and walks up to the fence without acknowledging any of them.

WILD BILL  
(to Stonewall) Can you talk to him?

STONEWALL

Won't do no good, you know Legs.

JOHNNY SPAIN

He knows what he's gotta do.

WILD BILL

Sometimes knowing what you have to do and doing it aren't easy things to reconcile. Every man has his pride.

EXT. BALLFIELD- LATER

Bill slips back around the side of the bus where Johnny and Stonewall are warming up. He's carrying a handful of makeshift betting slips.

WILD BILL

They almost done already, jeez.

STONEWALL

Bottom of the ninth, one away.

WILD BILL

About time. So here's the lines. We got under at seven runs but it doesn't pay much, so we need the over at 8 K's for us-

JOHNNY SPAIN

Are you outta your mind? How'm I gonna fan nine in a (lowering his voice), in a goddamn racist backwater shithole like this?

WILD BILL

Swinging strikes, I'd bet. Now we also got an over for them at ten hits, so you'll be walking a fine line out there. Make sure you let Nightingale and the rest of the infield know. That's all but the bus and the gear on the table today, so we gotta make these numbers and we gotta look lucky doing it. No good betting if we can't collect, you follow me?

JOHNNY SPAIN

Right, sure, pea-sized zone, lotsa hits, lotsa K's.

(MORE)

JOHNNY SPAIN (cont'd)  
Another day in the sticks with Wild  
Bill's baseball freak show

Johnny walks off toward the field.

WILD BILL  
We gonna be alright?

STONEWALL  
You're laying down a lot for a  
backwater game like this.

WILD BILL  
I'm thinking we need to buyout our  
"silent partner" a little sooner  
than planned.

Bill looks down towards the area where some of his men are stretching and throwing at Mule, who leans up against the team bus.

STONEWALL  
I thought that might be it.

On the field, the final out in the first game comes on a easy ground out and the teams shake hands and mosey off the field.

Mayor Eldridge walks up to home plate and waves his hands to quiet the crowd.

MAYOR ELDRIGE  
Alright folks, alright! I know some  
of you here are expecting the game  
between the Millstone Mining and  
Johnson's Hardware, but we have a  
special treat for you this  
afternoon, so we will be  
rescheduling that game for Monday  
at five PM. Today our town is proud  
to welcome a traveling team  
assembled by former star of the  
Orioles of the International league  
and one of the premiere pitchers  
ever to grace the fields of  
Kentucky, the Wild man, Billy Lee!

There is little applause after Bill's introduction.

MAYOR ELDRIGE (CONT'D)

Mr. Lee has searched far and wide for the best ballplayers outside of the major leagues and he has been kind enough to bring his Barnstorming Baseball Giants here to play against our town's best for you this afternoon.

After the word "giants," the crowd, taking his meaning begins to boo and hiss enthusiastically, except for the small section of black fans at the far right field corner, who cheer madly.

MAYOR ELDRIGE (CONT'D)

Tickets are just a dime and we will start the game just as soon as we finish collecting.

The barnstormers take the field and start warming up briskly. Johnny just watches from the side.

Stonewall hits sharp grounders at the slick fielding infielders.

From his place in the dugout, Bill watches the ticket collectors and tries to keep a running count of the money in his head.

His concentration is interrupted when he sees the Sheriff and several of the other men from the 'social club' suiting up as the umpires.

WILD BILL

(to himself) Mother-!

Bill walks across the field to the Sheriff behind home.

WILD BILL

Something wrong with those guys who called the first game?

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Excuse me.

WILD BILL

Don't seem right to have someone who has such a large wager on the game making himself umpire.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

I told you I'd make sure you got the game in and I will do so. This town is built on order.

(MORE)

SHERIFF MCKINLEY (cont'd)

That order does not include white men and black men sharing the same field, playing in the same games. If that is to be the case, myself and these other *concerned citizens* will make sure that what little order remains is not disturbed any further because of the actions on the field. Do you understand?

WILD BILL

I understand perfectly.

Bill calls over to one of the guys in the outfield.

WILD BILL

Alright Johnny, warm up.

Johnny Spain jogs in. Sheriff McKinley watches incredulous.

The sheriff grabs Bill who was walking away.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

You might have gotten the ok to play this game, but I'll be damned if I am going to allow a white man to play on the same *side* as their kind.

Bill chuckles.

WILD BILL

You mean Johnny? Ha! He's Cuban, he's just got real light skin (towards the mound) Hey Johnny!

Johnny jogs up to Bill, who gives him a quick wink.

JOHNNY SPAIN

Que?

The sheriff takes a long hard look at Johnny; his light tan skin, his dark, slightly knotty hair.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

This guy ain't white?

WILD BILL

They didn't let him play in the Bigs and it wasn't cause he couldn't cut it. He's a Cuban, mostly, that don't make him a white man.

The sheriff deliberates on Johnny's face. The scrutiny is obviously a regular source of pain for the pitcher.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Alright, he can pitch, but you're time on the field is up. Home team has the field

WILD BILL

Why of course. (to the team) Bring 'em in boys!

The team hustles off the field so the home team can warm-up. Johnny sticks close to Bill.

JOHNNY SPAIN

You got me walking a fine line with this town, Bill.

WILD BILL

It's just business, Johnny. You have a part to play, that's all there is to it.

JOHNNY SPAIN

It don't make an easier-

WILD BILL

Anything except throwing that ball there ever been easy for you, Johnny?

JOHNNY SPAIN

It's a dangerous game we have here, that's all.

Bill chuckles, but he can't help casting a look back at the saddle boxes on the bus.

WILD BILL

(to the field) Alright let's go Night!

Nightengale steps into the batter's box to start the game.

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

EXT. BALLFIELD- BOTTOM OF THE FIRST

Spain takes the hill to start the home half of the first inning.

The Sheriff crouches behind Stonewall with a look of disgust, keeping his distance.

Johnny takes the signs from Stonewall and nods.

He delivers his first pitch- a beautiful fastball on the outside corner, a perfect strike one.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Ball.

All Johnny can do is stare.

For his part, Stonewall holds his position for a long beat after the call.

WILD BILL

Damnit!

He looks down at the slip in his hand that read, "Over 8 K's 5:1"

WILD BILL

That's alright Johnny, you got 'em  
you got 'em!

Johnny digs his feet in on the mound and resets himself.

His next pitch is even better, inducing an easy ground out.

The next hitter steps in and again Johnny paints a beautiful pitch on the outside edge.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Ball.

Stonewall remains in place holding the glove right where he caught it. He holds the glove in place unflinching for a long count.

The sheriff snarls into Stonewall's ear

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Boy, you better get this game  
moving.

Stonewall stands up to his full imposing size and looks briefly over his shoulder.

Johnny gets the return throw and sets again.

His next pitch also induces a ground ball but this one skates by Nightingale who breaks very late to the ball. One on, one out.

Johnny darts a coy smile at his shortstop before he returns to the hill.

The next pitch is hit even harder to the same spot, but this time Night scoops it up easy and they turn two by a mile.

As they enter the dugout, Legs is fuming.

LEGS

That racist ump! I'm three hundred feet out in center and I can see those were strikes.

WILD BILL

Relax, Charlie, it's not gonna matter a damn bit.

LEGS

I'm getting mighty tired of playing half-ass so a bunch of fat ol' honkies can feel good about their game. Mighty tired.

WILD BILL

You tired of those three-piece suits and that Cadillac of yours too?

Legs grabs his bat and leaves the dugout.

From the on-deck circle he watches the Deputy throw. He throws almost as hard as Johnny. Almost

Legs has a fire in his eyes as he digs in to the box.

The deputy rears back and the ball rifles toward the plate.

Legs' swing is sweet and easy and the thunderous CRACK of the bat silences the whole yard.

Legs watches his shot sail well over the centerfielder and well over the last line of spectators in the segregated outfield. He trots just fast enough to avoid a fight breaking out. One-nothing, Stormers.

In the dugout, Bill is shaking his head. This isn't good for his little schemes.

WILD BILL

Thank god, there was no one on.

Legs walks back into the dugout past Bill without a glance.

MONTAGE- SCENES FROM THE GAME

*Johnny gets a swinging strikeout-*

*Bill marks it down on his scorecard; the betting slips are clipped above it.*

*Legs dashes over from center to field a fly ball hit to right which wouldn't have been caught by the right fielder.*

*Legs rips a line drive, driving in another run. Bill looks up uneasily at the score, 2-1 visitors.*

*Johnny paints and paints, but can't get a call. Three hitters walk their way on.*

*Johnny tosses a few easy ones and his defense pulls him through again.*

*A pop up to Nightingale leaves an easy play for the final out, but Legs comes in from distant center and steals the catch from right over Night's glove.*

*Johnny fans two more, 6 k's in the sixth, in spite of everything. After the second one, the once hostile crowd cheers for Johnny, now recognizing his skill.*

END OF MONTAGE

As the seventh inning starts, the score is tied 2-2. Bill is pacing incessantly. The rest of team is relaxed, even enjoying themselves.

JOHNNY SPAIN

Relax, Bill, it couldn't be going better. We're making 'em look ok and the crowd's getting a good game.

WILD BILL

Yeah, I guess. Just got a bad feeling, is all.

(MORE)

WILD BILL (cont'd)

It's too goddamn tight, here, we miss the under and the K's it ain't gonna be easy keeping this show on the road, even if we do win.

JOHNNY SPAIN

(smiling) You've held it together this long.

WILD BILL

It's like juggling fire though.

JOHNNY SPAIN

(In Spanish) Beats growing sugar cane.

Johnny winks at him as he heads out to the on deck circle.

Bill gives him some sign as he swings.

JOHNNY SPAIN

I'm right there with you, boss.

A hit drifts into the outfield and Johnny steps into the box.

He shows bunt, then takes a first pitch strike.

Bill sends signals to the runner on first.

Johnny steps in again, again he shows bunt.

The runner on first takes off with the pitch.

Johnny carefully bunts a short pop-up to the third basemen, who easily doubles up the runner. Inning over.

Johnny makes a show of kicking at the dirt, feigning disappointment.

EXT. BALLFIELD- BOTTOM OF THE SEVENTH

Spain throws a perfect strike for ball one. The next pitch he eases up and the batter drives it deep over Leg's head.

JOHNNY SPAIN

Damn it.

WILD BILL

Damn.

Legs races after the ball, catches up to it and fires the ball back to the cutoff man as the white player heads for third.

The SECOND BASEMEN makes a perfect throw ahead of the runner and the THIRD BASEMEN applies the tag.

Predictably, the umpire calls the runner safe.

In the Dugout, Bill loses his mind, throwing his scorecard to the ground knocking over bats and gloves.

Legs runs in from center, but Nightingale stops him at the dirt.

NIGHTINGALE

Don't do that Legs, don't make this worse.

LEGS

Get off of me.

NIGHTINGALE

This ain't anything to get strung up over, Charlie. Just a game- You understand?

In his rage, Legs can still understand that.

In front of home plate, Stonewall's booming voice rains down.

STONEWALL

No one out! Man on third.

He holds a fist in the air to signal the base-outs state. The entire team returns to their positions. When they are in place. Stonewall puts his mask back on and takes his place.

EXT. ARKANSAS BALLFIELD- 1927 FLASHBACK

WILD BILL looks even older then his thirty-one years. He rides down a dusty road in an old pickup.

The pickup pulls up to a baseball diamond where two teams are getting set to play. Bill is surprised to see that one team is all-black.

As he hops out of his truck, a gangly snare-tooth man greets him.

HOSS

Bill Lee, right?

WILD BILL

That's me. You Hoss?

HOSS

I sure am.

WILD BILL

So you have money for me?

HOSS

(chuckles) My, you are direct, sir. Yes, we scraped together a full fifty dollars between the team and the town folks. No one here wants to see those big ugly black sons-a-bitches beat our boys.

Bill looks past Hoss to watch the black players warming up. The team has a smooth carefree way of fielding and running that almost hides the substantial skill with which they play.

WILD BILL

Who are they?

HOSS

I heard they're one a them Negro National league clubs, some negros trying to build themselves a major league of their own.

Hoss laughs until he makes himself cough.

WILD BILL

Look pretty good.

HOSS

Word is they are pretty good. Beat up on the Mill team up in Monroe and swept three games against Pine Bluff just last week. Our boys are equal to any of those squads with the bat, maybe better, but we ain't got much for arms, since a St. Louis scout passed through here.

WILD BILL

Who was that, Arnie?

HOSS

Can't say as I know, just know he took the only real pea-thrower we had.

WILD BILL

You got my money, you got a pitcher.

HOSS

Oh, yes. Here you are?

He hands Bill a wrinkled mess of bills. Bill counts it.

WILD BILL

Guess I'll warm up.

Bill watches as the catcher throws down to second base like a bolt of lightning. It's Stonewall.

WILD BILL

Damn!

EXT. ARKANSAS BALLFIELD- 1927 FLASHBACK LATER IN THE GAME

Wild Bill is on the mound. He throws a sick breaking ball to fan one of the Negro league players.

Stonewall steps in the box. Bill shakes off the curve ball sign. He wants the heat inside. He gets it and nods.

WILD BILL

(to himself) Alright, blow it by this big ape.

He delivers the pitch and Stonewall uncoils in an instant unleashing a violent swing. He fouls the ball back and up into the air about a mile.

WILD BILL

(to himself again) Damn, is he quick! No more fastballs.

Bill gets the sign for the curve once again, but this time he takes it.

He rolls out a beautiful arching deuce, but Stonewall holds back, spots it, and sends a towering shot off into the distance.

WILD BILL

Who is this guy? Jesus!

Bill can only laugh to himself.

EXT. ARKANSAS BALLFIELD- 1927 FLASHBACK THE END OF THE GAME

The scoreboard shows the home team up 3-2.

Bill is still pitching, soaked in sweat from the sun and the strain.

He stares in for a sign, nods and pitches. Strike three draws a wild hoot from the tiny but passionate crowd.

Bill walks down off the mound and shakes hands with the catcher.

People make their way onto the field to shake Bill's hand. As he tries politely to excuse himself, his eyes watch the defeated black team gathering up their stuff and walking over to the bus, (a wagon with an engine really). They exit the field unnoticed except for a few black children.

One player doesn't get on the bus. Stonewall makes his way down the dusty, dirt road out of town alone.

WILD BILL  
'scuse me. Pardon me.

Bill separates himself from the well-wishers and fans and follows after him.

EXT. DIRT ROAD EVENING

Wild Bill catches up with the giant catcher.

WILD BILL  
Hey man, where are you going?

STONEWALL  
I'm going home.

WILD BILL  
You're from around here?

STONEWALL  
Yep.

WILD BILL  
You're not going with your team?

STONEWALL  
I quit.

WILD BILL  
Quit. How the hell could you quit?  
You're the whole goddamn team!

STONEWALL  
Mr. Fletch say he can't pay, so I  
quit.

WILD BILL  
 Alright, well, I can pay ya. I got  
 \$50 dollars for this game. Why  
 don't you come play with me?

Stonewall stops walking and looks at Bill.

STONEWALL  
 You got \$50 dollars for one game?

WILD BILL  
 Yes, I did.

STONEWALL  
 And you have a team?

WILD BILL  
 Well, No. I can't say I do.

Stonewall walks away back down the road. Bill is left there  
 to watch him.

EXT. BALLFIELD- 1938 AGAIN

Johnny stands on the mound and eyes the runner on third, then  
 he throws to the plate.

The instant the ball hits his glove, Stonewall snaps up and  
 fires to the third basemen, catching the runner well off the  
 bag. The Third basemen keeps his whole body between the  
 runner and the base, so there is no need for a call.

Stonewall stands up in front of the plate again.

STONEWALL  
 One away!

He holds up one finger to gesture to his team.

WILD BILL  
 Alright, nice play, Jackson, Nice  
 play.

Wild Bill shakes his head in amazement.

EXT. BALLFIELD- NINTH INNING

Johnny walks to lead-off the ninth inning.

Next, Nightingale lays down a bunt moving Johnny to second.

The next hitter, Cannonball, grounds the ball toward short. The shortstop misplays the ball and it drifts into left field.

Picking up the ground ball, the left fielder makes a terrible throw to third to try to get Johnny- the ball sails deep into the crowd.

Johnny has to come around to score.

The scoreboard changes: 4-2.

WILD BILL  
Damnit! (to no one in particular)  
what the hell was he thinking?

Legs steps into batter's box.

WILD BILL  
(to himself) Don't blow this Legs.  
Please, don't blow this.

The pitcher throws from the stretch.

The pitch, aimed at Legs' head knocks him down, just missing his skull.

Legs steps out.

LEGS  
(to himself) He's trying to kill  
me.

Legs steps back in tentatively.

The next pitch comes-

It is a change-up, low and away. Legs is bailing out all the way.

The Sheriff lets up a mighty laugh.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY  
Strike one!

Legs turns bright red with anger as he digs his feet back into the batter's box dirt.

The Deputy stares in for the signs, smiling wickedly. He nods. He comes set.

This pitch nails Legs square in the ribs with a THUD. He collapses to the ground.

Bill runs out to his player, but the sheriff steps up in his way.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY  
(to Legs) Well, boy. You gonna take  
your base?

He glares down at Legs mockingly.

WILD BILL  
I'm putting in a pinch runner. He  
coulda killed him, for Goddsakes!

Legs pulls himself up.

LEGS  
Like hell you are. I'm fine.

He jogs down to first clutching his ribs.

WILD BILL  
So much for order, sheriff.

The sheriff spins around to face Bill, but Bill is already walking away, talking to Legs as he walks off to first.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY  
What'd you say?

BILL  
(without looking) Didn't say  
nothing. (to Legs) You blow this  
for us I'm docking your pay. You  
hear me?

LEGS  
You do what you gotta do, Bill.

Bill walks back to the dugout.

Legs takes a lead off the base, an inferno burning in his stare.

Stonewall steps into the box.

He takes the first pitch as Legs breaks for second.

The catcher slings a throw to the base, but he is well wide and far too late to get the speedy centerfielder.

Legs dusts himself off and takes another aggressive lead.

The pitcher comes set again and at his first move, Legs is off.

Stonewall takes an awful-looking swing at the ball and misses for strike two. This time, there is no need to even throw down to third. Legs is standing on the base by the time the ball reaches the plate.

As the pitcher looks in for the signs, Legs is pacing like a caged tiger off the third base bag.

The pitcher makes a quick throw to the base, but Legs is back in no time.

Bill makes signs to Stonewall. The last sign resembles slitting his wrist. Stonewall nods.

Again, the pitcher comes set. Legs moves down the line.

The pitch is well off the plate, but Stonewall swings anyway striking out.

LEGS

(mockingly) Way to lay down, Jim.  
Good one.

Stonewall casts a ice gaze over at Legs. He stops his taunting.

Bill leans over to Johnny.

WILD BILL

Legs is gonna blow the under bet  
ain't he?

JOHNNY SPAIN

Reckon he is.

Bill looks on, resigned to his fate.

On third, Legs extends his lead.

Cannonball walks up to the plate and the pitcher looks for the sign.

WILD BILL

He ain't gonna get a close call.

JOHNNY SPAIN

He won't make it close then.

WILD BILL

Might not get any call at all.

JOHNNY SPAIN

Yeah, it might get ugly.

Wild Bill steps up to the edge of the dugout.

WILD BILL

Well, let's get it over with then.

Bill signs into Cannonball, who nods back.

JOHNNY SPAIN

He's taking?

WILD BILL

Sometimes its just best you accept  
your fate, Spanish Johnny.

The pitcher comes set-

SLO MOTION-

*The pitcher starts to throw.*

*Legs breaks hard for the plate, quickly hitting full stride.*

*As the ball comes to the plate, Cannonball steps away.*

*Legs slides across home.*

*The catcher gets the tag down high up his leg as he comes to  
a stop- easily under the tag.*

The whole field stands still.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

You're out!

Legs springs up and gets in the Sheriff's face.

WILD BILL

(to Johnny) Here we go. Have Ashy  
get the bus running.

Bill races out of the dugout and gets in between the sheriff  
and Legs as Stonewall come in to pull Legs away.

WILD BILL

That was bull, sheriff.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

You watch your mouth with me, son!

Legs is fighting against Stonewall to get back to the Sheriff  
as more players and fans crowd the scene.

STONEWALL

You wanna get your ass killed,  
fool.

LEGS

I'll take that fat-ass honkie with  
me, they try it.

STONEWALL

You know you wouldn't.

Wild Bill and the Sheriff continue their fight as Johnny  
tries to pull Bill back.

WILD BILL

You're just gonna let my men get  
drilled and you think I'm gonna  
stand here and watch it.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

You're *boys* need to keep their wits  
about them. If they have any-

WILD BILL

*(softly, hissing even)* I know what  
you're doing. I knew this was the  
case the second you stepped behind  
that plate. You've done everything  
you can to stop it and my team of  
'negros' is still beating your  
team. *(now loud enough for the  
crowd to hear)* Why don't you just  
let 'em play? That's what these  
people want.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

That's it- we're done here. I'm  
calling the game a forfeit.

WILD BILL

*(practically whispering)* I'm sure  
you are you, goddamn coward.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

What'd you call me?

WILD BILL

You heard me. You're a coward. You  
can't face a man in fair  
competition and that makes you a  
coward. Your teams still got three  
outs left.

(MORE)

WILD BILL (cont'd)  
 If you didn't figure they was  
 vastly inferior to a gang of  
 colored men, you'd let him have  
 their shot.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY  
*(whispering in)* I could have a man  
 shoot you or any one of these men  
 and not think twice.

WILD BILL  
 and you'd prove my point.

Furious, the sheriff backs away, beaten for now.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY  
 Alright, clear the field, let me  
 have a batter.

The rest of the umpires corral people off the field and the  
 game resumes.

Bill and Johnny return to the dugout.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
 That was some gutsy move there.

WILD BILL  
 Where's the bus? We're gonna need  
 it close.

JOHNNY SPAIN  
 What about the bets?

WILD BILL  
 Our fairy godmother has someone to  
 collect for us. We aren't gonna  
 wanna stick around here.

EXT. BALLFIELD- BOTTOM OF THE NINTH

Johnny is still on the hill. Everyone can see he is tiring.

The first batter takes four perfect strikes for a walk.

The next batter takes the first pitch, the bat on his  
 shoulder.

STONEWALL  
 Really smart of you guys, can't hit  
 'em so why swing huh?

The batter looks back at him, annoyed.

He swings and grounds the ball back to Johnny for the easy double play.

Behind Stonewall, the Sheriff is furious.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

You better keep you're mouth shut,  
boy.

STONEWALL

(overly obliging) Yessir.

Stonewall is nearly laughing.

The next batter steps in.

STONEWALL

I'll have him give you three  
straight fastballs if you think you  
can hit 'em.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

What'd I say to you!

Stonewall flashes the fastball sign. Johnny nods.

He throws the ball right by the swinging hitter.

STONEWALL

That's one.

The batter steps back in and again Stonewall gives the  
fastball sign.

Again, Johnny throws the ball by him.

STONEWALL

That's two.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

You better watch yerself-

STONEWALL

Just trying to be helpful.

For the third time, Stonewall calls fastball. This time, the  
batter connects.

The ball sails a long way out toward center field.

Legs gets a good jump and races out deep. The black section  
of the crowd shuffles back to give him more room.

He leaps high in the air and snags the ball, an unbelievable feat. The crowd, especially the black section erupts in a huge cheer. They swarm the field and Legs is lost in the crowd.

The rest of Bill's team wastes no time rushing off the field.

Behind their dugout, the bus pulls up and screeches to a halt. Behind the field, Leg's Caddy screams down the road.

Across the field, the Sheriff and Deputy are moving fast as well. As they reach the crowd, the other men, including the Rednecks from the previous night join them.

The crowd, even the white locals, now cheer for the Barnstormers and try to shake their hands as they rush off. Only the Klansmen fail to be won over.

REDNECK

You ain't gonna just let them waltz right outa here are you? After what they done.

SHERIFF MCKINLEY

Don't you worry. They ain't leaving this town. You men get some rope.

The Sheriff and the deputy get into a car and speed off.

EXT. DUSTY ROAD- EVENING

The bus is flying down the road away from town when the Sheriff's car skids to a stop in front of them in the road ahead.

I/E. BARNSTORMERS BUS- CONTINUOUS

WILD BILL

Damn it. Don't stop.

The old man driving the bus, ASHY, looks up at Bill, clearly scared.

ASHY

How'm I not gonna stop? They're blocking the road.

A second car, pulls up behind the first car. The Klansmen get out, some in full dress

WILD BILL  
Just don't stop. Everybody get  
down.

In the seats the players huddle down below the windows. Only Bill, right behind Ashy, stands tall.

The bus closes in on the road block.

WILD BILL  
Alright slow down, now. Wait on my  
word-

The bus slows down as it approaches the men. They will have to stop.

The players are trembling as they hide.

The bus has almost stopped-

WILD BILL  
Hit it!

Bill grabs the wheel and slams hard on the gas, right on top of Ashy's foot.

The bus lurches wildly, into the front of the second car, then swerves off the road, down the embankment into the cotton field. The clansmen scatter across the road.

Bill tries to steer the bus as it barrels through the tall cotton and manages to ride it back up onto the road.

As they pick themselves up, all the klansmen can do is fire at the back of the bus, shattering the window. The bus roars away down the road.

Bill looks back through the broken window as the players pull themselves back up. He laughs and WHOOPS as they race down the street.

THE END