

SIXTEEN INCHES

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BY

KEN GREEN

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*SETTING: A softball field in Waveland Park on Chicago's North Side.*

*TIME: Friday later afternoon, July 3, 2009*

*AT RISE: Seven players with matching t-shirts ("The Longballers" and caps - EDDIE, TONY, JIMBO, JIMBO, NO. 2, KALIFA, VAL and RYAN - sit on the bench shouting encouragement to other team members and drinking beer they take out of a cooler near the bench. Occasionally they take shots from a bottle of liquor. The coach of the team, EDDIE, stands and moves closer to the "field" (edge of the stage).*

...

TONY

(To UMP) Alright ump, c'mon, yell "play ball" or something. Let's finish this shit. (To EDDIE) Eddie, sit down.

*UMP walks back offstage and onto the field.*

EDDIE

(angrily) Fuck. Gimme another beer.

TONY

Why don't you wait till we get back to the bar?

EDDIE

What are you, my fuckin' mother? Just gimme the fucking beer, would you?

*Shouting out the field.*

C'mon, Kev, get this fucker out. I mean, chick... sorry, lady... woman. Whatever, just get the batter out and let's get outta here. (to TONY) Tony... the fuckin' beer? C'mon, what's the hold up?

TONY

Alright, fuck.

*Hands EDDIE a beer.*

You should take it easy, you gotta drive Mikey home, doncha?

EDDIE

His mom's coming to get him.

TONY

Tami? Out here? She ain't been to a game in...what? Years, I guess.

EDDIE

Eh, she said she didn't like all the drinking out here. She though we did more drinkin' than softball.

*Slams beer and reaches  
for bottle of Jager.*

Besides, she don't like softball that much no more.

TONY

Too bad. She was pretty fuckin' good. Damn good pitcher. She gonna be pissed to see you a little...fucked up?

EDDIE

Which is why she's coming out to pick up Mikey. She knows we drink out here. I don't drink at home no more so she lets me drink out here.

*Shouting back at the  
field.*

Alright, good out. C'mon, one more, Kevin. C'mon, Big K, one more, get this bum out.

TONY

She still talking about movin'?

EDDIE

*Picks up bottle of liquor  
again and takes a gulp.*

Yeah, she's tellin' me it's time. Says the neighborhood is getting' worse. She's worried about Mikey with all of the little hoodlums running now. Even picked out a new place already.

TONY

Already? You been talking about it for a year already.  
(pause) Where's the place?

EDDIE

Some cookie-cutter house out in Melrose Park or some shit like that. Been showing me pictures and shit she's downloaded from the internet. All the fucking houses next to it look exactly the fucking same. If I get drunk out there, I'm coming home to the wrong house for sure.

TONY

(laughs) You do that now.

EDDIE

Yeah, but here, the neighbors just push me out and point me in the right direction.

*Turns to shout at field  
again.*

Aw, for fuck sake, Jimbo No. 2, catch the fucking ball.

*Stands up to walk to the  
edge of the stage.*

Go three, go three, get the guy at third.. aw, shit.

TONY

*Slap clipboard on bench.*

Fuck.

EDDIE

Shit and fuck

TONY

No big deal. We're still up two runs. We can get this last out.

EDDIE

(shouting) Kareem, shift over to the left. Kareem! Hey, Kareem!

*Turns to speak to TONY.*

Why the fuck ain't he moving?

TONY

'Cause his name's Kalifa, that's why he's not movin'. He's told you, like, 17 times he won't answer to nothing else but Kalifa.

EDDIE

Oh for cryin'...

*(Pleadingly to the field)*

MISTER Kalifa, would you be so kind as to check the runner at second since he's taking a big fuckin' lead off the bag?

Thank you, Mister KA-LEE-FA.

*(Walks back to bench)*

Geez, those people always got those weird ass names. What the fuck kind of name is Kalifa anyway?

TONY

Alright, watch it. I'm half of "those people."

EDDIE

(somewhat embarrassed) Well...yeah, but you know...

TONY

And if you wanna talk weird ass names, I'll go ask Stanislaus, Alphonse and Shamus.

EDDIE

You're a funny fuckin' guy, you know that? It ain't the same and you know that.

TONY

What's the difference?

EDDIE

'Cause they make those names up. Kalifa, Shaquilla, Jamalquentella...

TONY

Every name was made up at one time or another, Eddie. And a lot of names sound funny to somebody else.

EDDIE

(Drinking beer)

Who are you, the fucking U.N.?

TONY

Stanislaus...now that's a funny name.

EDDIE

Ain't nothing wrong with Stanislaus. It's a...whachacallit...a traditional name.

(Says the name with  
deliberation)

Stanislaus...

TONY

(slowly) Stanislaus... (laughs) Yeah, that's a funny ass name

EDDIE

(repeats the name thoughtfully) Stanislaus...

TONY  
(thoughtfully) Stanislaus.

EDDIE  
Stan's a louse

TONY  
Stan The Louse.

EDDIE  
(laughing) Yeah, ok, even I think that's a pretty fucked up name. I got an uncle named Stanislaus, come to think of it. Makes everybody call him Stan and..

*Gets off the bench and walks to edge of field again, shouting angrily.*  
Aw, fuck, Bobby, dive for that. It's OK to get your clothes dirty.

TONY  
We're only up by one now.

EDDIE  
(annoyed) I know that. They taught math at Queen of Angels, you know.

TONY  
They mighta taught it but you weren't there for it. You and my brother cutting out of classes and wandering the halls, taking advantage of that poor old half-senile nun..

EDDIE  
Sr. Muselli. We usta call her Sr. Moose.

TONY  
...and telling her you that you and Gene weren't cuttin' class, that you two were out collectin' for ...what the fuck was it again?

EDDIE  
The Croatian Children's Soccer Shoe Fund. Your brother Gene came up with that shit.

TONY

Yeah, that sounds like Gene. Croatian Children's Soccer Shoe Fund. Geez.

EDDIE

How the hell were they going to check up on that?

EDDIE passes the bottle of whiskey  
to TONY, who takes it and drinks  
from it. He sighs heavily.

Yeah, your brother and me did some shit in those days.  
(pauses) What the fuck am I gonna do out in the fuckin'  
'burbs, Tone?

TONY

I dunno know, Eddie. Different than Sacramento and Montrose  
for sure. You and Tami talk about maybe staying in the city?

EDDIE

(distractedly) Nah, it ends up in a fight every time.  
(picks up can of beer,  
opens it and drinks)

I say I wanna stay, she says she wants to go, and - ding! -  
round one. So, I stopped talkin' about it.

TONY

looking over EDDIE'S shoulder  
Well, you can ask her again. (gesturing) Here she comes now.

EDDIE

(dejectedly) Fuck. (passes beer can to TONY) Hold this beer...

TAMI enters from stage right. She  
walks up to EDDIE and TONY and  
surveys the array of beer cans and  
liquor bottles on the bench. She  
picks up the can nearest EDDIE.

TAMI

(sarcastically) Wow, there's still something in this one.  
How'd you miss that?

EDDIE

(burps) I was getting to it.

TAMI

(exaggerated exasperation) I married a classy guy here, Tony.

TONY

I tried to warn ya. How you doin', Tami?

TAMI

I'm Ok, Tony. What's up with you?

TONY

Oh, I'm OK. Well, the usual problems... Well, maybe not so usual. I mean, nothin' really serious. Well, maybe a little ... somethin' I gotta work out, but it's my deal and...

TAMI

(interrupting) Tony, I really didn't wanna know, I was just being polite is all. I came to talk to this one.

(points a thumb at EDDIE)

TONY

Ok...right, yeah. You two got, um, stuff to, um, talk about and... (senses TAMI wants him to shut up) Yeah, I'm gonna go ... um ... over there and watch the game and stuff.

TONY stands up and walks over to the edge of the field and looks out

EDDIE

I swear, that guy gets stranger every fucking year.

looks up at TAMI, then at beer on the bench next to him. He gives her a "what the fuck?" look and picks up beer and drinks hard

TAMI

It's Friday, ya know.

EDDIE

Friday. Got it. Day before Saturday, right? See, I ain't that drunk.

TAMI

It's the Friday we're supposed to go see the realtor in Melrose Park.



EDDIE

Shit, today's THAT Friday? Well, the game's almost over. What time are we supposed to be out there?

TAMI

Four-thirty.

EDDIE

Four-thirty. What time's it now?

TAMI

Five-thirty.

EDDIE

(lightbulb) Five-thirty? Then we're late, right?

TAMI

(flat sarcasm) We are? Who knew five-thirty came after four-thirty?

EDDIE

Alright, alright, take it easy. Can we still make it out there or what?

TAMI

I already called the guy and rescheduled it for next week. This'll be the second time, ya know.

EDDIE

Well, I'm sorry, I've had some stuff to deal with.

TAMI

(looks out at the field)

Yeah, looks real important too. (pause) At least tell me you're winning.

EDDIE

We're up by one.

TAMI

That's it? (walks to edge of field and yells at players) Alright, let's go, c'mon, look alive. Hey Jimbo, head's up, this guy looks like he's gonna slice it right to ya. Lookit the way he's holding his bat, be alive out there!

she walks back to the bench and  
takes beer from EDDIE and takes a  
swig

EDDIE

(playfully) You wanna coach? Huh? You think you're a better coach than me?

TAMI

Baby, I KNOW I am. Better coach, better pitcher, better player period. I should be out here running this thing, not some old washed-up softball player like you. (playfully slaps cap on EDDIE'S head)

EDDIE

(pause, then sincerity) I'm sorry. I really meant to get out there and sign papers and shit. This game went on longer than I thought. You know I gotta be out here.

TAMI

(puts arm around EDDIE'S shoulder) C'mon Eddie, you know you ain't "gotta" do anything. Tony can sit out here and drink beer and yell dumb shit at grown men running around in the park.

EDDIE

Yeah but I'm the coach.

TAMI

...Of a bunch of guys who get together a coupla times a week to play softball and drink till they can barely run to first. You're not getting paid for this, Eddie, it's just softball.

EDDIE

Oh, so it's "just softball" now. I seem to recall you diving in the dirt and playing to win.

TAMI

(proudly) Yeah, well, I was a natural. (pause) But SOME of us grew the fuck up. SOME of us got kids now. In fact, I think you're one of those people. (looks around) Speaking of which, where's Mikey?

EDDIE

(looking around) He was here a second ago. (yells) Mikey!

offstage a kid's voice is heard

MIKEY

What?

EDDIE

Where the hell are you?

MIKEY

I'm over here.

EDDIE

Where the hell's "over here?"

MIKEY

Over HERE.

EDDIE

Well, get your ass over here!

MIKEY

I said I'm already over here.

TAMI

Smart ass just like his dad. (yells) Mikey, get your ass over here!

MIKEY

Ok...Jesus.

TAMI

Wha'd I tell ya about using the Lord's name like that? Now get your goddamn ass over here. (back to EDDIE) Your son.

EDDIE

You sure about that?

TAMI

Trust me, I wish I wasn't. Pretty soon HE'LL be out here getting drunk and yelling at the ump about balls and strikes.

EDDIE

OK, first of all, I NEVER yell at the ump about balls and strikes. Second, the way things are shakin' out, (pause) you won't have to worry about him doing any of that.

TAMI

(sigh) Are you gonna start again?

EDDIE

I ain't starting nothing. Just ... facts is facts.

TAMI

Yeah, well, here are some other facts. Our place ain't gonna be worth more than it is right now. You see what old lady Palovchek got for her house?

EDDIE

Yeah, yeah, I know...

TAMI

AND she's got one less bedroom than us, her basement ain't finished AND her place smells like cat piss.

EDDIE

Right? You can smell that shit all the way out to the street. How many them fuckers she got in there?

TAMI

Don't know, but even so, she cleaned up when she sold it. And we been offered WAY more than that. And with the price of the place out in Melrose Park, we come out ahead, maybe a lot.

EDDIE

Yeah, I know, I know. But we ain't just chasing money, are we? I mean, we're doing alright where we are. The house is paid for, Mikey's going to a good school...

TAMI

The school might close.

EDDIE

What? Since when? Ain't nobody told me that.

TAMI

I DID tell you. Several times, in fact.

EDDIE

Why the hell are they talking about closing the school?

TAMI

Not enough kids. Old lady Palovchek ain't the only one moving out. The Schieds and their three kids, the Nowaks, they're taking their five out, the Francos... The school district said they crunched the numbers and they're going to have to consolidate some schools. Mikey's school is on the list ... which you would have known had you come to the last PTA meeting.

EDDIE

I had a thing. (pause) And all those families, they're all moving out of the neighborhood?

TAMI

Either moving or moved already. They're getting out while they can sell big and houses in the 'burbs are cheap. Besides, nobody likes what's going on in the neighborhood.

EDDIE

What's going on in the 'hood?

TAMI

Jesus, how drunk are you? Well, on the one hand, we got the gangs...

EDDIE

Gangs? What gangs we got?

TAMI

The guys who hang out on the corner?

EDDIE

Those guys? That ain't no fucking gang. That's just a buncha punks hanging out together screwing around.

TAMI

That's kinda the definition of a gang.

EDDIE

Yeah, but alls you gotta do is call the cops and, poof, they scatter like fucking cockroaches.

TAMI

These punks ain't afraid of the cops. Hell, most of 'em probably already been in prison three or four times already.

EDDIE

So? How many guys we grew up with been to jail?

TAMI

Jail, Eddie, not prison. Big difference.

EDDIE

Not to the guys in Cook County. They say that place is worse than Stateville prison.

TAMI

Look, I didn't come here to talk about the condition of the Illinois correction system.

EDDIE

Ok, so, fine, gangs on the one hand. What's on the second hand?

TAMI

Well, the neighborhood's changing in other ways too. I told you the Francos' sold their place? It's gonna be torn down and they're putting up a three-story condo.

EDDIE

Condos? How come you know all this shit?

TAMI

'Cause I'm not out here screwing around on a softball field three days a week anymore. They're putting up a condo over there, the bakery's gonna be some new restaurant called Woodcut or something..

EDDIE

Kinda name is that for a restaurant?

TAMI

There's some fancy organic grocery store coming in, a place where you can buy vinyl records while you get your hair cut and TWO more coffee shops along Central Ave.

EDDIE

TWO? How much coffee can people fucking drink?

TAMI

You know Jenny's Place?

EDDIE

Wow, haven't been there in years. Not since Karl Scheid got drunk and broke the juke box when he tried to pick it up and dance with it.

TAMI

Her son sold it. Corporation that bought it supposedly said they're gonna turn it into a ... brewpub? What is that?

EDDIE

Not sure. But that don't sound ... too bad.

TAMI

C'mon, Eddie, you know that place ain't gonna be for regulars like us. All this stuff is for the new folks moving in. Good luck to 'em, but they don't want nothing to do with us. Us and them, we just don't... You know, I pass by a bunch of new faces every day and not one of them says "Hi" or "Good morning."

EDDIE

Rude. (pause) Wait, do YOU say "Hi" or "Good morning" to them?

TAMI

Well... no, but... hey, we were here before them, they should be trying to get in good with us first. They're walking around like they already fucking own the place.

EDDIE

(long pause) Fuckin' yuppies.

TAMI

Yuppies?

EDDIE

Yeah, yuppies. Fuckin' yuppies. (pause) What?

TAMI

You just get here from 1985? Who the hell says "yuppie" anymore?

EDDIE

Whatever, you know what I mean. Whatever the opposite of what we are, that's them.

TAMI

Generation X?

EDDIE

Yeah, that shit. Generation X. Taking over. Fucking Gen X'ers.

TAMI

I'm Gen X.

EDDIE

You're...? Oh... right... Well, I meant those other one. Y. Anyway, SOMEbody's taking over.

TAMI

Which is why we gotta move. It's not gonna be our neighborhood pretty soon and I don't wanna walk around feeling like I'm the stranger there. Which is also why you're gonna haul your ass out to Melrose Park next week.

EDDIE

I'll make it next time. I promise.

TAMI

(turns his head so it faces her) Huh, you promise.

EDDIE

I do.

TAMI

You said that one other time, remember. (they kiss) I know you hate this idea...

EDDIE

No, I don't.

TAMI

You do. But it's gonna be good, OK? (pause) 'Course if you don't make it next time, I'm just gonna have to forge your signature, I guess.

EDDIE

Hey, you can't do that. It's against the law. Twelfth amendment or some shit like that. I'll have the cops pick you up. (scoff) Forge my signature...



TAMI

Got news for you...it wouldn't be the first time I've done it.  
But if you wanna find out for sure, try not showing up next  
week.