

shootball

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ACT I

Scene 1

Lights. Early evening. Baseball field.

*There are three of them:
CYRUS, the pitcher, fifteen;
POX, his sister, catching, seventeen;
and CLAYMORE, to bat, fifteen.
Asian-American city kids.*

*They're staged from SL to SR: CYRUS, CLAYMORE,
POX, so that the action of the pitch draws the eye
from right to left, against Western habit.*

*CYRUS runs his fingers over the ball. CLAYMORE
mimics the at-bat routine of a major-leaguer: tap
your cleats, tap the plate. Step into the batter's
box, dig in your toes. He fixes his black armband.
He admires his brand-new bat lovingly.*

POX

It's nice, but it won't change your fate.

CLAYMORE

I don't believe in fate. Only outcomes.

POX

It won't change the outcome.

CLAYMORE

It improves my odds.

POX

From nothing to nearly nothing is nothing to get hard
over. Get in the box and let's do it.

She punches him on the black armband.

CLAYMORE

Ow!

POX

(mocking)

"Ow! "

CYRUS

He's got weak insides because he's an only child.
There's nobody home to beat the toughness into him.

(CONTINUED)

POX

Then I'm doing him good. I'll hit him when I feel like it, as long as he wears the armband. That's the rules.

CLAYMORE

Not much longer, Pox. Today is my day. You two aren't getting in my head. I'm in my Zen garden of ultimate tranquility, and it's bounded with high fences and automated lasers. You'll be wearing it tomorrow, Cyrus. Then, offense and defense shall trade; I'll be waiting with two fists raised when your blue Honda pulls up. I'll be waiting.

CYRUS

Fair's fair, fuckhead, but I don't believe in fate. Only outcomes. I like my odds. Let's dance.

CLAYMORE

I want a few to warmup.

POX

That's your call, Cyrus.

CYRUS

Let's give him three.

CLAYMORE

You in a hurry? Gotta get home and jerk off?

CYRUS

Every day, to my favorite Nolan Ryan highlights. That's why I got mad grip strength, and forearms like the necks of dragons. Pox can't hardly catch this fire, right?

POX

You're lucky it's not me up there with a brand-new bat to make your shit look foolish.

CYRUS

Not even you hit the shuuto.

CYRUS & POX

(unison, like a war cry)

Shuuto!

CLAYMORE

Let's go. Straight ones first.

POX

Fastballs.

(CONTINUED)

CYRUS

Stand in, son.

POX

Brand new bat, same old sucker.

She punches him on the armband. This time, he takes it without wincing and moaning. They ready. The energy between them evolves into some new thing.

The pitch. CLAYMORE keeps his eye on it, steps in, and swings: a high fly ball.

The three of them watch it, CLAYMORE admiring, POX standing, CYRUS turning upstage and watching it fall behind him.

CLAYMORE

Gonna be a good day.

POX

We haven't really started yet.

CLAYMORE

Gonna be a good day. Just like Excalibur.

He admires his bat.

CLAYMORE

(cont.)

Claymore and maple, some fresh alchemy, the bat chooses you, and nobody else was worthy of swinging it. Nothing gets over this plate today.

POX

How about another one, Cyrus, hit that same spot.

CYRUS

We'll show him another easy one.

CLAYMORE

They're all easy ones today.

The pitch.

CLAYMORE keeps his eye on it, steps in, swings. Good contact again. They watch it soar into right field and roll to the wall.

CLAYMORE

That's a stand-up triple.

(CONTINUED)

POX & CYRUS

(unison)

That's a double.

CYRUS

If you're fast.

POX

If you're lucky. You're not that fast.

CYRUS

We'll see how lucky he is. Get in the box, I got one for him.

A harder pitch. CLAYMORE is way behind it, swings and misses.

POX

That's the one. You ready?

CYRUS

All day.

POX

Claymore?

CLAYMORE

All day.

POX

O, shut the fuck up. Hit the shootball into the outfield. Then you can talk to me.

CYRUS

Three strikes, I win. One hit, you win. You know what's coming.

CLAYMORE

So do you, Cy.

The pitch. A little outside. CLAYMORE lets it pass. POX tosses it back.

CLAYMORE

That's outside.

CYRUS

Shut up.

POX

Right in here. This is your spot.

She sets her glove on the inside corner, indicating where she wants the next pitch.

(CONTINUED)

The pitch. It's farther outside, skidding in the dirt, and POX really has to reach to grab it.

POX

This is your spot. Set your front foot and point, like you're smashing George W.'s teeth.

CLAYMORE

No fun if you don't put them in the strike zone, Cy.

POX

Make him respect you.

She returns the ball and signals again.

The pitch. CLAYMORE looks ready--he steps into it, loads up the swing, and--POX pops up and punches him right in the balls. He doubles over.

CLAYMORE

Fuck was that?

POX

I'm sorry, what was what?

CLAYMORE

Shenanigans?

POX

Sorry, Clay, it's free shots whenever we see you wearing it and you gotta earn the right to take it off.

CLAYMORE

That's some cowardly shit. Never ends with you two. Your turn's coming. Your blue Honda pulls up tomorrow morning I'll be there two fists raised.

CYRUS

We'll see.

CLAYMORE

Patrice teach you a dirty trick like that?

POX

Time out.

She heads out to the mound to talk to CYRUS.

POX

You okay?

CLAYMORE

Course.

POX

Just want to make sure. His swing looks good today.

CYRUS

Not that good. Not Patrice-good. I know what I'm doing.
Got him off balance. I'll hit the spots.

POX

One other thing.

CYRUS

Yeah.

POX

I can't wear the armband for you if you earn it for
yourself.

CYRUS

Okay.

POX

Man dies alone, right, but he also eats his breakfast
alone and he wears the black armband alone if his time
comes. That's the rules.

CYRUS

I'll take the punches. I'm not a weird only child with
nobody to beat the toughness into me.

POX

Arm feels good?

CYRUS

For now.

POX

One other thing.

CYRUS

Yeah.

POX

There comes that point in competition where you have to
do something you thought you never could. Dig in.

CYRUS

Yeah.

(CONTINUED)

POX

When you go out there and you load the bases and everyone's cheering against you, you think that's it, that's everything I have, and it's not enough. In the cartography of the athletic soul, you've found a border.

CYRUS

I'm not afraid of high fences and lasers.

POX

But I'm just saying--when you dig in, for real dig in, you realize borders are fluid and porous.

CYRUS

What?

POX

You can pass through them, if you must, by employing the tool most hateful to you, whatever that might be.

CLAYMORE

Nolan's waiting, Cyrus. So am I.

POX

You hate that guy?

CYRUS

Don't you?

POX

Fuck yeah. Let's strike him out.

CYRUS

Gonna wear that armband to the grave.

POX

We hope so.

*They have a special handshake--sibling closeness,
but athletic seriousness.*

CYRUS

Squinty eyes can't see no shootball.

POX

Where'd you be without me?

CYRUS

Drawing Bush 43 in chalk on the back-alley fence.
Bouncing a tennis ball off his teeth.

(CONTINUED)

POX

Fool me once.

CYRUS

You can't fool me again.

They get in position.

CLAYMORE

That blue Honda pulls up I'm cracking my knuckles.

POX

Fool me once, Cy.

*The wind-up. The pitch.**CLAYMORE swings for it but obviously has no idea where it is. POX grabs the ball, way off the plate. She returns it.*

POX

Alright. Strike one.

CLAYMORE

(somewhat baffled)

Alright.

Same signal. Same wind-up. Same result.

CLAYMORE

Motherfucker.

She tosses the ball back to CYRUS.

POX

Easy. Rage doesn't make good contact. Rage strikes out.

CLAYMORE

Hold up.

He takes a step out of the box. Takes a breath.

POX

Take your time. We want you to be successful.

CLAYMORE

Yeah yeah.

POX

Only person ever could hit that pitch was Patrice.

CLAYMORE

I know.

(CONTINUED)

POX

And nobody expects you to hit like Patrice.

CLAYMORE

I know.

POX

Come on, Cyrus. Two strikes. You know what's coming, get in the box.

He does.

The pitch. CLAYMORE swings.

He gets a little piece of it and knocks it foul.

POX & CYRUS

O!

CYRUS

(watching it roll away)

Foul. Got a piece of it, though. First time.

CLAYMORE

O yeah. Next one's heading to deep left. The fences are electric, the lasers zeroed in.

POX

Don't think so. Nobody ever hit the shuuto but Patrice.

POX & CYRUS

(unison)

Shuuto!

POX

Remember him, Claymore? Your friend Patrice.

CLAYMORE

Yeah. I do. I remember him. Today's the goddamn day. Now shut up.

POX

Hold up--gonna tell me I can't talk about my brother?

CYRUS

Am I hearing this?

POX

I think Claymore's precious feelings are hurt because I said something about Patrice. How dare we forget to protect Claymore's precious feelings.

CYRUS

He doesn't need any more punishment than what we give him already.

(CONTINUED)

POX

You think? I don't know. Some criminals get more than one life sentence.

CLAYMORE

I said I was sorry.

POX

(punctuating with punches on CLAYMORE's armband)

Sorry? Sorry for what, again?

CLAYMORE

For what happened with Patrice.

POX

(feigning)

What in the world happened to Patrice?

CYRUS

He'll get what's coming to him, Pox. He'll wear it a long time. Even after he takes it off he'll still be wearing it.

CLAYMORE

Maybe not, Cy. Maybe we'll finish this and tomorrow she'll take it out on you.

CYRUS

I hope I'd face her with a little more pride.

POX

Let's finish this fuckparty. Cyrus, you ready?

CYRUS

Can't fool me again, Pox.

POX

How about you, lucky, you ready?

CLAYMORE

Ready--

POX

Shut the fuck up.

POX signals. A different signal: a middle finger. The bean-ball. CYRUS shakes his head. POX shows it again: a big middle finger. CYRUS shakes his head.

POX

Time.

(CONTINUED)

CLAYMORE

Not ready, I guess.

POX visits the mound again.

POX

I'm not negotiating.

CYRUS

He won't hit it. I'll get it past him. You were right.

POX

I was right?

CYRUS

About the borderland. Porous and fluid. I know he can't hit this one. The ball's singing in my hand like a struck bell, you hear it?

He holds up the ball. POX claps her hand over it.

POX

That was only half of my story. Ready to hear the end?

CYRUS

I don't know.

POX

The choice most hateful to you. The nuclear option. Right? Like George W. The nuclear [George W. Bush pronunciation] option.

CYRUS

I don't think it's necessary.

POX

I want to be excessive.

CYRUS

Blow the softball past him, let him wear it on and on, we'll all go home happy.

POX

Happy?

CYRUS

Maybe not happy. But satisfied with today. It resembles yesterday, we know what to expect tomorrow. He's not happy, but who gives a fuck?

POX

What about me? What about you? He was your brother. Clay doesn't know shit and never will, and I'm sick of him pretending.

(CONTINUED)

CYRUS

Not his fault he's young and stupid.

POX

But isn't it?

CYRUS

No. I don't know. Maybe.

POX

I'm not doing this again. It's over today.

CYRUS

Fine. Fine. But: bruise, not break.

POX

That will be enough.

Handshake.

POX gets into position. CYRUS considers the ball, the laces, the hum like the rung bell.

POX signals. Middle finger.

CYRUS gives the nod. He winds up.

As he delivers, the action slows. Shift to CLAYMORE.

CLAYMORE

I heard the story from Pox when she was drunk and I knew not to ask again when she wasn't. He did it while the rest of the family was sleeping. We heard about someone's cousin who did it he made it fifty seconds--we heard about someone else who only made it twenty, and died. I went for eight before I chickened out. He did it late at night; nobody awoke when he began to struggle. The next morning she walked past a closed door to a silent room and went to school and assumed, 'today would resemble yesterday.' A day borders yesterday to the west and tomorrow be the east; a culture, a language, a life can only change so much across such a meager distance. Then Cyrus did the same thing. Got up. Walked past a still door, an empty room, because rooms are empty when there are no people in them, regardless of what things are there, even when the thing is a thing that used to be a person.

When he was found, by their parents, they didn't call the school. They waited for Cyrus and Pox to come home. They hadn't called anybody. Not the school, not 9-1-1. They sat face-to-face at the kitchen table, not speaking, and careful not to touch each other. Cyrus got home first. He opened the door without knocking. He

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CLAYMORE (cont'd)

called the police but they only stayed for fifteen minutes. They saw, like everyone else, that there was nothing left unanswered by his body. They still promised to call. They didn't call. There was nothing to investigate and nothing to solve.

POX

Nothing to solve and nothing to talk about.

CLAYMORE

Between you and the police?

POX

Yeah. But also us, Cyrus and our parents and me. After the cops left he called the insurance company and the funeral home. All along our parents sat at the kitchen table hunched like two sick birds. I went toward Patrice's room, just trying to make them stop me. They didn't. I went in. His eyes were open. One was shot through red with exploded capillaries. The other wasn't. He waited for me to speak first. So I said, "Hey." He said nothing. I said, "Can I have your catcher's mitt?" He said nothing. I said, "That armband is pretty cool. What's it mean? Does it express solidarity with the proletariat? Is it a badge of your superior inner life? Is it a sign of mourning? What are you mourning? Yourself? It can't be yourself. Tell me it isn't yourself." But he said nothing. I'll take it then, I said. I'll say it's all those things.

CYRUS

Three pitches, three strikes, one man out. If only one person can ever beat you, and that person departs, you're still beatable, even if nobody ever beats you again. You'll never be as good as you could have been. You'll never effect that triumphant reversal. Shame on the one who departed. Shame on the first man out. Three siblings make a team. Three pencil strokes make a K. Step up, step in, step up motherfucker I've got your name on this one.

The pitch.

It's way inside. Obviously an act of aggression, but CLAYMORE dodges. POX catches it.

CLAYMORE

Alright. It's that way? I'm done.

He takes off the armband and drops it in the dirt.

(CONTINUED)

POX

That's not how this game is played, Clay.

She returns the ball to Cyrus. He runs his fingers along the laces.

CLAYMORE

I'm done with this fucking game. I didn't kill your brother. He was as stupid as I am but only half as lucky.

CYRUS throws the ball and hits CLAYMORE. CLAYMORE goes down. The ball rolls away from his body.

POX

There you go. Borderland conquered. Inning complete.

POX picks up the ball and flips it to CYRUS.

POX

Still ringing like a struck bell?

CYRUS

No.

He throws the ball as hard as he can into the outfield. He and POX watch it drift and fall for a long time.

CLAYMORE rolls onto his back and moans.

CLAYMORE

Fuck.

POX

Time to hit someone back. You took the pitch good, but a major-leaguer would rush the mound now.

CLAYMORE

Fuck.

POX

Come on. Get up and hit me, you little bitch. He didn't get you that bad.

CYRUS

I really didn't.

CLAYMORE

You knew I would'a hit it. I had the read on it. Next one was headed for the fences.

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CYRUS

That's neither here nor there.

POX

You're just lucky he didn't kill you.

CYRUS

Probably could have if I wanted.

POX

Or if I'd wanted.

CYRUS

Maybe so.

POX

You don't recognize some borders til you cross them, huh, Claymore? Death and back again, you seen the border from both sides.

CLAYMORE

You want to square up, you want me to hit you, come down here and meet me.

POX puts the armband around her neck and kneels beside him. CLAYMORE puts his hand gently around her throat.

CLAYMORE

(cont.)

You can take it off when you strike me out. You got any more balls, Cyrus?

CYRUS

No. That was the last one.

CLAYMORE

Lucky for you. I was getting a good read. That next one was headed for the fences. Headed far.

POX

Yeah.
Far.

*She puts her hand over CLAYMORE's hand, still there on her throat.
Lights out.
End of play.*