

SHORTSTOP

Where Grace and Power Collide!

MIKE
MALONI



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Strategic Book Group

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*To my family and friends who have or have not
worked in pizza shops, photo labs, and other places.
This one was nice because it proved
you could come home again.*

PRELUDE

Frank Lido and his father, Frank Senior, were sitting in the airport at Bradley Field in Hartford, Connecticut.

“Mom threw one heck of a party!” Frank smiled.

“Yeah, she can do that! I am really proud of you. You all square with money!”

“I am doing a right. We’ll see what it’s like before I spend a lot.”

“Scared?”

“A little. When I had money in high school; it went in one hand and out the other. I don’t want to act like an east coast punk with a big mouth and a lot of money.”

“You have enough to take care of yourself?”

“Oh, yeah, but I don’t want to get taken advantage of. Let me get the lay of the land first. Mom threw a heck of a party, huh?”

“She sure did! Did she mention that I am proud of you?”

“Hey, Pops, I know I screwed around in high school and luckily, by some grace of a leather mitt, I get a second chance.”

“You’re not just a baseball player.”

“I know, but Texas is a pretty tough school. I’ll have to work very hard. Baseball I can handle, but the school part makes me a little nervous! I wasn’t the model student!”

“Not only that, junior; for four years, I pulled my hair out over you! That’s why I don’t have any left! You have a golden opportunity to start over, and so can we. I won’t call every day and ask if you did your homework. You are a young man now. You are responsible and I think you know that.

“If you want to get drummed out of school before ending up in the low minors, that’s your business! I am just saying in the best country in the world, you have arguably the best opportunity.”

“I understand. Pops, I just went along with it sometimes even though I rallied the guys up. I was supposed to be a screw-up. All I could do was play ball. I had one talent and couldn’t succeed at anything else.”

“It’s funny, because it seemed to me like you liked screwing around.”

“At the beginning it was fun because I was accepted, but I don’t want to be that guy with the sewer mouth and no real commitments to good things!

“Son, you’re growing up and I knew it would happen. I am glad it happened sooner rather than later.”

“The flight is here. I have to go.”

“Break your spikes in really well.”

“Yes, Coach.”

“And don’t forget to oil your glove.”

“Pops! Mom should be here!”

“Good luck, kid! Don’t forget to call home.”



Frank Lido Junior jumped right out of the cab and landed in Austin, TX on the campus of the University of Texas Longhorns. He was there to chase down and conquer the college baseball world. He was eighteen and invincible. The only problem was that every opponent Frank and the Texas ball club would face would want to conquer the college baseball world themselves, too.

“Are you Frank Lido?” a voice asked.

“Yes, sir; that’s me.”

“Like in the Lido Shuffle?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’m the Grande Jefe, Hector Rodriguez. And this is Gillespie. I haven’t gotten the first name out of him yet. So we call him Gillesp. We’ll get your stuff put away and then we can check out the girls.”

“Where are you from?” Lido asked.

“The barrio, brother. Los Angeles, California.”

“Can you... What can you do?”

“I’m the new shortstop.”

“Does Coach Allard know that?” Gillespie asked.

“Look, I ain’t cocky, but I’m a baseball player if I ever saw one.”

“So you’re the man!” Grande Jefe said.

“No. I’m the guy in the middle. We’re a team. We play together,” Lido said.

“Get this, ‘We’re a team. We play together.’ If you can even catch and throw and swing the bat a little bit, you’re in,” Jefe said.

“Italian?” Gillespie said.

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, sir, you make it through fall semester and we’ll talk baseball. UT is a school and it’s a great one. What’s your major?”

“Business management with an eye toward entrepreneurship as a master’s program.”

“That would mean you would want to start a business!”

“Something to do with photography. I grew up with it. My dad was always taking pictures. I learned on my own. I have an art elective here that I’m going to use up with photography. Western Mass has a couple of them back home, but hopefully, with the pro money I could’ve had this year, who knows? Maybe something will come up.”

“Photography, huh?”

“A lot of different kinds, nature, sports, cityscapes, and candid... I like art photography a lot. It pushes you more than you know. But I don’t need *you know*. I need a girlfriend.”

“Well, that’s the first order of business; get the boy a girlfriend and examine his photographs. What do you say, Jefe?”

“Si, that’s a good plan.”

They ended up at the football game that afternoon between the Texas and Texas A&M. The Aggies were a pretty solid team who liked to bang the football down the field with a two hundred and thirty-six pound fullback and a two thirty-seven tailback. Texas had what was known as *the arm*. Colt Byron was big

and immobile, but that had the fastest release in the Southwest Conference. He could also take as much punishment as necessary to get the job done. He had somehow ridden this style to First Team All America his junior year, and now was looking hard at a National Championship.

By the third quarter, nobody was running anywhere for A&M. Lord Byron had thrown for four touchdown passes and stumbled into the end zone for another. By the fourth quarter, he was on the bench with the score 42-0.

Lido was very interested in the game, right up until he saw her.

“That’s her,” he whispered to Gillespie.

“Who her?”

“My girlfriend.”

“Ain’t you the optimist? I give you ten seconds to get there or I’m going after her.”

“See you around.”

“Don’t get lost.”

“I’ll see you gentlemen later today.”

“Spit the gum out of your mouth.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

He cautiously went over to her seat. He sat next to her and she looked right at him in surprise.

“I’m sorry,” he panicked. “I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“New to campus, I see.”

“How do you know?”

“I read about you in the paper. Actually, I wrote about you in the paper. You are a grand addition—our new shortstop.”

“Could we back up a minute? At which point in time did we meet?”

“We’re meeting now.”

“Frank Lido,” he offered his hand.”

“Dana Walters, second year pre-med.”

“Did you get any sense that I was a nice guy?”

“I thought maybe you had a brain in your head.”

“I have to prove it here. I ended up here academically by the skin of my teeth. It’s embarrassing to get into a school like

that way. I'm glad I have a semester here to prove myself before taking the field. It's a thing that won't go away. Believe it or not, I was kind of charming in high school. I was also great on the baseball field, but squandered my talent. A nice kid who would go nowhere without baseball. The night before I left on the plane, I woke up in a cold sweat from a dream that I flunked out before I got the uniform."

"That's a lot for a first conversation, but I like you anyway."

"What about you, miss?"

"Second year; I am enjoying it all immensely! Texas is home. What about you?"

"I'm still carrying a case of the freshman jitters."

"Come on; you're more interesting."

"As much as you love sports writing, I'm into photography. I have a little plan that may turn into a big plan if I don't screw it up."

"Do you want to go for a walk? I want a Coke."

"I'll buy."

"I really like you."

They walked for a while to kind of figure out where they were, and finally, they were found their way outside of the stadium.

"Mom and dad?" he asked.

"Sort of different. My dad has been a government beat for the paper. He would be what is known as a professional. He's been doing it for twenty-five years. Mom is sort of into computers."

"What do you mean?"

"She builds them in her spare time. She goes and buys spare parts and she'll work sometimes until eleven o'clock at night. She is fun because you get all this neat electronic stuff for Christmas. She works overtime then. Yours?"

"Well, I'm influenced by both. They are divorced but the family isn't. I don't feel pressured by either one of them. My dad owns a really successful photography shop in Cambridge. He was letting me use professional-grade cameras when I was eight. Incredible place to be, Boston and Cambridge. You can't

even tell them apart except that Cambridge is a ghost town on Marathon day. I have learned about photography from my father.”

“Mom?”

“Mom’s kind of cool in her own right. She’s a painting professor at Smith College. They work well as a team—he photographs and she paints off of them. He seems to have fallen in love with photography more than his family; mom keeps him in line with her paintings. I kid you not; every Sunday after church and before the meal, we sit down and grade her stuff. I always give her an ‘A’ and get the biggest portion. But it doesn’t work; I still weigh a hundred and sixty pounds. You should see them work together; it is comical.”

“Do you think she could paint me in my uniform?”

“There’s no doubt in my mind.”

“Show me what you have. Why are you here?”

“Well, from an ego gratification standpoint, I want my master’s. I want to meet my wife and I want to play ball.”

“Do you know that forty thousand kids are here?”

“I know that half of them are girls.”

“Just keep in mind that you are talking to one right now.”

“I am really not a playboy. I just have a big mouth. Sorry!”

“Oh, you wouldn’t believe what I hear.”

“Yeah, but that was not me. I shouldn’t have said that. I am trying to say I like you.”

“Let’s keep talking.”

“Fine. Texas is kind of great.”

“You expected differently?”

“I didn’t expect I’d like school. I was sort of a peaceful hooligan in high school. I just was into everything. It wasn’t like bad stuff, but we’d toilet paper the high school’s trees at Halloween and stuff like that.

“Granted, we would push it right to the limit with teachers, but it was all for fun. For the amount of time we goofed around, I bet we spent 1/100th of the time in the principal’s office. The teachers knew who was a bad kid. We were just stupid kids. We just couldn’t stop screwing around.”

“What did your parents say?”

“My father would chuckle because he knew that I would turn out alright. I had a feeling he knew how to squeeze the Charmin himself. Mom would freak; she would just lose it after every report—to no avail. The shrink at school said it was because of lack of love in the home. I could see that if Dad wasn’t hitting grounders to me after practice and Mom would stop painting pictures of me in action. Otherwise, I got through high school unscathed.”

“How much of a hellion were you?”

“Alright; it went beyond toilet paper in the trees. Mostly, we used to look for excuses to play baseball instead of go to class! My tendency was to go out with my camera and tell myself I was really smart and could do calculus, which I probably could if I showed up in class. I just was tossed into a double entendre jock itch/burgeoning artist, which meant if I became successful, wonderful. We’ll see you later.”

“You’re a little upset.”

“Just a little confused; how did I make it here, talking to you, 2800 miles away, when I couldn’t communicate that to my teachers in my hometown? Maybe that is my fault. I think I was just so much into being impressive to everyone on the planet but me. People need heroes, and athletes are heroes.”

“You don’t hold anything back, do you?”

“I figure if you get burned, you get burned by the truth. Truth is you’re kind of nice to talk to.”

“I am not saying that I don’t like you, but you can lay it out in a hurry?”

“Thank you. I was going to say, Lido Photographic attracts one or two Italians. It may sound strange to you, but it does. I want four years here. I think it is the stupidest thing in the world to walk on a college education. A lot of hockey players think that way, so they don’t stay. A lot of guys in other sports leave. Who wants a house full of stuff and no ability to move forward in other parts of your life?”

“Do you always take life so seriously?”

“I’m trying to impress you. How am I doing?”

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“Are you really there or is it just a dream?”

“I’ve got six years to find out.”

“Here’s my business card. I want a call tonight at ten o’clock.”

“Freelance journalist/photographer? Why don’t you tell me these things?”

“We have to have something to talk about when you take me out to dinner.”

“There any pizza places around here?”

“I’ll look in the book. Call me.”

“Wait a minute! We aren’t finished yet.”

“Yes, we are, and I know where you are going!”

“No. No. That’s not what I meant. I meant was...I know what I’m supposed to ask you for, and it ain’t your phone number. “

“Stop it. I’m telling you right now.”

“I was saying I don’t want to—yet! I just want to talk with you some more.”

“Are you serious?”

“You are quite the female.”

“What am I, an anatomy project now?”

“If you were that, we would’ve found someplace dark and we would’ve taken each other’s clothes off.”

“You’re sinking fast.”

“Can’t we just go for a walk and hold hands, please?”

“You’re really serious?”

“I’m trying hard not to dig into your past history.”

“You’ve sunk.”

“Come on. One little walk.”

“You’re persistent.”

“I’m groveling.”

“And?”

“And, for you, it’s worth it. No respect left. No dignity! You owe me a walk.”

“I guess I do.”

“Hi! I have brain teaser for you.”

“Sure, what about?”

“It’s my problem, really, so I need big advice.”

“You aren’t confused about our relationship, are you?”

“As of right now, you’re my buddy.”

“Likewise. Now what’s my buddy’s problem?”

“It’s about baseball.”

“No kidding?”

“Listen, please. Do you know how certain people are supposed to be a certain way? White guys from the mid-west are supposed to be humble; black guys have jazz; Italians are boisterous and fun loving, etc.”

“Well?”

“I’m kind of not.”

“Meaning?”

“The Italian thing. I’ve always been kind of a wise guy, but nothing serious. Just a joke in class or something. I’ve always admired Cal Ripken Junior because was the best ever. He was a big, slow, white guy who mastered all of that and became the best anyway. “But it’s the way he did it, you see. That is it. He was classy and a gentleman, no matter what park he played in. I saw him play in Boston once. Smooth. That guy could field—easy as you please. And he could hit, too. I’d rather be no class with class than high class no class.”

“Why do you have to settle?”

“You think I’m breaking down?”

“Why did you come all the way to Texas?”

“Too many relatives! They can do this for you and they can talk to somebody about a job. I love ’em all, but I have to be my own man. If I wasn’t in college, I’d be in the Army or the Marines. I have to make myself a man here. There’s a wife to find and baseball to play—not to mention school!”

“Are you going to do it all in one day?”

“No, I guess not,” he smiled.

“Take it easy. You’re going to pop.”

“I have a meeting with Coach Allard tonight. We all do. And then we get fifteen minutes to prove to him that his scholarship didn’t get shipped to the Aleutian Islands.”

“You’re grim.”

“Nervous.”

“Take it easy and go in just talk. You’re good at that.”

“You think?”

“Yeah!”

“I’ll give it a shot.”

They split a salad and Cokes before he went into the locker room.



“Gentleman, I’m Coach Allard. This is Coach Nicholas and his sidekick, Bob Vinitan. First and third base coaches, respectively. Guys, you came to UT for different reasons. You now have a new reason. The best reason! You are here to study your books. Baseball is second. Do we all understand that?”

“Yes, Coach!” They all answered in unison.

“If you want to play pro ball, sign a contract. This is college. And college means books. We have three red flags since winter practice. One guy bounced from the team for a semester. The other two are on probation; that’s bad, gentleman. We’re three guys down and we have three of the top five teams in the nation beginning in two weeks. We have no time for screw-ups. If I didn’t need them so badly, I’d toss their scholarships. There will be no excuses for missing study hall.

“I mean it. I’ve been at this institution for twenty-three years and my kids always pulled the grades.

“Hey! Coach!” Lido held up his hand.

“What, kid?”

“We’ll win that National Championship, sir. Those guys will have to play catch up.”

“I’ll see you first when this is over because your grades coming out of high school were no prize. Are you just here to fool around, son, or play ball with life?”

“Sir, I want it all. I want my degree.”

“You better do more than that. This university will eat you up if you just want to get by.”

“I won’t do that, sir.”

“Good; you get out early because you’re the first one on my list. Follow me.”

They ended up in a broom closet sized office with papers everywhere.

“Well, we have to talk. You had a good first semester; looked excellent in winter ball. Texas suiting you?”

“I like it, but it’s different. It’s April and it’s ninety-five degrees. Everybody back home is scrambling to get satellite dishes so they can watch the games. I have a lousy decision to make at the end of this year, you know. Millions of dollars is going to be thrown at me. The most I’ve made in a year is six and a half thousand dollars.”

“That ain’t it with you. I could tell from the way you bounced of the gym walls. You want every ball you can possibly get and you want a clean, safe hit every time up. I figure they’ll start you off in AAA. Maybe a call up by September.”

“New York.”

“Why didn’t you go out of high school?”

“I went through the semester ready to kill somebody because I had to prove myself, in my mind, to me. Now, I like it here and things are coming together and I thought maybe I overdid it.”

“What was the final score?”

“3.8.”

“Nice.”

“I really do want my degree. It’s not like the east coast here. It’s laid back, and the people are always smiling and there are gunfight shows at the park for the kids. It’s a riot. Back east, we have hockey and lots of it. Minor league teams, the Bruins, college at about a hundred different schools. If I was bigger, I would’ve played hockey and changed my whole destiny.”

“Where would you and your destiny have gone?”

“Boston University!”

“Nice place. Been there, but I was hooked on Texas.”

“I’m kind of glad I’m only five six. Everybody expected me to play hockey, but that’s my second favorite sport. You can be a near midget and play shortstop. I would’ve missed here.”

“How’s the girl situation?”

“Better than average; I can tell you that.”

“I’m surprised; I figured you could do better than that.”

“Well, actually, I’m in the pursuance phase. She’s pretty; wicked cool, actually.”

“Wicked.”

“Massachusetts.”

“Ah hah! Well, just bang on the door if you need me. If you didn’t do your homework, don’t waste my time. I gave you guys what you wanted. You wanted to act like adults. Now is the time.”

“Right.”

“Look, kid, I’ve a lot of baseball, and believe it or not, I’m friends with more than one professor on this campus and you are in a position to be a great college shortstop. Selfishly, I want you here for four years. I won’t have someone who wants to be in the middle.

“Also, personally, I think it’s the stupidest rule that you can be let out early. You get a free education and everything, and that college ring will be worth more to you than any World Series CWS Championship ring. It will round you out as a human being and, at the very least, you will be able to function in a grown up world.”

“I don’t want to sound stupid, Coach, but what is the grown up world?”

“When you graduate from college, do you intend to get married?”

“Shortly after.”

“How do you plan on taking care of her?”

“I’ll have a lot of money from baseball.”

“Fine! You have a lot of money from baseball. Where does it go?”

“My agent will take care of it.”

“And who’s going to take care of your agent?”

“You think he’d cheat me?”

“Some do. Then what are you going to do? No money! Embarrassment in the press! I don’t understand it. Where did your UT education go? Up in smoke because you didn’t ask questions! You have to understand, kid. You can buy the fanciest computer or the best bat, and you don’t understand how to

use either. If you don't ask your teammates and your coaches, then, what will happen when you don't understand something yourself?"

"I've always been taught to figure it out myself."

"That's why I'm taking extra time. This place is a little different. You have a lot of people who like to teach, which is good, because they put them in a university. I've been asking around to your professors and you're kind of quiet in class. What's the story?"

"I wasn't really sure I belonged here when I got here. I had an Italian last name, was kind of a wise guy, just fulfilled my academic requirements enough to play ball. I got accepted at this place and it was thrill of a lifetime! I almost became anti-social because I was here to get the grades and not mess with anything else. Now I'm more relaxed, and can handle hanging out with someone I think could go places with me."

"Alright, the séance is over. Tomorrow, you have weight training at ten and then practice in the gym at four. Just enjoy yourself. Get creative with baseball. The first couple of days it's kind of funny because we let the guys draw up their own plays. We want guys who think. You can do base-stealing plays. Hit and run. Pitch outs. Whatever. Pick out one thing that you think will work."

"Are you serious, Coach?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Coach, is there a prize or something?"

"Yeah, the winner gets to lead us in five laps around the gym. Baseball is baseball. I've been here for twenty-three with that philosophy, and we've won two national titles, twelve South West Conference titles, and umpteen guys in the pros! People say I like my players too much, but I'll tell you what; I'd rank them the hardest working teams in the country. In the classroom and out! Next!"

Gillespie told him to shower and hang around. The varsity was going to have a meeting.

Lido hung around the locker room for a good hour and half, and then Coach Allard came out of his office.

“Hey, Coach, before you get started, why just ditch for the season and play with JV guys?” Gillespie asked.

“Coach, I have to agree. That’s never been our style,” Darryl Jenkins, the Longhorns center fielder said.

“Look, I’m only a freshman, but it seems they ended up too big for the team,” Lido said, “If they aren’t disciplined in the classroom, they won’t be here. They think they can get away with that and still play ball. Those kinds of guys start fights at parties.”

“Do you really want greenhorns playing ball for us?”

“If they’re aggressive and they are tough,” Gillespie said.

“Yeah, those guys are right,” Matt Mulligan, the second baseman said. “We can’t have that here. We’re Texas. If we let a couple of those idiots on the team here, the girls softball has to take them, and the football team has to take them.”

“What about our won-loss record?”

“We’ll win anyway.” Lido said.

“How are we going to do that?”

“Sir, you become tougher and you turn something good out of it. Those idiots will be a distraction, anyway.”

“Coach, what he’s saying is some of those kids can play—maybe not as experienced but they’ll give a hundred per cent and they won’t embarrass us in the classroom,” Darryl said.

After a team vote, they voted the academically ineligible permanently suspended concurrent to their temporary suspensions.

They had the real team meeting at The Rock, a terribly good chili and wing place.

“Settle down. The business at hand has passed.” Gillespie waved his Coke in the air. “Enough. Except for the three JV guys, this is it. We’re going with us. Look around and start talking to who you are playing with. Find out where they came from, what their major is, and of course, if their girlfriend is on campus. Just shoot the breeze for moment or two and then it’s your center stage.”

Gillespie took charge in a way that made you believe he cared about you. He aired it all out and didn’t care very much if you didn’t understand him. Lido had to admit he was a great

leader. Lido squared off against his partner at second base, Matt Mulligan.

“You go first. You’re the rookie.”

“Alright; I’m from East Longmeadow, Massachusetts, and I’m a business major and working hard to get a female friend’s attention. I am looking for a national title. I don’t know if I’m going to leave early, and I am a first round pick of the Yankees. I wish I was going home to Boston but what can you do? I love Texas so far. The dorm food has been great! I think I shrank three inches.”

“In Massachusetts?” Gillespie asked.

“But really, I’m a nice guy, anyway!”

“I’m sure you are, but what are your goals in life?”

“I’d like to get married and really do it right. Have a family and teach the boys baseball and girls softball. I like photography and would like to teach them that, too. You’re turn.”

“I got drafted by the Angels in the second round last year. It didn’t make sense to leave. I had one year left in my history degree and one internship left to do as a high school teacher before I get my masters and teach in college. In the meantime, I’m going play ball for as long as it lasts. I have other plans and if something stupid happens, like I hurt my knee or the fastball is a little too fast, then I’ll teach, get married, and be happy,” Mulligan said.

Girl?”

“Yeah. She goes UTEP. Smart lady. We’ve been together since high school. She plays basketball and she beats me at it. It’s terribly embarrassing. It’s only because we turn the double play together that you know.”

“I beat you at it, too, and I can’t even hold the post,” the guy next to him said.

“Lido, this is my friend; best curveball pitcher in the league. Mr. Mack Ostrowski. The Bean Pole. The boy is a hundred sixty-five pounds at six feet even. His curveball will make you look silly. You only batted against JV. This is the real thing now. His curveball notwithstanding, Mr. Bean Pole, here, is a crooner

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in the Sinatra fashion. His 'God Bless Texas' and 'To Play in Texas' are just incredible."

"They ain't that good," Bean Pole smiled.

"He's the Karaoke king of all time."

"My fastball is clocked at seventy miles an hour, you know."

"It wouldn't dent my shirt."

"It'll scare your mother."

"Boys," Lido said, fostering team unity.

"This is communication with us. He's a good guy," Matt said.

"My girlfriend wants me to sing at the wedding."

"Oh, I have to go to that," Lido grinned.

"You know, I've been sitting here patiently," Robert Banning said.

"As you see it," Matt smiled.

"Well, because I'm the first baseman and can see the whole diamond. We are going to win this year."

"Do we have a captain?" Lido asked.

"The coach picks him," Bean Pole said.

"The coach can't pick him. It's the guys who got to play with him. It should be a team vote," Lido said.

"Alright, who's going to sell that one to the coach?" Banning said.

"I'll do it," Lido said. "Yeah, I'll do it!"

CHAPTER 1

Lido was the first famous rookie on the team. “Well, I’m from Massachusetts, which is great a lot of the times, except for the snow, which is why I’m here. I consider it a blessing to be playing here, considering my grades stunk in high school. I know I was kind of distant to you first semester, but I had to square some things in my life—particularly in the grade department. This semester, I would like to understand a little more about the University of Texas and I want to win a National Championship!”

“So you want to party more?” Darryl asked.

“No, I just want to see the people on the campus more. I’m a photographer as a semi-professional basis.”

“Nice,” Gillespie said.

The next day before practice, Big Jefe spoke.

“Gentleman, hombres, and mucho hermanos, we are here to play some baseball this year and Gillespie and are in agreement with the young ’un. We have to play with a captain chosen by the guys. Lido, you say something.”

“Jefe’s right. We discussed it last night at dinner as a team and we agreed that was the way to go. I’ve been here a grand total of a semester. I say we wait until Friday to cast our votes and then we accept them as the team’s vote and go out for any non-alcoholic beverage of your choice. I can feel something in this team.

We got the Jefe, who hasn’t missed a game since the seventh grade. We got the Big Horse Gillespie and the Bean Pole, along with fastest outfield in the league with Darryl, Omar, and Rafeal. Mr. Banning rounds it out at first and we have the Aces of the Bases on the bench, not to mention the rest of our start-

ing rotation, Kyle Jake, Curt Longra, and our bull pen Big Dan Wiley. Gillesp?”

“We’re going to be the best damned team in the country. Look around, boys. We even got somebody from Massachusetts and he could’ve been anywhere. We are here to play ball. When we’re in this locker room, we are here to play ball. Classroom; well, you have to idiots to miss this because you didn’t study. We are the Texas Longhorns and we will win the National Championship.”

At about eleven o’clock at night, Lido was studying.

“Good evening,” Matt Mulligan smiled, “Want to compare rigs?”

“I don’t have a truck.”

“Cameras, my friend.”

“What you said was really good today in the locker room.”

“There’s something about these guys. Every other team I’ve been on, we had good quality guys talent-wise, but they had listened to how great they were over and over and it screwed them up in the head. Maybe we don’t have as much talent, but damn, we hustle.”

“Yeah, it’s better than last year. Everybody was looking at their draft positions. Look, man, I got a Canon. I worked for a long time in a factory punching holes in saw blades.”

“What have you got for glass, bud?”

“I left the heavy artillery back at the office. A 300 2.8, and a 400 2.8.”

“Yeah, but impress me.”

“Okay, 24 2.4, 35-70 3.5, 85 1.8, 200 2.8, and a flash.”

“Can I work in your factory?”

“I’ve been acquiring them for a while.”

“By yourself?”

“Uh huh! I’m a business major so I can open my own camera shop.”

“I thought you wanted to be a teacher.”

“I’m doing a double.”

“Can’t you tell me these things right out?”

“We only had five minutes.”

“Canon, also. I have a 300 2.8. I’m working on the heavy artillery. Mostly I shoot a lot of wide angle. I like the effect. 24 2.8. 35-70 3.5, an 85 1.8, and 200 2.8”

“How’d you get yours?”

“Laying asphalt since I was sixteen.”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Shoot.”

“Basically, they were jobs you went to college for so you didn’t have to do again. Do you have any good feelings about them?”

“Yeah, you’re looking at it.”

“Why didn’t you go pro, man? Money everywhere.”

“I don’t know. I wish I did. There’s something about being an educated man that drives me. I think I am the only one in the family that has a serious chance at a master’s.”

“You’re sticking around for four years?”

“As it looks now, yes!”

“You could go to New York, you know. Girls, girls, and more girls.”

“I’m working on that one.”

“Tell me about her.”

“She’s probably one of the nicest people I ever met. Tell me about the basketball player.”

“Kelly is my age; she’s graduating with a business degree in May. We met at San Antonio high school. She wanted to stay in-state. I did, too, to be honest with you. I had places like Nebraska and Kansas giving me feelers but UT was UT.”

“You think we’re going to win it this year?”

“After the speech the three of you made?”

“Why didn’t you jump into the act?”

“I’m the steadier guy. Hit the ball, catch the ball, throw to first base. The guys can depend on me; they know it and they have never told me that I was a slacker. They’ve always respected my beliefs on how to play the game of baseball. They know I’ll be there. Don’t worry about that.”

“That’s sort of why I came here.”

“What do you mean?”

“Back home, there is a certain expectation of me. Basically, they think I’m a total loser for not taking Yankee money and running with it. They think I’ll be a failure in school. My parents and my younger brother are the only ones in the whole damned city that think I can.

“I just got tired of the bling. What do you care, you get your juray and you’re all good. I want my degree; they can keep the Rolexes for a while.”

“You have too much of an edge. Do it for yourself, man.”

“How do you marked as a failure at eighteen? Especially if you haven’t done anything bad with the law! The toughest part of it is going home—not to see my family because they’re as nuts as I am. They think I can succeed. When I succeed, will you think I’m a hot shot?”

“Shut up!”

“Why?”

“You worry too much. Who the heck cares? You enjoy yourself with that girl. Play a little ball, get a little grades. Enjoy yourself. Learn about life, man. I’m telling you as a senior; you’ll be better if you stick it out.”

At eleven thirty, Darryl and Gillesp came in.

“What is this? Show and tell?” Gillespie asked.

“We need to get the rookie another lens, and he can’t work until the end of the NCAA season.”

“Guys, I’ll do fine. I’ll work asphalt next break.”

“Your parents are pretty successful. Why don’t they buy it?” Darryl asked.

“I want to be my own man. They do a lot for me and it’s not just money. You see, I came from an Italian family that will do anything for each other.

“And that’s an extension of my parents. I came here because I wasn’t just Cousin Lido or Frank’s son. Barely anybody knew me but the baseball team. I want my family there for holidays and stuff, but for the times you have to grind it out, I don’t want them to worry.

“We had some brawls about it before I came, but it all worked out. My parents are good financially and they help

me out. So why abuse it? And how are you fine gentleman tonight?"

"Have you been taking happy pills?" Gillespie asked.

"Hey! It's true."

"You have cheap parents?" Darryl asked.

"No. They just grew up poor. And they cut coupons so they can look for the best deal in town, right down to the last ten bucks. Nobody is perfect. Money is a little different to them than me. I'll spend most of my summers spending money on equipment, and they'll pass out. Yet, they always respect my decisions."

"How about going half?" Matt asked.

"It's too complex a fraction. You gotta understand. It's like buying your first bat when you were a kid. If you bought it, nobody could take that away from you. In photography, it means you really have arrived."

"Could you arrive on this planet, please? Nobodies' parents think like this. Nobody of any consequence, anyway," Gillespie said.

"The girl's were hot at the library. Sorority sisters, two numbers," Darryl said to break up a possible confrontation.

"Yeah," Gillespie said.

"What did you get?" Mulligan asked.

"I learned about the Civil War."

"Well, that's why you came to college."

"What exactly do you two wizards do with stuff?" Gillespie asked.

"Just as much as we want to," Mulligan grinned.

"He won't go out in the desert because there are rattlesnakes," Lido said.

"It's a bad thing when a guy from Massachusetts has garden snakes to worry about and he's commenting on Diamondbacks."

"Oh, yeah, we'll have sharks in the Atlantic Ocean."

"How far is that away?"

"A few miles."

"I will worry about them later," Mulligan grinned.

"Seriously, man, you've got to do something with them," Darryl said. "Our Massachusetts connection?"

“I will shoot anything that moves, most notably sports. My dad bought me a camera when I was ten. I bought I bought my own Canon when I was eleven with my own paper route money.”

“Gentleman, do you know what we have here?” Gillespie asked, “We have ourselves earned money. Ask what Darryl did last summer.”

“I was bricklayer to a mason. What did you do, Gillesp.”

“I ran herd on a fork lift in a warehouse. How many of your parents went to college?”

“Mine went. Both graduated. My dad is a bank executive and mom is a paralegal at a law firm down San Antonio way. I was able to swing full-time hours splitting two jobs as a detailer in a body reconstruction shop, and I photographed the Diablos as much as I could scramble up on the weekends. One or two guys in the front office used to play here.”

“I used to watch the Red Sox and they had this retired catcher, Bob Montgomery, and he said the team had to be strong up the middle,” Lido said.

“Tomorrow’s the vote,” Gillespie said.

“We’re all good on that,” Lido said.

The next evening, Lido was on the phone with his father.

“Dad, something so great happened to me today, but I don’t know if I’m up for it.”

“Did you get pledged to a frat?”

“Sort of! The guys elected me captain of the baseball team. I don’t know what I’m doing. I’m eighteen years old. All I told the guys in high school was, ‘Hustle up boys.’ Stuff like that. I don’t know how to become a leader.”

“Frank, the fact that you’re eighteen years old and playing the game you love in a place of grand tradition bestows you the honor of being a leader, and leaders develop their own style their own way. You’ll do fine. Remember, the New York Yankees, the finest baseball organization in the world, drafted you number one overall. Don’t think these kids don’t read the newspaper.

“I’ve seen you lead Mark to the desk instead of the TV set so he could study his homework, by using positive reinforce-

ment. Just let them have it when they ain't hustling. Be positive otherwise."

"They're going to put a little, white C on my shirt."

"Do they do your laundry?"

"Oh, yeah, every day."

"Then it'll stay white."

"Yes, sir, it will."

"Give it a touch of luck for me."

"Mom home?"

"Out playing tennis with Joanie."

"That must be a sight."

"Be nice."

"Hey, Dad, I really like it here. I'm chasing this girl I met at a football game."

"Really?"

"She's nice. She's not an airhead."

"What's her name?"

"Dana, actually."

"You be careful."

"It's not like that yet. We're just friends now, but I am in hot pursuit. She's a nice girl, Pops. I have to be nice to her. It's in the rule book."

"And she is..."

"Kind of like a cross between a younger Christie Brinkley and a brain surgeon."

"But she's just a nice girl."

"In the long and short of it, yeah; she talked to me on the phone the other night defending the Texas Rangers record with her only argument, that the ball didn't fly out in the heat. I told her it did for somebody else."

"Absolutely. The Yankees hit home runs all the time in Texas."

"I whittled her down. Her first reason that the Yankees were so good was because they had the best nightclubs and the guys didn't get traded, so they played harder. There wasn't even a number two reason."

"What about your situation?"

“There is no situation. The Yankees are my number one team and the Sox are number two.”

“That’s not natural.”

“It is so. The Yankees are Jaguar, and the Red Sox are Chevrolet or Ford. You have to have almost all kinds of drivers in society.”

“Let me put it to you this way. If my career came to an end and I was offered a job at either the Boston Globe or the New York Times, I would have no problem saying, ‘yes to either.’”

“May you have a long career.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You turned down a lot of money. Once again, are you sure you know what you are doing?”

“Dad, I’m learning more and more about myself every day here. There is such an atmosphere of success here, from the full-time professors to the guest lecturers.”

“I’ve been to school and it’s been a long time since I’ve felt that, but it’s a good feeling. Meet as many people as you can.”

“I have a problem that’s special. Hector Rodriguez, our catcher, is a senior and he’s kind of upset that he ain’t captain. After all, he’s the catcher and anybody that knows baseball figures that’s willed to him senior year.”

“Take him out for a meal and square it with him.”

“He’s really upset.”

“Don’t be a chicken.”

“He can tear my arms out of my sockets.”

“Hey, it’s your team. You can’t always hit a home run.”

“Mind if I go talk to him?”

“No time like the present.”

So Lido gave him five minutes to meet him at Mama’s Tacos.

“Hey, it’s me!”

“You’re lucky I like you,” Hector said, “You know what’s worse? I voted for you.”

“Look, I thought about it a lot. I was thinking and, don’t laugh, but we have to be strong up the middle. Darryl’s our center fielder. We make him outfield captain. We make Gilles pitcher’s captain and you the alternate since you’re in the infield. Fair all around. Good enough!”

“You have class. I’ll give you that.”

“Yeah! But what do you think?”

“It’s a good plan. We are a team. Do I get a little ‘A’ on my shirt?”

“I’ll see what I can do. Hey, you really want to eat fast food tacos!”

“Grease factory. Come on! I’ll show you the real stuff.”

“No mas, señor. El Coke es bueno. Gotta go. Mucho estudiar. Mucho trabajo!”

“Hey, I have a question. How can you photograph for money?”

“Not during the school year! I just shoot to keep from getting rusty.”

“Fair enough.”

“Hey, captain. If you got lucky...”

“What do you mean? I am out of the barrio.”

“I mean if your friends weren’t so lucky. They had to settle for jobs they didn’t like and they had job stress from some boss who was a moron.”

“My friends got out through the military or boxing! My family is very strong, but I know what you mean. We are different. We are living a dream! Let’s face it; when you are twelve years old and you swing a bat, you know where you’re going! Nobody else in the world does, but you are there. My friends have stuck with me! We were guys who were kind of like at John F. Kennedy High to play sports, but our parents sat on us and we studied.”

“My friends are kind of split! Some are in the Armed Forces and some are pushing asphalt! I don’t know what to say to them. I am living a dream and they think life stinks because of the work they do.”

“Are they really like you?”

“They were the guys that were around when I was in a slump.”

“When did you slump?”

“In the classroom. We did stupid stuff and then we all got religion when we graduated. I got baseball, so I got the most!”

Mike Maloni

They have to find their own way, like I did first semester. The problem is I know some will make it and some won't! They're my friends! What am I going to do?"

"Jesus Christo."

"You're right. I'll tell you what! You're okay! See you on the field, mano. I have to hit the books."

"Okay, yeah, I should hit the books myself. They only problem being up at two in the morning is realizing that is actually getting you better. It pushes you and pushes you and pushes you."

"Did you ever have the 'I am nuts dream'?"

"Let me guess! It starts face down in books!"

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