

Sanchez · *David Jaus*

I AM A BASEBALL PLAYER. I come here from the Dominican Republic the home of Juan Marichal because baseball can't make you the same much of money in the Dominican League. That is why I live in the U S of A and play baseball for the Arkansas Travelers which are a team in the Texas League but live in Arkansas. The Arkansas Travelers are a team which is called a Double A team, meaning not so good as Triple A or Major Leagues—what everybody call The Bigs. Everybody here want to make it to The Bigs. There is no Bigs in the Dominican Republic and that is why I am living here so miserable and now that my family leave me I am more miserable ever than before. The only time I smile is after when I win a big game or if I forget for some minute and think my little Angelita is waiting at home for me to kiss her for goodnight. But tonight I am more miserable even than I think a dead man because my coach he throw me off the team and all because they leave me.

I love baseball. I love to pitch the ball. When I am the pitcher everybody depend on me, if I just stand there and hold the ball nobody do anything. When I throw the ball everything happen. It is a good feeling but not the same as love which is something I have too much of I think. My heart it feel like it is in shreds every time when I think about Angelita and her black braids. And Pilar. I can not even say her name now without wanting to cry. Pilar is so beautiful, sometimes when we were making love I could not breathe right. When I think about her gone and taking Angelita with her I want to be on the mound throwing hard like Juan Marichal who come from Santo Domingo the same like me. I am a starter so I pitch the ball every four days, no more, and the rest of the time it go by so slow I can not take it. I want to pitch the ball every night if I will not tear my shoulder which is what I did at St. Petersburg my year of being a rookie when I tried to show off I had stuff. Now my shoulder hurt whenever I think about Pilar and Angelita so I try not to think about them when I am pitching the ball. But most of the time it is no use because I think about them anyway. That is why I get in such big trouble tonight, I think of them when I should be thinking curve ball or slider, down or up.

The nights they are the most bad. I have dreams. Jackie say I grind my teeth when my dreams get so bad. When I wake up I am all wet with

sweating and scared to dying. Jackie try to make me all right then but it never work. She hug me and kiss me and say it only is a dream. Then I tell her what I dream and she say what it mean like a doctor. Some times I dream Pilar is opening her legs for Antonio who was sent back to Santo Domingo for being weak field and no hit. Other times I dream I am pitching when Angelita run out on the field with her arms reaching out for me but I don't see her till it is too late and I have already throw the ball and it hit her in the face and make her be dead. To me the dreams mean I love Pilar and Angelita so much my heart want to die. Twice I almost buy a gun and shoot myself. But Jackie say a gun is dumb, she say my dreams mean I should get married again and show Pilar some thing or two. She tell me to stop being a Mr. Sadface. That's what she call me when she try to make me smile. I know she want to marry with me by these signs but I don't want to marry with her. Still what am I supposed to do, be alone all the time. I make sex with her but that is not to propose for marriage.

Pilar take Angelita back to the Dominican Republic because she don't care about The Bigs. She don't care about Juan Marichal either or the Hall of Fame or driving a car with electric windows. She miss her mama and papa and the papaya grove in her yard in Santo Domingo. When she look at the photographs of home that was when she would start crying and then a minute later yell at me for taking her to the U S of A. She don't understand English good like me and no one but Antonio who play second base like a hole in his glove also speak Spanish. And she don't understand baseball too. To her it make no sense, to her it is crazy to pitch a ball that no one could hit it. She say to watch a game if no one hit the ball is no fun so I should make the batter to hit some home runs. She say Why you want to keep everybody from having fun, you think the fans pay so much of money to see pop-ups. She is a woman and she think like a woman. Still I did not suspect her to leave me. The trouble I am in tonight is all because she leave me. I try to tell Coach Glenn so he understand but still he throw me off the team maybe for good. He have a wife who never leave him and no kids.

The day Pilar leave I pitch seven and two-third without-score innings against the Shreveport Captains which are a team too in the Texas League, the East Division. Then my arm it get sore and Coach Glenn say to get a shower and ice my shoulder down. I think now my shoulder become sore because Pilar and Angelita were leaving me that same minute. It was a sign

but I don't see it then because I am wondering if Johnston will lose my win for me like he usually do, the junkarm. But this time he is lucky and I don't lose my win but because I am worrying so much I miss the sign. God give all of us signs like a manager so we know what he want us to do. But now I don't know what to do. I don't see any signs. I think God is mad with me and I am scared.

The night Pilar and Angelita leave I am halfway to almost home when all of a sudden I know what my sore arm mean and I drive fast with my foot down on the floor and run through red lights one after each other and squeal into the parking lot. I go up the curb and almost into the swimming pool next by the apartment manager's office I am so much scared they are gone. And when I open the door Pilar and Angelita are gone and I can not find them everywhere. I look in the kitchen and living room and both bedrooms even behind the shower curtain but they are so gone I can feel how they are not there. I sit down on the bathroom floor and look at the shower curtain which Pilar buy when Angelita pull the other one down. She buy it because there is parrots on it like in our country and palm trees. I am so much sad I want to hold this curtain against me tight.

I did not think she would leave, I think only she talk about it. But now I see she mean what she say. After when I get up from the bathroom floor I go back in the kitchen and find what I did not see at first, a note stuck on the refrigerator door with a yellow smiling face magnet. It say in Spanish If you don't make The Bigs come to home and be a family again. I sit down then and put my big dumb head in my hands and cry. Mr. Sadface.

I can not understand why I stayed in Little Rock. I should have went to Santo Domingo that same minute. Maybe there is something wrong with inside me that make me stay. Maybe I don't love Pilar and Angelita like I think so. Maybe I want to hurt them like they do me. Or maybe I don't want to be like Antonio and go back to home the same I left, a worthless nothing. When I go back I want to be like Juan Marichal who is a Hall of Fame pitcher with more strikeouts than dogs in Santo Domingo. I want World Series rings on all my fingers and a car so big it have a TV and a bar in it. But I want more my Pilar and Angelita I think. Why I did not go back I am not sure but maybe I should have went before all this happen, before I become this disgrace to my country and myself. Before I have to go back with no choice of my own.

Jackie she think I stay because of her but that is not true. Jackie mean al-

most nothing to me. She was Willie Jackson's girlfriend last year and after he dump her still she come around and ask to go for a ride in his car which he call his Love Chariot. But he always say No and Get lost and one night I am so lonely I get mad and say Manny you don't have to take this shit off of Pilar that bitch you can have some fun too. So when Jackie come around at The Press Box to drink beers and shoot pool after we lose the double-header to Tulsa I say Willie that's no way to hurt a lady and make him say he is sorry so I don't hit him. After that she have her hands all over me. Now she stay here and sleep on Pilar's side of the bed but I want her to go because she is not Pilar. She wear a blonde wig and laugh like she is underneath angry. But she love me and go crazy with crying when I say some things like I don't want you to hang your wig on the doorknob. I can't say anything mad without it making her cry and want to be dead so how can I tell her to get lost. She laugh a lot but she have a scar on both wrists from when Willie first tell her to beat it. The scars look like X's cut so careful and neat, I can see her trying to make them pretty, her tongue sticking out the corner of her mouth while she do it, concentrating. I am scared she will kill herself so I make sex to her but I cannot marry with her. I wish she would go away. She scare me with her crazy too much of love, like I scare myself.

Now I don't know what to do. Every day that pass I wait for a sign. But nothing happen. I want one minute to go home, I want that Pilar would lay on top of me and kiss me so I am lost in the dark cave of her so beautiful black hair. And I want to kiss Angelita for goodnight on her little nose and say to her like before the joke about the bed bugs biting. But another minute I want hard to be a baseball pitcher in The Bigs and hear everybody even the white people cheering my name. I want everybody to know I make the money they don't. I want a house with chandeliers and shag carpet everywhere and a swimming pool in the back yard with color lights under the water. I want all these things but I don't want Jackie with her blonde wig and eye make-up and crying. But more than this I don't want her to bleed to death because I leave her like she always threaten without saying. So I want to go and I want to stay. And that make me not want anything anymore.

That is why I did not finish the game this night. I was pitching the ball so good my forkball break in the dirt and still they swing and grunt. It is already inning number six and still I have no hits on me. Only three more

innings to a no-hitter which would make Whitey Herzog to see I am ready for The Bigs. I start to feel nervous so I turn to the bag of resin to pick it up and I see on the scoreboard all the zeros and somehow it take the breath out of me it all look so perfect and empty. I am so proud because I do it, I make all the zeros. And then I think about Pilar leaving and Jackie's scars and my dream with Angelita running on the field and my pitch hitting her dead. Why I think of these things then I do not know but I think of them and it make my heart to beat so hard.

When I turn back to the plate my legs they are shaking like in my first game for the Azucareros del Este when Pilar was in the stands to cheer for me and I imagine she is out there now watching me and knowing if I do good I will make The Bigs and marry with Jackie because I am scared to find her in my bathtub, the water red. So I look down at Gene my catcher and nod and then I throw the ball and it sail over everybody's head and up the screen, a wild pitch. Gene he signal time and run out to the mound and say Jesus Christ Manny I give you the sign for change-up not fastball what are you thinking of. I can not remember what I say but Gene he go back to behind the plate and thump his mitt and give me another sign. I nod and throw the ball and it hit the batter in the shoulder and he spin around like he want to fight but I just stand there and look at him. Then he go down to first holding his shoulder and swearing at me and Gene he say Don't worry about it kid. You'll get 'em, he say. Just take it easy.

All this time I am thinking, If I throw a no-hitter, I will never see my Pilar and Angelita again. Not ever.

While I am standing there thinking, the baserunner steal second. Gene he jump up and yell Second! Second! and I turn around to throw the ball to Peachy but the runner he is already standing up and brushing the dirt off his uniform, a sneer on his face. Coach Glenn is swearing so loud I hear him on the mound. But somehow I don't care like I should.

Settle down, Gene say then and give me a sign. I start my wind-up but then I forget what pitch he ask for and I stop, a balk. The runner he walk down to third, laughing at me. I don't look at him. Gene come out to the mound then and Coach Glenn too. Calm down for Chrissakes, Gene say. And Coach Glenn say Forget about that no-hitter Manny just rear back and hump that ball in there. Okay I say and they go back. Then Gene give me a sign maybe for a slider or could be curve. But I just stand there and hold the ball. He give me another sign I think for forkball but I can't do

anything, I just stand there. Then he come out to the mound again and say What's the problem Manny your arm getting sore again. I shake my head no. Then what gives, he say. What the fuck is going on. I almost can not talk the words are so far down inside of me but somehow I say Nothing but I say it in Spanish—*Nada*. I never talk on the team in Spanish because in The Bigs they want that you always talk American. But I say *Nada*. Then he look at me foreign and ask You all right. I say Fine in American and he say Good then he trot back to behind the plate and give me one more time again the sign and this time too I do nothing. If I do nothing nothing happen because I am the pitcher. I am in control, if I hold the ball everything stop. I want then everything to stop, I want time to stop, I want Jackie to stop, I want being alone and sad to stop, and I want Pilar and Angelita to be there and see me stop the game and make nothing happen. So I hold the ball. I stop everything for one minute. For that one minute the world stand still, nothing change, and I can breathe.

Then the umpire step before the plate and he say Throw the ball Sanchez or it is delay of the game. The batter he step out of the box and shrug his shoulders toward the dugout of his team and spit. I stand there more. Then Gene come out to the mound again and Peachy too and Gene say Goddamn it Manny what the hell are you trying to pull. Peachy nod his head and say Come on man let's end this thing. I just look down and say Okay I feel fine now. Then throw the son of a bitch Gene say and he go back to squat and stick down two fingers, meaning curve. But still I stand there. Peachy say What the fuck and everybody in the stands start to yell and boo but I don't do anything.

Then out of the dugout come Coach Glenn looking so mad. All of a sudden I feel so sorry for him, so sorry for Gene and Peachy and my teammates and for Jackie and Pilar and Angelita and the umpire and the people in the stands who are booing so disappointed. I feel so bad for everybody I want to cry. Then Coach Glenn he say What the hell do you think you're doing Sanchez. I say it again—*Nada*. And he say Don't give me any of that I want to know why you aren't throwing the goddamn ball. His face is red and close to mine the way he get with a umpire when one make a lousy call. I look down and say from somewhere My wife she leave me and my little girl is gone away. Jesus H. Christ he say then and touch his left arm which mean bring in the lefthander. Then he say Get the fuck off the mound and get the double fuck off this team until you get your head on

straight. And then he say I don't want to see you in the clubhouse when this game is over in fact I don't want to see your crazy face ever again period is that clear. I just stand there and listen to him without saying anything. Everything I live for is disappearing into nothing, I am becoming like a zero, but somehow all of a sudden I am gone away from everything he say and I am watching him from some far place where everything is so peaceful I almost want to cry. There is nothing I can say so I smile at him and he look away mad and swearing.

And I am still smiling when Johnston come in to take from me my no-hitter and make me a nobody who can not go to home or stay where he is without shame. I am holding the ball and everything have stop and I am so happy and I love everybody even Coach Glenn and the booing fans and Whitey Herzog who keep me from being in The Bigs so long and Antonio who steal my wife. I love everybody so much I feel like a saint, almost gone, not a man anymore, no passion or pain or anything. But then Coach Glenn take the ball away from me and give it to Johnston. He take the ball away from me, he take everything away, and I am standing there waiting and alone, and there is no sign.