

"How Much for the Head of Ted Williams?"

Scene: A small sports memorabilia shop owned by Barry Mandel. A sign reads "WILL BUY SPORTS ITEMS FOR CASH." Barry, wearing a Boston Red Sox jersey and reading the newspaper, stands behind the counter. Another man, wearing sunglasses and a trenchcoat, enters. He is carrying a portable cooler. The man glances behind himself, as if worried he's being followed, then turns to Barry. With a huge grin he approaches the counter.

GOLD: Good afternoon, friend. Beautiful day, isn't it?

BARRY: (Not looking up from newspaper.) Suppose.

GOLD: I've been made to understand that this establishment purchases collectibles. Sports related items. Am I correct?

Barry, still not looking up, taps the sign.

GOLD: Excellent. I have something I think you'll find most interesting--

BARRY: No baseball cards. I've got all the baseball cards I need.

GOLD: Right. Of course.

BARRY: (Mumbling into newspaper.) Baseball cards up to my freakin' eyebrows.

GOLD: What I am here to offer you, good sir, is far more valuable than any baseball card. In fact, I dare say it is the most valuable sports collectors item ever, and I'm prepared, for a reasonable price, to leave it in your possession, Mr...ah--

BARRY: (Sighing and putting down newspaper.) Barry.

GOLD: Mr. Barry--

BARRY: Barry. Just Barry.

GOLD: Of course. Barry... (He offers his hand, which Barry shakes reluctantly.) Gold...J. Thomas Gold, pleased to be doing business with you. Don't ask what the J stands for... (He waits a beat. Barry doesn't ask.) ...it stands for Julian. But that isn't a very manly name for someone dealing in the realm of sports, wouldn't you agree?

BARRY: (Shrugs.) I guess.

GOLD: Because sports is a manly realm. A realm full of dirt, and spitting, and grown men slapping each others rear ends in appreciation of a job well done. Men showering together, traveling together, growing together, learning everything about each other in a world completely free of women. Manly.

BARRY: Um...yeah. They do actually let women play sports now, too.

GOLD: Right, of course, how rude of me. But baseball...ah...that is a sport of men. (Noticing Barry's Red Sox jersey.) A fan of the Red Sox, are you?

BARRY: All my life.

GOLD: (Smiling.) Perfect. What if I told you that, in this cooler, I had one of the most significant objects in the history of that proud franchise?

BARRY: Holy crap! You got the Carlton Fisk ball in there?

GOLD: More important than a mere ball, I assure you.

BARRY: Mike Greenwell's bat?

GOLD: Better.

BARRY: Roger Clemen's jock strap?

GOLD: No, nothing that...soiled, I promise. I assume you are familiar with a legendary player by the name of Ted Williams?

BARRY: You mean Ted Williams, one of the greatest hitters in the history of baseball? The last man to hit .400 in a season? That Ted Williams? Hell yes, of course I know who that is! You got something that belonged to him?

GOLD: In a manner of speaking. (With a flourish, setting the cooler on the counter.) I have, in this very cooler, the head of Ted Williams.

Silence.

BARRY: Wait a minute...what do you mean his head?

GOLD: I think my phrasing was rather self-explanatory. His head. The object that, in better times, rested on his neck, above his shoulders.

More silence. Then Barry breaks out laughing.

BARRY: This is some kind of joke, right? You're telling me you got Ted Williams's head in that thing? What is this, one of those hidden camera prankster shows. (He starts looking around the store for a camera.) You're foolin' with me.

GOLD: I wouldn't dream of it. In this cooler is the head of legendary outfielder Ted Williams. I'm sure as an avid Red Sox fan you heard the stories, after Mr. Williams died, about what his son demanded be done with the remains.

Barry freezes. He does remember, and he starts wondering if Gold might not be serious.

BARRY: Yeah. Yeah...John-Henry Williams. He claimed he had a family pact signed by Teddy saying he wanted to be put in some sort of freezer when he died.

GOLD: Cryonic suspension. The head is removed from the body and frozen, to be thawed at a later date, when technology has advanced to the point of curing whatever disease or affliction caused the persons demise.

BARRY: And how did you--

GOLD: I am an employee at the Alcor Life Extension Foundation...well, ex-employee now...I was abruptly fired last week due to cut backs, but... (He taps the cooler.) I took a little severance package with me, and I am prepared to sell you this once in a lifetime collectors item for the mere sum of... (Thinks a moment.) ...Two and a half million dollars.

BARRY: (Stunned. He gestures at the cooler.) Can I...

GOLD: Of course. What type of salesman would I be if I didn't allow the customer to inspect the merchandise?

Barry cracks the top of the cooler, peaks inside. He jumps back with a startled shout.

BARRY: Holy crap! There's a freakin' head in there!

GOLD: Yes, I apologize. I thought I had just made clear the nature of the item I am selling.

BARRY: But, I mean...that's Ted Williams freakin' head!

GOLD: Correct.

BARRY: Well...won't the family miss it?

GOLD: Miss it? Please, the Williams family are too busy with their own internal squabbling to notice the comings and goings of one deceased relatives head. However...

Gold sighs and looks nervously at the door.

BARRY: What?

GOLD: My ex-employers have undoubtedly by now noticed that their inventory is short one head, and have possibly sent law enforcement officials after me to retrieve it.

BARRY: The police? Oh hell...Mr. Gold, uh, J...you gotta get that thing out of here! Now!

Barry grabs Gold and begins shoving him towards the door.

GOLD: Barry, Barry, Barry...an unbelievable, life-changing opportunity has just walked into your store, and you're going to throw it out like so much garbage? I mean really, would you throw out someone offering to sell you Barry Bonds's record breaking home run ball?

BARRY: (Still dragging him.) Home run balls don't stare back at you from behind the display case, and they don't have police following them because they were stolen off a corpse.

GOLD: You're blowing a huge chance...the financial opportunity of the millennium...you could be a celebrity...I noticed your store is going out of business--

This stops Barry cold. He and Gold freeze in some sort of awkward, undignified position.

BARRY: What?

GOLD: I noticed the sign, outside your shop. "Property for Lease." You're going out of business, aren't you?

Barry drops Gold.

BARRY: Nobody wants baseball cards, anymore. They want the rare items, the pieces of history, and I don't have any of that crap!

GOLD: Ah...but now you can have... (Holds up cooler.) ...the biggest piece of crap in sports history.

BARRY: Um...right. And what the hell am I supposed to do with a head, anyway?

GOLD: What are you supposed to do...? Are you kidding? In thirty years, when our medical technology has advanced enough, you can thaw this baby out and have as your own possession one of the greatest outfielders in baseball history. Teams will be tripping over themselves trying to sign him, and you'll rake in the profits.

BARRY: Sign him? Why would anyone want to sign him? How the hell would he run? How the hell would he field?

GOLD: He could DH.

BARRY: He can't DH, HE'S A HEAD!

GOLD: Okay, okay, okay. Ted Williams head might not be able to play anymore, but...he could manage! That's right...all those years of experience, that computer like ability to hit a curveball. Imagine it...game seven of the World Series, the Red Sox are up by one in the bottom of the ninth inning. Manager Ted Williams analyzes the matchup with his almost encyclopedic baseball knowledge, and makes his decision. He's calling to the bullpen for a lefty! (Gold demonstrates, pointing to his left arm like a manager signaling to the bullpen. He suddenly realizes what he is doing.) Well, he'll have to work out a different signal obviously. Maybe a series of blinks?

BARRY: Good God. This is disgusting and you are a horrible, horrible person. I'm not purchasing some...some, poor deceased person's head! It belongs buried with the rest of his remains!

GOLD: Belongs buried? Belongs buried? I'll tell you where this head belongs, my dear sir. It belongs in the public eye, to be worshipped and adored by millions of fans. (He stands on the counter or a table, really working the sales pitch.) Ted Williams was a celebrity, my friend. And when you become a celebrity in this country, the public owns you...your life, your privacy, everything. And when you die, your possessions, your experiences, and yes, even your dead body, is consumed by the public...it becomes their property, their reminder of your former greatness. Celebrities owe at least this to us, for without our adoration, their celebrity status wouldn't be possible. (He picks up the cooler, holds it high.) This head, my friend, is more than just a head, more than just a collectable. It is a reminder of our American way of life, and the delicate but necessary symbiotic relationship between those ambitious, talented demi gods we call celebrities and we more mortals who worship them. (Beat.) Also, if you get the head signed by all the members of the '07 championship team, I guarantee it will triple in value.

BARRY: I don't know. Even if I wanted to buy this...thing...I can't afford it. I mean, two and a half million? I don't have that kind of money.

GOLD: (Looking desperately at his watch.) It's your lucky day, my friend, I am feeling generous. One million, and the greatest collectors item in history is yours.

BARRY: Why did you just look at your watch?

GOLD: Excuse me?

BARRY: Your watch. You just looked at it like...you're worried about something, aren't you?

GOLD: Ha! Very perceptive, Barry. Ah, yes, as it turns out, I may not have been 100% forthcoming about exactly how close my ex-employers are on my tail. Point in fact, I need to be rid of Mr. Williams by tonight and headed for the Canadian border, else I may find myself incarcerated, or...worse.

BARRY: (Looking at his watch.) It's a quarter to five.

GOLD: (Trying to act unconcerned.) Is it?

BARRY: I close at 5.

GOLD: Do you?

Barry, suddenly sensing he has the upper hand, goes behind the counter.

BARRY: All right, Mr. Gold, I tell you what. Let me just take a look here and see what I might be able to give you for your item.

GOLD: Well, I'm afraid one million is as low--

BARRY: (He has taken out a large blue book from under the counter and pretends to thumb through it.) Let's see...ex-baseball greats head...yes, here we are...

GOLD: You have heads listed in your price book!?!?

BARRY: (Deadpan.) Everything is listed in the price book. What condition is the item in?

GOLD: Condition!?!? It's...I mean...it's seen better days, I suppose--

BARRY: So, not mint condition. Is it used?

GOLD: (Sputtering.) Well...yes...presumably.

BARRY: (Consulting book.) Head...fair condition...used...Mr. Gold, given the wear and tear on the item you're offering, not to mention its rather suspicious origins, I can offer you...ten dollars for it.

GOLD: TEN DOLLARS!?!? I stole this from...I dodged police all the way from...IT'S THE HEAD OF TED WILLIAMS!

BARRY: Yes. And it's worth exactly ten dollars. Unless, of course, you want to try to find another sports memorabilia shop in the next fifteen minutes? Or maybe you can sell the head in jail?

GOLD: Okay, okay, fine. (He sighs.) Ten dollars. (He takes the money from Barry.) What a rip off.

BARRY: A pleasure doing business with you. Please come back for all your sports collectable needs.

GOLD: (As he exits.) Yeah, right.

Barry watches him go, takes another look in the cooler. He picks up the phone on the counter and dials.

BARRY: (Into phone.) Hey, Hank...it's Barry Mandel over at the store. You'll never believe what I just got a hold of... (Pause.) No, it's not Roger Clemens's jock strap!

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY