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THE PRINCE OF NEW YORK

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

by Eric Matthew Fantauzzi

Guarini School of Graduate and Advanced Studies
Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire

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Abstract

Inspired by both Kendrick Lamar's 2017 album *DAMN* and Logic's 2017 album *Everybody*, my project, "The Prince of New York," is a story that speaks to the experiences of my character, Scott McKenzie. Using the thematic through line of athletics, the project is a coming-of-age story that shows Scott's growth as both a high school athlete and a biracial teenager living in New York City. Throughout the story we see Scott navigate the pressures of living up to the expectations set by his parents, as well as those of being a star athlete. Initially, Scott wants to win a championship in each of his three sports, football, basketball, and baseball because he wants the validation of his family. However, as the story progresses Scott finds that he doesn't need external validation as he's become more confident and self-assured. By the end of the story, Scott is comfortable making his own decisions in the face of the expectations thrust on him by his family.

Initially conceptualized as a satirical screenplay, "The Prince of New York" morphed into a hybrid project—combining narrative prose and poetry with the screenplay form—as I realized that this would be a more effective way to tell my story. I see my project in the same light a musician sees a concept album. Each of the individual pieces tell a compelling story in their own right, together they form an even more powerful and profound narrative. By weaving the screenplay with prose and poetry, I could blend aspects of all three mediums to craft a story that spoke authentically to Scott's experiences as a BIPOC person living in New York City. The fragmented, almost disjointed structure of the thesis mirrors the chaotic way in which Scott sees the world around him. His worldview consists of frenetic snapshots that are combined into one cohesive life experience. The unconventional nature of the project gave me the opportunity to tell a story that is authentic to my character's experiences and that speaks to my own lived experiences as a biracial man.

Preface

The Prince of New York is a culmination of all that I've learned throughout my time in the MALS Program as a creative writing student. I utilized skills that I learned from my courses in screenwriting, poetry, and narrative writing to create a project that authentically spoke to the experiences of my character, Scott McKenzie, as well as my own lived experiences as a biracial, BIPOC man living in America. My Writing Methodologies class was also instrumental in my writing of this project because it allowed me to see patterns between different mediums of writing, which was part of what inspired me to craft a hybrid project.

Though my project is a creative writing thesis, it incorporates themes that I learned in my cultural studies courses in the program (especially the concept of hybridity, which was introduced to me in my Diasporas and Migrations course). It also deals with the realities of what it means to BIPOC in New York City. I spent countless hours traveling throughout the city to make sure that I accurately reflected what life in New York was like. This involved exploring different neighborhoods and sampling different foods from high-end European restaurants to breakfast sandwiches in various bodegas amongst other things. I also rode every train in the New York City subway system multiple times throughout my research and thesis writing to immerse myself in my character's life. The attention to detail I put into my thesis makes for an engaging and realistic coming-of-age story, one that is an homage to my hometown.

I extend my gratitude to my thesis advisor, Prof. Harriette Yahr, and my second and third thesis readers, Prof. Anna Minardi and Prof. Vievee Francis without whom this thesis would not have been possible. Their guidance and mentorship were invaluable and integral to me throughout the thesis writing process. I extend my thanks to the following professors for helping me grow as both a scholar and a writer: Prof. Barbara Kreiger, Prof. Eugenie Carabatsos, Prof. Peter DeShazo, Prof. Donald Pease, Prof. William Phillips, Prof. Rena Mosteirin, Prof. Klaus Milich and Prof. Regine Rosenthal. Thank you to Colleen Andrasko for being an invaluable part of the MALS community, Amy Gallagher for her assistance in making sure my thesis was properly formatted and Sarah DePaoli for being my proofreader. Lastly, I'd like to thank my parents, Nora and Eric Fantauzzi, for being supportive of my writing and for always allowing me to pursue my passions.

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THE PRINCE OF NEW YORK

Written by

Eric Matthew Fantauzzi

DECEMBER 8TH

December 8th, a date that will be permanently etched into my psyche. December 8th was the night of the injury that almost killed my dreams. My deep hatred of authority was amplified because of the events that occurred that night. My coach, Jeff Lammons, told me to run a play during a pivotal moment of a playoff game despite me being against it. I had my doubts about the play working, mainly because we ran it ten times in practice, and I only had the protection in the pocket to perfectly execute it once. I wanted to hand the ball off to my friend Ansel, our team's running back. It was the only logical play in my mind because he was built like a tank and could get us into field goal range so that we could tie the game and head into overtime. Coach Lammons was a win-at-all-costs type of coach who hated losing almost as much as I did; I just wasn't as impulsive as him when it came to the plays I wanted to run from the pocket.

I told Lammons that the play was unsafe and Abernathy's D was too strong against our O-line. Lammons... he didn't give a fuck about any of that. He told me he'd kick me off the team if I didn't run the play, so I ran it. I hated playing football. It was my parents who forced me to play it way back when I was only five. When I was old enough to understand, they told me that being a great football player was an automatic way to get into a great college (my family may have been wealthy, but I was supposed to earn my way into college just like the rest of America). I detested authority, but for some peculiar reason I would always do what my parents told me. Even though I hated playing football, I hated disappointing my family more. If I got kicked off the team because of Lammons' ego trip bullshit, my parents would never let me live it down. He would twist the narrative to say I was being difficult or some shit like that. Lammons had a sternness in his voice at that moment, a sternness that I'd never heard before then. It reminded me of the tone my parents had in their voice whenever they were frustrated or disappointed in me for not listening.

I reluctantly said I would run the play and ran over to the huddle to tell the offense. The ball was hiked to me and, just like I had predicted, the pocket collapsed and I was fucked. I should have just taken the sack because we still had a down left to go. I could have even scrambled for the seven yards we needed to get into field goal range. Did I do any of that though? No, I ended up trying to get the touchdown myself instead of waiting for help. I wasn't allowed to wait for help in Lammons' eyes. I was the captain; I had to lead my squad to a W however I could. It was that unwillingness to have my teammates help, combined with my uneasiness at defying authority from people, that reminded me of my family that was my downfall. By the time I decided that I needed help, it was too late.

I was bulldozed to the ground, and as far as I was concerned at the moment, both my knee and my dreams were destroyed.

FADE IN:

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

It's a frigid December night. Blackman Academy is playing their rivals, Abernathy Prep. Fans from both sides are in a frenzy in the bleachers.

The scoreboard reads "Blackman: 30 Abernathy: 33"

Blackman's quarterback, SCOTT MCKENZIE, 16, signals for a timeout. A referee BLOWS his whistle and Scott darts to the sideline.

Scott calls for his coach, JEFF LAMMONS.

SCOTT

All right, Coach. What should I run?

Lammons quickly glances at the scoreboard. There's less than a minute left to play.

COACH LAMMONS

Go with Metro 86.

SCOTT

But their linebackers have been pouncing me all game. What about Chrysler 44?

COACH LAMMONS

Trust me. Metro's going to work. Just run it like we did in practice.

SCOTT

I've got almost no time in the pocket. Their defense is too quick.

COACH LAMMONS

Just run the damn play, McKenzie.

SCOTT

It's too risky. No way I can get that pass off in time. Why not just have York run it?

COACH LAMMONS

Run the goddamn play or you're off
this team. I don't care *who* your
grandfather is.

Scott begrudgingly runs back onto the field and relays the
play to the offense.

SCOTT

All right, listen up. It's going to
be Metro 86 Z Post Slant. On zero,
on zero. Ready, break.

The offense gets into position and waits for the ball to be
snapped.

Scott silently motions for the ball with his hands, the
center snaps it to him.

Scott looks for an open man downfield but doesn't see any
targets. He darts back-and-forth in the pocket waiting for
someone to get open.

He sees the tight end open. As he winds up to throw the ball,
the pocket collapses around him.

Scott secures the ball as best he can and scrambles
downfield. He weaves through the defense, keeping his eyes
open for any targets.

He jukes a pair of defenders, stiff arms a third before
winding up for a pass. One of Abernathy's safeties tackles
Scott just as the ball is thrown. Both players fall
awkwardly.

A subtle POP is heard. Scott writhes on the ground in agony,
clutching his right knee.

Everyone on the Blackman sideline lets out a collective gasp,
except Lammons. The coach is seen muttering the same word
repeatedly as he paces down the sideline: "Fuck."

THE PRINCE OF NEW YORK

From the minute I was born the trajectory of my life was
predetermined for me by my family. Not so much by my father's
side of the family but rather by my mother's side. My father,
Patrick McKenzie, was born and raised in the Bronx, a self-
professed hood rat. That being said, he never let his
situation define him. He hustled his way to the top by
outworking everybody. Pops got a full ride to NYU by being a
standout power forward. After he graduated, he earned a merit
scholarship to Yale Law School.

He parlayed his success into a thriving law business, opening his own firm in the late 90s, McKenzie, Neidman and Thorpe. He met my mother, Frannie Meyer, in the 80s while he was still at NYU. He enjoyed DJing during weekends to pick up extra money. His favorite place to DJ was Webster Hall on the East Side. He met my mom on a Saturday when he was finishing up a set, and they vibed. My mother became my father's confidant and rock, and it was with her help that my father was able to start up his law firm. She had her family provide him with \$100,000 of seed money and twenty-plus years later he's thriving.

My father may have come from humble beginnings in the Bronx, but my mother was born into New York royalty. My mother's parents are Jonas and Betty Meyer. The Meyers can trace their roots back to Anglo-Saxon England. They settled in New York in the mid-1700s and made their fortune via the growing fur trade. They later pivoted into real estate and finance and quickly became part of the New York elite. The Meyers mingled with the likes of the Astors, Rothschilds and Roosevelts among others, such is their renown. My mother and grandparents never let me forget this prestige. I was constantly told that I was going to go to Columbia and continue the family tradition of being a Lion. When my sister, Phoebe, got accepted during my sophomore year my mom's family threw her a massive celebration at Delmonico's and got her a Tiffany necklace as a gift. I didn't mind being born into a family like this. I enjoyed the perks of being a prince of New York. It was a fantastic life to experience. We took summer trips to Europe and spring breaks were spent in Brazil or whatever tropical country Ma and Pops picked out for us. They gave me a Jaguar when I got my license. Every year Pops bought season tickets to all my favorite sports teams. It was a typical life for those in our social circle. We were expected to do these things and to live up to these standards of what it meant to be New York royalty. The only downside to being a so-called prince was that I felt I couldn't make many mistakes. For as long as I can remember, I was told what clothes to wear, how to style my hair, who I could befriend, etc. It was all in an attempt to cultivate the image of the Meyer family. When I was about 14 I was learning how to date White girls, and I went to Pops for advice because I knew he could relate to the situation; we were both Black men doing our best to fit into White society. Pops told me that the only reason he was allowed to marry mom was because he was a lawyer and so the Meyers were willing to look past his "shabby upbringing." It had more to do with him growing up in a bad neighborhood as opposed to him being Black and my mom being White. The Meyers are the farthest thing from a racist family. They've always been down with the cause, from being abolitionists to marching for civil rights to even now donating millions to BLM and other pro-Black causes. No, the Meyers were just a bit snobbish at times, but that's how most of the old New York royals are.

Given that I was born a Meyer and that Pops clawed his way to the top, my parents were never going to let me fail. My parents love me deeply, and I love them as well, but they also frustrate me at times. I feel conflicted that I always have to perform and give it my all. I wish I could fail for once and not be given a lecture by Pops about how I need to try harder. Even now, my mom's refrain of "task at hand, Scottie," is reverberating in my head. I try to hide my identity as a Meyer because I enjoy living under the radar, but my parents want better for me, and so they thrust me into the New York spotlight any opportunity they get. I'm touted as "the next heir" and as "the great one" by New York media. The pressure to live up to these expectations is immense, and I detest it. I despise the vanity of it all while also enjoying the opportunities that it affords me. People think being rich is easy, but between the fake friends and the constant drive to stay on the top by families like mine, it's quite exhausting.

EXT. BROWNSTONE APARTMENT - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: NINE MONTHS LATER

The sun rises in New York's Upper West Side neighborhood. Buses and taxis zip down the street as morning rush hour is underway.

A prominent brownstone is seen on 82nd Street and West End Avenue. Even nestled amongst the other townhouses and brownstones in the neighborhood this one stands out for its craftsmanship and ornate detailing.

INT. KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - DAY

A contemporary open concept kitchen/dining room setup with hardwood floors and marble countertops.

The sounds of coffee brewing and sizzling bacon are heard.

Scott's father, PATRICK, 40s, Black, bearded with glasses, is sitting at the dining room table reading the *New York Times*. He's dressed in an Italian suit and brown dress shoes.

His mother, FRANNIE, 40s, White, dressed in elegant but comfortable clothes, is making breakfast. She takes a Moka pot off the gas stove, puts it on the countertop.

Patrick fiddles around with the crossword puzzle. A pensive look on his face as he taps his pen on the table and shakes his leg.

Frannie walks over to the dining room table, hands Patrick a cup of espresso. She glances at the crossword for a moment.

FRANNIE
Hard one today?

PATRICK
Damn hard.

FRANNIE
Scott'll help you when he gets down here.

PATRICK
Yeah. Just like he always does...

FRANNIE
You can't fault him for being competitive. I mean just look at the way you obsess over everything: puzzles, work, you name it.

Patrick grunts in agreement. He picks up his espresso, savors it, still fiddling with his puzzle. Frannie walks back toward the stove to tend to breakfast.

INT. SCOTT'S BEDROOM - DAY

A phone alarm RINGS. Scott reaches for his side table, feels around for his phone, head still stuffed into his pillow.

He grabs the phone, turns off the alarm. He slowly rolls over onto his back, looks up out through a skylight. He lets out an audible yawn as he stretches. He slowly gets out of bed.

Scott's room is filled with various posters of athletic role models i.e. Tom Brady, Michael Jordan and Derek Jeter, as well as Polaroids of the cities he's visited with his family.

Scott walks to his closet, opens it, grabs a towel. He closes the closet, walks to his door. He exits his room.

UNDER PRESSURE

The recovery process from my ACL, MCL and meniscus reconstruction was a long and exhausting one, but I pushed on nonetheless. I definitely didn't want to, but I had to, it's what was expected of me. Like I said earlier, being a Meyer means doing everything to perfection and with a gleaming smile on your face. I wouldn't be able to complain even if I wanted to. I recovered in bed for a month and as soon as the doctor cleared me I did physical therapy every day for almost three months just to be able to walk again.

It was exhausting, and there were moments that I resigned myself to give up and to stop trying. At least that way I'd have an excuse to not play a sport I hated for a family that I resented at the best of times. However, I pushed through it all because I loved my friends on the team more than I resented my family.

After a hellacious few months of learning how to walk again, I slowly started doing strength training to gain back some of the muscles that had atrophied during my time resting in bed. That was followed by me learning how to run again. I would wake up at 5 a.m. every morning and head down to the Reservoir in Central Park. I'd run laps around it until it was time to head to school. I'd then go back to it after school and run until exhaustion. After a few weeks, the routine became easier, and I regained most of the mobility and strength in my leg. The last thing I did was meet with a throwing coach so that I could relearn how to throw the ball. I did that for a few months after I made such an effort to rehab my knee. I knew that if I was going to take the field again that I would have to be the best QB out there, despite what my parents, coaches or anyone else thought. For once in my life, I was actually passionate about football because I wanted to be, not because my parents told me I should be. My one goal was to come back and lead my team to a championship, one that I could call my own. It was this drive to win on my own terms that numbed the pain I felt throughout my recovery.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Shower sounds are heard from upstairs. Frannie begins serving breakfast while Patrick ponders over the crossword.

Frannie brings the plates to the table, sits down. Patrick puts his pen down and the couple start eating breakfast.

Footsteps can be heard from the hallway. Scott slinks into the kitchen wearing a tracksuit and high-top sneakers.

Scott walks over to his parents and greets them, they greet him back. He sits down, begins eating his breakfast.

SCOTT

So, Ma, do you think Uncle Marc will give me the green light to play again this season?

FRANNIE

He might, you never know.

SCOTT

I mean he worked a miracle on Phoebe and now look at her.

PATRICK

Yeah, son, but you've got to be realistic with these things. Her injury wasn't as bad as yours.

SCOTT

I'm just being optimistic.

Patrick gets up from the table, walks to the kitchen counter. He picks up the Moka pot, pours himself another espresso.

FRANNIE

Did Coach Lammons say anything about you starting again?

SCOTT

Not yet, but I'm sure my spot's a lock.

PATRICK

I wouldn't be so sure, son.

SCOTT

Don't front, Pops. It's too early.

PATRICK

I'm not. All I'm saying is to not get your hopes up too much.

ANYTHING TO WIN

I'm a legend of the game

A true pioneer of sport

An athletic savant from the day I was born

Perpetually poised to perform at a premier level

I bludgeon myself, push my body to its limits because I must

Life, like sport, is a competition, and I'll do anything to win

Anything to give myself an edge and thrive,

Because in the game of life tying is nonexistent

There is only winning and losing, and so I do anything to win

I'm a devout disciple of the religion of winning

The injuries I endure are my penance for being

a believer The broken bones, the torn ligaments, the
concussions

The mental anguish that I feel after a loss

All of it is fleeting; it's part of the price I pay.

EXT. 82ND STREET AND WEST END AVENUE - DAY

It's early afternoon. Scott and Frannie walk out of their
brownstone onto the sidewalk. They walk over to a black Range
Rover where a driver is waiting for them.

The pair get into the car and drive through the congested
streets of upper Manhattan.

EXT. MOUNT SINAI HOSPITAL - DAY

The towering edifice of the hospital looms large over Central
Park. The Range Rover pulls into the hospital, and Scott and
Frannie exit the car.

RELIEF

I was nauseous the entire drive from our house to Mount
Sinai. My future would be determined by what my godfather,
Dr. Marc Hailey, an orthopedic surgeon, would say about how
my recovery was going. Phoebe had torn her ACL playing soccer
a few years back and Uncle Marc had worked a miracle on her
knee and she recovered a few months sooner than most. I was
hoping that my recovery would be as smooth as hers; my goal
of winning a ring depended on it. If he said my meniscus and
knee ligaments weren't recovered enough I think I would have
felt both a sense of dread at my dream of winning being
crushed, but I would have also felt an overwhelming sense of
relief. I would be able to forge my own destiny instead of
the one laid out for me. All I could do was wait and see what
he had to say. I just knew that it didn't matter if I was
cleared to play or not. I had given it my all and I was proud
of that.

When we arrived at Mount Sinai I couldn't hide my
uneasiness any longer. I opened the car door and vomited
violently. My body purging itself of the anxiety and dread I
must have been feeling for all 17 years of my life but had
been too mortified to express outwardly. It was a relief to
actually feel something for once after all that time being my
parents' robot. It showed that I was an actual human and that
it was okay to feel emotions. Up until that point I forgot
what it was like to feel an emotion that wasn't frustration
or feigned joy. It was simultaneously painful and cathartic
standing there, vomiting, feeling.

My mom didn't share my glee at my vomiting. She made me wipe myself off and hurried me into the hospital. As usual, she had to protect that Meyer image. And just like that, my face turned back to stone, any remnants of my emotion washed away.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Scott and Frannie enter and take a seat. Scott on the examination table, Frannie in a chair by the door.

Frannie takes a magazine out of her purse, starts reading it. Scott's eyes continuously dart around the room as he anxiously waits for the doctor to arrive.

The doorknob is heard rustling, someone walks in. It's Patrick.

FRANNIE

Hey. What took you?

PATRICK

The Nichols trial dragged on. Again...

FRANNIE

It's all right. You didn't miss anything. Marc's not in yet.

PATRICK

That's odd.

FRANNIE

I know. He's normally early.

The door opens. DR. MARC HAILEY, 40s, walks in. He's holding a clipboard. He greets Frannie by kissing her cheek, shakes Patrick's hand.

MARC HAILEY

Sorry about the hold up. I was getting a consult on Scottie's leg.

FRANNIE

What would you need a consult for? Did something unexpected happen?

PATRICK

Relax, honey. Marc knows what he's doing. If he had to get a consult he probably had a good reason for it.

(to Marc)

All right, Marc. Give it to us straight.

MARC HAILEY

How straight do you want it?

PATRICK

Straighter than a MAGA supporter. Give us brass tacks.

Marc turns toward Scott.

MARC HAILEY

All right, then. Well, Scottie, your recovery went much better than we had anticipated. But you're not quite out of the woods yet.

SCOTT

What does that even mean, Uncle Marc?

MARC HAILEY

I'd wait a few more weeks before attempting any sudden lateral movements. You don't want to aggravate the injury or risk damaging the ligaments again.

SCOTT

That's great, Uncle Marc. Thanks again for fixing my knee.

MARC HAILEY

No problem, Scottie. Good luck this season.

Marc walks over toward Scott, gives him a hug.

REDEMPTION

Senior year was my opportunity to claim my rightful place on top of the throne. I wanted to prove the haters wrong as well as show my family that I could be successful without their help. It was my chance to get out of Phoebe's shadow and show that I could be great in my own right. I had been known to most as "Phoebe's baby brother," a moniker that I couldn't seem to shake no matter how much work I put in or how many accolades I won. She never won a championship during her senior year at Blackman, though, despite being a five-star athlete in three sports. If I won even one championship in any of my sports I'd have bragging rights over her. Winning three would mean being able to take a seat at the table and be acknowledged as being her equal.

It wasn't a sibling rivalry because she never had any beef with me; it was me feeling inadequate because I felt like my parents saw her as the favorite.

In a family like mine, you had to perform to earn your love. It's an OD fucked up thing to say, but it's true. I'd have to always get the best grades or the most wins to be loved. With Pops' drive and Ma's family image to protect, they didn't tolerate inadequacy. It was a win-or-be-scorned family dynamic, which is super fucked up and dysfunctional, but my family couldn't care less about any of that bullshit. I was ready to wake up on my first day of senior year and grind 24/7. I wasn't going to let anything or anyone get in my way of achieving greatness, not even myself. I was going to be laser focused and give my best any chance I got. I wanted to shake the image that I was washed up or the bullshit rumor that I was a nepotism baby because of my mom's side of the family. Senior year was going to be my coronation, and I was dying to sit atop the throne when it was all over.

INT. SCOTT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Scott's phone alarm rings. He quickly grabs the phone off his night table, turns it off. He looks up through his skylight, feels the warmth of the sun's rays.

He gets out of bed, does some mobility stretches. He lets out an occasional yawn as he stretches.

He finishes his stretches. He walks to his closet, opens it, grabs a towel. He opens his bedroom door, walks into the hallway. FOLLOW as he makes his way to the bathroom.

FRAGMENTED

The injury damaged me mentally, as well as physically. My knee may have been shredded, but it was my mind that caused me the most pain over those nine months of recovery. I was bombarded with constant thoughts of inadequacy and anxiety, and nothing seemed to help ease the franticness that I felt on a near-constant basis. I did my best to keep things hidden from my family, but after a few months I broke. I started breaking out into stress hives and taking out my aggression by punching anything I could. I got so incensed one day that I punched my bathroom mirror and shattered it. Ma and Pops saw my bloody hand and realized how anguished I was, so they decided to get me a therapist. They had an image to protect, sure, but they weren't entirely cynical when it came to taking care of me. After our first session my therapist realized I was more fucked up than most of the patients she typically encountered on a daily basis, so she prescribed me some pills to help.

I'm not going to get into OD detail about what I take, but the important thing to know is that I'm starting to actually feel content with my life again. I enjoy mental clarity and a sense of peace that I don't remember having before.

Therapy helped me come to terms with the problems in my life. It helped me to find balance in my life. I can actually work on solving the problems I have instead of suppressing them and hiding my emotions. Life before meeting Nikki and getting medicine was chaotic, filled with drugs and countless bottles. I self-medicated on an almost daily basis for like three or four months because I didn't know what the fuck to do. It wasn't hard to get that shit. I was so revered by people from Queens to Harlem. People would just give it to me just to get an opportunity to hang out with me. Being wealthy in New York can get you almost anything, except a sense of sanity or mental clarity. My family was so obsessed with preserving their collective image that they didn't know how to deal with me as a human. If I had a problem, I was always told by my parents or grandparents to not give it too much thought or to learn how to deal with it and not complain. My therapist and I talked about this, and she told me that that's toxic positivity. Nikki let me know that it was okay to fuck up and be myself, and I didn't always have to feel happy all the time. The first time I spoke with her I started to cry and then I apologized to her. She gave me a box of tissues and told me that I could cry all I wanted, and her office was a sanctuary for me and my mental health. I went from smoking three blunts and drinking a Stella almost every morning to smoking only one blunt and becoming only a sporadic drinker because of Nikki. She helped me cut down on some of my shitty habits like drinking and popping Adderall, Percs and Klonopin, but she was also dope enough to prescribe me medicinal weed for my anxiety. She's my guardian angel and that's no cap. If more people in New York had a Nikki in their lives, then maybe I wouldn't see as many drunk or high niggas on the subways or in the streets. I gotta think that life would be better if we actually gave a fuck about how people felt. It probably wouldn't make a difference, but I hope that it would.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Scott enters, places his towel on the towel bar that's on the shower door. He walks to the sink, turns on the faucet, washes his face with cold water.

He grabs his toothbrush and toothpaste, walks back to the shower. He turns on the shower, waits for the water to get warm, he enters with the toothbrush and toothpaste.

HIGHS AND LOWS

I want to get rid of the emotional baggage that I've been carrying for so long.

Everyone I meet tells me that I'll be successful in the future, but I feel so empty at times.

People have high expectations of me, it's nerve racking;

I feel like I can never live up to the potential that they say I have, it makes me feel low.

The reason why I drink and smoke is because I feel so emotionally low.

The highs I get from drinking and smoking distract me.

For a fleeting moment in time, I feel absolutely invincible; I feel like I can do anything

Everything I set my mind to.

The lower I feel emotionally, the higher I want to get.

Getting high numbs the constant pain that I feel in my life.

Getting high or drunk is a welcome distraction for me;

for once I don't feel my crippling anxiety or depression choking the life out of me.

I know that getting high isn't the solution to my emotional stress,

but at times I truly don't care.

Life is filled with its highs and lows, but lately I've been getting high because I feel so low.

I've been getting so drunk and high lately that my life doesn't make sense to me anymore.

Even this poem makes no sense to me at this moment

But maybe life, like this poem, isn't supposed to make any sense.

Life would be no fun if it made sense.

Are the experiences I write about in this poem real or are they the hallucinations of a drunken soul?

You, nor I, may never know the answer to that question

What I do know for certain is that I am not the only one
being choked by an emotional noose

There are countless others experiencing the same pain I am

Some ease the pain by getting drunk or high like I have so
many times.

Others may simply ignore the pain as if it doesn't exist.

People have different ways of coping

One thing is the same no matter who we are though: we are all
vulnerable.

No matter how hard we try to conceal our emotions, we cannot
conceal our vulnerability.

We cannot run away from our collective trauma forever.

But we always suppress how we truly feel

It's "taboo" to express your emotions

You get labeled if you do.

If you're a man, it's not "socially acceptable" to cry

Men who do that not only get called names,

they get their manhood questioned.

men are not supposed to be sensitive or in touch with their
emotions.

We don't need to change men

men are perfectly fine.

We must fix the broken system

INT. SCOTT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Scott walks in. He's wrapped in a towel. He walks back toward
the closet, opens it. He scans through his wardrobe, finds
the clothes he wants, takes them out of the closet.

He walks to his bed, lays his clothes down on the bed. He
turns to his night table, opens a jewelry box. He grabs a
watch and a gold chain from it, puts them on the bed with his
outfit.

THE FLEX

My jewelry is an extension of who I am, so I enjoy being able to flex any chance I get. Sure, the championship rings I've won are dope, and I always make sure to wear one at all times, but they're not even close to being my favorite pieces of jewelry. I think my favorite pieces of jewelry have to be the pendant necklace my girl Teddy got me, the vintage Rollie that Pops got me for my 15th birthday and the diamond bracelet that Phoebe got me. I love them all, but for totally different reasons.

The Rollie meant a lot because it was one of those times where I felt like Pops showed me his love and there were no strings attached. I didn't have to worry about the grades or the wins, I could just be happy and not care about shit. It was more about the vibe than the watch. In fact, I've got like 12 or 13 Rollies now, and I'm finna buy another one in a few months. I basically fuck with the bracelet for the same reason I fuck with the Rollie. Phoebe got it for me just because. She said she wanted to surprise me on Christmas one year, so she handed me this box. When I opened it, I saw an iced out Tiffany bracelet. I love it so much that I wear it every day, it never comes off my wrist. Phoebe and I don't bond as much as we used to when she was still in high school and I was in middle school, so I was happy that she thought of me. If it weren't for Pheebz, I wouldn't be the athlete that I am today. She's the one that taught me how to play basketball, hit a baseball and play infield, and how to throw a perfect spiral. She used to help me warm up before every football game until she started going to Blackman; that's when we started to drift and shit hasn't been the same since.

When I got that bracelet, and we both smiled together, it reminded me of why I love Phoebe in the first place. She'd do anything to make me happy or protect me. No cap, she was my second mom. She loved me unconditionally, but she just couldn't say it as much as she would've liked because of that family image bullshit, so she showed it. I love my sister just the same, and I love my girlfriend Teddy almost as much as I love Pheebz. That's saying something because I don't feel comfortable getting all soft with people and shit unless I have to. Teddy made me feel special because she was one of the few people I could be vulnerable around. I didn't have to pretend to be something I wasn't. I could just keep shit real with her. She got me an iced out Cuban chain with a number pendant for our anniversary. She said that she wanted me to show everyone how great I was whenever I suited up to play, and that's why the pendant was a number one. I don't think she knew that my uniform number had always been number one when she got it for me; I think she just wanted to show how special she thought I was. She wanted to let me know that she'd always love me even if I couldn't love myself or feel loved by others. I always make sure I have the pendant on no matter what, however, I only wear the Cuban on special occasions because I don't want niggas yanking it off my neck.

I always switch out which chain I put the pendant on, but I make sure that nothing's too icy unless I've got a reason to flex on people; it's a lesson that Pops taught me.

My jewelry matters to me because it's my subtle way of rebelling against my parents and being my own person. Ma likes her diamond and pearl earrings, Pops prefers his watches, and Phoebe's a bracelet and ring type of girl. Me, well, I enjoy looking icy like my favorite rappers (Drake, Logic, Jay-Z, the list of icons goes on and on). My parents give no fucks about it because they see jewelry as a status symbol, but I don't. I see it as an art form, every flex is unique and has a story, the same way every Picasso or Basquiat has nuance and layered meaning. Like Jay-Z, Warhol or Basquiat, I'm making my name for myself as a New York legend and jewelry's my medium.

INT. KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - DAY

Frannie and Patrick are sitting at the table enjoying espresso and biscotti.

Scott slinks into the kitchen. He's wearing a windbreaker, jeans and a pair of New Balances.

SCOTT

Morning, Ma. Morning, Pops.

PATRICK

Hey. Morning, slugger. Ready for your first day back?

SCOTT

You for real? First day of senior year, why wouldn't I be?

Patrick chuckles lightly.

PATRICK

Is there anything you aren't ready for?

SCOTT

I don't know. Besides getting injured, not really, no.

FRANNIE

Oh, that reminds me, don't forget to speak to Coach Lammons today.

SCOTT

Don't worry, Ma. I won't. I got this.

FRANNIE

I'm your mother, I always worry.
Even when I don't have to.

PATRICK

Yeah, what your mother said. Now
sit down, eat, have some espresso.

SCOTT

Nah, that's all right.

PATRICK

You sure? Your mother made your
favorite amaretto biscotti.

SCOTT

Yeah, I'm sure. I'll have some when
I get home from practice.

FRANNIE

What are you going to have for
breakfast then? You've got to eat
something.

SCOTT

I'll swing by Zabar's, grab a quick
bite. Now will you two stop
worrying? You're going to give
yourself wrinkles.

Scott quickly hugs his parents goodbye. He turns around, walks out the kitchen. He walks down the hallway to the front door, opens it, exits.

CRUISIN'

Long boarding used to be life. I loved being able to hop on my board and cruise through the maze of Manhattan streets in front of me. I vibed with the freedom that long boarding afforded me (that feeling of just being a normal teenager). It didn't matter that I came from New York royalty when I was boarding. I blended in with all the other bikers and commuters that were on the streets. I started boarding to school when I was about 12, and I had done it every year since. I'd only take the subway if the weather was shitty or if it was too cold outside, other than that I'd cruise to school. I'd get up like a half hour earlier sometimes because I liked to weave through Central Park instead of riding in a straight line from 82nd to 107th. All that ended for a while when my knee got shredded. My parents didn't want me to take any risks. So took my board away and told me I'd get it back when Uncle Marc told them I was good to go.

I could take the subway to get to Blackman or I could have one of our drivers take me, but I couldn't board, not unless I wanted to "fuck up my future" Pops told me.

The whole point of long boarding was me wanting to establish my anonymity amongst the crowds, so I rarely had a driver take me to school. Instead, I figured I'd either get up an hour earlier so I could walk or I'd take the subway at 86th Street and get off at Cathedral Parkway and walk down the three blocks to school. It was an awkward feeling at first, having to rely on others to get to school, either by being driven or by having to wait for the train, but after a while I began to mellow out. Taking the 1 train to school gave me plenty of time to think and to meditate. I enjoyed people watching, I'd scan the subway cars and imagine the types of lives that others may have been living. It didn't give me the same freedom or joy that I got from boarding, but riding the subway was fulfilling in its own way. It allowed me to just be myself, and I enjoyed that. New Yorkers on the subway don't give a fuck if you're rich or not, just if you're in their space or not. I wasn't Scott McKenzie, Prince of New York, on the subways. I was just Scott, a teenager, and I fucked with it because I could be goofy and nobody would care. There weren't any consequences for being myself on the subway because anything and everything happens in New York. People just look the other way and embrace the chaotic as if it were normal. If you haven't seen some crazy shit at least twice a week, you're not a real New Yorker, and that's just facts.

EXT. 86TH STREET AND BROADWAY-SUBWAY STATION - DAY

The morning rush hour is in full effect as Manhattanites jostle down the sidewalk. Scott's got a coffee cup in one hand, a paper bag in another. He carefully makes his way through the throng of commuters.

He gets to the subway entrance, scurries down the stairs, careful not to misstep.

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - DAY

Scott is waiting for the train. He tries to take his bagel out of the paper bag, but has no luck. The platform is packed to the gills with morning commuters. He puts the bag in his windbreaker pocket, drinks his coffee instead.

A train rolls into the station, comes to a screeching halt. The doors open. All hell breaks loose as swarms of passengers try to simultaneously exit and board the train.

Scott slowly backs up, leans on a wall, he shakes his head at the scene. He looks up at the board that has the train arrival times. He shrugs his shoulders.

SCOTT

Fuck it. I'll catch the next one.

Iconic

Circulatory system of a city filled with people who have no quit in their souls

The five boroughs linked together as one through the lifeline that is our subway

Trains gliding and weaving across rails from Manhattan to the Bronx, Brooklyn to Queens and Staten Island, too

It may be disheveled at the best of times and crime-ridden at the worst

Yet, it's a legendary part of our city. There's no New York without the subway

It's as mesmerizing as the Yankees or as ubiquitous as a slice of \$1 pizza, though, it's not as beautiful

Packed subway cars, the jostling of a rush hour commute, heroin fiends

meandering throughout the stations

Images that are etched into my heart, indelible snapshots of what my city means to me

Wall Street and Broadway are the beating heart, our sports teams are the joy, the NYPD are the courage

But the subway, that glorious system of weaving tracks, that's the lifeline of arteries and veins

That keeps the spirit and lifeblood of New York circulating without fail

FAMILY TRADITION

Going to Blackman wasn't my choice, far from it. I was told I was going there for high school. I wasn't even asked by my parents if I wanted to or not. The Meyers had been going to Blackman since its founding in 1834. It was founded by Ezra Blackman and my ancestor, Ezekiel Meyer, with the "intention of creating better men for a more civilized society" (they revised the motto and started admitting women in the 1870s after the Suffrage Movement gained traction).

Every Meyer had gone there since its inception; I was simply the next in line to carry on the tradition. There was tremendous pressure on me to exceed the expectations that my family had set for me. I was a contemporary Atlas with the weight of New York society weighing on me.

Just about every Meyer had used Blackman as a stepping stone to get into the Ivy League or a top tier school. The school of choice always seemed to change, but the idea stayed constant. From the 1840s up until about the 1910s Yale and Harvard were in vogue. From the 1910s, up until Jonas started college in the 40s, Princeton was the school. It's been Columbia ever since. Phoebe's the latest one to carry on the legacy of the Meyers going to Columbia, but I want to change that. Like I said, I can't stand to be obscured by her shadow, I've got to step out into the sun and enjoy my own life and make my own memories. I've always loved hiking and skiing when we went on our yearly vacations across the world, so that'll probably help me choose a school when the time comes. Maybe Dartmouth or Rowayton could work, or I might head out to Cali and play at USC or Stanford. For now, I'm just going to focus on vibing with my brodies and dominating at Blackman any way I can.

EXT. BLACKMAN ACADEMY - DAY

Blackman Academy, a regal looking edifice built in the Victorian style, located on 107th Street and Broadway. Its prominent architecture stands out from other surrounding buildings in the area.

TRES AMIGOS

One of the bright spots of going to Blackman was that I got to hang out with my brodies, Josh and Ansel. We've been friends since we were like four or five. Ansel reminded me of Mac Miller or MCA from the Beastie Boys. He was a White boy, but he was down with the cause and hard as fuck. Nobody messed with him because he was like 6'2" and built like a beast. Josh was light skin, but his bars were fucking phenomenal. This nigga could spit game without even trying, and he used his raps to boost his street cred. He was brolic as fuck and like 6'1". I respected him because he always stood up for Ansel if people said he was hanging out with us just for the clout. We're so tight that I call their moms "Auntie," and I've slept over at their pads after cyph sessions.

My favorite memories with the boys were the street ball games we used to play at Riverside Park. Pheeb's may have taught me how to handle the rock, but Ansel and Josh weren't rookies either. Ansel had OD hops for a White boy and actually taught me how to dunk.

I saw him posterize a nigga during a game when we were 14, and I couldn't even believe the skill he had. It was like watching Vince Carter but in Steve Nash's body. That shit was fucking incredible. Ansel helped me with style, but Josh was the one who helped me improve my handles. His shit reminded me of Iverson or Curry. He'd mercilessly break your ankles and then hit the j. I had made varsity when I was in 7th grade because Pheebz was a female Coach Pop. I had to focus on the fundamentals. My game was taken to the next level when I was in 9th grade because of the skills I learned from the brodiez, and I've got two rings to prove it. My brothers make Blackman enjoyable because they give me something to look forward to every day. Blackman would be fucking hellacious without them and that's the fucking truth.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Scott walks to his locker, sees two of his friends, JOSH FRANKLIN and ANSEL YORK, waiting for him. Scott opens his locker as he talks with them.

JOSH FRANKLIN

Scottie Mac, what's good, brodie?

SCOTT

Not much. Same shit, different year. You know how it goes.

JOSH FRANKLIN

How's the bod? Like what's the story on your leg?

Ansel groans, shakes his head.

ANSEL YORK

Dude! The fuck?

JOSH FRANKLIN

What? I'm just asking how our QB's doing.

ANSEL YORK

Read the room, man. It's eight fifteen. Let the kid wake up first. He just got here.

SCOTT

It's fine, York. I'm up. And yeah, the leg's all right. I got cleared yesterday.

ANSEL YORK

So you're good to go for this season then?

SCOTT

Yeah. I mean... I should be good.

JOSH FRANKLIN

What do you mean you should be good? You just said you got cleared.

SCOTT

I just don't know if I'll be the same player I used to be. What if I'm washed?

JOSH FRANKLIN

Don't worry about any of that shit. It doesn't mean anything.

ANSEL YORK

He's right. Last year was last year and this year is just starting. Don't doubt yourself before you've even played a down.

SCOTT

Thanks, guys. But I'll be fine. I've just got to work things out on the field, you know?

Ansel, Josh and other high schoolers shuffle into their classes as an alarm bell can be heard RINGING.

Scott puts some books in his locker, closes it. He casually slinks into his homeroom.

AN ORDINARY DAY

Being mixed comes with its own set of challenges that you can't really prepare for. I'm not just talking about the side eyes or the confused looks that I get from people when they see me. No, no, it goes deeper than that, this is deeper than any of that bullshit. It involves dealing with microaggressions from people who aren't woke enough to understand me. Every year I've got a teacher that'll ask me my perspective on shit because I'm mixed, so they feel like I can give my thoughts from "both sides." They don't even know how fucked up they are, but some of my classmates do, so they try to help me out. But that shit only pisses me off more because I feel like it's more of that fake woke White Savior Complex bullshit. They're just speaking out because they want that Instagram clout.

I don't even speak up because I know that I'll be the angry Black person, and it'll make my family look bad. Money and power are powerful weapons, but they can only take a Black man but so far. After all, Obama was President, and motherfuckers still wanted to kill him. So I keep my mouth shut while these racists who don't even know their own racism look at me like I'm some fucking unicorn.

I've been dealing with stuff like this my whole life, but I only started to realized how fucked up it was when Pops started telling me more about my Black side after the Eric Garner killing. He told me about how he protested against apartheid and how he dealt with a lot of racist shit growing up in the Bronx. He went through some serious shit growing up, like one of the nuns at Catholic school calling him a nigger when he was only 10. He told me that that one experience changed his entire mindset, and the reason he hustled is because he wanted to be seen as a successful person who happens to be Black, not as a successful Black person.

Pops taught me a lot about what it is to be Black and how it's okay to feel some type of way about White people and racists. At the same time, I know that he and Ma push me because they want me to have a better life than he did. I can't say that I've never been called a nigger before, but I've definitely never let the fam know; I'm not trying to cause waves or anything. The only person that I actually told was Nikki, and she told me that it's fine to feel angry, just not to let my anger define who I am. I told her that I feel like I have to be the best at everything and that's why I always wore number one when I played. She suggested that I might feel better if I change my number to something new, something that shows that I'm okay with embracing the chaotic and unexpected. After doing research and thinking about everything, I decided to go with 13, the same number as some of my athletic heroes: Wilt Chamberlain, A-Rod, Dan Marino. I figured that I wasn't going to always be able to dodge the racism or bullshit that came my way, but at least I could embrace it in a new way.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Scott walks in, takes a seat toward the back of the room, near the window. The other students shuffle around, find their seats.

A teacher, MRS. DINA PAZZANO, mid-30s, walks into the class. She grabs a piece of chalk, writes on the chalkboard. She walks to her desk, walks in front of it, addresses the class.

MRS. PAZZANO

Good morning, everyone. I'm Mrs. Pazzano. This semester we're going to be learning about European history.

One of Scott's classmates, XAVIER REYNOLDS, Black, chimes in.

XAVIER

European history? Don't you mean whitewashed history?

MRS. PAZZANO

Say that again. I don't think I heard you right.

XAVIER

No, you did. I'm tired of learning about this whitewashed, Jim Crow bullshit.

MRS. PAZZANO

Well, I'm sure that's just your opinion, Mr...

XAVIER

Reynolds. But call me X.

MRS. PAZZANO

All right, X. Why do you think European history is whitewashed?

X scoffs at Mrs. Pazzano, shakes his head.

XAVIER

You can't be fucking serious right now. I can't believe this shit.

MRS. PAZZANO

It's a simple question.

XAVIER

It's not that simple.

MRS. PAZZANO

Just answer the question.

XAVIER

What do you want me to say? It's not like I can just give you the TedTalk version of how and why imperialism and slavery are fucked up.

MRS. PAZZANO

Just let me teach then. We can talk about your concerns after class.

Scott straightens up in his desk, chimes in.

SCOTT

Come on, Mrs. P, just let him speak. You're acting like a privileged boomer.

MRS. PAZZANO

Are you calling me a Karen, Scott?

SCOTT

I mean... You're acting fucked up right now.

MRS. PAZZANO

I'm not a racist Karen.

XAVIER

He didn't say you were, but if you're so scared of being branded one, you might be more racist than you thought.

MRS. PAZZANO

(smugly)

I support the NAACP and go to BLM protests. I don't see color.

SCOTT

That's not a good flex, Mrs. P. Being color blind isn't a good thing...

MRS. PAZZANO

It's not?

XAVIER

Nah, it means you're ignoring the racism that's going on in the system because you feel it doesn't affect you.

MRS. PAZZANO

What does the system have to do with me? I'm just a teacher.

SCOTT

Exactly, and you're part of an educational system that's inherently racist and always has been.

XAVIER

It doesn't matter how much you support the minority communities from the outside if you don't work to change the system from the inside.

MRS. PAZZANO

And how the hell am I supposed to do that?

XAVIER

How about you listen to other teachers and see how they're teaching, instead of thinking you know everything.

SCOTT

Yeah, I mean it's the twenty-tens, things have changed. Maybe you should change your attitude as well.

MRS. PAZZANO

Are you mocking me?

XAVIER

You're mocking yourself at this point. You didn't need his help to do that.

MRS. PAZZANO

I've had enough of your nonsense.

XAVIER

My ancestors took a whip to the back and you're suppressing my history and you've had enough of *my* bullshit? Bitch, that doesn't make sense, but it is what it is.

MRS. PAZZANO

Get the hell out of my class! You've got a real attitude problem. You know that?

XAVIER

What, because I'm Black and I speak
my mind? Fuck this.

X stands up, grabs his book bag. He walks out the classroom,
slams the door as he leaves.

MRS. PAZZANO

Anyone care to join X?

Scott slinks out of his seat, walks toward the front of the
class. He looks at Mrs. Pazzano intently.

Scott scoffs at Mrs. Pazzano.

He walks out the class, flips her the bird as he exits.

COLOR BLIND

"I'm color blind, I don't see race."

It's contradictory, almost paradoxical to

turn a blind eye and say you're color blind

You fail to see the patterns of hate by saying those words

"Blue Lives Matter" or "All Lives Matter"

it's a shot to the soul to hear that All Lives Matter because

the bastards who wiped out my ancestors and rewrote our
history

are the same ones who deem us offensive for wanting to
unearth our past

White fragility is more painful than Black suffering in the
eyes of AmeriKKKa

Weaponized tears as dangerous to Blacks as a cop with a gun

And Karens put on performances for the masses because

they revel in Black degradation

and will do everything they can to stop us from gaining

true emancipation because we're chained by the antiquated

expectations of a country that never gave a fuck.

REAL TALK

The minute X opened his mouth and started arguing with Mrs. P I knew that the nigga was spittin' straight facts. No cap, in a matter of minutes. He said everything that I had wanted to say for years but that I couldn't, or rather that I felt I couldn't because I was handcuffed by both my parents' and society's expectations of how I should act as a mixed person. X on the other hand gave no fucks, whatsoever, and he didn't let you forget it. Just from his tone I could tell that he was a cat from the streets and he had no problem keeping shit real. He was the brash Malcolm X to my soft spoken Dr. King. I knew that we needed to talk about what went down in Mrs. P's so I figured I'd dip.

I hated Mrs. P anyway, I just didn't say anything until X ripped into her. She was the type of teacher that would call you out for "being distracted," and I never liked that shit. I found it insulting. I got all-A's in every class I took at Blackman, but I still had to put up with her bullshit. It wasn't until X called her out that I figured that I didn't have to sit back and tolerate that bullshit. He helped me realize that I didn't have to be the robot that people wanted me to be. I could stand up and be who I wanted. I didn't know how he'd vibe with me, but I knew that I had to link up with him and talk.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Scott sees X idly roaming the halls, runs toward him.

SCOTT

Ayo!

X stops and turns around, sees Scott.

XAVIER

What up? Shorty kick you outta class or something?

SCOTT

Nah, I dipped.

X gives him a skeptical look.

XAVIER

You dipped? For what?

SCOTT

Just because. I couldn't listen to any of that shit she was saying. She's bugging the fuck out.

XAVIER

She definitely lives in Staten Island or some shit. She wasn't even trying to hide the racism.

SCOTT

She really wasn't. That's why I gave her the bird when I dipped.

XAVIER

That's some OG shit coming from a White boy.

SCOTT

I'm not White, my nigga.

XAVIER

Deadass?

SCOTT

Nah, my nigga. I'm mixed.

XAVIER

You be code switching then?

Scott gives X an incredulous look

SCOTT

Nigga, what you think?

XAVIER

Yeah, aight. Where you live?

SCOTT

Upper West Side.

XAVIER

Yeah, you're definitely on that Carlton flow.

SCOTT

I be hating that shit though. Feels fake as fuck.

XAVIER

Hey bro, better to act fake then be killed. You feel me?

SCOTT

I feel ya. What about you, where you at?

XAVIER

Harlem.

SCOTT

What part? El Barrio, East Harlem,
West Harlem?

XAVIER

West. By One Twenty Fifth on the A.

SCOTT

Bet. I know where that's at. They
still got them bodegas or is that
shit gentrified now?

XAVIER

Nah, they still got some. But you
gotta know where to look.

SCOTT

Facts. I gotta take the subway to
get a good chopped cheese. They
don't have that shit where I'm at.
And if they do, you gotta pay dumb
money for it.

XAVIER

That's that hipster shit. Taking
our shit and charging stupid bread
for it.

SCOTT

No lie. Anyway, I'mma have to come
through with my boys and cyph.

XAVIER

Bet. When you tryna come through?

SCOTT

Whenever, my nigga. Just let us
know.

XAVIER

Aight, I gotchu.

SCOTT

Good shit. I'll catch you later, my
nigga.

Scott gives X a pound, walks away.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Scott is eating lunch with Ansel and Josh. Indistinct chatter
is heard as other students move around the room.

JOSH FRANKLIN

Damn, b. I can't believe you checked Mrs. P like that. Major cojones, my guy.

ANSEL YORK

More like major stupidity. What the hell's wrong with you, Scott?

SCOTT

It's not that big a deal. My folks'll take care of it.

ANSEL YORK

Not a big deal? You can be suspended or Coach can kick you off the team.

JOSH FRANKLIN

Ah, you always worry too much, Ansel. Give it a rest for once, will ya?

ANSEL YORK

I'll give it a rest when you two stop doing stupid shit. I don't even know how I'm friends with you two sometimes.

SCOTT

Yeah. It's one of history's greatest mysteries. Anyway, like I was saying, everything'll be fine.

ANSEL YORK

I don't know how you're so calm about this. It's like you've got ice water in your veins.

SCOTT

It's just how I am. You can't overthink everything.

JOSH FRANKLIN

Hey, Mac, how's that girl of yours? What was her name, Terry or something? The one we met at that party.

SCOTT

Teddy? Yeah, she's good. She's trying to throw a party at her place for homecoming if you two wanna come through.

JOSH FRANKLIN
For sure. Where at?

SCOTT
The Village.

ANSEL YORK
East Side or West Side?

SCOTT
West, in Greenwich. By West Fourth.
So, you guys in or nah?

JOSH FRANKLIN
You already know what I'mma say.

SCOTT
Bet. What about you, York?

ANSEL YORK
Maybe, it depends.

Scott sighs, facepalms.

SCOTT
On what? Don't start second
guessing shit like you always do.

ANSEL YORK
I don't second guess shit.

JOSH FRANKLIN
Nigga, please. You always bugging
about some shit. Who you tryna lie
to?

SCOTT
You've been a nervous wreck since
the day you were born.

ANSEL YORK
Fuck you.

SCOTT
I'm deadass. Tell me I'm wrong. You
need to start cyphing again. You
been all into your feelings since
that shit with Gina went down.

ANSEL YORK
I don't wanna talk about that shit
anymore. It happened already.

SCOTT

Look, all I'm saying is you should come cyph with us again. Like old times.

ANSEL YORK

I'll think about it.

UNTOUCHABLE

Ansel was scared shitless about how things went down in history class, but I gave no fucks. I knew that as long as I performed on the field and fought for what I thought was right then my family would bail me out of whatever. I may have hated that my fam was so obsessed with image, but I enjoyed the fact that they always bailed me out when I was on my bullshit. I'd never gotten in trouble much because Grandpa Jonas or my parents would pay people off and I'd walk away as if nothing went down. Sure, I'd get a lecture about how I'd have to "stop messing around" or how I was making the family look bad. I'd rather that than anything more major, like jail time or getting expelled.

People always seem to see red until you give them the green. It wasn't any different in my case. I could fuck up as many times as I wanted because Grandpa Jonas or my parents would clean up the mess and pick up the pieces later. There are so many libraries and charities named after or created by the Meyers that I can't even keep track anymore. But this shit was deeper than money, this was about image. It was about painting a picture of who our family was, money be damned. The fam would go through C-notes like a chain smoker going through a carton of Newport's to get what they wanted. And what they wanted, was to be untouchable, to not have to worry about the bullshit that regular New Yorkers worried about. Our family was wealthy, but they weren't entirely naive. They'd always keep up with the news to see what people on the streets were going through so that they could ensure that me or my sister didn't have to experience any of that shit. They had no problem paying off the Post or the Times to stop a fucked up story about me or Phoebe from being printed. They were OD pissed at me every time I was on my shit, but they always let me get away with it. I think it's because I always kept the family relevant, whether it was in a good way or not.

Image is everything in our family. I knew that from the jump. As long as I killed it on the field and my grades were type solid I got a pass on my fuck ups. New Yorkers can look past me being a "wild one" because I'm endearing and charming to them. An image carefully cultivated by mom's fam, down to the way I spoke. I couldn't really use slang like that unless I was around my friends or Pops' side of the fam, especially my Aunt Kimberly or her kids, Joey and Julius.

Aunt Kimberly and Pops grew up in a single family home with my Grandma Sophia because her husband, my Grandpa Hank. He was a gangbanger and was never around much (he was mostly in and out of jail or sleeping around with other women). Pops told me as he was growing up he felt a deep sense of shame not knowing his father as well as he would have liked growing up, so he made sure he was always in my life and Phoebe's. That meant making sure that I showed the world the best version of myself, giving people nothing to criticize me for. He and Ma agreed that I always would do my best no matter what. If my grades were shit, then New Yorkers would look at us funny and say that I was spoiled and couldn't fend on my own. It was a negative image that the Meyers needed to avoid. So I put in the work to show people that I could grind on my own. I didn't need the fam to pull strings. People wouldn't see it as some spoiled snob walking out because he didn't get his way, they'd probably see it as me standing up against a racist and doing what I felt was right. I was banking on that possibility, otherwise I'd really be fucked.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The Blackman football players are getting ready for practice. The sound of banging locker doors and players walking in cleats can be heard as the team gets suited up.

Scott is putting on his uniform. He reaches into his locker, grabs a knee brace, carefully puts it on. He takes a seat on a bench, puts his cleats on, he makes sure they're tied tightly. He grabs his helmet from his locker, slams it shut, walks out of the locker room.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

The team is lined up on the 50-yard line. They stand quietly waiting for their coaches to arrive. Coach Lammons and a few other coaches walk out of an adjacent building onto the field.

SCOTT

All right, let's warm up!

The team follows Scott as he performs each warm-up exercise: jumping jacks, burpees, butt kicks, etc.

X hurries onto the field as the rest of the team warms up. He jogs over to Lammons.

COACH LAMMONS

You're late. Go run some laps.

XAVIER
All right, Coach.

X runs onto the track, starts running. Scott and the rest of the team continue limbering up. He sees some of the team is starting to fatigue. He stops what he's doing, the team follows suit.

SCOTT
Come on, guys. Wake up! Stop half
assing everything. Let's do it
again.

Scott starts doing jumping jacks, the team jumps in unison with him.

Lammons is standing on the sideline with the coaching staff. X runs past them, Lammons signals him back onto the field. X jogs toward him.

Lammons blows his whistle multiple times, the team runs towards the coaches.

COACH LAMMONS
Everyone, listen up!
(he pulls X towards him)
This is Xavier Reynolds, we're
going to test him out, see what he
can do. McKenzie, get him warmed
up.

Scott breaks away from the pack, walks up toward X. They exchange a quick pound. Scott grabs a sack of footballs, drags it on the ground. He and X head to an isolated area of the field.

XAVIER
Your last name's McKenzie?

SCOTT
What, you expected something
blacker?

XAVIER
Nah, I just didn't know that you
were that McKenzie.

SCOTT
What do you mean?

XAVIER

People told me to transfer here because of this kid McKenzie that had a bazooka for an arm. I had no idea that that was you.

SCOTT

I like to let my play do the talking for me. You dig?

XAVIER

No doubt. I gotchu.

SCOTT

So, what position do you play.

XAVIER

Safety normally, but Coach L said he wanted to see how I'd do as a wideout.

Scott opens the sack of footballs, takes one out, gets a grip on it.

SCOTT

Bet. Let's see what you can do.

X runs straight, cuts, runs diagonally to the left. Scott shuffles on his feet, winds up, throws it to X. X makes a one-handed grab, runs into the end zone.

X runs back toward Scott. Scott silently whispers in X's ear. Scott gets into position, X runs as quickly as he can, Scott delivers a pinpoint pass, X catches it over his shoulder.

X and Scott prepare to run another route.

XAVIER

Let's see that arm in action.

Scott signals toward his knee.

SCOTT

I don't know if I can get that much zip on the ball yet.

XAVIER

Don't worry. You thread the needle, I'll take care of the rest.

X gets a running start, Scott dances around in the pocket. X runs toward the end zone, Scott lets it fly. The pass is high and long. X whips his head around, speeds up, he jumps up, makes a leaping catch.

SCOTT

Damn, g. That was wild. You've got them OBJ moves. You sure this is your first time at wideout?

XAVIER

I'm deadass, bro. I just know how to read your eyes and scan for the ball.

SCOTT

Those ball hawking skills you picked up will definitely pay off.

XAVIER

Other teams won't know what hit 'em. I'mma torch them on both sides of the ball.

Scott gives X a dap.

SCOTT

That's what I'm talking about, boy.

WEAPON X

X was the best weapon I could've asked for as a QB. He was going to be the keystone of our offense, and I knew it. Ansel was the team's tank, but I knew he couldn't do it all by himself or he'd burn out after the first half of games. Josh was a Gronk type of tight end, but I always thought he was better as a blocker. I had solid wideouts before, but none of them had the intangibles that X did. X had a passion and knowledge of the game that you just can't teach. I knew after I'd worked him out that X would help us to a championship. We'd be able to use him as a decoy or as a weapon downfield because his presence was so electrifying and dominant. I saw Lammons and the rest of the coaches practically foaming at the mouth with excitement when we lined up on offense and I threw a bomb to X, among other plays.

Our squad was going to be as dominant as the New England Patriots and X was our Julian Edelman. He was the perfect player to complement Ansel's James White, Josh's Rob Gronkowski and my Tom Brady. I was still feeling aggrieved about Lammons going into the season, but I had to give him his props. I've got three rings because of his discipline and his coaching style. He was never afraid to try new schemes or to change players around to find what worked best. Like I said, it was his stubbornness and his reluctance to listen to us players that really pissed me off. Fucked up part is we won that Abernathy game last year by running Chrysler 44 like I had wanted. My backup, Lenny Chambers, ran it the next play, and Ansel cruised in for the game winner.

All that bullshit about wanting to run his play and it ended up being the play I had suggested that won it for us. X had made me more confident and allowed me to speak up for myself in class. I was banking on him doing the same on the field because I wasn't trying to get hurt again like I did last year. X was my new weapon and brodie, and he was teaching me how to be a new and more confident person.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The football team get changed out of their uniforms. Scott talks with X, Josh and Ansel.

SCOTT

Good shit out there, X. We need someone like you.

JOSH FRANKLIN

We might actually have a chance at winning homecoming this year.

Josh and Scott look intently at Ansel. Ansel bows his head in embarrassment.

ANSEL YORK

You two are never going to let me live down that fumble are you?

SCOTT

We lost by one point, bro. If you hadn't fumbled on that conversion we would've won.

Ansel takes out a necklace from under his shirt, a ring is hanging from the chain.

ANSEL YORK

At least I scored when it mattered, so can we drop it?

JOSH FRANKLIN

All right. So, X, Mac here tells us you cyph?

XAVIER

For sure. All the time.

JOSH FRANKLIN

We should link up one day.

XAVIER

Yeah, I already told him you guys could come through whenever.

JOSH FRANKLIN

Where at?

XAVIER

Harlem.

ANSEL YORK

No way, I'm not going up there. Too many crackheads.

SCOTT

Chill out, York. That's only if you head out too late or you get lost.

XAVIER

I'll keep you safe nigga, stop stressing. You don't even have to bring the bud, I've got you covered.

JOSH FRANKLIN

You deadass with that?

XAVIER

On god. All you gotta do is come through.

Scott, Josh and Ansel look at each other. The trio nod in agreement.

SCOTT

All right, we're down.

XAVIER

Bet. Just let me know when you wanna come through, and we'll vibe.

EXT. BROWNSTONE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott takes a seat on the stoop steps. He reaches into his windbreaker pocket, pulls out a weed vape, takes a few puffs.

INT. BROWNSTONE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott walks into the LIVING ROOM. Patrick and Frannie are sitting on a sofa.

PATRICK

Son, we've gotta talk.

SCOTT

Yeah, what's up?

PATRICK

Take a seat.

Scott walks over to an armchair, sits down.

FRANNIE

I just got off the phone with Principal Ashby. He told us that you lashed out at Mrs. Pazzano.

SCOTT

Yeah, but before you guys get upset, let me explain.

PATRICK

There's nothing to explain. You shouldn't have done it!

SCOTT

Pops, she was being wildly racist. I did what I felt was right.

FRANNIE

You sure she was being offensive, Scott?

SCOTT

Yes, I'm sure! She was saying some incredibly racist shit.

PATRICK

Like what?

SCOTT

She said that European history wasn't whitewashed and that she didn't see color. She's the poster girl for White privilege.

FRANNIE

You still shouldn't have chewed her out, Scott.

SCOTT

Ma, c'mon, you and dad protested apartheid back in the eighties and Grandpa Jonas fought for civil rights in the fifties and sixties. Why are you guys so mad?

PATRICK

Your mom, grandfather and I all fought for causes that mattered.

SCOTT

Standing up for myself and my classmates doesn't matter?

PATRICK

You could've done it differently. Without drawing unwanted attention.

SCOTT

Unwanted for whom? Me, or you guys?

FRANNIE

That's enough, Scott. Your dad's right. You've got to make better decisions. We're not going to keep bailing you out of these messes.

SCOTT

These messes? You're making it sound like I murdered somebody.

FRANNIE

Look, we're not going to help you out if you keep getting in trouble like this.

SCOTT

I didn't ask you guys to!

PATRICK

You didn't have to. We did it because we love you.

SCOTT

Let's get the facts straight. You did it to save your image, not because you love me. We all know that.

FRANNIE

You've gotta take accountability for your actions. We're not going to keep having your grandfather bail you out.

PATRICK

He's not some get out of jail free card. This isn't Monopoly, this is life. And not the board game. Shit is gritty out there and the quicker you learn that, the better.

FRANNIE

You want to end up a headline? Is that what you want your life to be, Scottie?

SCOTT

You're really going to go there? Like Phoebe hasn't fucked up every now and again?

FRANNIE

We're not talking about Phoebe, so don't try to change the subject.

SCOTT

I'm not changing the subject. I'm just stating facts. Phoebe can do no wrong, and I'm the angsty son. Go ahead, tell me I'm wrong. We all know she's the favorite.

FRANNIE

Stop being so dramatic, Scott. We love both of you just the same.

PATRICK

Besides, Phoebe's not throwing her life away one decision at a time.

SCOTT

I'm throwing my life away? I'm seventeen! What life am I throwing away? I'm still in high school.

PATRICK

And you'll never get a scholarship if you keep getting yourself in trouble.

Scott scoffs in indignation, he glances at Frannie.

SCOTT

Ma, are you really going to let him say that? You two did the same thing when you were my age.

FRANNIE

He's right. You're a McKenzie and a Meyer. Start acting like it.

SCOTT

Pops was a hood rat, and you were a trust fund baby, so don't come at me with your bullshit.

You're just mad that Phoebe fits your cookie cutter lifestyle and I don't.

FRANNIE

Where's this attitude coming from, Scott? You were never like this.

Scott sighs heavily, puts his hands on his head.

SCOTT

Jesus Christ, why does everyone think I have an attitude problem?

Scott gets up, slowly walks away.

FRANNIE

We're not done here.

PATRICK

You better not walk away.

Scott ignores them walks into the hallway. He opens the front door, exits.

Patrick looks at his wife. They shake their heads.

FRANNIE

The nerve of that kid.

PATRICK

Don't worry about it. He'll learn. He always does.

FRANNIE

That's what I'm afraid of. He's too hardheaded for his own good.

PATRICK

Maybe we're mistaking his determination for stubbornness, Fran. I mean we weren't exactly stainless ourselves.

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - NIGHT

Scott's leaning against a wall, waiting for a train. He's got AirPods in and is listening to music on his phone.

The station is mostly isolated, save for a few homeless people scattered throughout.

WHAT IF?

Looking around the platform and seeing those druggies and homeless people walking around made me feel some type of way. I had had dinners at Delmonico's and dined at Michelin star places, and these people were walking around asking for change so they could get some dollar pizza or halal food. I was standing there in my Levi jeans, wearing a Brooks Brothers sweater and windbreaker while across the platform there were people with torn up shoes and yellowed T-shirts; I couldn't help but feel guilty about who I was as a person. I saw the looks of dejection on homeless peoples' faces whenever people grilled them or tried to get violent for whatever bullshit reason, and it both angered and saddened me.

It made me question what I was doing complaining about my life. Here I was complaining about my parents while there were literally countless people without a home or family to go to, or without food to eat or clothes to keep warm. I can't lie, I felt like a fuck boy when I thought about it. What if I wasn't born into the family I was? Would I be treated the same way or would I be seen as disgusting as dog shit on the bottom of a motherfucker's Timb? I had been taught for so long by Ma to be proud of my heritage and my privileged upbringing I had forgotten how bad shit could really be. I felt like I talked all this game about actually being down with "the cause" and fighting for what I felt was right, and yet I really couldn't back that shit up. At least not until that night that was. Pops was right, I hadn't fought for shit that mattered and that was on me for being ignorant about the real real happening in the city. I decided to change that perception and actually help people out and make an impact because I actually wanted to, not because the family forced me to.

The train rolled into the station, but I decided to miss it and wait the 12 minutes for the next one; hanging with Teddy could wait. I had to help myself by helping others. So I walked over to one of the homeless families and started talking about how I wanted to help out. Found out that they used to live in El Barrio but they got evicted when gentrification happened and rents increased and how they'd been station hopping since. That shit really gave me the feels, so I took out my wallet and gave them a stack, and I gave the dad my jacket. I walked around and kept on helping people and learning their stories. It made me better as a person. I was actually out there making a difference instead of just saying I wanted to. I kept it on the low because I didn't want it to become a media circus like shit with my family usually does. I was doing it as Scott, the human, not Scott the rich wild one. Jonas told me how the family almost collapsed after the crashes in '29 and '87 but rebounded through cunning and brilliant business tactics. We were now in the age of crypto trading, and Bitcoin was the shit, but I knew that if we fucked around too much we could crash again.

We could be like those people I helped in the subway if shit didn't go our way; we were just too jaded to see it. Me on the other hand, I got humbled real quick after shredding my knee. Pain hurts the same no matter who the fuck you are. Money just gives you something to be grateful for.

Fam may have seen me as a fuck up, but at least now I could tell myself that I wasn't an asshole. I didn't even care if they saw this shit or not because that wasn't the point. Helping people for optics isn't fucking charity, it's just a way to try to get clout and seem woke. It took meeting X and listening to more of my parents' bullshit to realize how toxic and fucked up my family really was. They wanted clout and to feel good about themselves to the point that they gave no fucks who they hurt, myself included. I wanted to break free of that lifestyle and show them that life was deeper than money and clout. The train slid into the station and I hopped on, ready to link up with Teddy, but something was still weighing heavy on me the entire ride downtown. I had no fucking idea what it was until I checked to see what time it was and looked at my watch. Then it hit me, I felt like money and jewelry were my family's way of showing me love, so I embraced it and vibed with it for almost all of my life. But as the train zipped through midtown and into downtown Manhattan, I didn't feel the same way about my watch or the cream, or any of it. I wasn't living a healthy life because everyone around me was trying to shield me, to mold me, to control me. I had felt more love and energy from the homeless people in those 12 minutes than I had from my fam in 17 years, and that's real talk.

EXT. WEST 3RD STREET AND SIXTH AVENUE - GREENWICH VILLAGE - NIGHT

Scott walks by a set of brick facaded condos and townhomes. He stops in front of a maroon brick building. He opens the front door, makes his way inside.

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Scott presses the button for the top floor. The doors slowly close in front of him.

INT. RUSSO APARTMENT - NIGHT

The elevator doors open and Scott exits. He walks into an opulent full-floor loft apartment.

He walks toward the living room, where a movie is playing on TV.

He heads over to the couch, sits next to his girlfriend, THEODORA "TEDDY" RUSSO, 17, brunette, soft eyes, lithe physique. He leans closer to her, they cuddle.

TEDDY

I wasn't expecting you until Friday.

SCOTT

I had to see you. Shit at home is too real.

TEDDY

Aw, Mackie. You want talk about it?

SCOTT

Not much to say. Just Pat and Frannie on their bullshit.

Teddy runs her fingers through Scott's hair.

TEDDY

Again? I thought you set them straight the last time they yelled at you.

SCOTT

I wish. They never fucking listen to me.

TEDDY

Fucking boomers.

VIBING

Teddy and I ended up heading onto her terrace and cyphing for a while after I told her about my parents' bullshit. I smoked a ton of weed with her and drank a Stella or two as we ended up vibing. She knew I was on my J. Cole shit, all into my feelings, so she pulled out the Cali chronic after we finished our first blunt, and shit got intense. I cyphed on the reg, but Teddy was a different type of stoner. I called her Poison Ivy because her tolerance was unreal; she's the only person I know that actually out smoked me during a cyph sesh. Teddy and I ended up going through like four or five blunts before we headed back inside.

Teddy and I were teenaged Tom Brady and Gisele. I was the superstar athlete who was loved by my teammates and despised by every other team out there. Teddy was the bombshell girl of my dreams and I never let her forget it.

She was on the Blackman cheer squad but I never knew her like that until later on when my ex, one of her teammates, broke up with me over some White girl Instagram clout bullshit (she only wanted to date me because she wanted to fit in with Black people and get street cred. I was offended and hurt by that). I went to a house party in Brooklyn to get over it. I was vibing with Ansel and Josh, Stella in my hand, when I saw her walk by and I knew I wanted to make a move. I went over and tried talking to her, but I was so fucked up from playing pong all night and so into my feels that I started to cry in front of her. I thought I had fucked it up with her, but she actually took a j out her pocket and comforted me. We ended up smoking up together. When she said she liked my sensitivity, that she didn't give a fuck about me crying, that it was normal, I knew she was a real one. It didn't hurt that we were both great looking people. She always told me she adored my hazel-green eyes and curly mop top. She reminded me of Ruby Rose with her auburn pixie cut and blue eyes; I always felt she was out of my league, but I never told her that. I was just fucking blessed to have her because she was the only one besides my boys or Nikki I could be real with, I never had to act or try with her, I could just be me. She told me she felt the same way about me, that I was the only one besides her family who could call her Teddy (she actually liked being called Thea). Her nickname for me was Mackie. I loved it because nobody else called me it; I was always Mac, Scottie Mac or Scottie. We weren't a perfect couple, and we had our fights, but when I was with her, my life felt functional for a change.

INT. TEDDY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Scott and Teddy have the covers draped over them. Scott's still half-asleep, Teddy turns over, speaks softly to him.

TEDDY

Hey, sleepy head. Feeling better today?

Scott lets out a yawn, turns toward her.

SCOTT

I don't even remember what I was mad about.

TEDDY

Hard to be mad when you're being loved like you were yesterday.

SCOTT

That's straight facts. I needed this. I need you. You're the Kelly to my Zack.

TEDDY

That's so sweet. I love you, too.

SCOTT

You wanna wake and bake before we head to class?

TEDDY

C'mon, Mackie. I think you already know the answer.

SCOTT

Bet, get everything ready and I'll meet you in the living room. I'm gonna use the bathroom.

INT. RUSSO APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Scott sits next to Teddy on the couch. She's hunched over a coffee table rolling up some blunts on an ashtray.

TEDDY

One or two, hon?

SCOTT

Hmm, good question. One. I'm not tryna get too smacked before class.

TEDDY

You still worried about what your parents said to you? Fuck them, they were being a bunch of assholes.

SCOTT

I know, but still. They're right, I can't be fucking around like that anymore.

TEDDY

Stop sounding like a narc. We're seventeen, it's OK for us to fuck up.

Scott sighs.

SCOTT

Not in my family.

TEDDY

What do you mean?

SCOTT

What do you mean what do I mean?

TEDDY

You've been saying that since you got here. That you can't mess up and that your parents always piss you off. So, why do you feel like you can't be yourself?

SCOTT

My family's New York royalty. I mean, not Pops' side, but definitely Ma's side. The Meyers have been elite as far back as I can remember.

TEDDY

So? My family's rich, too, and my parents let me have a little fun.

SCOTT

Your family's wealthy, but my ma's family is *wealthy* wealthy. It's like Gatsby rich versus Tom Buchanan rich. It's a whole different type of vibe.

Teddy grabs a blunt and a lighter from the ashtray. She lights the blunt, takes a few puffs, passes it to Scott.

TEDDY

You need to unwind. You've got too much going on in your head.

Scott grabs the blunt from her, he slowly inhales, savoring the blunt as if it were a Cuban cigar.

OTHER

A blurred image stares back at me as I glance

in the mirror

it's Neither Black nor White,

but Other, simultaneously loved and loathed.

I'm a zebra, something to be gawked at
in fascination.

People asking if I'm White

with Black blood or Black with White blood
misunderstood by my Black tribe who call me
a cracker or say that I'm not a real nigga
because I'm too light skin
And by my White clan who call me a nigger because of my hair.
Not White enough to escape the barbs of racism. Not Black
enough to be truly accepted.
A vagrant left to find my own place in the world,
a loner navigating through life,
doing whatever I can to not let anxious thoughts about
what I am slow me down.
Always deciding *last minute* what mask I want to don
when I walk outside
I'm a chameleon, shifting my identity
to blend in and stay safe,
but by being invisible, I'm killing a part of my identity,
the Other
This hybrid of Black and White that's never truly appreciated
here
detested by both Black and White
a parallel to the bisexual community
But we're all treated with disdain, misunderstood, labeled
and mistreated
Not fitting neatly into either side of the spectrum,
each of us residing somewhere toward the middle
Yearning to fit
In a country that values White-privilege over Black lives.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Scott is sitting in his desk, looking out the window, daydreaming. The rest of the class is texting and gossiping away.

The classroom door opens and their English teacher, JACKSON DUNBAR, mid-30s, walks in. He walks over to the blackboard, picks up a piece of chalk, writes feverishly on the board.

Mr. Dunbar turns around, slaps the chalk down on his desk, walks forward toward the students.

MR. DUNBAR

Who can tell me about some of the symbolism in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*?

Scott raises his hand

MR. DUNBAR

Yes, Scott. Please, go ahead. Enlighten us.

SCOTT

I always thought it was fascinating how both Daisy and Myrtle are named after flowers, yet Tom Buchanan treated both of them with disdain.

Mr. Dunbar is agog at Scott's answer.

MR. DUNBAR

Yes! That's interesting, Scott. Go on, tell us more.

SCOTT

Well, both daisies and myrtle flowers are symbols of love and fertility. But Tom never seemed to love Daisy or Myrtle. He just loved the idea of possessing them. He didn't truly appreciate them. Like actual flowers, they were seen as disposable.

MR. DUNBAR

Excellent job, Scott. I never thought of it like that before, but you brought up some great points. Anybody else care to answer?

One of Scott's classmates, TERESA, raises her hand to speak.

MR. DUNBAR

Yes, Teresa. Go for it.

TERESA

I can't top, Scott. But I always enjoyed the dichotomy between New York and Long Island in the novel.

MR. DUNBAR

Tell us more, Teresa.

Teresa speaks inaudibly as Mr. Dunbar bops his head up and down in agreement as he and the rest of the class listen to her. Scott slinks down in seat, looks out the window, daydreams.

ON WRITING

English was my favorite class since I was 12. I always enjoyed reading, but it was when I was in seventh grade that my love of English really took off. My teacher, Jennifer Niccoletti, taught us about poetry by having us look at rap lyrics, and my focus in school shifted from that day forward. I began staying after class because I wanted book recommendations or because I had a question or idea I wanted to talk about. Mrs. Niccoletti sparked my passion for English because she listened to what each of her students had to say and nurtured their thoughts. English was the only class where I could be subjective and use my imagination; I couldn't do that with science, math or history. It was also the only time in school, except when I was on the field or court, where I could just let loose. I enjoyed writing, and Mrs. Niccoletti sensed that, so she told me that I should join the middle school paper as a reporter. I was going to say no because I didn't know what my parents were going to think. I was afraid they'd be disappointed in me for not "using my time wisely" or for "acting dramatic" like I usually did. However, once I found out that Mrs. Niccoletti was our faculty advisor, I agreed.

Some of my favorite writers started their careers out as journalists: Dickens, Twain, Hemingway, etc. I was overjoyed to be in the same shoes as some of my literary role models. I worked my way through the ranks. Tirelessly doing my part to make sure that both the paper and my writing were vastly improved. I learned how to write everything from poetry and plays to essay and op-eds, and it cultivated a passion in me that I can't find anywhere else. It's the feeling of fulfillment and purpose that my parents tried, but failed, to instill in me by sculpting me into an athlete. Five years later, and I'm editor-in-chief of Blackman's literary magazine, *The Colossus*, a fact I'm proud of, but my parents aren't.

They think I'm wasting my time with it, and say I could use that time to study or practice for one of my sports. They'd rather I follow in the Meyer family tradition and be in finance or pursue a more tangible field like medicine or chemistry. I'm not even surprised at it because I know that all writers have demons as the old adage goes. It just so happens that my demons are named Frannie and Patrick. They figured I could be writing my stories on the field or court, but I said why can't I do both? The more they scoffed at my passion for English and journalism, the more I wanted to excel and give them a subtle "fuck you." Writing and doing crossword puzzles is how I passed the time those first few months of recovery that I was bedridden. Pops had trouble with literary or witty clues, so I always helped him out with those, a fact I never let him forget. Like most aspects of my life, my parents didn't want me focusing on English unless it somehow benefitted them or made them look good. When I got a summer internship for the *Times* helping out with social media, my parents kept shut and I made them eat their words.

I didn't flinch or miss a beat during that internship because I had sharpened my writing and editorial skills so much over the years that I knew how the system worked. Mrs. Niccoletti was my faculty advisor in middle school, when I got to Blackman I began working with Mr. Dunbar. Mrs. Niccoletti put in a good word for me, and Mr. Dunbar made me the assistant editor-in-chief my freshman year. I was the youngest person to hold the position in the history of the school, I was just 14. I was following my dreams and creating a safety net by helping out Niccoletti and Dunbar. If I ever got injured again at least I'd have a backup for what I would do with my life. My story wouldn't have to end abruptly like it almost had last year. I'd be able to start anew and do shit my way. Ma and Pops may have been doing their best to silence me and suppress my dreams, but I was fighting back and using my voice.

THE DREAMER AND THE REALIST

The Dreamer dreams about what the world could be in all its resplendent glory. The Realist dreams about the world in its present state.

The Dreamer dreams of a world that's at peace. The Realist acknowledges the world is a bleak, desolate place.

The Dreamer yearns for the world to be a utopian paradise.

The Dreamer wishes humanity could live in deep harmony. The Realist acknowledges the world is dystopian because humanity cannot live in harmony.

I am both the Dreamer and the Realist.

I have come to terms with the world around me, yet

I wish the world was not as dreary.

I live in the moment, but I also hope for a better future
with no hate or pain.

I was always the Dreamer.

Society turned me into the Realist.

Years of being transformed me into a Realist.

Humanity will remain innocent as long as true Dreamers
thrive.

However, until that time arrives, I will remain a Realist.

I will be a Dreamer as long as I'm a writer.

Writing cleanses my soul and frees me from the negativity of
this dystopian world.

I am a contradiction; I'm neither a true Realist nor a true
Dreamer.

I embrace the world as it is yet I dream it can be better in
the future.

I imagine the Realists in this world were once Dreamers,

but, they were ridiculed by society and changed their views
in order to conform.

Society always judges those whose views meander away from the
stream that is *normality*.

People say humanity has expanded its views to become better.

But these same people are quick to compartmentalize others
and judge them

based on their differences, not their similarities.

The Dreamers are the lifeblood
of our fledgling world society.

Without them, culture would become stagnant and wither away.

The Dreamers may be the lifeblood of the world but the
Realists are just as important.

Without Realism the world would not be able to cope.

Both impact the world, and,
balance each other out perfectly.

Thus, the world can function.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Scott and his teammates are finishing up their warm-up routine. Lammons and his assistants are talking silently on the sideline.

Lammons jogs to the 50-yard line, CHIRPS his whistle, the entire team run to him, huddle up.

COACH LAMMONS

All right, listen up. We've done a great job of winning these last few weeks. But there are some things we could tighten up, mainly on special teams. Let's get out there and run some plays.

SCOTT

What do you want us to run, Coach.

COACH LAMMONS

Take a look at your wristband. Me and the other coaches did some brainstorming, revamped special teams.

The scout teams are running a third-and-long type of play. Scott tosses a pass to Josh, who gets tackled short of the first down marker.

The offense, save for Scott, run off the field, the field goal unit runs on the field. Scott quickly looks at his wristband to see what the play is. The kicker gets lined up, Scott signals for the ball, it's snapped. Scott pretends to set up the ball for the kicker. He gets up, scrambles around, finds a gap, runs for a first down.

The offense runs back onto the field. They check their wristbands, get in position. Scott hands the ball off to Ansel, who tosses it to X. X laterals the ball back to Scott, who lobs a pass to an open Josh downfield.

Lammons and the other coaches are observing the plays as they're being run. One of the assistant coaches, SIMON PARKER, turns to Lammons and speaks.

SIMON

So, how do you like the new plays,
Jeff?

COACH LAMMONS

Pretty damn good, Simon.

SIMON

You told us you wanted McKenzie to
scramble less and use his head
more. We drew these up with that in
mind.

COACH LAMMONS

Well, you guys nailed it. They're
tailor made for him.

SIMON

They might give us that edge we
need against Abernathy.

COACH LAMMONS

Goddamn it, I hope so. Fourteen
years we've lost to those bastards.
I'm not trying to make it fifteen.

SIMON

I'd rather get back with my ex-wife
than lose to those shit heads.

The pair chuckle at this.

The punt team is on the field. The punter gets the ball, does
a fake punt, scans downfield, throws to an open man.

Lammons CHIRPS his whistle as he makes his way to the 50-yard
line, the team huddle up, take a knee around him.

COACH LAMMONS

Great job today, guys. I want us to
play with that type of intensity
every play. No practice tomorrow, I
want us to be fresh for homecoming
on Friday. Now get out of here, get
some rest.

EXT. 116TH AND BROADWAY - NIGHT

Scott exits the train station, makes his way down Broadway.

Columbia's campus is blanketed in a quilt of autumn leaves.

Scott walks until he gets to 114th Street, he stops outside of a beige brick dorm building, BROADWAY HALL. He opens the door, heads inside.

INT. BROADWAY HALL - NIGHT

Scott makes his way inside. He walks through the lobby, heads to an elevator. He enters, presses 12.

INT. DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

Scott lurks down the hall, glancing at the room numbers on each door. He finds the room he's looking for, knocks on the door.

PHOEBE (O.S.)
Go away! I'm studying.

SCOTT
Pheeb, it's me. Open up.

Soft footsteps and the sound of a door being unlocked are heard. Scott turns the door handle, walks inside.

He walks toward a desk where his sister, PHOEBE, 21, athletic build, soulful eyes, is sitting. Phoebe gets up from her chair, hugs her brother, sits on her bed.

PHOEBE
Scott, what are you doing here?

SCOTT
I need to talk, Pheeb. I've got a lot on my mind.

PHOEBE
I've got midterms to study for this week. Can't we talk some other time?

SCOTT
I wish, Pheeb. But I've gotta talk now. It's about Ma and Pops.

PHOEBE
What about them? I thought everything was fine between you guys.

SCOTT
Nah, it's not. Shit's gotten tense lately.

PHOEBE

This about that whole thing with your teacher that happened a few weeks ago?

A look of confusion on Scott's face.

SCOTT

Wait, they told you? Un-fucking-believable. I can't with them.

PHOEBE

I'm the one that asked, you can be mad at me.

SCOTT

I don't want to be mad at you. You're my second ma. I'm just getting tight at always being the fuck up.

PHOEBE

You're not a fuck up, Scottie. They're just harder on you because they want to keep you safe.

SCOTT

They were never that hard on you.

PHOEBE

That's what you think.

SCOTT

How's that now?

PHOEBE

They used to slut shame me if I stayed out with my boyfriend too long or if I wore outfits they didn't like.

SCOTT

Damn, that's fucked up. So did they stop or nah?

PHOEBE

Yeah, they did. But only because I called them out on it my freshman year here. When the #METOO movement became more of a thing.

SCOTT

I don't even know what to say,
Phoebe. I'm sorry you went through
all that shit.

PHOEBE

I don't care that you're mad at
them, Scottie. I'm pissed at them,
too. I'm just mad that you thought
I never got grilled by them.

SCOTT

What was I supposed to think? I
never saw them giving you lectures
and you never stood up for me when
I got grilled.

PHOEBE

You never saw because they didn't
want you to see. And what was I
supposed to do, Scott? You know how
mom gets when you try to talk to
her, it's useless. She always talks
over you.

SCOTT

I had to listen to Ma say that I'd
be a fucking headline in the papers
if I didn't stop with my shit. How
the fuck do you think I felt? You
really think that I wanna hear that
I'll be another Eric Garner or
Trayvon Martin? Nobody wants to
hear that shit.

PHOEBE

You should have called me. I
would've let you stay the night.
Talk it out, express your feelings.

SCOTT

I did call you, Phoebe. It went to
voicemail. And before you even, I
tried texting but you never
answered back. So I said fuck it
and went to Teddy's because I felt
like I could trust her more than my
own fucking family.

PHOEBE

Look, Scott, I'm sorry. I had my
own shit going on. It's not like I
ignored you on purpose.

But I'm here for you now and that's what matters.

SCOTT

I'm sorry, sis. It's not you. I've just got a lot of shit going on in my head.

PHOEBE

It's not us, it's them. It's this family, it's the world we're living in, it's everything. Everything is fucked up right now.

SCOTT

Bet. That's straight facts. Lemme ask you something. I've been wondering for hella long. How do you deal with the fam's bullshit all the time?

PHOEBE

When I figure that out I'll let you know. I've been trying to deal for years. Hey, you wanna stay the night? You look drained.

SCOTT

I mean... don't you have midterms to study for?

PHOEBE

Fuck that. You're my brother. I'll always make time for you. I mean, I will now that is. Now sit, let's chill.

Scott walks toward the bed, gives Phoebe a quick hug and kiss. He takes a seat next to her.

SCOTT

What were you studying for anyway, Pheeb?

PHOEBE

I don't even remember, I've been up for so long. Hey, you want a beer? I've got some Sam Adams in the fridge if you want.

Scott nods his head. Phoebe gets up, opens a mini fridge under her bed. She takes out two beers, opens them, hands one to Scott.

SCOTT
Cheers! And fuck all the haters!

The sibilings clink bottles, drink their beers in peace.

PHOEBE
So tell me about Teddy. I'm dying
to meet her...

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Homecoming night. Crowds from both Abernathy and Blackman are in the bleachers, cheering raucously. Blackman's cheerleaders are getting the crowd excited. Scouts from Dartmouth, Rowayton and Columbia, among others, are in attendance.

Scott and the offense are lined up on the field. He gets the ball, scans the defense, fakes a handoff to Ansel. He winds up, throws a pass to Josh, who runs it in for a score.

The Blackman defense cause a fumble and recover it. The offense heads back onto the field. Scott gets the ball, throws a long pass toward X, it's intercepted.

Abernathy runs a few plays, ties the game.

Scott and the offense run a few plays, can only manage a field goal.

Abernathy's offense score a touchdown to take the lead.

The scoreboard reads 14-10 in favor of Abernathy. There's 50 seconds left in the first half.

Lammons grabs Scott by the collar as he's headed onto the field.

COACH LAMMONS
I don't care what you run as long
as they don't get an interception.
Now stuff it down their throat.

Scott runs onto the field, calls a huddle.

SCOTT
We're gonna go with Chrysler 44
Toss Zero Left. Ansel, you run your
ass off. The rest of you block.
It's gonna be on one. Break.

Blackman's offense gets lined up, Scott sees the defense shifting, calls a set of audibles.

He gets the ball, waits for X to get open, launches it downfield. He overthrows the pass, it's intercepted and run back for a pick-six.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Scott takes off his helmet, starts banging it against his locker door and screaming.

He throws the helmet on the floor, kicks it across the room.

SCOTT

What is this shit? I didn't work my ass off for almost a year to fuck around and lose. Especially not to Abernathy.

Josh, Ansel and X walk over toward Scott. They try calming him down.

JOSH FRANKLIN

Bro, calm down. We're not losing on purpose.

SCOTT

I'm not saying that. But it's like last year, I'm being rushed by the defense. Where's my protection?

JOSH FRANKLIN

I can't speak for everyone on the O-line but I'm telling you I'm giving it all I've got. No cap.

ANSEL YORK

We need to run the ball more, Scott. The O-line can't give you enough time in the pocket for a deep pass.

SCOTT

But that'll take too much time, we need to score as fast as we can.

ANSEL YORK

You don't have to pass for three hundred yards though. Those picks are killing us. We're already down by eleven.

SCOTT

You're right. I need to be smarter with the ball. Anybody have any ideas how to tie it back up?

XAVIER

I've got a long one if you need it.

SCOTT

You sure, X? That safety's been crowding you all night.

XAVIER

I can get an extra step on him. Anytime you need it I can catch a deep one.

SCOTT

Bet.

ANSEL YORK

I can score the two after X gets the long one.

SCOTT

We'd still be down by three though.

JOSH FRANKLIN

Not if we run a fake instead of kicking a field goal. Toss it to me, I'll take care of the rest.

SCOTT

No doubt. Let's go show them whose house this is.

Scott picks up his helmet, puts it back on. He lines the team up, they run out together.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Abernathy kicks it off to Blackman. Ansel catches the ball, runs it to about the 50-yard line.

Scott and the offense rush onto the field. He reads the defense, calls an audible.

SCOTT

Shift! Mamba Cobra Wide Right.
Let's go.

Scott, the running backs and Josh twirl, shift to the right. The center direct snaps the ball to Ansel, who bursts through a gap and sprints into the red zone before being tackled.

The offense are stuffed the next three plays. The field goal unit heads onto the field. The ball is snapped to Scott who runs a fake. He sheds a tackler, throws it to Josh in the end zone.

Scott fakes a handoff to Ansel, runs to his right, tosses it to his left. Ansel catches it, runs it in for two.

The scoreboard reads 18-21. It's the fourth quarter.

Both teams go back-and-forth but score no points, time winding down.

Abernathy's QB throws a deep ball, X times it perfectly, gets the pick. He's pushed out of bounds before he can run far.

X is mobbed by his teammates as he heads to the sideline. The crowd is at fever pitch.

Scott puts his arm around X's shoulder as they make their way onto the field.

SCOTT

I'm ready for that long one.

X grunts in agreement. The duo dap up, before they get lined up.

Scott gets the ball, fakes a handoff to Ansel, scans downfield, pump fakes, hurls the ball to X. X catches it, weaves through a set of defenders, leaps into the end zone.

Scott runs a QB sneak to score two.

The game clock reads 0:00. The score reads 26-21.

Blackman players, cheerleaders and fans mob the field in celebration. Scott and some of his teammates run to the sideline, pick up a jug of Gatorade, dump it over Coach Lammons. It's complete pandemonium.

INT. RUSSO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott, Ansel, Josh and X arrive at Teddy's place.

Teddy walks up to Scott, gives him a kiss.

TEDDY

So, are we having a pity party or did you boys pull out the win?

SCOTT

Nah, babe. We're partying all night. We won!

TEDDY

Congrats, baby!

Scott walks over to his friends, puts his arm around X.

SCOTT

Ah! You're a beast. We did it! We did it! Babe, this is X. X, this is my girl.

X extends his hand, shakes hands with Teddy.

TEDDY

Nice to meet you, X. I'm Thea.

XAVIER

Word. Likewise. Your man's the best quarterback in the city. No cap.

JOSH FRANKLIN

Hell yeah. Monster McKenzie over here.

XAVIER

York killed it, too. That conversion you ran in was money.

Scott pats Ansel on the back.

SCOTT

Get the beers ready, Teddy. I gotta celebrate with my boys.

Teddy walks toward the kitchen. She opens the fridge, pulls out a six pack, walks back towards the boys. The boys and Teddy each take a beer.

XAVIER

Cheers to Monster McKenzie and winning homecoming.

The group clink bottles, sip their beers.

BALLIN'

That homecoming after party was lit as fuck, but it was nothing compared to the party Teddy had for us after we won the chip to go perfect. The vibe was out of the 1980s. Shit was like one of the parties that Pops DJed when he was in college. I got fucked up on some nose dust, Perc and lean and just embraced that shit. Don't really remember much because I got OD fucked up and basically blacked out. I just remember feeling like I was the fucking man and everybody knew that shit. We went 13 and 0 because me, and the squad killed it every game. I was hyped to do the same shit on the basketball court.

I've been playing basketball since the time I could walk. Football was something I was great at; basketball was something I was a master at. I was a hardcourt savant and everyone at Blackman knew it. I already led them to four consecutive championships in football, I was determined to win another championship for basketball. Had it not been for me fucking up my knee, we'd have a three-peat and would be going for the fourth. That shit hit me in the feels, going from starting two guard and going back-to-back, to watching from the sideline as my team lost in the championship. The minute the final buzzer went off during that game I told myself that I was going to grind and get us back to the championship game. This shit was personal to me. I loved the game almost as much as my squad, Teddy or the fam. Football was war, a series of battles over 60 minutes to see who was more dominant. Basketball though, basketball was serene, it was art, basketball was a graceful ballet on hardcourt, something to be appreciated. I was a Napoleon on the gridiron, but a swan on the b-ball court, and I was yearning to spread my wings and fly again.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Scott waits with his teammates at center court.

The team's coach, DAN CARRUTHERS, mid-40s, grizzled, gruff-voiced, walks in.

COACH CARRUTHERS

Everybody on the baseline. Let's hustle.

The team sprints onto the baseline, wait for Coach Carruthers to speak again.

COACH CARRUTHERS

On my whistle, 50 suicides, baseline to baseline and 200 pushups.

SCOTT
Anything else, Coach?

COACH CARRUTHERS
McKenzie, good to have you back.
Maybe we can win a damn
championship this year.

SCOTT
I'll carry the team on my back if I
have to. I want that ring as much
as you, Coach.

COACH CARRUTHERS
You know my motto, boys. "Practice
leads to Playoffs." It all starts
here in the pre-season. Now on my
whistle suicides and pushups.
Ready?

Coach Carruthers BLOWS his whistle. He walks to the sideline.

The team sprints from baseline to baseline as they complete
their suicides. Coach Carruthers is making observations,
taking notes on a clipboard. NELSON ANDREWS, an assistant
coach, is keeping tabs on practice in the interim.

The team is going into high gear and hustling down the court,
except Scott, who's noticeably lagging.

COACH ANDREWS
Is that the best you've got, Scott?
I've seen you give more when you
were on JV. What the hell is this
bullshit?

SCOTT
(panting)
I'm trying, Coach Andrews. Just a
bad day.

COACH ANDREWS
There's dozens of other guys that
are gunning for your spot. You
don't get to have bad days.

SCOTT
Gotcha, Coach.

Scott keeps hustling down the court as best he can as he
completes his suicides. He finishes, takes a quick breath
before getting to the ground and starting the pushups.

Coach Carruthers walks toward Scott, who's the last one doing pushups.

COACH CARRUTHERS
McKenzie, get up.

SCOTT
Hold up, Coach C, I'm not done yet.

Coach Carruthers blows his whistle.

COACH CARRUTHERS
You're done, Scott. It's okay. Now get up, we've got to talk.

Scott pants as he slowly gets up off the floor. Sweat is dripping down his brow.

SCOTT
Yeah, Coach?

COACH CARRUTHERS
Not here, Scott. Let's head to my office.
(to Coach Andrews)
Take over the practice.

Coach Carruthers and Scott walk off the basketball court and exit the gym.

INT. COACH CARRUTHERS' OFFICE - DAY

Coach Carruthers and Scott walk inside. Scott closes the door behind him. Coach Carruthers takes a seat at his desk.

The office looks much like a typical coach's office, pictures of old teams on the walls, trophies and other accolades lining the shelves.

COACH CARRUTHERS
Take a seat, Scott. We need to talk, one-on-one.

Scott sits in an armchair.

SCOTT
What's up, Coach, is everything okay? You're not cutting me are you? Because I told Coach--

COACH CARRUTHERS
Relax, Scottie, relax. I'm not cutting you, don't worry.

SCOTT

Oh. So what did you want to talk about then?

COACH CARRUTHERS

I'm thinking about changing your position from a two to a one. Can you play effectively if we moved you?

SCOTT

Yeah, I could do it. But why now, Coach?

COACH CARRUTHERS

Coach Lammons told me what your doctor said and how he changed the way you operated from the pocket to save your knee. I'm just trying to do the same thing, but on the court instead of the field.

SCOTT

But, I've been playing at the two since I was six...

COACH CARRUTHERS

Look, you're the most skilled player I've got. If anybody could do it, it's you. Besides, it's not like I'm asking you to play forward or center.

SCOTT

You really think this'll work?

COACH CARRUTHERS

If it doesn't I'll put you back at the two. All right?

SCOTT

OK, Coach.

Coach Carruthers and Scott get up, exit the office.

THE SWITCH

Being switched from the two to the one wasn't something I was thrilled about, but I was with it if it meant we'd win. I liked being MJ or Kobe, the clutch go-to guy on our team. I wasn't ready to be John Stockton and dish out dimes, when I could be finishing at the rim. I had craved attention because that's how I was raised.

But when I thought about it on the walk back to the gym I realized that Magic Johnson was a one and he was the main face of the Showtime Lakers. He made his team better because he always knew where to put the ball to help his teammates score. I was going to be that guy this year and lead us to another ring. From now on I was going to put my teammates in the spotlight and forget about being the main guy. I was going to show my parents and everyone else that I didn't have to shoot the ball in order to help my team win. Magic was a one and Kobe was a two, but they both got five rings with the Lakers. I didn't know who was going to be the Karl Malone to my John Stockton. I just knew that I'd do whatever it took to win.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Scott and Coach Carruthers walk back into the gym.

The rest of the team is practicing shooting drills with Coach Andrews.

Coach Carruthers blows his whistle.

COACH CARRUTHERS

Everyone line up on the baseline.
I've got an announcement to make.
We're going to switch things up at
the one and two guards. Reynolds,
get over here!

X sprints over to Coach Carruthers.

COACH CARRUTHERS

Everyone here knows, McKenzie. But
go ahead and introduce yourself,
Xavier.

XAVIER

All right. I'm X, I play shooting
guard, and I'm here to help us win
a championship. No matter what I
have to do.

COACH CARRUTHERS

Scott was our old two guard. But I
think he'd work better at point
this year. He and Reynolds have
good chemistry, so our offense will
revolve around them. Any questions?

WILL TRACY, Blackman's center, speaks.

WILL TRACY

Coach, I thought Lindsey was gonna play point this year.

COACH CARRUTHERS

Academic probation. Can't do anything with him till he gets those grades up.

WILL TRACY

You sure that we'll win like this, Coach C?

COACH CARRUTHERS

As long as we've got a Scott McKenzie on our team we've always got a chance at winning.

SCOTT

Don't even trip, Tracy. You get me those boards and me and X will handle the rest. Just focus on improving that D of yours.

WILL TRACY

At least I actually play defense. You couldn't play tight D on your life.

SCOTT

Dawg, that's bullshit.

COACH CARRUTHERS

He's right, Scott. Your D is sloppy at the best of times. Maybe you can learn something from Will.

A look of embarrassment washes over Scott's face. Tracy gives him a smug look.

SCOTT

For sure.

COACH CARRUTHERS

All right, enough talking. Let's run some plays.

SCOTT

No prob. Someone pass me a rock.

MARK QUEEN, the starting small forward, grabs a basketball off a rack, throws it to Scott.

Scott runs up the court, he scans for an open man. He passes to his teammate, JACK LORENTZ, the starting power forward. Lorentz attempts a floater.

Lorentz misses, Scott goes for the rebound, he's overpowered by Tracy. Scott yells in frustration.

Tracy throws the ball downcourt to an open man. Scott anticipates where the pass is headed, gets a steal.

COACH CARRUTHERS

Great hands, Scott. That's the type
of D I want you playing.

He dribbles down the length of the court, does a no-look pass to X who slams it home. The duo high-five each other.

HARDCOURT BALLET

Basketball is a game of fusion

Black style mixed with White fundamentals

Racial juxtaposition in sync on the hardcourt

A series of graceful movements in motion

An athletic ballet performed on the hardcourt

For an audience of enthralled spectators

Five players on each side doing their part

To contribute to the game in any way possible

Each with their own individual style of play

But all of them choreographed by their coaches

The maestros who conduct their teams as skillfully

As possible and inject a soulful rhythm into the game

48 minutes to determine which performance is more masterful

Basketball is a universal game played by athletic savants

Those who give their souls minds and bodies

To advance the game they love forward any way they can

Black and White merging together in a way that

is unparalleled.

In a country's whose national pastime
is racism

Basketball is a utopia

A breath of fresh air

Played with an orange ball.

GAME DAY NERVES

The tension I felt going into that game was intense. I couldn't even eat breakfast that morning because I'd just end up vomiting. It's not even that it was my first game back since I got injured. It's that I didn't know how I'd be as a point guard and that weighed on me. If I fucked up and we lost it would be on me because I was the captain. My parents went to all my games and I didn't want to mess up with them watching. I'd get a lecture about needing to practice more or some shit like that if I didn't come through in the clutch. I did my best to push all of that aside as I suited up for the pre-game shoot-around. Sweat was dripping down my forehead the entire time and my stomach was churning. Inevitably the pressure got to me and I puked violently, tears running down my face. I slowly got up and composed myself before getting cleaned up. No cap, I was hella happy that I was alone when it all went down. I didn't the rest of the team to see me like that. Yeah, I was embracing my emotions more thanks to Nikki's help, but I still wanted my team to see me as locked in. At that moment I was far from it. I was an anxious mess. It didn't matter though. I had to push all that out of my head and be there for my team. I could worry about my own shit after the game. Whatever happened that game didn't matter to me as long as I gave it all of my intensity. Four weeks of pre-season practice and countless hours of watching film couldn't prepare me for how I was feeling. It was going to be my battle to win or lose as the floor general, and I knew it. At that point I could do was trust my instincts and hope I didn't fuck it up for us.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Scott and his teammates are in the midst of a shoot-around.

Abernathy's team is simultaneously doing their shoot-around on the opposite side of the court.

Scott practices his three-pointers while his teammates work on their footwork, free throws or defense respectively.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Scott and the rest of the team grab towels off of a table, make their way to the benches and sit.

Coach Carruthers walks to the center of the room, approaches his players. He's got a no-nonsense look plastered across his face.

He grabs a dry-erase marker, scrawls on a whiteboard as he talks.

CARRUTHERS

We're going to run a three-and-D scheme, men. Make them play our game. Not the other way around. Simple enough, right?

SCOTT

Yeah, Coach.

Carruthers walks over to Scott. He puts his hand on Scott's shoulder, looks at him intently.

CARRUTHERS

You ready for this, Scott?

Scott looks at Carruthers confidently.

SCOTT

No doubt, Coach. Let's just say I've been doing my homework.

COACH CARRUTHERS

That's what I like to hear. Now let's go out there and get a W.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Scott and the Blackman team are huddled on the sideline.

It's pandemonium as fans on both sides of the gym cheer on their teams.

The stands are packed with frenzied fans, as well as college scouts from Rowayton, Dartmouth and other top-tier basketball programs.

Cheerleaders from both sides wait on the sidelines.

Scott speaks to his teammates.

SCOTT

All right, boys. This is a big game for me. I've got scouts looking at my game, so I'm not trying to fuck around. Now, let's go out there and get a dub.

A referee throws up the opening tip. The game begins.

Tracy and Abernathy's center jump, try to haul in the ball. Tracy is outsized by a few inches but he somehow wins the battle. He lobs the ball to Mark Queen.

Queen darts down the court, makes an easy mid-range shot.

Abernathy answers with a three-pointer.

Lorentz passes to Scott inside the key, Scott runs to the perimeter, makes a three.

Abernathy's center lobs a downcourt pass to one of his teammates, who goes for a layup.

X jumps up, blocks it. He passes it to Scott who hits a step back floater.

The scoreboard reads "Blackman: 7 Abernathy: 5" with ten minutes left on the clock.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

Scott looks at the scoreboard. There's three minutes left in the half.

He runs a fast break, lobs a pass to X. X makes a contested dunk.

Abernathy's center tries a three-pointer, misses. Queen gets the long rebound. He dashes downcourt, makes an easy layup.

Abernathy answers with a three-pointer. Scott inbounds it to X, who gives it back to Scott.

Scott's double-teamed. He performs a crossover move to create space. He charges to the basket and dunks it.

Abernathy tries to answer with another three. Blackman's defense is smothering. Abernathy gets a 24-second violation.

X inbounds it to Scott. He dribbles downcourt, attempts a pass to Will Tracy. It's stolen by an Abernathy player who makes a mid-range shot to narrow the score.

Scott glances at the clock, sixteen seconds left. He dribbles out the clock as long as possible. He pump fakes and hits a buzzer beater to put Blackman up by three at halftime.

The scoreboard reads "Blackman: 34 Abernathy: 31"

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Scott and the rest of the team sit on the benches. Carruthers strides in, walks to the middle of the room, addresses his team.

CARRUTHERS

Alright, boys. That was a great first half. Scott, great job at point. Tracy, Reynolds you did an excellent job defending. Keep it up in the second half, don't get sloppy. Now listen up. I'm going to adjust the game plan a bit.

Carruthers walks over to a whiteboard, grabs a dry erase marker. He sketches out X's and O's and arrows on the board as he inaudibly talks to his team.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Tracy and the Abernathy center vie for the jump ball. Abernathy gets the ball. The center dishes a pass down court.

An Abernathy player scrambles down the court, tries setting up a shot.

Scott stays with him, gets a steal. He sprints down the court, makes an uncontested three-pointer.

Scott switches to defense, backpedals as he stays with his man. He goes for a steal, fouls his man instead.

The Abernathy player makes both free throws to narrow the gap.

The score is "Blackman: 49 Abernathy: 47" with seven minutes left in the third.

Both sides are playing smothering defense as time winds down in the third.

An Abernathy player gets free, sprints downcourt and hits it from the free throw line.

Chants of "Defense. Defense." can be heard from the Blackman fans.

X passes it to Queen. Queen throws it out to Lorentz. Lorentz is double-teamed, passes it to Tracy in the post. Tracy hits the dunk emphatically.

Blackman shifts to defense. Scott and X double-team Abernathy's point guard. The guard sees an open teammate, throws it away. It's thrown too hard, goes out of bounds.

Queen inbounds it to X who charges downcourt and lobs it to the right corner. Scott catches and releases it, drains the three-pointer.

There's ten seconds left in the third. The game is tight.

Abernathy's center heaves the ball downcourt, his teammate catches it. Scott jumps up for the block, fouls the shooter.

The Abernathy player sinks both free throws. Lorentz inbounds it with five seconds left. Scott scrambles downcourt, passes it to X. X hits a buzzer beater jumper to end the third.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - A WHILE LATER

Blackman's players are huddled around Carruthers on the sideline.

CARRUTHERS

Let's get focused now. They're chipping away at it. Don't let the pressure get to you. Just keep playing like you have and we'll win.

SCOTT

Coach is right. Let's finish strong. You guys get me the ball. I'll do the rest.

Scott and his teammates hustle back onto the court.

An Abernathy player jukes around X and Scott, makes a finger roll shot.

X passes it to Scott, who heaves it downcourt to an open Queen. Queen hits an uncontested layup with his left.

Abernathy's center gets fouled by Lorentz as he drives to the rim.

Abernathy's center makes the first free throw. He misses the second, gets his own rebound, slams it in.

Scott gets the ball, dashes downcourt, he makes his way to the right corner.

He jumps up to shoot the three-pointer, gets fouled as he releases the ball.

Scott looks toward the stands before he shoots his first free throw. He sees the scouts looking at the game intently.

Anxiety gets to Scott, he bricks the first shot.

He makes the second shot, signals for a timeout.

The ref blows his whistle. Scott gathers his teammates.

WILL TRACY

What's up, Scottie?

SCOTT

If I miss the last shot and you get the board I can ice the game for us with a three.

WILL TRACY

No doubt, just don't miss.

SCOTT

Don't worry, Tracy. I've got this.

Scott returns to the line, intentionally misses the shot. Tracy gets the board, looks to pass to Scott, but can't, dunks it instead.

The scoreboard reads "Blackman: 68 Abernathy: 69" with 20 seconds left in the game.

Abernathy inbounds the ball, but Queen manages a steal.

Scott gets the ball and heads downcourt.

He looks around, sees Carruthers on the sideline holding up two fingers.

Scott subtly shakes his head, he dances around the defense, taking time off the clock.

Lorentz signals that he's open. Scott doesn't see him.

Scott lets a three-pointer fly with two seconds left on the clock, it spins in and out.

The BUZZER sounds as the game ends. Scott falls to the floor in anguish, puts his hands over his face.

The scoreboard reads "Blackman: 68 Abernathy: 69"

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Scott's covering his face with a towel.

He walks into the showers, uniform still on, turns on the water. He lets the water cascade over him as he lies on his back and sobs profusely. He's an inconsolable mess.

Driven

My lack of defense and my nerves cost us that first game and I knew it. As you can guess, I got a lecture from my parents once they found me in the showers. Pops deadass slapped me across my face to snap me out it while Ma kept on telling me all the ways I fucked up the game. It was my first game back in more than a year and my parents were acting like I had blown a 3-1 lead in the NBA Finals. Coach Carruthers and the others told me that it wasn't my fault, but it didn't matter. It wasn't their validation I wanted. It was my family's. I was going to tell Coach that I should hang up my shoes as a point guard. If I did though, I'd get an even bigger lecture by the fam about how I was making them look bad. So I said fuck it. The very next day I went to Riverside Park and practiced my free throws and three-pointers for four hours. I wasn't going to make the same mistake again. I'd make the clutch shot or dish the key dime when it mattered, no excuses or bullshit. That loss unlocked another level in me and I never stopped working. I was the first one in the gym and the last one to leave. I practiced defense relentlessly and watched film on every point guard I could from Bob Cousy to Steph Curry.

Coach had the janitor give me a key to the gym so I could practice whenever I wanted and I didn't disappoint. My game averages in assists and steals went up, and I was leading us to dubs without playing recklessly. We won 27 games in a row after that L and I was going to make sure that we finished with a ring. Nobody was going to score points as effectively as I was on my quest to redeem myself. I didn't give a fuck who we went up against because I was going to get a ring either way. That was a promise I intended to keep.

INT. SCOTT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Scott's sitting at his desk watching NBA highlights on his Mac. He keeps on rewinding the same play of Kareem sinking a sky hook.

SCOTT

I've got to learn that move...

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - DAY

It's dawn. Scott's practicing his moves.

He dribbles the ball, drives to the lane, flicks his arm up to attempt a hook shot, the ball bricks the rim.

He gets the rebound, dribbles it out toward the arc. He makes his way toward the basket again, tries the hook shot again, makes it.

He gets the rebound, works on his handles by dribbling the ball between his legs and behind his back.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Scott and the rest of the Blackman squad listen to Carruthers.

CARRUTHERS

All right. Here's the plan: there is no plan. Do whatever you have to do to win. Organized chaos. Get the dub.

Scott gets up and rallies his teammates.

SCOTT

All right, guys. You heard, Coach. Let's go out there and dominate. Let's show them how bad we fucking want it. Last time was on me. I got sloppy with the ball. I'm not going to let that happen again. No cap.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Scott and the rest of the Blackman players are waiting in the tunnel at one end of the court. Their rivals are waiting at the other end of the court.

Scott and his teammates wait in their tunnel as the starting lineup for the Abernathy is announced by an unseen PA ANNOUNCER. Abernathy players run onto the court, then to their team's bench as their names are called.

Scott turns to his teammates, gives a quick pep talk.

SCOTT

No matter what goes down, you play your ass off and wear that jersey with pride. Aight? There's no quit at Blackman. No quit.

Each of the Blackman players run out the tunnel onto the court as their names are called until only Scott is left.

PA ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And the point guard and captain, number thirteen, Scott McKenzie.

Scott sprints onto the court as his name is called, runs to his team's bench.

The stands are packed with frenzied fans from both sides. It's a cacophony of cheers and jeers.

Cheerleaders from both schools are lined up along the sidelines.

Scott glances at championship banners that are hanging from the rafters. He looks at his team and mouths the words "Our House."

There's a fire in his eyes as he focuses on the game ahead.

SUPERIMPOSE: BLACKMAN VS ABERNATHY

All-CITY CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

A REFEREE walks to the middle of the court, tosses a basketball into the air. Both sides fight for possession.

Abernathy's center wins the tip-off, lobs it to his teammate.

Abernathy's shooting guard does a crossover to Scott, makes a hook shot from the paint.

Queen inbounds the ball to Scott.

Scott runs up the court on a fast break, no-look passes it to Tracy, who dunks it in.

An Abernathy player gets the inbounds pass, darts his way down the court.

The Abernathy player goes for a layup, gets fouled by Lorentz.

He makes his first free throw, misses the second.

X weaves his way between two defenders, makes a floater.

Abernathy answers by making a three-pointer.

Scott does a crossover to create space, pump fakes, lobs it to Queen who hits an easy three-pointer.

Abernathy hustles downcourt, drive toward the basket. X gets an easy steal, passes it to Queen. Queen darts to the rim, gets double-teamed. He throws it out to Scott who drills a long two-pointer.

The tempo of the game is starting to pick up.

Blackman players dash down the court. Scott fools a defender with a pump fake, drills in a buzzer beater sky hook to end the first quarter.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - MOMENTS LATER

The Blackman players are on the sideline, huddled around Coach Carruthers. They towel their faces off as Carruthers speaks.

CARRUTHERS

Make them play our style. You're doing great. Tracy, Reynolds, excellent D. McKenzie, Lorentz, Queen, keep up that tempo. Now here's the plan...

The team look intently at their coach as he lays out the game plan.

Abernathy starts the quarter by getting an uncontested three-pointer.

Scott hustles downcourt, does a no-look pass to X who answers with his own three-pointer.

Abernathy's center goes for the dunk, Tracy gets a clean block. Tracy tosses the ball to Scott.

Scott darts downcourt, passes it to Queen. Queen is swarmed by Abernathy defenders. He passes it back to Scott.

Scott attempts a fadeaway jumper, misses, goes for the offensive rebound. He's elbowed in the face by an Abernathy defender, QUINCY JACOBSON.

A CRACK is heard as Scott falls down hard.

He grabs his face and writhes in pain as he lies on the floor.

The crowd goes silent. The only noise heard is the ref's whistle -- injury timeout.

An athletic trainer, LISA NICHOLS, runs onto the court, kneels down next to Scott.

She gives Scott a towel which he puts against his nose. She slowly helps him up. The two walk to the Blackman bench.

Scott takes a seat, tilts his head forward as Coach Carruthers and Lisa talk.

CARRUTHERS

So, can you patch him up?

LISA

(sarcastic)

Of course I can. That's my job.

CARRUTHERS

Now's not the time sarcasm. Not with the game on the line.

LISA

We're up by ten, Dan...

Coach Carruthers grows frustrated.

CARRUTHERS

For now... Just get him cleaned up would ya?

Lisa walks away from Coach Carruthers, toward Scott.

Scott takes the towel off his nose, it's blood soaked. His nose is a faucet.

Lisa takes the bloody towel. She grabs another towel, wets it using a water bottle.

She tries cleaning Scott's face, he winces.

The bleeding doesn't stop.

LISA

Ah, this is useless. Come on.

She helps Scott up. They walk back through the tunnel, Scott holding the wet towel against his nose.

The pair walk until they reach a door marked "Lisa Nichols, Athletic Trainer."

LISA

Anytime I got an injury or got hurt during a game there'd be only one person I'd call for: Lisa. She was the one who helped me off the field when I got injured last year. Except for Uncle Marc, I trusted nobody with my health more than her. She never made me feel bad for getting hurt like my parents did and she had the same kindness in her voice that Nikki did. If anybody was going to fix me up in time to head back into the game it'd be her. She was a no-bullshit type of person. But she did it in a way that made me laugh not in a way that intimidated me like my parents. All the progress I made during my recovery, all the success I had on the field and on the court, was 100% because of her. It was her idea to have me switch my playing style in both sports, not Lammons or Carruthers; they were just her mouthpieces. She's the one that gave me workout advice and guided me through the year. It was her that was going to set my nose, and not for the first, but for the third time. Lisa's the GOAT and that's straight facts. If it weren't for her, my college dreams might have been dead the minute my knee popped. But I've been bouncing back and it's because of her, no cap. Lammons and Carruthers may have coached me, and my parents may have pushed my ass, but it was Lisa who was the glue that held it all together. Without her, my body wouldn't be able to do any of this shit. She's helped me take my shit to a new level and I've enjoyed being dominant because of it.

INT. ATHLETIC TRAINING ROOM - NIGHT

Scott hobbles in, Lisa makes sure he doesn't fall.

She helps Scott onto an examination table.

The room looks like a typical doctor's office with touches of physical therapy equipment sprinkled throughout.

Lisa walks to a cabinet, grabs some items: stitches, gauze, a bottle of nasal spray, a nasal splint and tape. She opens a drawer, picks up a syringe and a vial of numbing.

She walks back to Scott, puts the items on the table.

She grabs the towel from Scott. She dabs some of the blood away, flushes his nostrils with the nasal spray, clotted blood oozes out.

Scott's nose is bruised, discolored and noticeably broken.

She delicately touches Scott's face as she begins stitching him up.

Scott grimaces as she touches his nose.

She fills the syringe, numbs the area around his nose.

An audible CRACK is heard as she attempts to reset the broken nose.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

The Blackman fans are quiet as Abernathy scores to tie things up before halftime.

There's 55 seconds left on the clock.

Scott's replacement, CHARLIE BAXTER, looks to attack in the paint, he's elbow checked as he makes his way to the basket.

The ref doesn't whistle the play dead. Abernathy steals the ball, darts down the court, scores an uncontested three-pointer.

Carruthers is seething, runs over to the ref.

CARRUTHERS

You can't be serious. How about you make the right calls for once?

REF

I didn't see anything dirty.

CARRUTHERS

Didn't see? Didn't see -- are you fucking blind? Even Helen Keller could've seen that!

The ref walks over to the scorer's table makes a "T" with his hands.

Coach Carruthers throws his hands up in exasperation, mutters under his breath.

INT. ATHLETIC TRAINING ROOM - NIGHT

Scott's still getting his nose fixed by Lisa. She puts gauze in his nostrils, tapes up his nose.

LISA
All right, that should do it.

SCOTT
Thanks, Lisa. You're amazing.

LISA
No problem, Scott.

SCOTT
Hey, can I head back into the game?

LISA
Scott, you just got your nose broken and reset. You really think that's a great idea?

Scott looks at her coyly.

SCOTT
Come on, Lisa. This is me we're talking about. Just give me a face mask and I'll be fine.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Carruthers and the Blackman team are incensed.

Carruthers explodes, kicks a wastebasket in a blind fury.

CARRUTHERS
Those bastards will do anything to beat us. It's like we're the Lakers and they're the Celtics. We need to toughen up if we've got any chance of coming out of here with a win.

CHARLIE BAXTER
What the hell do we run, Coach? You saw what they did to Scottie. They're ruthless.

CARRUTHERS
I don't know, Charlie. I just need a moment to calm down and think.

WILL TRACY
We're fucked without Scottie,
aren't we, Coach?

Carruthers reluctantly answers.

CARRUTHERS
Honestly... Yeah, we're fucked.
He's the focal point of our
offense. But we'll figure it out.
Somehow...

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Both teams head back out for the second half. Scott is the last one to step onto the court. He's wearing a face mask to protect his nose.

Scott walks over to the sideline, his teammates and Coach are shocked to see him.

XAVIER
Oh, shit! Mac, you actually came
back.

SCOTT
Of course I did. I came here to get
a win and that's what I'm going to
do. Fuck a broken nose.

CARRUTHERS
What are you all waiting for then?
Get your asses on the court so we
can finish this thing.

Carruthers gently pats Scott on the back. Scott and his teammates get in position on the court.

Tracy wins the jump ball, passes it to Scott.

Scott throws an alley-oop to Queen who slams it home.

A back-and-forth battle between both sides ensues. Abernathy and Blackman vie for the lead.

An Abernathy player misses a shot, Tracy rebounds it, passes it to Scott. Scott sets up a screen, passes to Lorentz, who makes a jumper.

Scott is a maestro conducting his team. He dishes out assist after assist as Blackman chips away at Abernathy's lead.

Scott passes to Queen who drains a floater.

The score is "Blackman: 60 Abernathy: 58" with eight minutes left in the third.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - A WHILE LATER

The game is at full intensity, both sides jockeying for a lead.

Scott dishes it to X who gets a dunk.

Carruthers signals for a timeout, the ref blows his whistle. Blackman heads to their bench.

COACH CARRUTHERS

All right, crunch time now. We can pull this off. Scott, you try and get a steal and go for the dagger. If you can't get a shot off dribble the clock out and we'll win in OT.

Scott gets a vital steal toward the end of the game, runs down the court, goes for a dunk. He's clotheslined hard by Jacobson, falls flat on his back. He's slow to get up. Queen gets the rebound, makes the layup.

Scott is helped up by Lorentz.

SCOTT

I've had enough of your street ball shit, Jacobson. Fuck you.

He lunges at Jacobson, punches him in the face. The two players brawl.

Both benches clear as teammates try to break the two up. Players from both sides exchange punches, a melee ensues. Scott and Jacobson get knocked to the ground, the duo wrestle.

Spectators on both sides get incensed, start fighting each other.

BRUTALITY

The cops rolled up and broke up the fight and the game was stopped indefinitely. We ended up winning the championship because Lorentz had gotten the rebound and banked it in. I was on top of the world for a split second, but came plummeting down in a blink. I was slammed hard to the ground by this jacked white cop and the stitches in my nose popped. My nose was broken again. I don't even remember much after that. I was just fucking scared of the whole situation. My mind just remembers fragments of that night. Police station.

Phoebe. Phone call. Home. Crying. Anger. Numbness. I woke up the next day and just smoked up the whole day. Didn't even leave my room. Just blasted Kendrick and Logic and got into my feels.

BLACK AND BLUE

Maroon blood was spilt on black asphalt
by a White man wearing a blue
uniform the cop let out a snigger as the
man

laid dying on the ground, the last words he heard Were
by the cop, who called him a "fucking nigger"

Those who were sworn to protect us

the same ones who terrorize and brutalize
us, a cocktail of disgust, anger and lament
chokes Black America--

Those who want to matter

in a country that deems them invisible,
disposable, savage, inferior,
protected by a blue wall
Built of Black souls

BACK IN THE FIELD

Two championships were in the bag and I was finna win the third and cement my legacy as the best athlete out there. Baseball was something I had to do, not because my parents ever told me to, but because I was a New Yorker. Everybody in my family was a Mets fan except me. I vibed with the Yankess. Jeter, Mariano, Ruth, Gehrig, the list of legendary players is endless. I enjoyed rubbing it in whenever the Yanks won the Subway Series (which happened more than Ma and Pops would've liked). They hated the Yankees, but not that I modeled my game after Derek Jeter, The Captain.

They respected that he had won five rings (even if one of those rings was against their Mets). He had the grit, dedication and winning mentality that all New Yorkers could vibe with, no matter who you cheered for.

I practiced fielding grounders and bouncers for hours until I felt like I could predict the tendencies of each batter I might go against. Jeter's jump throw was something I tried practicing as often as I could, just because I wanted to prove that I was on another level with my game. No cap, my fielding was OD solid but other teams loathed facing us because of what I could do in the batter's box. I could hit from either side, draw walks, power hit and bunt better than most. Our team was exponentially better when I was in the lineup and everyone knew it. Rival coaches would draft up fielding schemes based just on when I'd appear in the order. They didn't even give consideration to the other eight batters. It drove my coach, Lenny LaBianca, up the wall having to deal with that bullshit. Not me, though. I embraced it. I loved being hated because it meant I was doing something right. I never wanted to be called just an asshole because that would mean I was average at best. I always wanted to be *the* asshole because that meant I was doing my job better than anybody else.

It had been more than a year since I had put my glove on and practiced but I was oddly calm given the situation. Maybe it's because there was no fear about being moved to a new position or having to change up my playing style like I had during football and basketball season. The reason for that was because I was our team's utility player. I could play all the infield positions at an elite level in addition to filling in as an emergency catcher when needed. I was the glue guy that we needed. Going into our first practice of the season I was feeling locked in. The vibes were on point and I felt like we could win it all that season. As long as I did my best to grind and enjoy the game then we would win. That was straight facts, no capping. I already did it twice that year and I was hyped to do it again.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: All-City Baseball Championship

Blackman vs. Sexton Hall

It's a perfect day for baseball, warm with clear, azure skies.

Scott and his teammates are getting ready to field against Sexton in the first inning.

The first two players hit singles to start things off.

The third hits a roller toward second base, Scott's teammate mistimes it. Scott dashes, scoops it up, makes the throw in time for a double play.

Sexton's cleanup hitter hits a homer with one man on base.

The next player strikes out.

EXT. BLACKMAN'S DUGOUT - MOMENTS LATER

Scott and his teammates run off the field and into their DUGOUT. COACH LABIANCA speaks to his team.

LABIANCA

Scott, good job out there, son. You stopped a lot of damage out there. Now, let's get out there and get some runs.

Scott puts his arm around Blackman's second baseman, NICK REESE, talks to him.

SCOTT

Don't pay attention to him. You'll fix everything with one swing of the bat. Now c'mon, let's win this game.

Scott, Nick and the rest of the team get ready to bat.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Blackman's catcher, FRANK QUINN, exits the dugout, walks over to the batter's box.

Quinn hits a double on a three-two pitch. Reese enters the batter's box, hits a single to bring Quinn home.

Blackman's left fielder, TOM WALSH, gets walked to put men on first and second.

Scott runs out of the dugout, gets in the batter's box from the left side.

The first pitch is a curve, he whacks it for a triple to bring his teammates home, steals home.

The score is 4-2 in favor of Blackman at the end of the first.

Blackman heads out of the dugout and onto the field as they get ready for Sexton to hit.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - A WHILE LATER

The game is scoreless for the next few innings until the top of the eighth.

Blackman's center fielder, ISAAC WILSON, lets a deep ball get by him and three runs score.

Scott makes a diving catch to get the last out of the eighth, the score is tied.

EXT. BLACKMAN DUGOUT - MOMENTS LATER

Coach LaBianca tears into Isaac.

LABIANCA

Wilson, what the hell was that?
You've made that catch in your
sleep.

ISAAC

I lost my footing and stumbled.

SCOTT

It's all good, Isaac. We'll still
get this win. Not your fault.

ISAAC

Thanks for looking out, Mac.

SCOTT

No doubt. We can still win this
thing.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The score going into the ninth is 5-4 in favor of Sexton as Blackman takes the field.

Blackman's pitcher strikes out the first batter. He ends up hitting the second one with a pitch. One out and one on.

The next batter hits a deep ball. Scott stays with it, makes the jump throw to get the runner out at second to complete the double play.

EXT. BLACKMAN DUGOUT - MOMENTS LATER

Scott rallies his teammates.

SCOTT

Let's go boys. We've got this. Two more runs and we win a fucking chip. Two more runs. Now who's going to be the one to step up?

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Quinn runs out of the dugout and into the batter's box.

He draws a walk, one man on.

Reese steps up to the plate, hits a single to left, two on.

Walsh gets grazed by a pitch in the arm.

Bases loaded. Scott's up next. He lives for moments like these.

He runs out of the dugout and gets in the batter's box from the right side. He's going to switch things up and bat lefty.

He looks around at the stands, sees Teddy, his family and college scouts in attendance. Sweat trickles down his cheeks as he waits for the first pitch.

It's a ball.

He hits a foul ball to right for a one-one count.

A swinging strike on a changeup, one-two.

A high fastball evens the count.

Scott doesn't swing on a four-seamer, it's a full count now.

There's a look of palpable tension on Scott's face as he waits for the pitch.

More than a year of grinding for a shot at redemption. It all comes down to this.

One pitch to decide if Scott will be the GOAT or the goat.

Sexton's pitcher winds up for the pitch, flicks his arm, releases it.

It's a sinker. Scott times his swing perfectly and hits it deep to left for the walk-off grand slam.

The runners round the bases. They're mobbed by the rest of the team who are running out of the dugout onto the field.

Scott puts up one of his hands, holds up three fingers. He waves his arm in triumph. The comeback is complete now, three rings in one year.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: SCOTT'S COLLEGE SIGNING DAY

Scott sits at a table. He's joined by his parents, Patrick and Frannie, and sister, Phoebe.

The table has a variety of hats with different college logos on top of it.

In front of the table, news media and coaches fidget in their seats in anticipation. Scott's almost blinded by the camera flashes going off in the background.

Scott feeds off their anxiety, reaches for a hat, puts it back down. He does this a few more times until Frannie slaps his hand.

SCOTT MCKENZIE

Thanks to everyone for coming today. I've kept you waiting long enough. It's time to make my decision. It was an agonizing process, but I've decided that I'm going to go to Rowayton and play for the Titans.

He picks up a purple hat and puts it on. The logo is an orange "R" with crossed daggers below it.

A SPORTS REPORTER attempts to ask Scott a question. He's a ball of nerves, chokes over his words. He takes some deep breaths, collects himself.

SPORTS REPORTER

Scott, Mo Laine for the Post. First off, congrats. Why Rowayton, though? Why not go to NYU like your dad? Or Columbia like your sister and mother?

SCOTT

Yeah. I mean that's a great question. I could've continued the family tradition, go to NYU or Columbia. But I wanted to go down my own path. Live my own life.

SPORTS REPORTER

What do you mean by that, Scott?

SCOTT

I wanted people to see me as great because of my own talent and hard work. I'm tired of being known as Phoebe's little brother or as Frannie and Pat's son. If I'm going to be successful it's going to be because I put the work in myself. Not because of my family connections.

SPORTS REPORTER

Do you think you succeeded?

SCOTT

I won three championships after coming back from a shredded knee. No doubt I succeeded. I did what I wanted to do, and I did it my way. Now I'm gonna go to Rowayton and do the same there.

EXT. ROWAYTON COLLEGE - DAY

A campus in upstate New York. It's reminiscent of an Ivy League school with its stone buildings, sprawling campus greens and forest scenery.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Scott stands with his teammates in the tunnel leading to the field. He looks back at his teammates, he stops them.

SCOTT

We're gonna go out there and put seven on the board every time we have the ball. Let's go out there and dominate!

Scott leads them in a team chant before he turns around and gets ready to run onto the field.

The noise from the stadium is deafening. The Rowayton crowd is at fever pitch as they wait for the Titans to head onto the field.

Scott leads the team onto the field. He feeds off the energy of the crowd as he makes his way toward the 50-yard line.

He stops in the middle of the field, looks around at the crowd, smiles. He's made his dream a reality.

FADE OUT.

THE END

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