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Fellowship of the Misery

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Fellowship of the Misery

TITLE

A Feature Screenplay presented to and approved by
the Faculty Thesis Committee in the MFA Writing for
the Screen Program in the School of Film & Television
at Loyola Marymount University of Los Angeles,
California.

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the
Degree Master of Fine Arts
Writing for the
Screen By

Malachi James Moore

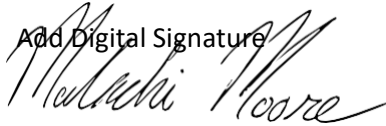
MFA Candidate

APPROVAL TO MFA CANDIDACY

The following graduate student has met all the criteria to advance to candidacy for a Masters in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Writing for the Screen by completing the following requirements and portfolio:

- Three revised feature film screenplays
- One spec episodic teleplay (either a half-hour comedy or one hour drama)
- One original pilot teleplay (either a half-hour comedy or one hour drama)
- SCWR 690: Thesis feature screenplay workshop
- SCWR 691: Revised thesis feature screenplay workshop
- SCWR 692: Feature film portfolio workshop (revision of all projects written during the three-year program)

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Graduate Director: Patricia K. Meyer

Date: May 13, 2020



Loyola Marymount University
School of
Film and Television

This thesis is approved and accepted by the Graduate Director and all Thesis Committee Members in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Writing for the Screen.

May 13, 2020

Date

Patricia K. Meyer

Graduate Director, Patricia K. Meyer

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SCRW 691 Professor Paul Chitlik

FELLOWSHIP OF THE MISERY

by

Malachi Moore

A Thesis presented to the

Faculty of the Department of
School of Film & Television
Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Screenwriting

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

One hundred thousand atypical FANS fill every seat of a massive, open dome. Their impassioned CHEERS blend into a shuddering ROAR.

FATHER JOHN (70s), a hoarse gentleman with an aged voice fluently proclaims his sermon. A call to war.

FATHER JOHN (V.O.)
Under the lights of the infinite
Heavens, beneath the trinity's
imperishable faith, let us all come
together this time, I ask of you,
for the love of yourself, for the
love of your God, and for the love
of your brother.

(pause)
Gentlemen, bond with your fellow
teammates, and listen to what I
have to say.

His speech is unyielding, almost overcompensating.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

A dimly lit, open-space with a red and black color scheme.

Fifty adolescent FOOTBALL PLAYERS gather around on one knee. Their silhouetted faces are held down in prayer, arms interlinked with one another's.

FATHER JOHN (V.O.)
If whenever out there, you get lost
in search of thyself. If after all
of your calls to God are met with
silence, I beseech you...seek for
your brother and you will find all
three.

Dead center, in the middle of them all, a large, red "U" logo is etched in the black carpet.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - PREGAME TUNNEL - NIGHT

A glass panel above the entryway gleams under the dimmed overhead lights; a creed enshrined on it reads:

"WHAT YOU HEAR HERE, WHAT YOU SEE HERE, LET IT STAY HERE,
WHEN YOU LEAVE HERE."

FATHER JOHN (V.O.)
 And for this sacred covenant, you
 pay the ultimate sacrifice. The
 sacrifice of Men. Its virtue is
 divine, its oath is sacred.

Inspirational TEXT illustrate the vinyl wall graphics of various football players. All of them silhouetted, none distinguishable.

Double doors appear further down the seemingly endless tunnel. White light peeks through the crevices, the reverberated crowd vibrates the room.

FATHER JOHN (V.O.)
 And now, it is time to give proof
 of its excellence!

The double doors open, the light blinding!

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

Fireworks EXPLODE as the Team make their way onto the massive turf field.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

ROSS DOUGLAS (20s) fastens his helmet, slides on his gloves, and makes the sign of the cross.

Team STAFF and COACHES run about in a hurry. Other Teammates hit each other's helmets, slap and grab each other's behinds.

Ross looks up, sees his magnified, peach-fuzzed face on the jumbotron, a large grin spread on his face.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 Now coming on to the field, out
 very own star, student-
 athlete...Ross Douglas!

Ross waves to the ROARING crowd as he takes the field.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - STUDENT SECTION - NIGHT

Fans sport his number everywhere' beautiful WOMEN with Ross' face on their low-cut tees, MEN wave various, positive and witty signs.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

A frenzy of indistinct YELLS and "play call" SHOUTS of random words come from every direction.

Ross' huddle breaks; everyone takes their position on the white line of scrimmage.

He aligns his thin frame just barely over the line. The back of his jersey sports his surname and the number "9". Then:

HUT!

Ross sprints down the field and maneuvers his way around defenders.

He continues down the field as the football spirals perfectly through the air. Ross leaps, defies gravity and secures it in one hand.

A thunderous CHEER. Ross lands gracefully on the ground and rolls back on his feet. Then, out of nowhere, an Opposing Player's helmet CRACKS the front of Ross'.

His body plummets to the ground. His limbs lay limp by his side, body sprawled out on the field. The sounds and ruckus of the coliseum continue.

He lays on his back, face silhouetted from the beaming stadium lights.

PLAYER (O.S.)

Pussy ass nigga.

Flashes from multiple cameras in every direction create a light show.

VOICE (O.S.)

(distant)

Someone get me another receiver!

No one comes for Ross; he's the only one left on the enormous field.

EXT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - FIELD - DAY

Gray smog reduces the sun to a dull glow on a breezy, Fall morning. Dead leaves parade around a withered track that encircles a muddy football field.

CHARLES MARQUES JR. (18), a Black adolescent whose chain necklace and limbs are far larger in proportion to the rest of his body, profusely sweats and runs around the field.

LATER...

Mid-field, Charles uses one hand to catch passes from an automated, football-throwing machine.

INT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - SHOWER - DAY

Wale's, 'Ambition' plays through the speakers of Charles' phone, perched above.

He rinses off inside an intimate, private shower, uses a pink LOOFAH and scrubs thoroughly.

INT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The music continues. In the mirror, Charles brushes his hair methodically, very happy with himself. He carelessly dances to the song.

He stops to put in large, cubic zirconia earrings, flexes his bare body and takes a photo with his iPhone. SNAP! Satisfied, he types on the screen.

SUPER: "Somethin' light for this morning, grind never stops!"

A flashy, Ed Hardy t-shirt, ripped blue jeans, a fresh pair of Jordan sneakers, and a fake Louis Vuitton belt are laid out next to him.

Charles holds his shirt up, sees that its wrinkled. Visibly flustered, he looks inside of his BAG for something else to wear.

EXT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - ENTRANCE - DAY

Charles sits on a nearby bench with sunglasses that cover two thirds of his face, his Ed hardy shirt still wrinkled.

He holds out his phone, checks the time and SIGHS, looks around; not a single person in sight on the pristine grounds, encircled by luxury Victorian homes.

Charles poses for a selfie, grits his teeth and presents his chain with the other hand. SNAP!

Satisfied, Charles' phone CLICKS on every press of the screen while he types a caption.

SUPER: "Big announcement coming...makin' my grand entrance soon. I stay fashionably late!"

INT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - DAY

A hushed MURMUR inside of a tattered, dusty basketball court. A sea of reporters sit in pull-out chairs, eager and bored. A few of them have already dozed off.

COACH BELLO (O.S.)
(mundane)
Okay. I guess we'll, uhh...start
then. Welcome everybody to the
Parsippany Hills' Signing Day
event.

COACH BELLO (44) a hefty, barrel chested White man leans on a podium in the middle of the court. He checks his watch.

Next to him, frail and pale twins, MEGAN and TIA LOURY (17) sit at a cloth covered table, an IVY League logo placed in front of both.

A vacant seat is left in the middle that separate the two. A microphone and three, distinctive manilla folders with different logos lay out front.

COACH BELLO (CONT'D)
Obviously, we were gonna
wait..until everyone got here but,
uhh. I guess Charles is gonna be a
bit late. Anyway.

Both Megan and Tia are ecstatic to be there. The Reporters remain lethargic and unenthused.

COACH BELLO (CONT'D)
(clears throat)
It is a great honor. These two
young women are the ninth
generation to attend Ivy League
schools in both academics and
athletics. Today they'll both be
signing their scholarships to play
golf, and I know I speak for the
whole community when I say we are
very proud of them.

The only applause is heard from the pullout stands; a small gathering of frail and pale FAMILY MEMBERS cheer beside an underwhelmed school band. They all sport Ivy League apparel.

COACH BELLO (CONT'D)
Okay, uhh. We're gonna open the
floor to anyone who has questions
for Megan and Tia at this time. So,
go ahead.

A moment passes, the gym is still. Finally, a Reporter stands.

REPORTER #1
When is Charles arriving--

COACH BELLO
Sir, do you have any questions for
Megan and Tia?

The Reporter sits back down. Coach Bello checks his watch again.

EXT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The sound of a rushed individual wearing heels is heard from a slight distance. Charles looks further down the walkway.

VIVICA MARQUES (40), Charles' mother, rushes towards him in a black sequin dress and a large drape coat, her purse tucked under her arm. He stands to meet her.

CHARLES
Do you even know that you're late?

VIVICA
Boy, please. I can be late and pay
for that car of yours, or quit my
job and have your ass walkin'
everywhere.

She walks and attempts to put earrings on simultaneously
stumbles a bit and fixes Charles' chain.

VIVICA (CONT'D)
(aside)
Then who goin' be the one that's
late?
(re: Charles)
They all set in there for you?

CHARLES
I was waiting for you.

VIVICA
Don't start now, Charles. Hush! I
want to make sure they get the set-
up right.

She anxiously brushes his shirt.

VIVICA (CONT'D)

(aside)

Look at you. Can't even iron your own damn shirt.

CHARLES

Southern's up there with two of the other schools.

VIVICA

Those the two biggest ones?

CHARLES

(pause)

They're both better than Southern.

Vivica speedily reaches in her purse and applies lip gloss through a compact mirror.

VIVICA

Good, Southern will like that.

Charles says nothing as Vivica continues to apply make-up. He slowly gets anxious, an expression of masked fear and shame.

VIVICA (CONT'D)

You talk to Coach Ware today--

CHARLES

Shouldn't I be going to the best school that offered me?

She stops, turns to Charles.

VIVICA

(abrupt)

Excuse me?

CHARLES

I'm just sayin', I don't know if Southern is the best school for me.

VIVICA

Southern is the best school for us. Don't be selfish, now. You know those incentives help us both out, boy.

(pause)

Besides, they're already expecting you and a check is in the mail.

Charles sticks his chin up, avoids eye contact.

CHARLES

I think it should be my decision.

A moment of disbelief. Vivica stares at Charles, wide eyed. Charles avoids it, walks towards the entrance.

VIVICA

I guess someone bustin' their ass
to keep a roof over your head...
shippin' you off to this expensive
White school should have no say in
the matter?

Charles SMACKS his teeth, mumbles under his breath. Vivica quickly follows.

VIVICA (CONT'D)

I can't believe how selfish your
ass can be sometimes. You are your
father's child, Lord have mercy.

CHARLES

(sharp)

Look, can we go? We're late.

They've both arrived at the entrance. Vivica snatches Charles' arm, physically turns him towards her.

VIVICA

Don't play with me, Charles! This
is not the time. Take them damn
glasses off and look at me.

Charles sheepishly removes his shades.

VIVICA (CONT'D)

The decision is final.

CHARLES

(pause)

Yes ma'am.

Charles reaches for the glass door to his high school, holds it open for Vivica.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

You know I love you, Mom.

VIVICA

I hope so.

She walks and disappears inside. After a moment, Charles puts his shades back on and follows.

INT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - DAY

An elderly, feeble Reporter stands alone in the span of others. He holds out his flip phone and records the twins, the only two at attention.

FEEBLE REPORTER

(monotone)

I believe it was 1975...no '76
since we had anyone from here as a
golf player. In fact my wife played
here that same year. She wasn't
nearly good enough.

Megan and Tia look at once another, smile, and look back at him simultaneously. They patiently wait for the follow up question; it never comes.

MEGAN

(sincere)

Did you have... a question?

The feeble Reporter looks confused. Coach Bello shuts his eyes and pinches his nasal. Then, a door to the gymnasium SLAMS shut.

Suddenly, the rest of the Reporters spring out of their seats, expensive cameras in hand. They snap photos and speak loudly over one another.

Charles and Vivica make their way towards the cloth covered table. The subpar band plays all of its three brass instruments. Charles grins and waves like a superstar.

REPORTERS

Charles, Charles! Charles!

CHARLES

What's up, y'all?!

He bumps into Megan while he takes his seat, gives no semblance of remorse or awareness. He sits and raises his arms in the air. Vivica stands right behind him, coy.

COACH BELLO

(lively)

Alright, alright, everybody.
Let's uhhh, let's quiet down now.

Coach Bello hushes the Reporters, makes waving hand gestures.

COACH BELLO (CONT'D)

We are very pleased and excited to
have Charles here with us, today.

(MORE)

COACH BELLO (CONT'D)
It's a great opportunity to...to
celebrate you--the three of you.

CHARLES
Sorry I'm late, Coach, everybody.
I'm just...still learning how to
manage my time now that everyone
wants it.

He grins, is very pleased with himself; the snaps of photos
continue. Vivica puts her hand on Charles' shoulder, waves
with the other.

COACH BELLO (O.C.)
I think, at this point, we've
probably exhausted all questions
for Megan and Tia, so let's just
move right along. Charles will
choose which school he's gonna
attend and answer some questions
after.

Vivica leans down to Charles' right side, speaks in his ear.

VIVICA
(whispers)
I'm so proud of you.

She raises and smiles. The band stops, the rest of the gym
quiets.

Charles takes off his shades, looks at the three manilla
folders placed out in front of him; one is from "Southern
Connecticut", another from "Austin College".

The third folder stands out, is all black and has a red "U"
in the middle. Charles takes a deep breath.

CHARLES
I want to thank Coach Bello for
everything he's done for me over
these past four years. Thank you
Parsippany, everyone here for
coming today. Um, I really want to
thank God, cause without Him, none
of this would be possible.
(pause)
Thank you, Mom. For everything
you've done for me. You held
me down through a lot of tough
times. I know you've made a lot of
sacrifices for me to live out my
dream...as any great mother would.

He looks up to her. Vivica smiles and squeezes his shoulder.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
It's been a tough process. But,
with a lot of consideration and
prayer, for the next three to four
years, I'll be attending....

He slowly reaches out for the Southern manilla folder, at the
last second grabs the black and red one.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
The University.

APPLAUDS erupt, the band resumes. Reporters chat over each
other and flash photos. The entire gym has excited, beaming
expressions. All except Vivica.

Charles takes the scholarship out of the folder and signs the
documents.

COACH BELLO (O.S.)
Alright, let get some questions
goin'.

He indirectly points to the Reporters.

REPORTER #1
Charles! Big fan, been following
you since your pop warner days.
Congrats on signing with a big time
school like that. I think this
entire town knew you'd be somethin'
special, man.

Suddenly, Vivica calmly walks towards the furthest exit of
the gym. Charles' genuine grin slowly loses its luster. He
puts his shades back on.

CHARLES
Yeah. You know, I've been playing
for as long as I can remember. I'm
just happy who it's made me become
as a person.

Vivica is halfway towards the exit. Reporters take photos of
her as she walks through them.

REPORTER #1 (O.S.)
Talk about why you chose this
school over the others.

Charles' large shades hide everything but the defensive
tremble in his voice. He speaks directly to Vivica's back.

CHARLES

Well, as a man, I expect great things for myself. I want the best, I want to be the best...

(raised)

So I don't see why it's so hard to understand. The University was an easy decision.

Vivica walks out the door, it SLAMS shut behind her.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(pause)

Does anyone else have questions about me?

After a moment, another Reporter rises.

REPORTER #2

How do you see your chances of making an impact as a true freshman?

CHARLES

(sniffles)

Great! Absolutely great!

REPORTER #2

Even now that you're a small fish in a big pond?

CHARLES

You're talkin' to a shark, sir. Next.

REPORTER #3

With you being an impressive addition to their wide receiver core, this being their star receiver Ross Douglas' last go, what are some things you hope to learn from him in order to fill those shoes?

Charles tenses up, leans over and rests his arms on the table.

CHARLES

I am not filling in any one's shoes. I am my own person. I am Charles Marques Jr. And I will leave my own legacy at The University.

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(pause)

Does that answer your question?

More Reporters shout at Charles for their chance to ask questions. Charles' large shades reflect the flash of their cameras, his sullied expression partially hidden.

INT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Later, Charles sits hunched over on the bottom row of the pullout stands. He holds his shades in one hand and stares at the floor.

A JANITOR hangs up the chairs while another sweeps. Reporters and other individuals make their way out of the gym. Coach Bello approaches Charles.

COACH BELLO

Hey, congrats again kid. That's huge for us.

Charles stands and gives Coach Bello a firm handshake.

CHARLES

Thank you, sir.

On the far side of the gym, Megan and Tia's family all hug and embrace them. They're given gifts, flowers, and balloons by everyone.

COACH BELLO

When you came to me four years ago, I knew there was somethin' special about you.

(jokes)

Had your head so far up your ass, you couldn't be distracted with anything else but runnin' those routes.

Charles half heartedly smiles.

CHARLES

Well it worked, didn't it?

COACH BELLO

You really set a fine example for those kids. Back over there, where you're from, I mean. I'm serious about that.

Charles slightly squints, unsure of how to perceive the "compliment".

CHARLES

Thanks.

COACH BELLO

Alright, well. I'll let you go.
Probably got a whole bunch of
people to celebrate with, right?

Charles watches Megan and Tia's family leave the gym.

CHARLES

Uh, yeah--oh yeah. Big party. Back
over there, where I'm from, I mean.

They shake hands and Coach Bello leaves with the janitors.
Charles remains, is the only person left. The HUMM of the
old, overhead lights are the only thing heard.

After a moment, Charles takes out his phone and begins to
record himself.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(to phone)

What's good, y'all? Just had my
official signing day. Just here
now, reflecting to myself. When
you're all about that grind, it's
nice to take it all in from time to
time. What's good for tonight?
Holla at me!

Charles continues to speak into his phone. The gymnasium
looks cold and massive with no one else inside.

EXT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - FIELD - DAY

Charles solely plods down a sidewalk that stands just over
the field. His bag rest over one of his shoulders, his one
arm grips the strap.

He stops and looks at the large, unkempt football field of
his high school. The low sun sits right in the middle of the
goal post. Charles SIGHS. After a moment, he smiles.

EXT. PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - DAY

BEEP! BEEP!

A beat-up, disheveled 2006 Hyundai Sonata flashes its lights
in a massive parking lot by itself. Charles approaches,
unlocks the door and gets inside, his bag in first.

INT. HYUNDAI SONATA - DAY

Charles closes the door. Empty water bottles crowd and CRUNCH on the floor, loose packages of protein bars, old shaker bottles crowd the passenger seat.

He puts the key in the ignition, twists it many times in order to get the car to start. After three tries, the car just barely revs.

EXT. PARSIPPANY HILLS BACK ROAD - DAY - MOVING

Withered sun light peers through the substantial amount of thin trees and their foliage that surround the area.

The winding and curving road takes Charles' car through a labyrinth of a beautiful, secluded neighborhood.

Large modern and contemporary homes hide in the trees on tall cliff sides, their long, brick driveways stretch meters to reach the road, only few with their lights on.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HACKETTSTOWN MAIN STREET - NIGHT - MOVING

Charles' Hyundai drives at a much slower pace down a flat and crowded road. Fast food restaurants line the street along with ancient diners and family owned restaurants.

HOMELESS PERSONS crowd old gas stations; a miniature Hooverville of tents and "homes" made from old school bus shelters.

EXT. BALD EAGLE ROAD/CHARLES' HOUSE - NIGHT

Charles drives past a few ramshackle, Victorian homes and pulls in the driveway of one not too far off the aesthetic: his own home, a random CAR parked next to Vivica's.

INT. CHARLES' HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Vivica sits on the couch, hunched over, with a used napkin in one hand and a random man's palm gripped in the other.

COACH WARE (47), a burly, bald Black man with a collared golf shirt and wrinkled khakis and no belt sits next to Vivica, almost too close for comfort. He consoles Vivica when--

Charles opens the front door from the outside and steps in. The two immediately separate, Coach Ware stands. Charles stops, unaware of what to make of the scene.

COACH WARE
Hello Charles.

Charles slides his bag off of his shoulder, it falls hard on the ground.

CHARLES
Coach. What...wait, what?

VIVICA
I called him to talk some sense into you, boy--

COACH WARE
It's okay.

Coach Ware raises his hands in the air, implies his innocence.

COACH WARE (CONT'D)
I was coming to surprise you and your mother after the signing, but then heard the news while on the way here and...well. I thought maybe we could talk about it to see if I can't change your mind.

Charles' is both angry and confused. He turns around and closes the front door.

CHARLES
I'm sorry you came out all this way. The decision was...well, sudden.

COACH WARE
It's what I do, Chuck. It's what I do for my guys. Over at Southern, your happiness is our first priority. I feel like you might've overlooked a few things before you made that decision.

Charles walks over and sits on the edge of the couch, the furthest away from Vivica.

COACH WARE (CONT'D)
Now I'll give credit where credits due, The University is a great school. No doubt about that.
(MORE)

COACH WARE (CONT'D)

But you gotta understand there are things they can't offer you over there that Southern can.

CHARLES

(nods)

Like I said, it was sudden. But I still did my homework, and I feel like this is the best school for me to go to.

Vivica abruptly stands to the right of Coach Ware.

VIVICA

Charles you better act like you was raised to have some manners. Listen to what the man has to say.

Vivica and Coach Ware glance at one another, just long enough for Charles to notice. He folds his arms, drifts further away from interested.

COACH WARE

I just got off the phone with our guys over there who manage the team's threads. Everything next year will be sponsored by Reebok. I'm talkin' new jerseys, more gear, some new facilities in the works.

CHARLES

The University has Nike. And to be honest, Coach, that's not the reason I chose them.

(pause)

I want to be a part of something that's great, a place where that mentality has been the norm for as long as I've been alive.

COACH WARE

And you have the opportunity to be a pioneer who set that in motion over at Southern, son. We're takin' this program to the next level and it doesn't happen without you.

Charles shrugs and looks away, hesitant to say what he really feels.

CHARLES

(soft)

That sounds like a like more of an
incentive for you.

Coach Ware barely hears Charles, but the message was loud and
clear. His frustration grows.

COACH WARE

What happened? The last time I
spoke to you about this, you were
all in. I didn't even know you had
an offer from them, I thought--

CHARLES

(sharp)

Why?

COACH WARE

I thought those other offers were
for show, Charles. We talked about
this! Think about what this could
do for our program, what it could
do for you and your mother. It's
time to be a man, now. You can't
just go around makin' decisions
that only benefit yourself.

CHARLES

I agree.

Coach Ware raises his hands in the air again, this time in
careless despair.

VIVICA

I'm tired of this back and forth
bullshit. We're a team, Charles.
You and I.

(pause)

You really embarrassed me today,
you know that?

CHARLES

I embarrassed you? You walked out
on me!

VIVICA

You're supposed to take care of
your family!

CHARLES

You made the entire thing about
you!

Coach Ware tries to intervene the shouting match.

COACH WARE

Okay, now. Let's all just try to
calm down--

Charles stands, gets close to Coach Ware.

CHARLES

And why are you even here? This
whole thing is really fuckin'
bizarre. And pitiful.

COACH WARE

Chuck--

CHARLES

Nah. I bet The University wouldn't
make a house call to guilt my ass
into going there.

Coach Ware walks to the opposite end of the couch, grabs his
BRIEFCASE and approaches Charles, even closer this time.

COACH WARE

They wouldn't. Because they don't
give a fuck about you.

Coach Ware leaves, brushes Charles' shoulder on his way out.
Charles turns.

CHARLES

Is that what this was?

Coach Ware SLAMS the door shut. Charles turns back towards
Vivica, tears nearly falling from her eyes.

VIVICA

You goin' end up all alone, you
know that?

Charles doesn't say anything, is deeply hurt by her
statement. Then, a quick two KNOCKS at the door. Coach Ware
opens it.

COACH WARE

Uhh. Someone's car is blocking me--

Charles answers without turning from Vivica.

CHARLES

(sharp)
I got it.

He stares a moment longer, turns around and leaves.

INT. CHARLES' CAR - NIGHT - MOVING

Charles drives slowly through his rundown, rural neighborhood. The reflected street lights give life to his sullen expression.

On the passenger seat, his cell phone VIBRATES intensely. He looks over and sees "UNKNOWN CALLER" on the screen.

Charles picks up the phone and clicks the side, ignores it.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

A two-pump gas station with large LED lights amidst its pitch-black surrounding. The HUM of the lights mesh with the CHIRP of the crickets. A still night.

JAQUAN BRYANT (20) smokes and drinks next to an old Acura with several other individuals. Music blares from speakers inside of the opened trunk. Their 'party' resumes.

ISAIAH GREEN (18), opens the driver's door, exits the vehicle with a wad of CASH in his hand and approaches Jaquan.

ISAIAH
It's all there.

Isaiah hands it to Jaquan, who first takes a swig out of an open bottle of PEACH CIROC. The two exchange one for the other. Jaquan shuffles a few bills, hands them back.

JAQUAN
That's all you.

Isaiah nods and takes a sip from the bottle. Just then, random headlights approach them.

JAQUAN (CONT'D)
You know who that is?

Isaiah downplays it, shrugs.

ISAIAH
Probably a junkie who sees some niggas on the corner.

JAQUAN
(firm)
You goin' find out?

Isaiah immediately changes his demeanor, gets serious. The random headlights slow down as it approaches the gas station and stops.

Charles opens the door, leans out of the car.

CHARLES

Yo!

ISAIAH

(re: Jaquan)

Oh shit, it's Charles!

Isaiah and a few other individuals hurry over to his car. Jaquan doesn't move an inch.

ISAIAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

What's good, bro? Congrats!

Jaquan sees two Wome walk towards Charles' car. He stops the last one, Cynthia (19).

JAQUAN

Where you goin'?

Cynthia stops and approaches Jaquan. He puts her arm around her and lights a cigarette.

LATER...

Jaquan, Cynthia, Isaiah, Charles, and two others form a circle near the trunk of the car. A bottle and a blunt rotates around them, The music is still BLARING.

Charles' phone vibrates again; the same "UNKNOWN" caller appears on his screen. He ignores it.

Visibly intoxicated, Isaiah holds the bottle of Ciroc high above his head.

ISAIAH

To my boy, Chuck, for goin' to "The U" you know.. puttin' H-town on the map for all these niggas that don't know. Salute!

Isaiah mistakenly pours out a substantial amount of vodka.

JAQUAN

Nigga don't be wastin' my fuckin' shit.

Everyone laughs despite his severe tone. Jaquan looks at Charles, sees that the blunt is passed to him. Charles looks at it for a moment and passes it again.

JAQUAN (CONT'D)

So Chuck, man. What's good with you? You too good to smoke with us now?

CHARLES

Nah, I just gotta report soon. You know? Don't wanna fail a drug test the first day I get there.

JAQUAN

You big time, bro. They don't even be doin' that. Go ahead.

CHARLES

Nah man I'm--

Jaquan addresses MYLES, the teen with the blunt.

JAQUAN

Myles, yo. Give that shit back to Charles. It's not everyday we get to see his face 'round here.

Myles does exactly as he's told. Charles holds it in his hand for a moment before taking a hit.

CHARLES

(coughs)

So what y'all been up to?

ISAIAH

You knew where to find us. Same ol' shit. Where you been at?

JAQUAN

Over there with his White friends. They're done with him now, so he came back here.

Charles COUGHS and chuckles at the same time, hands the blunt back to Myles.

CHARLES

It ain't even like that.

JAQUAN

What's it like then?

Charles has a slight defensive tone in his voice.

CHARLES

I've just... been workin'. Tryin' to get up out of here, you know? I wanted to see y'all before I left.

The two stare at one another, Charles tenses up.

ISAIAH (O.S.)

This nigga crazy. Up at the crack of dawn, puttin' in work on the field. Y'all follow his stories on Instagram?

Everyone takes out their phones simultaneously, very impressed, including Jaquan's Woman.

CYNTHIA

What's your username?

Jaquan has yet to break his stare. Charles feels it.

CHARLES

It's uh...Chuck2Diesel

Jaquan smokes from the blunt, laughs to himself.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

That's funny, Jaquan?

JAQUAN

Nah, nigga. You funny.

CHARLES

How am I funny?

JAQUAN

Comin' around here like you know somebody, acting all buddy-buddy and shit...I ain't seen you since like the eighth grade. Don't even come to Church no more. Now you wanna come back here and kick it.

(pause)

Was the country club in Par Hills closed or somethin'?

ISAIAH

(quick)

Jaquan, relax man--

JAQUAN
Don't tell me to fuckin' relax.
I'll be damned if my reality is
treated like some side bitch,
especially by this sellout.

Charles doesn't react, just nods.

CHARLES
I'm gonna dip.

He daps up Isaiah again.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
It was good seein' you, Isaiah.
Sorry that I haven't been around.

ISAIAH
Don't sweat it, you know we're
proud of you.

CHARLES
I was hoping somebody would be
happy for me.

Charles walks in the middle of the circle, nears Jaquan.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I hope you love the life you got
here, Jaquan. It's not going to
change with that stank attitude of
yours.

Jaquan leans in to Charles as he passes him. Charles avoids his shoulder at the last second, almost trips. He plays it off cool and continues to walk towards his car.

JAQUAN
Don't worry about me. Only real
niggas live this life. Got no place
for Uncle Toms who'll shuck and
jive for a job.

Charles stops and turns around.

CHARLES
You're talkin' real reckless right
now.

Jaquan turns away from the circle, faces Charles.

JAQUAN
Cause I know your ass ain't gonna
do nothin' about it.

Charles stays put, attempts to remain tough. Everyone from the circle catches on.

JAQUAN (CONT'D)

You know what, I am happy that you're gettin' out of here. You're not cut out for this. Even before you left for that school I knew you were soft. A real Oreo-ass nigga.

Charles says nothing, slowly walks back to Jaquan.

ISAIAH (O.S.)

Ay, y'all chill!

Jaquan moves Cynthia away from him and stands facing Charles.

JAQUAN

What's good?

Charles wildly swings at Jaquan's face, misses terribly. Jaquan puts his fists up; the two jitter with increased adrenaline.

Charles swings again and misses. Jaquan hits him directly in the face; blood seeps from Charles' nose. He wipes it with his hand, becomes wide-eye at the amount.

JAQUAN (CONT'D)

I know you ain't ever been hit like that over in Par Hills.

Charles embarrassingly tries to hit Jaquan multiple times to no avail. Jaquan connects with Charles' eye and mouth. Fed up, Charles tackles Jaquan; the two wrestle on the concrete.

CYNTHIA

(cries)

Stop!

Myles records the fight on his phone. Isaiah does nothing but stand there.

On Charles, Jaquan gets on top of him and pins him down.

CHARLES

You're going to die a fucking nobody.

Jaquan punches Charles in the face repeatedly, doesn't stop. Then, Isaiah pulls him off.

ISAIAH

That's enough, man. Damn.

Jaquan pushes Isaiah off of him. The three stand in a triangle, Charles still on the ground.

JAQUAN
(to Isaiah)
Let's go.

Jaquan walks back towards the Acura, grabs Cynthia on the way.

ISAIAH
(to Charles)
I'm proud of you, Chuck. He's right
though, you don't belong here.
(pause)
I'll be rootin' for you.

The music from the trunk speakers cut off. Isaiah looks over, sees Jaquan SLAM it shut.

JAQUAN
Let's go!

Isaiah rushes over. Charles lays on the ground, bleeds from every crevice of his face.

The Acura SKIRTS as it pulls off. Charles can hear the HUM of the LED lights, the CHIRPS from the crickets, and then the VIBRATION from his phone.

He slowly turns his head and sees it shaking on the concrete. He grabs it, sees "UNKNOWN CALLER". Finally, he answers.

CHARLES
(weary)
Hello?

A commanding, inspirited voice of an older man answers. It's the HEAD COACH (59) of The University.

HEAD COACH (V.O.)
Charles Marques Jr. How the hell
are you? Congrats on signing with
us, young man.

CHARLES
(pause)
Coach? How did you get--

The Head Coach laughs, proud and slightly maniacal.

HEAD COACH (V.O.)
You sound tired son. What-- were
you sleepin'?

CHARLES

No, no, I was just...I was just resting my eyes.

HEAD COACH (V.O.)

That's what I like to hear. You're a no nonsense kinda guy. I can't tell you how excited we are to get you down here.

CHARLES

Thank you, Coach.

HEAD COACH (V.O.)

Word around her spreads quickly. As soon as you made it official, we started drawing up some packages for ya. I'm tellin' you, the whole place erupted.

CHARLES

Really?

HEAD COACH (V.O.)

Absolutely, Charles. We're a family here. And as the head of this family, I wanted to be the first one to call and say welcome. I can't wait to see everything you're going to accomplish.

Charles takes it all in, gleams.

CHARLES

Thank you, Coach. I can't wait.

HEAD COACH (V.O.)

We're gonna work you, now. This is a grown man's business. We work hard and love hard, that's what I always say. So! Rest up and we'll see you soon, okay?

CHARLES

Alright, Coach.

Charles removes his phone from his face, there's blood all over the screen. He puts the phone back in his pocket and, after a moment, rolls to his side.

Charles slowly gets off of the floor, makes his way to his car and gets inside. It stalls twice. On the third try, the engine REVS, and Charles drives off into the dark.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE/CAULFIELD LN. - NIGHT

Flashing, red lights glimmer in the far distance, progressively intensify.

An AMBULANCE zooms down the dimly lit, residential street. The sirens BLARE, zoom by a street sign, "CAULFIELD LN."

The ambulance approaches a grand, steel, immaculate gate; the entrance of The University. It slows and turns down the narrow street into campus.

Time speeds rapidly; months of days turned to nights come and go in a matter seconds.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE/CAULFIELD LN. - DAY

Time slows back to normal on a brisk, sunny day; the Sunday of a New England summer. A 2006 Hyundai Sonata stops just at the entrance.

INT. HYUNDAI SONATA - DAY

Charles' looks up at the massive gate of The University, admires its gothic aesthetic. In and around the grounds, he sees no one; an eerie calmness settles.

He pulls out his phone, takes a photo and begins to type on the screen.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY/CAULFIELD LN. - DAY

After a moment, Charles' car turns and slowly drives inside campus.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - HALLWAY - DAY

DING!

The elevator doors slowly open to a long, white hallway with red tile flooring and rooms on both sides.

Charles exits, struggles to carry two large duffle bags and roll a suitcase on his own. Each door he passes has two strips of white tape with surnames crudely drawn on them.

Charles passes an open door with the names "KURNATH" and "LUCAS". FAMILY MEMBERS of TIM KURNATH (19), a brawny, hard-nosed type with sensitive blue eyes, unpack his things.

His MOM sheds tears and smothers Tim. Tim fully embraces her, sees Charles and immediately shoves her off.

Charles continues down the hall, sways his attention back and forth to each side, searches for his last name.

He reaches the last, final door in the hall, room "4D"; "MARQUES JR." is posted above "DIMICELLI".

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - DAY

A cramped space with two mattresses parallel of one another, each placed on a low, wooden frame at opposites sides of the room. A small, restricted path leads to the door.

One side is completely done-up while the other lays barren of sheets, supplies, or any homey touches.

Keys JANGLE from outside. Charles uses his foot to open the door and props it with his suitcase.

CHARLES

Hello?

He pushes inside and immediately drops everything. Charles PLOPS on the barren mattress, catches his breath and pulls out his phone.

ON CHARLES' PHONE SCREEN: A PHOTO of The University gate entrance above the caption, "I'm Home". Below, "300" appears next to a heart icon.

Charles smirks down at his phone, looks up and surveys the room.

Several, uneven mattress pads lay top of the other bed, topped with a thick comforter. Under the frame is an entire snack aisle at Costco.

Charles leans over, unzips one of his duffle bags and pulls out a framed photo: In a pool, an infant Charles hugs a much younger Vivica.

He stares at it for a moment, apprehensive, and places it on the desk at the end of his bed.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

A commotion of fused CHATTER and low volume, rock music PLAYS off in the distance of the massive, open-space.

At the entrance, A GRADUATE ASSISTANT (20s) with no distinct features, decked in athletic gear from head to toe, carries a step ladder and places it just below a large, LED countdown.

He places it on the ground, reaches the highest step, and gets on his tippy toes. Still, he just barely manages to FLICK a switch on the side of the countdown. It reads:

"1,848 HOURS, 43 MINUTES, 23 SECONDS"

Just then, Charles walks inside, hears the sounds of the locker room the moment he enters. He wears workout gear with cleats hanging over his shoulder.

He passes by the Graduate Student, smiles and nods.

The GA doesn't reciprocate, instead gives a look of disapproval and rushes off elsewhere. Charles continues further inside the locker room.

The sounds of commotion increase as Charles walks into the main area; a space no less chaotic than a trading room on Wall Street. Charles is wide-eyed, almost disoriented.

VETERANS make loud conversations with one another; some are dressed, have a towel on, or are completely nude. Identical GAS run around aimlessly, TRAINERS talk to certain players.

Charles continues, sees each position at their own designated area separated, shaped in a "U" formation with the lockers. Veterans gawk as he passes by, some even WHISTLE.

RICH (O.S.)

That's some fucking bullshit!

RICH (21), a tall, cut Black man with tattoos that cover his entire torso, argues with a GA inside of the wide receiver "U".

GRADUATE ASSISTANT

Come on, Rich. I'm doin' my job here. What do you want me to do?

RICH

Have some respect for my brother.
Man's ain't been gone 3 months, and
y'all niggas already forgot about
him.

Charles stops unexpectedly, watches the scene play out. Rich and the GA stand in front of a cleared out locker. The GA holds a pile of random clothes and a full trash bag.

GRADUATE ASSISTANT
We have to make room for the
incoming freshmen. Are they not
supposed to have lockers now?

RICH
Not that one!

Rich notices Charles eavesdropping, looks directly at him.

RICH (CONT'D)
The fuck are you lookin' at?

Charles trips on his own words, tries to say something.

CHARLES
I--I was just. I didn't know--

COACH CLIFF (O.S.)
Charles Marques Jr!

He shifts his attention to a stocky, clean shaven man with a
receding hairline, COACH CLIFF (30s), and rushes over to him.
Coach Cliff reads from a CLIPBOARD.

CHARLES
Yeah, hi. Man this place is huge--

COACH CLIFF
You're supposed to have been
checked in already.

CHARLES
I--oh. I didn't know--

Coach Cliff doesn't look up from the clipboard, swiftly
points his finger towards a door on the furthest side of the
locker room.

COACH CLIFF
Head to the Training Room. You
don't have a lot of time, let's go.

Charles doesn't move quick enough for Coach Cliff.

COACH CLIFF (CONT'D)
(claps)
Let's go, right now! Move!

Full of anxious pep, Charles runs off.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - TRAINING ROOM - DAY

A room the size of a small auditorium full of physical therapy equipment, machines, and tubs. Charles waits last in line between an endless row of hard medical tables.

In front of him, a broad, stubby man-child with shaggy blonde hair, wears a stained cut-off shirt, has the name "DIMICELLI" on the back.

CHARLES
DiMicelli?

FRANK DIMICELLI (19) turns around, faces Charles.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I think we're roommates.

FRANK
Sup' man? Frank. I'm gonna give you
a pound--no homo. Hands are sweaty.

CHARLES
Charles. Nice to meet you.

The two gently hit fists. Charles motions towards inside of the training room. An array of injured Veterans sluggishly do their physical therapy. Some look way too old.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I hope I never have to be in here
again.

FRANK
Right? It smells like chlorine and
mothballs.

CHARLES
Has anyone told you what we're
doing?

Frank shakes his head, holds up his other hand. His fingers are covered in warts.

FRANK
Right place, right time. I just
came in here to get some band-aids.

CHARLES
Oh. Man. That looks--

FRANK

Fucking disgusting, yeah. Ladies love getting their breasts cuffed by a wart-infested hand.

CHARLES

(chuckles)

What?

FRANK

Anyway, there's no way I'll be able to snap if one of these bitches pop. What'd they bring you here for?

CHARLES

I'm a receiver.

FRANK

Oh shit, yeah they were just talking about you. You're the new Ross.

CHARLES

I don't know what you mean. Who's *they*?

TRAINER (O.S.)

Next!

The both of them turn and face forward. Frank looks back at Charles.

FRANK

See you out there, brosef.

Frank heads towards the trainer. Ahead of him, Charles sees a toned brunette WOMAN (22) with a warm complexion. She waves him over.

LATER

The Woman takes a mouthpiece out of a pot, full of boiling water and places it in front of Charles mouth.

CHARLES

What's your name?

ASHLYNN

Ashlynn. Open your mouth, please.

Ashlynn forcefully nudges the mouthpiece further. Charles opens his mouth wide.

ASHLYNN (CONT'D)
Bite down.

CHARLES
(muffled)
I'm Charles.

ASHLYNN
Don't talk while it's in your
mouth.

Ashlynn picks up and reads from a clipboard.

ASHLYNN (CONT'D)
Any injuries or surgeries since
your last updated medical file?

Ashlynn removes his mouthpiece. Charles shakes his head,
smiles and flexes his arms.

CHARLES
Fit as can be.

Ashlynn remains unimpressed.

ASHLYNN
Are you on any medications the
Trainer should know about?

CHARLES
I'm only nineteen.

ASHLYNN
Is that a yes or a no?

Charles shakes his head again and studies Ashlynn as she
writes on the clipboard.

CHARLES
Hey what's your sign? I bet I can
guess.

Ashlynn finishes, places the clipboard over her chest.

ASHLYNN
You don't need to know my sign. But
since I'm sure you saw the necklace
in my cleavage, you know that I'm a
Pisces.

CHARLES
I didn't..that wasn't even--

ASHLYNN

If you need water on the field, let me know. That's about all you need to know about me, freshman.

CHARLES

Well you should know that I'm a Taurus. The perfect match for a Pisces.

Ashlynn walks away, doesn't acknowledge Charles' comment.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(shouts)

I'm stubborn!

He smiles, watches Ashlynn leave. Simultaneously, COACH WEBB (46), A bald, Black man with a backwards visor rushes towards him.

COACH WEBB

Chuck Diesel! What's up, playa?

Coach Webb daps up Charles.

CHARLES

What's up, Coach?

COACH WEBB

I see you been doin' those workouts I sent over to you.

CHARLES

Just tryin' to stay ready, you know.

COACH WEBB

I like it, I like it. I'm excited to see how you do today, man.

CHARLES

(pause)

Today?

COACH WEBB

We're puttin' together a lil freshmen competition to get ya'll better acclimated on how things are done around here. The vets'll be watchin'. This is a great chance to show them what you got.

CHARLES

Great. No problem. What do I need?

COACH WEBB
You got your mouthpiece?

Charles holds it up.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
That's all you need. Get geared up
and ready to go. Afterwards I want
to talk and introduce you to the
other guys. I'll see you out there!

He SLAPS Charles on the shoulder and runs out.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

A run down football field, the remaining patches of grass wet from the sprinklers. The sun casts shadows of the entire team in all black gear, gathered under the goal post.

Centerfield, Coach Cliff BLOWS his whistle violently and waves them over.

Six freshmen, Charles included, all look disheveled in their separate get-up. They stand by the sideline, watch and wait for Coach Cliff.

CAMERON ANGLIN (20), a shorter, muscular black kid with hoop earrings, stretches his hamstring.

CAMERON
Hope y'all are ready to go.

They all see him stretch and follow.

TIM
(worried)
Has everyone been doing those
workouts they sent us?

All nod.

CHARLES
If this workout is anything like
those, we'll be straight.

Tim looks over to Charles, is extremely sheepish.

FRANK
Glad I took a shit before this.

The freshmen watch as two Veteran players run off the field towards a small area, covered by tarp. They take it off and reveal a sand pit.

TIM (O.S.)
The fuck is that?

HARRISON LUCAS (19), A tall, thin-framed bi-racial teen with perfect waves in his hair stands and tucks his cross chain necklace.

HARRISON
Okay everyone, let's bring it in.

He raises his fist in the air; everyone follows, Charles holds back for a moment, looks him up and down. After a brief moment, he joins.

HARRISON (CONT'D)
You guys are family now. Let's stick together and kill whatever this is like it's nothing.

CAMERON
Straight up.

FRANK
Yessir.

Everyone looks on Harrison with reverence; Charles just notices.

HARRISON
This is the beginning of a new day. God has given this day to do as we will. We can waste it or use it for good. What we do with this day is important--

COACH CLIFF (O.S.)
Freshmen, bring your asses over here!

HARRISON
Time to prove ourselves.

The freshmen break and sprint to Coach Cliff.

EXT. SANDPIT - DAY

Coaches, GAs and the entire team gather around the circular zone, completely filled with sand. They CHANT and SHOUT indiscernible remarks.

Charles, Frank and Cameron stand on one side and face Harrison, Tim and DAN HARVEY(19) a lean White male with a strong chin.

Coach Cliff paces in between them with a towel in his right hand, his voice carries above the rest of the mayhem.

COACH CLIFF

Gentlemen! Today we're going to have a little competition. You've been split up in teams. One person from each team is going to meet the other in the middle and grab one side of this towel here. You have one job, to make it back on your side with the towel...by any means necessary.

Every onlooker's CHEERS increase.

COACH CLIFF (CONT'D)

Players, go stand behind the team you think will win! Loser does 100 burpies.

The team separates. Charles watches Rich walk to the opposite side with a handful of others. He continues to look around.

CHARLES

(to Frank)

Is the entire team here?

FRANK

Jesus, I hope there aren't more of them.

COACH CLIFF (O.S.)

Anglin, Kurnath, step up!

Cameron and Tim meet in the middle, each grab a side of the towel.

CHARLES

I don't see Ross anywhere.

FRANK

(shrugs)

The only person I see is Coach White staring at me. Look at that man.

Charles sees COACH WHITE (30s) stare at Frank intensely, as if he wronged his entire family.

FRANK (O.S.) (CONT'D)

He looks like the evil sensei from Karate Kid.

COACH CLIFF
On my count. Ready?
(pause)
HUT!

Cameron makes easy work of Tim; Charles' side CHEERS loudly. Cameron finishes off Tim, holds the towel with one hand; Tim holds for dear life.

FRANK
(re: Cameron)
That man is on crack.

COACH CLIFF
That's one point for this side.
DiMicelli, Harvey, step up!

CHARLES
You got this, dude. You outweigh
him by a ton.

FRANK
(joking)
My mom says I'm big boned.

Frank and Dan hurry to the middle, each grab one side of the towel.

COACH CLIFF
On my count. Ready?
(pause)
Hut!

Frank and Dan both pull as hard as they can, are in a stalemate to everyone's surprise. The Veterans on Charles' side BOO.

COACH WHITE
Are you fucking kidding, Frank!?
Move your fat ass!

Dan's muscle's strain, Frank's face is red. Each of their hands are purple from their grip. Then, one of Frank's warts break. Frank YELPS, releases his grip and falls on his back.

Dan runs to his side and throws the towel in the air, celebrates with everyone.

Blood profusely drips from Franks's hand.

COACH WHITE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ. Get up!

Frank goes back to Charles' side.

CHARLES
What the fuck, dude?

Frank says nothing, sinks his head further towards his chest, ashamed.

COACH CLIFF (O.S.)
All tied up!

Suddenly, there is a shift in the atmosphere; the onlookers hush, move out of the way for someone.

Amongst the crowd, a glimmering, bald head makes it way forward. The Head Coach stands with a commanding presence and pensive expression.

COACH CLIFF (CONT'D)
All tied up, Coach!

HEAD COACH
Who's up next?

COACH CLIFF
Marques, Lucas, step up!

Head Coach makes eye contact with Charles, raises his brow as if saying, "Don't fuck up".

Charles walks towards the center, looks at Harrison as he moves closer; he takes his cross necklace and kisses it.

The two stand in the middle, both look directly in each other's eyes.

COACH CLIFF (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Where's my towel!?

A GA hurries to the middle and places the towel down. The two freshmen simultaneously reach for it. Coach Cliff stops them.

COACH CLIFF (CONT'D)
Hang on, hang on. There's fucking blood all over this thing.

COACH WHITE (O.S.)
Frank's fucking vagina bled all over it, Coach!

Everyone JEERS and LAUGHS at Frank. He looks at the ground, his shaggy hair only partially hides his sullen expression.

COACH CLIFF
Can I get some water or something?

Ashlynn runs to the middle of the sand pit. The crowd WHISTLES, Ashlynn unfazed. She hands Coach Cliff a squeeze bottle, he douses the towel in water.

CHARLES

You were on my side this whole time, weren't you?

Ashlynn ignored him, takes the bottle back from Coach Cliff. Ashlynn leaves the circle as Coach Cliff places the towel down.

COACH CLIFF

Good enough! On my count. Ready?

Charles and Harrison attempt to get a grip of the wet towel, both stare right at one another.

COACH CLIFF (CONT'D)

HUT!

Both pull as hard as they can. Immediately, Charles and Harrison lose their grip and fall on their backs. Each side of veterans go wild.

COACH CLIFF (CONT'D)

Get up! Get the towel to your side!

Harrison bolts for the towel first, grabs it and attempts to get out of the sand. Charles dives for the other side, just barely grabs it.

The two are in a tug of war, Charles on his stomach, Harrison pulling on his back side. He starts to lose his grip and kicks sand in Charles' eye.

CHARLES

Fuck!

Charles closes his eyes, scoops sand in his free hand and grips the towel with both. He pulls the towel closer to him, Harrison lets go.

Charles flips over to his back and stands, holds the towel close to his body and runs. Harrison jumps on him and claws at his arms.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Get the fuck off me!

Charles jolts his head back, hits Harrison in his nose. Finally, he falls backwards and catapults Harrison the ground. Charles' body weight knocks the wind out of him.

Charles immediately gets up and runs to his side: the victor. Veterans CHANT his name and CHEER.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You can't fuck with me! You can't
fuck with me!

Charles looks over to where the Head Coach was standing and is now gone.

COACH CLIFF
Winning team, hit the showers.
Losing side, get em' choppin!

Coach Cliff BLOWS his whistle. The other side begins burpies while Charles' heads in.

COACH WHITE (O.S.)
The fuck you think you're goin',
Francis? You lost, too.

Charles watches Frank hang back and walk towards Coach White as players continue to congratulate him.

Coach White gets right up in Frank's face, his face red from screaming. Frank holds his bloodied hand up, Coach White slaps it right back down.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Coach Webb, Charles, Rich and the four other wide receiver veterans gather around in their "U".

COACH WEBB
That was an excellent display of
character, young man. Good for you.
(re: Rich)
Rich, maybe next time you'll have
more faith in your own unit.

RICH
I don't know this nigga, Coach--

COACH WEBB
Watch your language, son. We don't
call each other that. And if you
keep using it where you're at, the
entire White community will start
to question why they can't say it
themselves.

Rich turns submissive and puts his head down.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)

Now look, Charles there's something you need to know about our unit. We had a loss in our family recently. Ross is no longer with us.

CHARLES

What?

COACH WEBB

He passed about 2 months before you got here. Now we're all still grieving, but if you need to talk to anyone, I'm here, your brothers are here, and I can even call up Father John. He's our team pastor.

CHARLES

I'm okay.

COACH WEBB

Well, just know there's always someone here to talk to if you're ever feeling upset about something. Now our creed is posted right above the entrance. We keep our family affairs internal, understand?

All reply with a firm nod.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)

Good. Your binders were put into your lockers.

(re: Veterans)

Guys, you know from previous years how important that is. It's got everything in there. Schedule, installments, phone numbers, everything. Help Chuck out, please.

(re: Charles)

Great introduction, keep that same energy in everything you do here and you'll be fine.

CHARLES

Yes, sir.

COACH WEBB

Rich, break us down, son.

Rich raises his fist in the air.

RICH
Family on me, family on three.
(shouts)
One, two three!

ALL
Family!

COACH WEBB
Hit the showers, y'all.

Coach Webb leaves, the rest of the wide receivers go to their lockers and undress. Charles admires his silver engraved name plate in the middle of his own.

Rich watches Charles take out his phone and take a photo.

RICH
No phones in here.

Charles turns around.

CHARLES
My fault.

Rich walks closer to Charles.

RICH
You don't even give a fuck, do you?

CHARLES
I didn't know him.

RICH
Ross sat right here not two months ago, and everyone's forgotten. You better respect his name, lil nigga. When you go, someone will do the same.

Rich goes to his own locker, gets undressed.

CHARLES
I'm not going anywhere.

RICH
We all leave at some point.

He points to the LED countdown.

RICH (CONT'D)
You only see that clock go down to zero so many times, before it's your own time.

Rich, now completely nude, heads to the showers. Charles opens his locker and slides out a massive binder. An unmarked LETTER falls out with it.

Charles studies it and places it back inside. He puts the binder down and starts to get undressed when he notices everyone nude.

He covertly pulls out the front of his shorts and looks down, then looks back at everyone else, uneasy. After a moment, Charles sits down and looks inside of the binder.

Soon, an exhausted Frank trudges inside, his hands covered in blood. He makes his way to his own locker and falls flat on the floor.

CHARLES

You good?

Frank's belly further protrudes out as he attempts to catch his breath. He raises his hand, makes a thumbs down.

Soon, an exhausted Frank trudges inside, his hands covered in blood. He makes his way to his own locker and falls flat on the floor.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

You good?

Frank's belly further protrudes out as he attempts to catch his breath. He raises his hand, makes a thumbs down. Charles walks over, takes a knee beside him.

FRANK

Something tells me this isn't going to be all that fun.

CHARLES

(shrugs)

Won't always be. I got you, though.

FRANK

There goes my chance at bein' somebody here. Coach White wants me gone, I can feel it.

CHARLES

We just got here, man. Don't overthink it.

FRANK

(sarcastic)

I knew I should've been a quarterback.

Charles laughs as Franks attempts to roll on his side and get up without using his bloodied hands; it doesn't go so well.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - LOBBY - NIGHT

A miniature museum; the history of The University on full display with glass stained, biblical stories above.

Trophies, newspaper clippings, ancient equipment and photos behind shiny, illuminated glass.

HARRISON (O.S.)
(distant)
I think this is the exit.

A side entrance pops open; Harrison leads Charles and the rest of the freshmen through the maze, being the entire building. All but Charles look disappointed in the room.

TIM
It's like they don't ever want you
to leave this place.

FRANK
Not with your sanity.

The crew splits up in the large, enclosed room. Charles is enraptured at all that's there. Everyone else looks for the exit.

He stops at a row of team photos from every year since the 50's. Every football player looks identically the same as the next.

CHARLES
These guys are immortalized.

FRANK
In a random dusty room, sure.

Charles ignores him, continues to go down the row of photos. He stops at the most recent and sees a handful of familiar faces. Next to Rich's beaming face is a dejected Ross.

FRANK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Sweet Jesus, here it is.
(pause)
It's over here!

Frank finds the obscure exit to the outside; the jet black sky gives no extra light or indication as to anything out there.

Everyone but Charles follows Frank's lead. They eagerly leave the building, Frank stalls.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You comin', amigo?

CHARLES
I'll catch up.

FRANK
Don't stay too long. We gotta be
back here in....

Frank check his phone, slowly moving his body further outside.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Seven hours.

Frank disappears in the darkness. Charles turns around and looks at the photos once more. He peers at all with Ross; his demeanor progressively worsens in each one.

FATHER JOHN (O.S.)
It's funny.

Charles startles, swings his head around and sees Father John lurking in the shadows. He moves into the dim, overhead light.

FATHER JOHN (CONT'D)
I'm in more of these photos than
anyone in this program.

CHARLES
Father John.

Father John holds his hand out. A firm handshake between the two follows.

FATHER JOHN
Charles, am I wrong?

Charles smiles, shakes his head.

FATHER JOHN (CONT'D)
Learning about our history here?

CHARLES
I was looking through some of the
old team photos.
(pause)
Did you talk to Ross a lot?

Father John moves closer to the photos on display, looks down at them all.

FATHER JOHN

Ross was an interesting individual.
He wanted to do everything on his
own, never sought guidance or
wisdom from anyone.

CHARLES

He just looks.... so sad, you would
never know.

FATHER JOHN

I do what I can to help you young
men stay close to God, but
Sometimes It's easier to live
within the fellowship of the
miserable than it is to see the
light of blessings we've all been
given.

CHARLES

Well, Coach Webb speaks highly of
you.

Father John smiles. An awkward beat follows.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I should be getting back. It was
nice meeting you, Father.

Charles heads towards the exit when...

FATHER JOHN (O.S.)

Charles.

He turns around.

FATHER JOHN (CONT'D)

As proven by the decades of photos
with me in them, I'm always here.

Charles smiles, nods and leaves. Father John turns back
around and faces the photos; a resentful expression appears
as he looks down on Ross.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - NIGHT

Charles unlocks the door from the outside, presses inside and
sees Frank in bed, already passed out, a teddy bear tucked
under his arm.

On Charles' own side, his bed is made with Franks's sheets. He sits on the edge of his bed, takes off his shirt and ruffles through his duffel bag and takes out EAR BUDS.

He lays down, ear buds in, and slowly shuts his eyes to a calming, LO-FIX MIX.

Suddenly, Frank jolts awake and leans forward in bed, looks as though he's had a terrible dream. He catches his breath and, after a moment, faces the wall and goes back to sleep.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - DAY

First light; the resting sun just barely illuminates the still campus. A single Mourning Dove HOWLS from every direction.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - HALLWAY - DAY

The sounds of the Mourning Dove's HOWL continues, echoes throughout the empty hallway.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - DAY

A sliver of gray sunlight peeks through the small, square window just below the ceiling, splits the dark room in half.

Frank lies on his side, passed out on his man-made nest of blankets and pillows, SNORES atrociously.

Ear buds in, Charles sleeps peacefully under a sheet that barely goes down to his shin. Then...

DOOF! DOOF! DOOF! DOOF! DOOF!

Thunderous BANGS from the other side of the door. Charles wakes in a frenzied state. A GA shouts from a MEGAPHONE, vibrates the room.

GRADUATE ASSISTANT (O.S.)
WAKE THE FUCK UP!

A SIREN goes off next followed by incessant AIR HORNS. Frank rolls over and buries himself under the covers. Disoriented, Charles moves about the room with his eyes barely open.

CHARLES
(raspy)
Frank.

Charles can't determine where he is under all the covers. He shakes a massive clomp of bedding.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Frank! We gotta go.

Frank peeks his head out of the covers, looks frightened.

FRANK
(disoriented)
Mmmm, fuck? What the fuck time is it?

CHARLES
Get up, dude!

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - HALLWAY - DAY

Charles shoves a half-awake Frank out of their room to an all out war zone of SCREAMS and SIRENS. Players meander and sway out of their rooms, some with no articles of clothing.

Charles and Frank make their way to a dense, cramped elevator of foggy body heat. Both are forcefully shoved out faster than they could get in.

On the stained-tile floor, Frank and Charles search for the nearest exit. Charles sees Harrison scurry into a fire exit.

CHARLES
This way, come on.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

A dark, hollow shaft with the red emergency lights on. Charles looks over the railing and sees what looks to be an endless set of stairs.

CHARLES
Let's go.

Charles takes off; he only gets down five steps before he turns around, sees an apprehensive Frank.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Yo, man. Let's go!

FRANK
I guess this is what are lives are now.

CHARLES

This is what you signed up for.
It'll get better, dude. Now let's
go!

Charles continues down the steps. After a moment, Frank trudges behind.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY - MAIN CAMPUS - DAY

WE speedily make way through a curvy trail of gothic architecture and statues. Far ahead is the massive, contemporary football stadium.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The large, LED countdown shines it's red numbers brightly, reads "30 DAYS, 2 HOURS, 14 MINS, 56 SECONDS"

Steadily, the numbers begin to countdown faster and faster. Time goes by; days feel like hours, hours like seconds. Just like that, 4 weeks have gone by.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

The entire team are all involved in a '7-on-7' drill, now with shoulder pads, helmets, black jerseys, and 4 intensive weeks worth of muscle mass.

Coaches, Players and Trainers stand on the hash marks of the field, surround the drill.

ON DRILL.

Frank gets ready to snap the ball, his fingers taped excessively. A Quarterback, SAM (20s), waits behind. Cameron stands, leaned over next to him.

Both Charles and Harrison get in position on the line of scrimmage, their helmets and numberless jerseys make them unidentifiable.

SAM (O.S.)

HUT!

Frank's mediocre snap wobbles its way into Sam's hands. The two competing Wide Receivers sprint out and into the field.

Tim guards one in particular, gets beaten terribly. Sam throws the ball his way; a perfect route, a perfect catch.

COACH WEBB (O.S.)
 Yeah boy! That's what I'm talkin'
 about!

The Team CHEERS in the background. The catcher takes off his helmet, reveals himself to be Charles and jogs to the sideline.

Coach White marches to Frank while the next rotation of players come in.

COACH WHITE
 Just answer me this one question,
 Frank. Please see if you can do
 this for me.
 (raised)
 Are you ever going to get the
 FUCKING snap down?

FRANK
 (soft)
 Yes, sir.

COACH WHITE
 When!?

Frank stumbles on his words. Coach White marches back to the sideline, still fuming.

COACH WHITE (CONT'D)
 (distant)
 I've 'bout had it with you,
 Francis. I swear to God, I've 'bout
 had it with you!

Frank repeatedly slaps his helmet.

FRANK
 (aside)
 Fuck me!

ON CHARLES

Charles approaches a beaming Coach Webb; the two fist pound. From a distance, Harrison sees their blossoming connection.

COACH WEBB
 Okay showtime! That's some
 impressive stuff right there.

CHARLES
 I had to go up and get that awful
 pass, Coach.

COACH WEBB

Well you did the damn thing, didn't
you? Keep it up, son.

Coach Webb walks elsewhere. Charles looks across the field
towards Ashlynn, coyly smiles. She tries to hold back her own
and shakes her head.

COACH WHITE (O.S.)

Goddammit! Reset! Reset!

ON DRILL

The snap has gone flying right over Sam's head. Cameron jogs
back to his starting position, passes Frank on the way.

CAMERON

Ay yo, you better get this right,
man. Tired of fuckin' running extra
reps 'cause of you.

ON CHARLES

Charles is so caught up in the drama, he doesn't notice The
Head Coach next to him.

HEAD COACH

You look good out there.

Charles swings his head to attention.

CHARLES

Thank you, sir.

HEAD COACH

Webb and I are thinkin' of puttin
in some packages for you this
season, what do you think of that?

Cameron almost trips on his words in excitement.

CHARLES

That would be--!

(calm)

That would be amazing, Coach.

HEAD COACH

You've done a fine job this
offseason, Charles. I need you to
continue to do that with school
coming in the mix, can you do that?

CHARLES

Yes, sir--

HEAD COACH

Just be careful. You remind me a lot of a player we had here not too long ago. All the talent in the world, brought down by the company he kept.

CHARLES

What do you mean?

HEAD COACH

I know everything, Chuck. I see the people you surround yourself with.

They both look at Frank; he gets ready to hike the football.

HEAD COACH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

That kind of toxic energy can destroy you. Remember that.

CHARLES

What happened to him?

HEAD COACH

Hm?

CHARLES

The player I remind you of. Is he still here?

HEAD COACH

Doesn't matter. The point is that he had a promising future, and now he doesn't. But that won't be you.

Frank's snap is perfect. Cameron springs out of his stance and runs ten yards down the field. He plants his foot down, turns his ankle.

Cameron lets out shrill SCREAMS of pain as he holds his entire foot.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ.

The Head Coach hurries onto the field, leaves Charles to ponder.

ON DRILL

Coach White runs to Frank like a raging bull. He clenches Frank's face-mask in his hand and forcefully tugs it closer.

COACH WHITE
(through teeth)
See what happens when we have to
reset because of you?!

Coach White hurls Frank's face-mask back. He falls back,
almost loses his balance entirely.

COACH WHITE (CONT'D)
You're a goddamn embarrassment, you
hear me? A shame to all the
DiMicelli's before you.

Two TRAINERS and Ashlynn rush to the middle of the field to
attend to Cameron.

HEAD COACH (O.S.)
Whoa, whoa, whoa! What the hell are
we doin'?! We're not stoppin' the
whole drill for one guy.
(to Cameron)
Get up, son. You're fine.

Cameron agonizes on the ground; he clenches his ankle tight.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)
Get the fuck up!

Cameron is in so much pain, he doesn't even hear.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)
(aside)
Christ Almighty.
(screams)
Move the drill up twenty, let's go!

Everyone gathers their equipment and begins to head twenty
more yards down the field.

Charles switches his attention back and forth; no one attends
to Cameron, and Coach White continues to scream in Frank's
face.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Charles gets undressed, sheepishly turns to the corner, takes
off his underwear and quickly puts a towel on.

He opens his locker and takes out the unmarked letter. After
a moment, he puts it in his bag.

EXT. MAIN CAMPUS - DAY

The time of Dusk begins to settle on the quiet afternoon. Charles walks down the curvy trail to his dorm, sees early arriving STUDENTS drive and unpack their cars.

He takes out his phone and makes a call, the DIAL TONE barely discernible.

PHONE

(muffled)

Your call has been forwarded to an automatic voice message system.

(Vivica's voice)

Vivica Marques--

Charles hangs up, puts his phone back in his pocket, and continues to walk further down campus.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - HALLWAY - NIGHT

An array of White families wheel in completely filled carts of items into their rooms. Charles passes them by, awkwardly smiles at a few. None of the parents smile back.

He reaches and unlocks his door, but it doesn't budge. Charles pushes again, nothing. Just as he tries once more, Frank swings it open.

CHARLES

What were you doing?

FRANK

(shrugs)

Crying and masturbating.

Charles squints, disgusted, but smiles and shakes his head.

CHARLES

Dude.

Charles walks inside...

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - CONTINUOUS

..and immediately sits on the edge of his bed, slides his bag off. Frank jumps on his own and lets out a large SIGH.

Charles digs through his bag and sees the letter. He stares at it for a moment.

FRANK (O.S.)
I don't know if I can take this
anymore, man.

Charles snaps out of it. Tries to change the subject.

CHARLES
Coach said he's gonna put me with
the one's this season.

FRANK
Did you hear me?

CHARLES
(pause)
I don't know why you let Coach
White get to you like that.

FRANK
(raised)
Do you hear the shit he says to me?

CHARLES
Then get over it, Frank!
(pause)
You can't hold on to this. The
longer you do, the more it's going
to upset you.

Frank puts his head down, says nothing.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Look...talk to Father John about it
or something. You can trust him.

FRANK
Easy for you to say. Everyone here
loves you.

An awkward pause. Charles hears a slight ruckus from outside,
LAUGHTER and loud, muffled speeches.

CHARLES
People are moving in already. Let's
go find something to do.

FRANK
I don't know.

Charles springs out of bed and onto his feet.

CHARLES

I'm serious! Let's go celebrate.
Preseason's over, we're about to
start our first year, man. I'll hit
up Sam for some booze and we'll
head to the football house.

Frank is in a daze, completely elsewhere. Charles takes his
pillow and slams it on top of his head.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Francis!

FRANK

Alright, alright!

Charles rushes out of the door.

CHARLES (O.S.)

(shouts)

Attention! When all of your tight
ass parents leave, there will be a
party at 237 Caulfield Ln. I
repeat. 237 Caulfield Ln!

Frank sinks back down into himself, hopelessly depressed.

INT. FOOTBALL HOUSE - NIGHT

A large, old Victorian home, filled with more alcohol, cases
of beer and garbage than furniture. Drunk teammates and
patrons SCREAM and ROAR in the dimly lit living room.

Charles and Frank stand in the corner and chug from red cups,
Frank visibly drunk. He finishes first.

FRANK

(slurs)

Fuckin' rookie.

CHARLES

I guess we all have our own special
talents.

FRANK

I bet I could out drink bitch ass
Coach White too.

CHARLES

(disinterested)

Probably, yeah.

Outside, Charles sees Ashlynn with two other YOUNG WOMEN.

FRANK (O.S.)

He makes my life a living hell. I bet--I bet if I had a beer with him, he'd lighten up. I'd be like, Coach White....lighten the fuck up bro.

CHARLES

I'll be right back, man.

Charles rushes off towards Ashlynn. Frank looks over to a large handle of whiskey on a nearby table.

EXT. FOOTBALL HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Charles slowly walks up to Ashlynn, taps her on the back of the shoulder. She turns.

CHARLES

You don't like me, do you?

ASHLYNN

Why do you say that?

CHARLES

Cause. I mean. You don't talk to me. Everyone talks to me.

Ashlynn raises a brow.

ASHLYNN

I don't know you.

CHARLES

So get to know me. You know I'm going to be playing this year. As a starter.

ASHLYNN

Congratulations, but, I'm not with the whole football player craze. My body is not another accolade y'all can use for clout.

CHARLES

There's plenty of trophies out there. I want you to be mine.

ASHLYNN

Do you even hear yourself?

Ashlynn walks past Charles to go inside. He grabs her arm.

CHARLES

Hold up. I'm just--

Ashlynn darts a look at his hand, then back into his eyes. Charles realizes, and immediately retreats.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

CRASH! A loud commotion is heard from inside. Rich's voice is heard throughout the uproar. They both rush inside.

INT. FOOTBALL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Two massive LINEMEN grab an intoxicated Rich by his arms. A fold out table is tipped over with cups and glasses broken next to it.

RICH

(slurs)

Get the fuck off me, y'all know what happened. Y'all know what the fuck happened and won't say shit! We all going to hell, on everything.

One of the Linemen places his hand over Rich's mouth.

LINEMEN #1

(shouts)

He's just drunk, don't worry!

They attempt to shove Rich towards the stairs when he sees Charles.

RICH

(slurs)

You! You better watch out lil' nigga. It's comin' for you next. I promise you, watch out. Got the same locker and everything, watch!

LINEMEN #2

(aside)

Shut the fuck up, Rich!

The two Linemen pick him up and walk upstairs. Charles stares, Ashlynn looks around.

ASHLYNN

Where's your friend at?

He snaps out of it, looks around; Frank is nowhere to be found.

INT. FOOTBALL HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ashlynn and Charles stop in front of a large line, formed outside of the bathroom. A PARTY GOER (20s) SLAPS his palm on the door.

CHARLES
What's going on?

PARTY GOER
Someone's taking a shower in there
and I have to piss.

SLAP! SLAP! SLAP!

Charles moves him over and slowly opens the door.

INT. FOOTBALL HOUSE- BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The steam from the shower fogs the pink-interior. Ashlynn stands with her hands covering her mouth, absolutely horrified at what she sees.

CHARLES
Oh my God.

Charles shoves everyone out of the doorway and back into the hall.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Get the fuck out!

He turns around and sees Frank, bare naked in the shower. On all fours, he lays under the water and gags out blood. Charles rushes over.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Stop, bro, what are you doing?!

He pulls Frank's hand from out of his mouth and positions him to sit up. Frank dry heaves as he just barely opens his eyes.

FRANK
I'm a fuckin' loser. I'm a fuckin'
loser.

Charles can't seem to say anything. He turns the shower off and covers Frank with a towel, hugs him tight.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The LED countdown clock shines and flickers brightly on the Team's Creed on the adjacent wall.

"WHAT YOU HEAR HERE, WHAT YOU SEE HERE, LET IT STAY HERE, WHEN YOU LEAVE HERE." shines brightly in red.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Charles stands in the middle of the field in his full practice gear.

COACH WEBB (O.S.)
Chuck! Snap out of it, let's go.

Charles looks over and runs towards Coach Webb.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
You alright?

CHARLES
Yes, sir. Just...a lot on my mind.

COACH WEBB
Look Chuck. I get that school's starting and everything, but the season's almost here. It's time to be a man and prioritize, understand?

CHARLES
Yes, Coach.

COACH WEBB
Let's go, get your damn head out of your ass.

Charles puts his helmet on and runs off.

LATER

In the huddle, Charles looks at all of his teammates.

SAM
Pro-right, Black 42 Y Beam Gator.
On one, ready?

They all CLAP and break out of the huddle simultaneously.
Charles takes his position.

SAM (CONT'D)

HUT!

Charles sprints off the line. He runs an impressive route, gets open. He jumps to catch the pass and is immediately hit by a Defender, smacks his head hard on the ground.

COACH WEBB (O.S.)

You good, son! Now that you got that lick in, there's nothin' to worry about!

Charles' vision is blurry. He squints in agonizing pain as his ears begin to RING. He carefully gets up and walks back to the huddle.

SAM

You good?

Charles looks back up at all of his teammates in the huddle. This time, they're all silhouetted; he can't make out any of them.

CHARLES

I'm fine.

SAM

(shrugs)

Ace Green 671 X Badge-Dolphin. On one, ready?

The huddle CLAPS and breaks once more. Disoriented, Charles jogs to the wrong side.

SAM (CONT'D)

Ace green, Chuck!

He rushes to the other side, gets in position. The RING in his ear continues, now incessant.

FRANK (V.O.)

I'm a fucking loser.

RICH (V.O.)

You better watch out lil' nigga. It's comin' for you next.

HEAD COACH (V.O.)

He had a promising future, and now he doesn't.

SAM

Hut!

Charles is slow to get off the ball, but manages to get open again.

The ball is thrown high. Deuce jumps as high as he can and grabs it with one hand. He tries to come down gracefully, but is too dizzy to do so.

His shoulder hits the ground first. Deuce begins to WAIL in pain for a split second until his head comes flying down even faster.

Lightning STRIKES the moment his head makes contact with the ground.

CUT TO BLACK.

Lightning STRIKES the moment his head makes contact with the ground.

CUT TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK

Frank's voice trembles, exhales a SIGH of exhaustion and relief.

FRANK (V.O.)
I fucking hate football.

FADE IN:

INT. STUDENT SERVICES - DAY

Frank sits, squeezed and uncomfortable in a stiff, brown leather chair. The stuffy, windowless room is offset by comfortable LED lighting and Feng shui decor.

FRANK
I've played my entire life...and
I'm just now realizing.

A THERAPIST (50s) sits directly across from him; her voice is soothing, reassuring.

THERAPIST (O.S.)
Do you feel a sense of relief now
that you've said it?

FRANK
(pause)
I'm embarrassed.

THERAPIST (O.S.)
Embarrassed?

FRANK
How I've done something this long
and not known.

THERAPIST (O.S.)
I'm sure playing all these years
had brought you *some* sense of
happiness. You should be proud of
all that it's helped you accomplish.

Frank doesn't respond. His red, glassy eyes look off to a
corner of the room, ponders.

FRANK
(shrugs)
I've never felt like more of a
failure. That's all I can think
about. That's all being here
reminds me of.

THERAPIST (O.S.)
You are not a failure, Francis. You
are simply encompassed in a world
you've always known to be as a safe
haven. This is the point in
everyone's life when, whatever
that's been for them, begins to
crumble. It's called growth, and
it's uncomfortable.

Several tears escape from his left eye; he quickly wipes them
with his sleeve.

FRANK
But there's no way out.
(pause)
I can't take four more years of
this.

Frank SNIFFLES. He grins, lets out a slight chuckle and wipes
his face again.

FRANK (CONT'D)
(aside)
Jesus, Frank. Get it together.
(to Therapist)
I'm sorry. I don't cry.

THERAPIST (O.S.)
There's no need to apologize.

Her bony hands reach for a tissue box to the side of her. She plucks several out, hands them to Frank. Frank grabs them and wipes his nose.

THERAPIST (O.S.) (CONT'D)

When I'm feeling overwhelmed like this, it's good to put things in perspective. We are not always going to be our happiest selves in anything we choose to do. Life is a lot like football in that way.

FRANK

(sarcastic)

What a life.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

School starting next week can help put things in perspective as well. Plus, I'm sure it'll finally be nice to see your folks with Parent's Week right around the corner, too.

Frank forces a smile, his cheeks now rosy from subdued tears.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - TRAINING ROOM - DAY

Charles looks out to the rest of Campus through a large, pane window. A solar-powered, dancing flower rests on the sill, sways from side to side.

From his point of view, the dancing flower stands still. The rest of the world oscillates. His eyes widen. Then...

ASHLYNN (O.S.)

You hit your head pretty hard out there.

Charles turns, sees Ashlynn on the other side of the examination table with two empty bottle carriers in hand.

ASHLYNN (CONT'D)

Think you might have a concussion.

Charles looks away, turns his attention back to the window.

CHARLES

Just my shoulder. I'm fine.

Ashlynn looks at Charles' apprehensive expression for a moment longer, turns to leave.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I never got the chance to
apologize. At the party the other
night.

ASHLYNN
Look at you. You *must* be concussed.

CHARLES
(playful)
I could've if I had your number.

ASHLYNN
(dubious)
That's okay. But thank you for
apologizing. The whole night was
bizarre...how's your friend?

Charles doesn't respond, is unsure who she's referring to.

ASHLYNN (CONT'D)
Frank?

CHARLES
Oh, I don't know. He's been out of
whack lately. He's so sensitive.

ASHLYNN
All of y'all are.

CHARLES
You don't know me. Isn't that what
you said?

She smirks.

ASHLYNN
Feel better.

Charles watches as she leaves, slowly turns around and looks
back to the window. The flower is back to swaying back and
forth.

PRE-LAP sounds of a clock's TICK TOCK in sync with the
flower's movement. Charles peers closer, the sounds become
deeper, more bass.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Charles continues to stare off into space. After a moment, he
comes to, looks around the bleak office space with no
pictures or windows to the outside world.

In front of him, a DOCTOR (50s) and another TRAINER (29) stand and discuss, their speech muted; all Charles hears are thunderous, methodical TICKS from the clock above the door.

DOCTOR
(hollow)
Alright.

The Doctor approaches Charles, gently grabs his arm.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
How you feelin', Charles?

CHARLES
I'm fine. I think it's just a
stinger.

DOCTOR
I heard you fell pretty hard out
there.

She rotates his arm a bit. Charles WINCES.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Well, it's still in there. But
barely. I'll give you something for
the pain and put you in a sling for
now.

CHARLES
Can I still play?

DOCTOR
(re: trainer)
Write a prescription for twenty,
eighty milligram Oxycodone?

The Doctor puts his arm down as the Trainer leaves. She turns to a cabinet, opens it up. Inside Charles sees MEDICAL RECORDS. The Doctor quickly realizes it's the wrong one.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
I wouldn't advise it, Charles, no.

To her right, she opens another one, pulls out a sling and walks towards Charles.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
But I know how you boys are.

The Trainer opens the door of the office, SHAKES a large bottle of pills and tosses it to the Doctor.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Just try to take it easy with
these.

Charles takes the bottle, stares at its contents.

DOCTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
And I want to see that sling on,
mister. No excuses.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Sling on, Charles exits the Training Room and walks down the hall of the Locker Room. MUSIC plays louder the closer he gets to the center, his ears begin to RING.

Halos are casted around the bright lights; he squints, slightly disturbed.

On all sides of him, members of the Team go about their business, completely heedless of his presence. Sam walks right by, sees Charles' sling, and says nothing.

Charles looks around; it's as if no one sees him at all.

INT. HEAD COACH OFFICE - DAY

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

Head Coach sits at his massive desk, completely covered with paperwork of all criteria. He looks down at one in particular and reads with his thin glasses half on his face.

HEAD COACH
What?

Charles opens the door. He looks at and around the small, open-space loft with luxury carpeting, slowly walks in.

CHARLES
Hey Coach.

Head Coach doesn't look up from his reading.

HEAD COACH
What's up, Charles?

CHARLES
I wanted to let you know what the
doctor said.

Head Coach doesn't respond, is too invested in whatever he's reading.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
They just told me to take it easy
for a couple of days.

Silence. Charles is unsure whether or not he heard.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Coach?

HEAD COACH
The season starts in a week.

He drops his reading glasses on the desk and stands.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)
(shrugs)
I'm not jeopardizing the state of
our offense if I can't count on
you. I'm giving your spot to
Harrison.

CHARLES
Hold on, what? I'll be ready,
Coach. They just told me--

HEAD COACH
They told you? Well whose fucking
body is it?

CHARLES
(sheepish)
Mine--

HEAD COACH
Are you hurt or injured, son?

CHARLES
I don't...What do you mean?

HEAD COACH
Men, Chuck... know the difference.
If you're injured, there's nothing
you or I can do about it. Fine,
whatever. It sounds to me though,
that you don't want it bad enough
and frankly...I'm a little
disappointed.

CHARLES
Coach--

HEAD COACH

I didn't take you as the player who
felt sorry for themselves every
time they got a fuckin' boo boo. Do
you know how much I invest in you?
Huh?

Charles is speechless. Head Coach shifts papers on his desk,
pinches a closed envelope and holds it up.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)

You know how much time and effort
goes into making sure these dumb
ass donors don't know where there
money is going?

He tosses it on top of his desk. Charles looks at who it's
addressed to.

HEAD COACH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

That's your address isn't it?

CHARLES

(aside)

What?

HEAD COACH (O.S.)

When you call mommy and tell her
you're giving up, you might wanna
explain why the checks aren't
comin'.

Charles stands up straight, looks at Head Coach.

CHARLES

I didn't even know.

HEAD COACH

I invest in players that I believe
in. Players who want to be great
and want to be a part of something
bigger than themselves.

Charles quickly removes the sling, the pain masked by his
watery eyes.

CHARLES

I do!

HEAD COACH

You do?

CHARLES
(abrupt)
I'm fine, Coach. Really.

Head Coach raises his hands.

HEAD COACH
Then I expect your ass back in pads
for game week.

Charles quickly nods and anxiously heads towards to door
when...

HEAD COACH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Wait.

Charles stops. Head Coach commands him over with his pointer
finger. Charles stops at the base of the desk, Head Coach
hands him the check.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)
Give this to her when you see her.

Charles looks at the check, then back at Head Coach.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)
Well?

He says nothing, turns around and leaves the office.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sounds of RETCHES and GAGS come from the inside of a stall.

Charles kneels over a toilet, violently vomits, still weary
of how he positions his arm. Tears and mucus stream down his
pain-stricken face.

The RINGING in his ear is piercingly loud. He rolls over to
sit, tries to catch his breath. He takes his prescription
bottle out from his pocket, uncaps it.

Charles shakes a couple oxy's in his palm and swallows them
with ease. He puts the bottle back, takes out his phone
simultaneously.

ON CHARLES' PHONE SCREEN: A PHOTO of The University's
football stadium above the caption, "Almost that time!".
"700" hundred appears next to a heart icon.

INTERCUT

Charles reads the comments under the photo. A look of concern washes over his face.

One reads, "Can't wait to see you play!" Another says, "Everyone's so proud of you!"

He continues to scroll. After a moment, he leans back on the toilet's cistern and stares up at the ceiling.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - NIGHT

Frank lies on his bed, face buried in his iPad. Charles slowly walks in.

FRANK
(lively)
'Sup, chief?

Charles says nothing. He drops his bag and gently gets into bed.

FRANK (CONT'D)
What'd they say?

CHARLES
(sullen)
I'm fine.

Frank looks over to Charles, slightly concerned.

FRANK
I never thought I'd be happy to
start school, man.

CHARLES
Yeah.

Charles looks up at the ceiling.

FRANK (O.S.)
Your mom comin' up next week?

CHARLES
I don't know.

FRANK
My folks said they cooked a bunch
of kielbasa for us to chow down on.
Just wait till you try this shit.

Charles doesn't respond. In a daze, he slowly blinks; a slight smile of euphoric relief.

CHARLES

(slow)

How are you feeling?

FRANK

Much better, honestly. I think I
just needed someone to talk to, you
know?

He looks over again; Charles is fast asleep.

Frank gets up to turn off the light, notices Charles' prescription bottle in his hand. He takes it, examines and places it on the desk.

Frank puts a blanket over Charles and turns off the light.

OVER BLACK

PROFESSOR (PRE-LAP)

Marques, Jr?

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A large classroom with an array of White, attentive students. Charles is leaned over on his desk, fast asleep. A PROFESSOR (40s) takes attendance.

PROFESSOR (O.S.)

(raised)

Charles Marques Jr?

Charles SHRIEKS and springs out of his chair, awake.

CHARLES

(groggy)

Here.

Students giggle amongst themselves. The Professor gives a knowing expression of disappointment as she checks his name off.

PROFESSOR

(aside)

Athletes.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY - MAIN CAMPUS - DAY

University Square; a small courtyard almost completely surrounded by large, gothic buildings.

Charles moves slowly through the now crowded campus. He looks at faces; they all seem to know each other already. Everyone ignores him.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Charles hurries inside, doesn't look at anyone as he makes his way to his locker.

Charles places his bag inside, slowly removes his shirt. He rotates his arm clockwise, slightly winces. Then, he opens his bag and looks inside.

He searches and takes out his prescription bottle, swallows a few more. Charles sees Harrison and Rich enter the locker room, together. He quickly puts the bottle away.

Rich and Harrison laugh and dap up while they enter the Wide Receiver section. Charles ignores them both, sits and puts on a shoulder brace.

HARRISON

(re: Charles)

How you feelin', Chuck? Heard you was nappin' on the field the other day.

Rich laughs as Harrison gets undressed.

CHARLES

You saw that from the scout team, huh? Or were you even on the field?

Rich laughs even harder, Harrison now in a towel.

RICH

Oh shit!

HARRISON

I'm rollin' with the ones now, homeboy.

CHARLES

What? Since when?

HARRISON

Coach just tol' me.

Charles stands from his stool, grabs his bag in the process with his good arm.

CHARLES

Bullshit!

Harrison just smiles, heads towards the showers.

HARRISON
See you out there.

Charles violently tosses his bag in his locker, his pills fall out and onto the floor.

CHARLES
(aside)
Fuck!

Rich notices as Charles picks them, one by one. The image disturbs him.

RICH
Be careful with those, lil nigga.

CHARLES
Fuck do you care?

Rich is taken aback, Charles stands.

RICH
Come again?

CHARLES
And stop calling me lil nigga. You ain't no one's father around here.

RICH
I'm tryin' to look out for you--

CHARLES
You just want me gone like Ross, don't you?

Players in the locker room hear the commotion. All eerily turn and look at the argument that ensues.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Caught you slippin' the other night. Isn't that what you said to me?

Rich moves in closer to Charles.

RICH
(soft)
You don't know what the fuck you're talking about.

CHARLES
You're probably glad.

Rich grabs Charles' shirt, slams him up against the wall, his eyes as wide as humanly possible.

RICH

You think I give a fuck about playing? About any of this shit? My nigga died... trying to make the same people happy who could give a fuck about what happened to him.

CHARLES

What happened to him?

Rich looks around; everyone's eyes are on them.

RICH

I'm here to get my degree and bounce. You keep running your mouth, and the both of us are out of here.

He lets go of Charles and walks away. Just like that, everyone goes about their business. Charles puts his prescription bottle in his locker.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Charles jogs out of the locker room and looks out on the field. Only a handful of Players, KICKERS and GA's get ready for practice.

LATER

Charles stands in front of an automated, football-throwing machine. A GA stands behind it, turns it on.

Charles tries to catch a pass. The moment he raises his arm, he SCREAMS in agonizing pain. He falls to his knee, clenches his shoulder.

GRADUATE ASSISTANT (O.S.)

What the fuck?

Charles sees a handful of other Players come out from the locker room, one in particular being Harrison. He immediately stands.

GRADUATE ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

You good?

CHARLES

Turn it back on.

The Graduate Assistant turns on the switch and loads another ball. Harrison is nearly there.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - PREGAME TUNNEL - DAY

Frank trots behind other teammates to the field. Coaches and GAs make their way out towards the stadium.

Frank sees Coach White at the end of the tunnel. His expression immediately turns.

FRANK

(nods)

Coach.

COACH WHITE

I hear you been complaining to other coaches about me, Frank. Who else you been talkin' to?

FRANK

What?

Coach White grabs his pads by the collar and pulls Frank closer. Frank resists.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Don't fuckin' touch me--

COACH WHITE

Get the fuck back here when I'm talking to you!

Frank allows himself to be thrown to the wall, terrified. He looks around, no one else is there.

COACH WHITE (CONT'D)

If you ever talk to anyone, inside or outside of this program about me again, you're going to wish I kicked you off the team.

(pause)

You'll beg me to.

FRANK

Fuck you.

Coach White smiles, walks out of the tunnel.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Charles continues his attempt to catch passes. Just then Harrison approaches behind the machine and puts on his helmet.

HARRISON
Ay, lemme get sum real quick,
Chuck.

Charles ignores him. Harrison goes behind him, gives a playful pat on his bad shoulder.

HARRISON (CONT'D)
Don't be greedy. Come on, now.

Charles grabs Harrison's face mask with his good arm and violently shoves it backwards.

GRADUATE ASSISTANT (O.S.)
Alright, you two!

HARRISON
What's your problem, cuz?

Harrison punches Charles' bad shoulder. He loses his temper entirely and tackles Harrison.

GRADUATE ASSISTANT
Fucking stop before the coaches
come over here!

Harrison easily gets on top of Charles, sees him protecting his shoulder.

HARRISON
Fuckin' bitch ass nigga.

He holds Charles down and tugs at his shoulder. Charles SCREAMS. Then, a jarring POP sound. Harrison's arm lays limp, completely out of its socket.

Coach Webb sprints over, pulls Harrison off of Charles.

COACH WEBB
(re: Harrison)
What the hell, son?!

HARRISON
He started it!

Charles cries silently, tears stream down his face.

COACH WEBB (O.S.)

Ashlynn!

WE stay on Charles. After a moment, a third shadow is casted on him.

ASHLYNN (O.S.)

Coach?

COACH WEBB (O.S.)

Get the cart. He needs to go to the hospital.

(re: Charles)

We're gonna get you some help, Chuck.

Coach Webb and Ashlynn try to help him up. He sees Harrison smile, the Head Coach in the far background.

CHARLES

(soft)

I'm fine.

The two continue to help Charles off the field.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(screams)

I'm fine, Coach! Get the fuck off me.

He jerks away from them both.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Get the fuck off of me, I'm good!

Several GA's come rush to the scene; it takes four of them. Everyone else simply watches as Charles is forced off of the field.

ON HEAD COACH

From a distance, he sees the whole thing. After a moment, he blows his WHISTLE.

HEAD COACH

Game week, fellas. Let's get it going!

The rest of the Team cheers. Head Coach walks off.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE- WAITING ROOM - DAY

Charles sits in a cold, plastic chair, his face still swollen from crying. Elsewhere, Coach Webb and Ashlynn stand side by side.

COACH WEBB

I have to get back to practice.

ASHLYNN

I can stay with him.

Coach Webb nods, looks on Charles with apprehension.

COACH WEBB

I'm worried about him. Players get hurt like this and....well, they don't know what to do with themselves. Their whole world crumbles.

Ashlynn is at a loss of words, unsure whether she should say anything at all. She watches his look.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)

Just, keep an eye on him. Okay?
Call me as soon as they tell him what's going on.

ASHLYNN

Will do.

Coach Webb leaves. Ashlynn walks over to Charles. After a moment, she sits next to him, says nothing.

ASHLYNN (CONT'D)

(pause)
You know--

PA (V.O.)

Mar-kees Junior?

Charles immediately stands up and rushes out of the waiting room.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - SCAN ROOM - DAY

A plain room of sheer white with a massive CT machine in the middle of the tiled floor.

Now in a gown, Charles grips his arm, in pain. He walks over to his bag, unzips it and searches for his pills.

His search becomes frantic after no success. He turn the bag over completely and lets everything fall out. Pencils, crumpled up paper, and Ross' letter.

Charles drops his bag, slowly bends down to pick up the letter.

He rips it open and takes out a series of letters ripped from a composition notebook.

He begins to read. The more he does, his expression moves from focused to horrified. Tears well in his eyes as he turns the page.

Then, a PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT (30s) walks in the room. Charles doesn't even notice. The PA's lips move, Charles hears nothing but inaudible FUZZ.

Charles drops the letter on the table next to him. The PA motions over to the CT machine, guides him there.

He lays on the machine's bench. It slowly moves inside of the machine. Charles looks catatonic.

INT. CT MACHINE - CONTINUOUS

His wide frame is scrunched together; the tip of his nose barely brushes against the top. Still, no expression.

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT (O.S.)
(inaudible)
Hang tight. Shouldn't take too long.

The bench comes to a stop. Charles is completely surrounded and encapsulated in what looks like an all white grave. A pause.

Suddenly, neon red lights begin flashing inside, followed by the most excruciating, loud BUZZING noise. Charles flinches but has nowhere to move.

His SCREAMS and CRIES are hushed by the loud sound of the machine.

Charles violently wiggles his body, mistakenly hits his head on the top of the machine. He WINCES in pain.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A printed, MRI slide of Charles' shoulder is posted on an LED viewer.

The Doctor FLICKS the machine on, it's light illuminates brightly and shine on Charles' melancholic expression.

Ashlynn leans on the wall, her arms crossed and looks at Charles, unsettled.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
Well. Charles...looks like you and
that sling'll be best buddies for
the next seven weeks.

Charles says nothing. A moment passes; The Doctor sits on a medical stool, slides next to him, is excessively optimistic.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
We'll get you in surgery and
reattach that labrum of yours as
soon as possible! You'll be
back...squaring off and...catchin'
that pig skin in no time!

Charles looks at the Doctor, then back at the ground. The Doctor gently places her hand on his good shoulder.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Hang in there, Charles. It's not
the end of the world.

She goes to the table and closes Charles' record, places it inside of a cabinet and closes it.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
I'll go notify your coaches and
schedule an appointment with our
surgeons.

She looks at Ashlynn to head to the exit, opens the door...

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Be right back.

And leaves. Ashlynn holds back.

ASHLYNN
Is there something else bothering
you?

Charles shakes his head, no. Ashlynn slowly leaves the room.

CHARLES
Thanks.

Ashlynn turns, gives an uneasy smile, and closes the door behind her.

Charles immediately hops off the examination table and swings open the cabinet. He looks at the extensive record system, each one marked by last name initial.

His eyes stop at "D". Charles pulls on one, four fall out on the table and over the floor. Frantic, he continues to search inside.

Charles rushes to another cabinet, carelessly pulls records from their slot, makes a complete mess.

LATER..

PLOP! A medical record labeled, "DOUGLAS" is tossed on the table; a plethora of disorganized documents lie under.

Charles stands in the now disorderly room of misplaced files, medical instruments and opened cabinets. He quickly sifts through Ross' dense file.

Inside are multiple documents from different physicians: Medical reports, prescription receipts, therapy session accounts.

INSERT: 'UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICES' DOCUMENT:

'PATIENT SUFFERS FROM BIOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND SOCIAL DISTRESS. EXCESSIVE DRINKING, EXPRESSES THOUGHTS OF SELF HARM'

BACK TO SCENE

Charles hears the door open. He quickly turns and faces Coach Webb and the Doctor, both immensely startled at the scene.

DOCTOR
What did you do!?

Wide eyed, Charles holds up Ross' file, shakes from stifled adrenaline.

COACH WEBB
Charles. What...are you doing?

CHARLES
Did you know?

COACH WEBB
Did I know what--

Charles' voice cracks, tries to hold back tears.

CHARLES
(screams)
About Ross!

He slams the record back on the table, some documents fall to the ground. Coach Webb's expression immediately changes; a look of shameful enlightenment. He turns to the Doctor.

COACH WEBB
Will you excuse us, please?

DOCTOR
Absolutely not! I'm going to lose my job!

COACH WEBB
I'll take care of it,
just...please.

Coach Webb escorts her out of the room and closes the door. He takes a moment, SIGHS while facing the door.

Coach Webb turns around and faces Charles, expressionless. He moves suddenly, Charles flinches.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
So I'm the bad guy now?

CHARLES
He left a letter in his locker.

Coach Webb stops, shrugs and bends over to clean the mess.

COACH WEBB
There's more at play here than you realize. I don't expect you to understand, but. We're talking people's jobs, livelihoods...Look, I don't expect you to understand that a freak accident of one player would've put this entire program under wraps.

CHARLES
(stern)
He killed himself.

Coach Webb stops, grabs a piled stack of documents and places it on the desk. He doesn't look at Charles.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
All the Coaches knew?

Coach Webb doesn't answer, bends down again and picks up documents; it's answer enough.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

The team?

COACH WEBB

Not everyone.

CHARLES

(disgusted)

Fuck, what does his family think?!

COACH WEBB

(pause)

His family thinks...he died doing what he loved, Charles. And, honestly, that's a much better way to remember someone than the truth.

Charles shakes his head, has heard enough. He walks towards the exit; Coach Webb quickly moves in the way.

CHARLES

Let me out.

Coach Webb raises his hands in front of him.

COACH WEBB

What are you going to do?

CHARLES

What are you going to do?

COACH WEBB

(pause)

Chuck. You are not. Thinking. Clearly here.

Charles looks at Coach Webb's slight sign of desperation; a weakness he's never seen from him.

CHARLES

I'm thinking that none of you actually cared about us to begin with. Am I trippin'?

COACH WEBB

You're tripin'.

CHARLES

Then let me out.

After a moment, Coach Webb puts his hands down and stands to the side. Charles rushes out of the office, leaves Coach Webb with his mess.

INT. HEAD COACH OFFICE - NIGHT

Charles violently swings the door open from the outside, rushes in. He heads towards Head Coach's massive desk, sees no one sitting there, just stacks of papers. Charles stops.

CHARLES

Coach!

He looks around; only half of the Head Coach's large office is illuminated. Charles walks to a trophy case. The collection is extensive; some awards go back thirty years.

HEAD COACH (O.S.)

What can I do you for, Charles?

FLICK! The Head Coach leans on a wall, hand next to a row of light switches. Behind him, a couch, lamp and coffee table filled with SCOUTING REPORTS come into view.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)

You got some fuckin' balls, bargain'
into my office like this.

Charles is hesitant, much more daunted than he thought.

CHARLES

What are you doing?

The Head Coach's calm, his demeanor eerie remains. After a moment, he motions to the coffee table behind him.

HEAD COACH

I don't just get to be the head of
this place. I got letters of intent
to send out, that scouting report
is bullshit, everyone's class
schedule...I got eighty fuckin' of
you's I gotta look after.

Charles remains silent, unsure of himself now. He can feel his breaths tighten.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)

(annoyed)

Is there something you want?

Charles gathers all of himself that he possibly can.

CHARLES
Ross Douglas, he...he killed
himself. I found a letter he left
in his locker...

Charles swallows, grows strength from frustration.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Right before he did it.
(pause)
And I know that you covered it up.
I know... that everything that has
been said about him since. Its all
been a lie.

The Head Coach squints, questions Charles' demeanor. The
silence makes Charles uncomfortable.

HEAD COACH
And you know all of this, how?
Because of what some random letter
said? You know how many fake
letters I send out daily?

CHARLES
His medical records add up to what
he said. How you made him feel.

The Head Coach says nothing. He takes off his reading
glasses, points them at Charles and turns to the coffee
table.

HEAD COACH
Come sit over here.

The Head Coach sits on his couch, leans to the side and opens
a CIGAR BOX next to a square DECANTER SET. Charles slowly
follows.

The Head Coach cuts a cigar as Charles arrives.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)
Sit down, shut the fuck up, and
listen to me.

He ignites a match and lights the head, inhales. Charles
slowly sits, Head Coach exhales.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)
Right before I came to you about
our expectations of you this year,
I said one thing. Watch the company
you keep.

(MORE)

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)

No matter how hard any coach tries, there's always some jagoff's on the team that just don't get with the program. They bitch, and they moan, and they whine, and then complain when things don't go their way. Some kids refuse to grow up, and their attitudes only makes their situations worse.

The Head Coach takes another drag, pours himself a drink of whiskey.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)

Now.

(exhales)

By some...unexplainable phenomenon, these kids always seem to find one another. The goddamn... fellowship of the miserable. Their combined, toxic energy can warp the severities of their reality, I mean really? You guys are fuckin' spoiled. You don't have it that bad. When I was your age, I would've killed to have a speck of the privilege you all get. Ross...he, he just didn't get it. We pushed him to be better, and he just cracked. He fell under pressure, checked right into the fellowship, burrowed there.

(shrugs)

It was only a matter of time.

Head Coach takes a stern gulp. He takes another drag, Charles still tries to process everything, can't look at Head Coach.

HEAD COACH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

We're a family, Chuck. Families push each other to be better, or there's no getting better. That day you came in here? I challenged you to be better. And I saw you on that field. You were fucking hungry.

Charles's teary eyes finally look up. Head Coach points his lit cigar directly at him.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)

You took on that challenge. You took it on because you wanted to be better. For your team, for you family.

He wipes his eyes and face, sits up straight.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)

Now you still have an amazing opportunity on your hands. But you gotta figure out what you want out of your time here. To reach your full potential, or be a part of the fellowship.

Head Coach sits back, takes a fourth drag of his cigar. Charles face clouds in the smoke of his exhale. When the smoke clears, Ross' letter is on the coffee table.

Charles stands.

CHARLES

I'll handle my own family affairs.
The checks come to me from now on.

HEAD COACH

They'll be in your locker at the end of every quarter.

Charles takes the long stroll to the exit. The Head Coach ashes his cigar, places it inside of the ash tray. Then, he sits up, puts his reading glasses on and gets back to work.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Charles quickly paces down the hall, stops and sees the empty locker room to his left; The LED countdown shines its red light in the darkness.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - SHOWERS - NIGHT

Charles stands nude in the middle of the massive, communal showers, the obscure countdown his only source of light. Steam rises from every corner.

He grips his shoulder, lets the hot water run on the back of his head. After a moment, Charles hugs himself fully and shuts his eyes. He cries.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - NIGHT

Charles gently opens the door from the outside; the sliver of light from the hall creeps inside first. Charles hurries inside, closes it shut.

In the pitch black, he lies on top of his bed, places a cover over his body and stares at the ceiling for a long moment, hears Frank SNORE. Then, his eyes slowly start to close.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - DAY

Charles lies fast asleep. Gray sunlight comes in from the small window, the visibility of the room barely affected.

FLICK!

Frank turns on the overhead light. Charles squints, puts his arm over his eyes.

FRANK (O.S.)
Dude. We gotta talk.

CHARLES
(groggy)
What?

FRANK
Did you tell someone I was talkin'
to a shrink?

Charles is barely awake. He drifts back to sleep; Frank shakes his bad shoulder.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Wake the fuck up, dude.

Charles' eyes spring open, flinches and jolts his body away.

CHARLES
Fuck, what! What?

FRANK
I told you I was going to get help.
Who did you tell?

CHARLES
I told Coach Webb.

FRANK
(desperate)
Why did you do that?

CHARLES
I thought he could've helped,
Frank! The fuck is wrong with you?

FRANK

You knew he was gonna fuckin' tell someone else about it, dude. Now Coach White is even further up my ass.

Charles pulls the cover off of himself, sits and leans over the side of his bed, rubs his eyes.

FRANK (CONT'D)

My parents are coming today, my fuckin' dad, man. He's gonna tell my dad about this? I can't tell him I saw a fucking therapist, dude.

CHARLES

Then stop seeing the fucking therapist, Frank!

Frank is speechless. He puts his finger in Charles' face.

FRANK

This is your fucking fault!

Charles swats it away, stands up straight.

CHARLES

No. Stop blaming me for being a little bitch all the fucking time!

FRANK

I can not....tell my dad that I'm seeing a therapist. He'll fuckin'... send me off somewhere, I don't know.

CHARLES

Grow up, Frank. Rise to the occasion, be a fuckin' man and just deal with it.

Frank and Charles stare at one another. After a moment, Frank grabs his bag from the floor and makes a swift exit.

Charles SIGHS, plops back on his bed and gently takes off his shirt.

EXT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - DAY

Frank walks out of the dormitory, fastens his bag, walks out a couple of steps. He looks to his right, sees The University's football stadium amongst the gothic buildings.

Frank looks to his left, sees The University's Gates; cars zoom by on "CAULFIELD LN." just outside.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY/CAULFIELD LN.- DAY

Frank stands just at the entrance, looks through the busy traffic, has no idea which way to go.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY/CAULFIELD LN. - DAY

Late afternoon. Frank sits on the side of the gate with heavy, dry...lifeless eyes. He hoists himself up, stands for a moment, and turns back inside The University, trudges.

Frank continues to walk down the path, further in campus. Then, he takes a sharp right into his dormitory.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - HALLWAY - DAY

Charles, sling on, stands in a large hallway the size of a small lobby at the very top of the stadium. Other members of the team lounge about, all in matching polo shirts.

Charles peeks inside of a larger room, the Skybox:

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - SKYBOX - DAY

PARENTS greet one another, take their seats inside.

He sees Vivica, beaming, sit at a table directly in front of a PODIUM.

A short, wide man with a thick mustache, DON (50s), Frank's father, pulls a seat out for his wife, CHARLOTTE (50s).

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - HALLWAY - DAY

Charles turns away from the door, sees Rich near the window, looking out at the sunset.

Charles walks over, stops. Rich doesn't notice his presence.

CHARLES (O.S.)
You were Ross' roommate last year,
weren't you?

Rich doesn't respond, avoids eye contact. After a moment, a slight nod.

CHARLES (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You knew this whole time?

RICH
(pause)
My moms is in there all by herself
right now. Out of my three
brothers, I'm the only one she has
left. I have to graduate.

The door to The Skybox opens; members of the team walk towards the entrance. Rich turns to Charles.

RICH (CONT'D)
Like I said, lil nigga. Just keep
it movin'. There's no love in this
game.

Rich walks inside, leaves Charles staggered and perturbed.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - DAY

Frank bursts inside the room, on the verge of tears. He breaks down, punches and throws everything in sight.

HEAD COACH (PRE-LAP)
To the parents of these fine young
gentlemen I have the pleasure of
coaching this upcoming season, I
want to be the first to welcome you
to Parent's Weekend, and toast to
one hell of an offseason.

Frank tosses his bag across the room. It hits the side of Charles' desk; his oxy pills fall out and onto the ground.

HEAD COACH (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)
I want you all to know that your
boys are treated no differently
than any of my own kin.

Frank looks over, calms. He gets on his knees, picks them up.

INT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - SKYBOX - DAY

A large, open-space banquet room that overlooks the stadium field. The entire team sits, all dressed in matching polo-shirts. FAMILY MEMBERS of each player sit by their side.

Tracey sits next to Charles, a seemingly matured, well-sculpted man than at his signing day. They all look to Head Coach; he stands at a podium.

In the corner, Coach Webb makes tentative eye-contact with Charles. Charles closes his eyes, subtly nods.

HEAD COACH

We're a family here. Families push each other to be better, or there's no getting better.

He looks directly at Head Coach, painfully recognizes his speech.

HEAD COACH (CONT'D)

I challenge your kids, my family, to be better. To be better for your team, to be better in your community, to be better men in general.

Char nervously looks about the room for Frank; Don holds his cell phone to his ear, irate. He shushes Charlotte's nervous whispers.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - DAY

Frank holds a handful of oxycodone pills in the palm of his hand, grabs the bottle with the other one.

HEAD COACH (PRE-LAP)

Here, my staff and I, we help your kids take on the challenge of reaching their full potential.

An APPLAUSE.

Frank leans back and sits on the floor, props himself on the entrance. On the floor, his cell phone VIBRATES. The lit up screen reads, "DAD".

Frank stares at the pills with hopeless eyes.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM/MAIN CAMPUS - NIGHT

Members of the team and their parents walk outside and converse; some give hugs, some gifts, all are happy to see one another.

Charles walks out with Vivica, sees Ashlynn with her parents elsewhere. She smiles at him, concerned

VIVICA (O.S.)
That man sure loves to hear himself
speak, damn.

Charles halfheartedly smiles back, walks with Vivica.

VIVICA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
But I see he's got ya'll right.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY - MAIN CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

They both stop, now away from the stadium entrance. Vivica looks at Charles, puts her hand on his face.

VIVICA
Look at my grown ass son with his
shirt all pressed.

CHARLES
You happy I came here?

VIVICA
It's three extra tolls and a whole
lot of gas money, but it's growin'
on me.

CHARLES
You probably still have more from
the checks here than the total at
Southern's though, huh?

Vivica freezes, her jaw tightens.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I'm not upset, mom. But the checks
are staying here. I think you can
afford to take off work and come
see me once in awhile.

Charles' eyes swell, his voice breaks.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I can't do this without you. I need
you on my side.

Vivica grabs Charles, hugs him tight.

VIVICA
You're right, I'm sorry. I'm so
sorry, Charles. You know I love
you.

(pause)

(MORE)

VIVICA (CONT'D)

You know, your mother didn't make many good decisions when she was your age. And you shouldn't have to pay for that. That money is yours to do what you want. I shouldn't have to depend on you for things like that, baby.

CHARLES

We've always been a team. This way you'll have some time off.

The two embrace for a long moment.

VIVICA

I love you.

Charles SNIFFLES, breaks off the hug and quickly wipes his face.

CHARLES

Can't let them see me like this.

VIVICA

A man can hug his mother, too, now.

Vivica tries to playfully hug Charles, he avoids her, smiles.

Elsewhere, Ashlynn hugs her father goodbye; her family leaves. She turns and looks at Charles.

VIVICA (CONT'D)

Alright, go on. I'll see you tomorrow night at the game.

Charles walks off, heads towards Ashlynn near the entrance.

VIVICA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And tell that girl she better watch those eyes!

He looks back at Vivica, wide eyed, slightly embarrassed.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM - CONTINUOUS

Don rushes outside while he talks on the phone, Charlotte's arm gripped in his other; he's irate.

DON

(into phone)

You think it's funny to worry ya mother like this, to keep me waiting?

(MORE)

DON (CONT'D)
I swear ta God, you betta' have a
good fuckin' excuse tomorrow. I
hope ya mother gets to you first.
(to Charlotte)
Let's go, Char.

Don tightens his grip, rag-dolls Charlotte; she does nothing.

Just then, Ashlynn and Charles meet in front of the entrance
to the stadium.

CHARLES
My mom says hello.

ASHLYNN
You tell her about...everything?

CHARLES
I told her it would be half the
season before I'm healthy. Might
have to redshirt.

Ashlynn's expression slowly turns to disappointment the more
Charles speaks.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Might not be the worst thing, I
guess.

ASHLYNN
So you're in a good place then?

CHARLES
(shrugs)
Relatively. I'm bummed that I can't
play but...now I can just get
better. Bigger, faster, stronger,
you know.

Ashlynn doesn't respond, just peers back at him.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
What?

ASHLYNN
I'm worried about you.

CHARLES
(smug)
Finally?

ASHLYNN
No. Seriously.

Charles' flirtatious grin vanishes.

ASHLYNN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It bothers me how hard all of you
come down on yourselves. You don't
tell anyone what's wrong.

CHARLES
I just... don't want to focus on
the negative. It's toxic.
(pause)
Look, I'm fine, alright? Everything
is going to be great. From now on.

ASHLYNN
Nothing is always great, Charles.

Ashlynn hugs Charles; his stoic demeanor slowly melts.

ASHLYNN (CONT'D)
When it isn't, I really hope you
tell someone.

Charles hesitantly hugs her back. The two separate.

ASHLYNN (CONT'D)
See you tomorrow.

Ashlynn walks away. Charles watches her leave for a moment,
turns the opposite direction and heads to his dorm.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Charles slowly walks down the long passage of warm,
colorfully decorated doors, mixed student CHATTER from behind
every one.

Someone plays music entirely too loud. A RESIDENTIAL ADVISOR
(24) has her door open. A large bowl of CANDY sits right
inside. She smiles and waves as Charles walks by.

RESIDENTIAL ADVISOR
(giddy)
Welcome to your first week on
campus!

Charles waves, doesn't stop walking. He finally reaches his
room; the only bare door that resembles a past, isolating
time. He takes out his key, places it inside.

Charles turns the knob, but the door doesn't budge. He
presses on the door, this time with more force. It barely
budges.

He catches a glimpse of something on the other side of the door, holds the door open with his foot.

CHARLES
Frank, you in there? Move
whatever's blocking the door, man.
Come on.

No response. Charles tries to push the door in further; the obscure object is deadweight.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I don't have time for you to be
masturbating right now. Open the
door.

Nothing. He heaves his good shoulder into the door, slightly moves the object; it comes back at the door with a THUD.

Then, Frank's back slides into the doorframe where Charles finally sees him on the floor.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
(aside)
What the fuck--
(raised)
Frank?

Charles frantically pushes the door further in, tries to squeeze in the crack.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Frank!

Charles winces in pain as he uses both shoulders to push the weight of Frank's limp body on the other side. It still barely budes.

INT. CHARLES' DORMITORY - ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The door is wildly shoved in from the outside.

Frank lays unconscious on the floor and blocks the entrance with his body, the prescription bottle empty, the oxy's gone, foam at the mouth.

CHARLES (O.S.)
Somebody fuckin' help!

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Charles sits in the same, firm cushion chair, now inside of a completely empty, dimly lit setting.

Through the sensor doors of the entrance, he sees Vivica frantically rush from her car to the hospital.

SWOOSH! The door's slide open just barely in time. A strong look of concern on her face, Vivica scurries towards Charles. He stands, slow.

Vivica snatches Charles' body to hers, hugs him tight, says nothing. Charles takes his good arm, grips her tighter.

Then, automatic doors to another wing swing open. Don and Char lumber inside of the waiting room, Don with his arm over her shoulder, consoles her. They sit.

Charles let's go of Vivica, walks towards Frank's parents.

CHARLES

Mr. And Mrs. DiMicelli?

They both look up to him, Don stands.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I just wanted to apologize.

DON

Who are you?

Char slowly rises from her seat.

CHARLES

Charles, I'm Frank's roommate. The one that...found him.

Char cracks a smile, fights off tears.

CHAR

We should be thanking you.

Don HUFFS in relief, brutally clasps Charles' hand and shakes vigorously.

DON

Thank God for you, son.

Vivica walks towards Charles, stops behind him. Char collects herself; she's overwhelmed with emotion.

DON (CONT'D)

Doc says you got there just in time. That knucklehead in there owes you his life.

CHAR

I just don't understand how this could've happened. Shouldn't..shouldn't someone be here? Where is everybody, where is his coach?

DON

(obvious)

They gotta game tomorrow, Char.

CHAR

(sharp)

What difference does that make? One of their players swallowed a bottle of narcotics, Donald!

DON

Alright, alright. Just...try to calm down.

Don places both hands on her shoulders, Char immediately jerks her body away, turns and points her finger at him.

CHAR

No--This is our son Donald! Don't tell me to calm down now. What the hell was he doing with oxycodone?

CHARLES (O.S.)

(pause)

They were mine.

Don and Char both look at Charles, concerned, curious.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

They were prescribed to me for my shoulder and...I lost track of them. I'm sorry, I feel like I'm part to blame here.

A brief moment of firm composure. Then, Char breaks down.

CHAR

I still don't understand why he would do this!

(re: Donald)

This is your fault.

DON
Charlene--

CHAR
You pushed him too hard. You pushed
him too hard...and now our son is
in the hospital.

DON
The kid gets no discipline anywhere
else...you've been coddling him
since the womb!

Char rushes off.

DON (CONT'D)
Where you goin'?!

CHAR
Don't follow me!

Don SIGHS, lets her go. Vivica puts her hand on Charles'
shoulder.

VIVICA
This isn't your fault, Charles.

DON
Kid, you got nothing to apologize
for. This whole thing is just...
embarrassing. I tell his mother all
the time to stop baby'in him. Now
look where that's got him.

Don shakes his head in genuine disgust. Charles is staggered
at the fact.

CHARLES
Frank was seeing a therapist.

Don widens his eyes, swallows hard.

DON
About what?

CHARLES
Coach White is really hard on him,
Mr. DiMicelli. You should know
what's been going on--

DON
(dismissive)
Ah, boo-hoo!
(MORE)

DON (CONT'D)
They're hard on all of ya's, for
christ sakes. I don't see you
cryin'.

CHARLES
Not like this. They punished him
like...they hated him. I've seen
it. I see it all the time.
(realize)
It was right in front us all, this
entire time...but they pushed Frank
to do this. You need to do
something about this.

Don taps his foot on the tile floor repeatedly, wipes his
bright red face.

DON
(embarrassed)
We'll figure it out. Excuse me.

Don nods and quickly hurries after Char, towards the exit.

VIVICA
All of that's true?

CHARLES
It's been a rough summer. For some
more than others.

VIVICA
(pause)
How are you, really?

Charles nods his head as he looks down, attempts a smile.

CHARLES
I'm gonna go talk to him, okay?
I'll see you tomorrow.

Vivica embraces her son, dubious of his words.

VIVICA
I love you.

CHARLES
I love you too.

They break; Charles walks to the automatic doors.

VIVICA (O.S.)
Charles.

He turns back, faces Vivica.

VIVICA (CONT'D)
You've never wanted...you've never
had thoughts of that, have you?

Charles waits; A moment passes. He shakes his head, no.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANK'S ROOM - NIGHT

Frank lays in a narrow, gatch bed positioned in the middle of the room. The over-bed lighting is dimmed, the rest of the space barely visible.

Charles slowly opens the door from the outside, peeks his head in. Frank stirs.

CHARLES
'Sup man?

Frank slowly nods.

FRANK
(groggy)
'Sup. Man.

Charles enters, makes his way towards the bed.

CHARLES
How you feelin'?

FRANK
(pause)
Livin' the dream. And you?

Charles edges closer to the bed.

CHARLES
I'm really glad you're still here.

Frank doesn't respond, looks down at his protruding feet.

FRANK
(sarcastic)
Can't wait to see the look on
Coaches' face when he finds out I
couldn't even kill myself right.

He HUFFS, Charles doesn't flinch.

CHARLES
He's gonna pay for that bullshit,
man. I'll be right there with you,
too. I've seen everything they did.

FRANK
(dimissive)
Don't worry about it.

CHARLES
No, seriously. He's not gonna get away with this. Your dad and I talked about the shit he's been putting you through.

Frank shoots his eyes back on Charles.

FRANK
Course you did.

He fidgets in bed, looks as far away from Charles' face as possible.

CHARLES
I had to tell him how badly they've been treating you, dude. Your dad's going to get his ass fired--

FRANK
(raised)
Yup! Thanks, Chuck. I'm sure Don will do exactly that. Everything's great.

A long pause; Charles waits, expecting. Frank glances in his direction.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Something else?

CHARLES
What's going on with you?

FRANK
You want me to thank you? For not minding your own goddamn business again? My dad's not going to do a fuckin' thing.

CHARLES
I'm trying to help you, Frank. I'm your friend.

Frank sits up, stares directly at Charles.

FRANK
Since when? You saw how things were going down from the beginning and you never said anything.
(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

Coulda said somethin', but you didn't... because you agreed with them. All you saw was a waste of space.

(pause)

You're not trying to help, you're just fuckin' bored cause you got nothin' to do. Don't act like you didn't want this to happen too.

CHARLES

That's not true--

FRANK

But! Thanks to you, I'm either the suicidal whistleblower or a suicidal hack. They'll be put away...somewhere back home, where the nobodies go. Right where I belong.

(pause)

Don't worry about me, Chuck. You'll be just fine. You're just like the rest of them.

Charles' bewildered expression looks down on Frank's deadpan.
A moment passes.

CHARLES

I..am not... like one of them, Frank. They don't give a fuck about any of us.

FRANK

No?

CHARLES

No! This isn't even the first time this has happened!

FRANK

Sounds like you know somethin' about somethin'. I guess you actually can keep a secret.

Frank COUGHS. Charles pauses, swallows his words.

FRANK (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Look. Just leave it alone, alright? Stop volunteering others to be martyrs. In six months, you'll be back to normal.

CHARLES

I'm not just going to let this go.

FRANK

Well then, you're fucked either way. Either way, someone's gonna get hurt. Just keep doin' you, Charles. You're good at it.

CHARLES

(pause)

What are you gonna do?

FRANK

I'll just... deal with it. It's what I've been told works.

Charles is at a loss of words. Frank shuffles in bed, finds a light switch on the side.

CHARLES

I'm sorry, Frank. I'm going to make this right.

Frank FLICKS the switch; the lights go off.

FRANK

You can't. Just get out.

Frank turns over and lays on his side, back to Charles. After a moment, Charles leaves.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE/CAULFIELD LN. - NIGHT

A quiet, empty street. Decorative street lamps shine only the small circumference around them. In the far background, small headlights appear.

INT. CHARLES' CAR - NIGHT - MOVING

Charles drives down Caulfield Lane, the passing street lights reveal his deadpan expression.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE/CAULFIELD LN. - NIGHT

Charles' Hyundai Sonata approaches the gate. It slows, turns down the narrow street inside and continues.

INT. CHARLES' CAR - NIGHT - MOVING

He slows down the car, stops and looks out of the passenger window.

Charles sees his dormitory; STATE and CAMPUS POLICE cars line the curb. He looks further up the building, stops on his own room; the lights remain on.

He looks back at the road, now uneasy. Charles SIGHS, puts his car in gear and drives.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM/MAIN CAMPUS

Charles' door SLAMS shut; he walks towards the empty stadium.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

Completely empty; a calm stillness resides over the massive, open-dome. Charles continues to walk out on the field, his shoes CRUNCH on the fresh turf.

Charles stops, now directly in the middle. He cautiously attempts to squat with one arm and sits on the emblem.

He looks out to all of the empty seats, hears nothing, sees nothing but the night sky. He lays down, stares at the stars. Suddenly, his phone VIBRATES.

On his phone screen, A call from "Coach".

Charles SIGHS, continues to let it ring. Slowly, his eyes begin to close.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

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DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

SUPER: 4 YEARS LATER

Thousands of FANS fill every seat in the stadium, their impassioned CHEERS stir into a shuddering ROAR.

ON FIELD

Two teams compete against each other, both in their respective huddles, The University on offense.

CLAP! The offense and defense huddle break simultaneously; every player gets in position. Then:

HUT!

The QUARTERBACK takes the snap, shuffles back three yards while the play commences. He looks down field; after a moment, he hurls the football.

The perfectly spiraled football zooms through the air. A PLAYER from The University sprints down the field, number "9" on his jersey, dark visor obscuring his face.

He continues, the ball nears close to the end zone. The Player dives for it, secures it in one hand and falls right on his shoulder: Touchdown.

A thunderous CHEER. The Player hops up, unfazed, and celebrates alone while his teammates run to him. The player takes off his helmet, faces the crowd.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

What a stunning catch by The U's
very own senior captain, Charles
Marques Jr!

Charles waves to the deafening crowd. He sees every type of fan sport his number, a proud Vivica amongst them. She cheers relentlessly.

Charles looks up to the screen, sees his own face and sprints off the field.

LATER

Halftime. Both teams remain on their opposing sides of the field. They and the boisterous crowd remain attentive to six individuals in the middle of the field.

A large MAN(50s), too decrepit for his age, wears an old University polo. He speaks to the crowd through a microphone.

MAN

Twenty amazing years, I've been able to come back here, my alma mater...and give out this prestigious award to one of the fine gentlemen this team continues to produce.

To the Man's left, the Head Coach-- an entirely different man with identical features-- stands next to Marcus and Vivica.

HEAD COACH

(whispers)

Way to go, kid.

MAN (O.S.)

And this year, I'm sure it comes to no surprise, the individual who has best served as the archetype for this.

Vivica leans in closer to Charles.

VIVICA

I'm so proud of you, baby.

MAN

A man of his team, a man of his community, a man who pushes himself and others to be the best version of themselves. Charles Marques Jr.

Charles smiles, beams with pride.

MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

This year, we've done something special for one of our fallen brothers. Five short years ago, Ross Douglas was taken too early from us, doing what he loved to do. And that was playing for this team.

The crowd cheers louder. Charles' smile vanishes; he slowly begins to lose his color

MAN (CONT'D)

Charles, if you would come and
receive your award, we've brought
someone here today that would love
to present it to you.

The Man reveals the older couple, standing on the opposite
side of him. A man and woman, eyes full of gleam and weary,
MR. and MRS. DOUGLAS (50s) walk towards him.

Mr. Douglas holds a large, golden TROPHY. The center piece is
a stature of Atlas.

MAN (CONT'D)

Mr. and Mrs. Douglas are here
everybody, give them a round of
applause!

The Man guides Charles and Ross' parents to where he's
standing. Mrs. Douglas delicately hugs Charles.

MRS. DOUGLAS

Congratulations, young man.

Mr. Douglas shakes Charles' hand, hands him the trophy with
tears in his eyes.

MR. DOUGLAS

Enjoy the love! You've earned it,
son. Congratulations.

He takes the trophy. Charles looks at Mr. and Mrs. Douglas,
their proud, smiling faces. He pans his attention towards the
Man, Head Coach, his mother; all wear proud expressions.

Charles turns around, faces the crowd; he has every person's
undivided fixation. They all love him.

Charles stands there, pale. Tears stream down his eyes; he
waves, cracks the most weighted smile.

FADE TO BLACK.