

Racing Twilight

by
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Inspired by a True Story

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EXT. PLAYGROUND - EVENING - 1992

A group of twelve-year-old BOYS play basketball on a playground. The setting sun blankets the rural North Carolina landscape in a soft, orange glow.

One BOY possesses skills far exceeding those of the other children. He is by far the most focused and tenacious player on the court; deftly dribbling through a crowd and pulling up for a jump shot. The shot soars towards the rim and...

CUT TO:

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY - PRESENT DAY

A basketball drops through the rim, snapping a net made of chain-link. INMATES scurry around a basketball court; some are shirtless, others wear washed-out grey prison uniforms. The words **Piedmont Correctional Institution** are written on the back of the shirts, PRISON NUMBERS are on the front.

Among them is A WHITE MAN, the only white man on the court. He is twenty-eight, scruffy, shirtless and intense with a slightly faded tribal tattoo wrapping around his left arm. He has a fire inside him; one that fuels his intense play.

He is easily the best player on the court with mesmerizing ballhandling skills. He weaves through the sea of black flesh and grey uniforms and attacks the basket, scoring.

On the next play, he intercepts a pass, streaks the length of the court with the ball and is leveled by CRAWFORD, an enormous convict that has six inches and forty pounds on him.

The man tries to stand up but Crawford shoves him to the ground. The man shakes his head, tries to get up again and is shoved to the ground even harder. Unable to contain his anger, he leaps to his feet and unleashes a flurry of punches that send Crawford sprawling.

The white man is struck from behind by another INMATE and falls to the ground. Crawford walks over, wipes a drop of blood from his nose, stares down at him and smiles. He winds up, kicks him in the face and we BLACK OUT.

INT. RALEIGH ARENA - NIGHT - 1998

A YOUNG MAN elevates and dunks the ball; a significant accomplishment for a six-foot white kid. The sellout CROWD at Raleigh RBC Center erupts, rising to their feet.

PA ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Drake Paxon.

The scoreboard reveals that the game is between **Waynesville** and **Hickory** for the **1998 North Carolina High School State Championship**. Hickory leads by eight points with twenty-four seconds remaining.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
Paxon with the steal and the stuff and that should just about wrap it up. The McDonald's All-American Drake Paxon with twenty-four points, ten assists, four steals and now, one state championship to bring with him to Duke University, where Coach Krzyzewski has said that he will start next year as a freshman. What a player and what a future this young man has.

DRAKE PAXON'S face floods with joy as the BUZZER SOUNDS and he celebrates with his TEAMMATES. We see the same tribal tattoo on his left arm; the ink is practically still wet.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - 1998

Drake and his TEAMMATES pour into a party packed with high school STUDENTS. The party explodes as Drake hoists the trophy above his head, SCREAMING in triumph.

Drake and several of his teammates inhale shots and chase them with beers. Drake is a boisterous and charismatic kid. He is already noticeably drunk when JEZZIE PHELPS walks over and hands Drake a double shot.

He puts up a meager fight but she coerces him and he sucks it back. She is sexy and confident but there is something in her eyes that is not entirely trustworthy.

There is an awkward moment when MELANIE LAMB walks past the table. Drake and her lock eyes, sharing a gentle but tenuous glance. Jezzie glares at Melanie, a pretty but insecure girl who is too passive to meet her glare. Melanie scurries off.

Drake pours himself another enormous shot and he inhales it. His eyes glaze over and he is now completely plastered.

DRAKE
State champs baby!

The party erupts and Drake SCREAMS in drunken elation.

INT. PAROLE BOARD CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A GUARD opens the door and the man from the basketball court, an older DRAKE PAXON, shuffles into the room with fresh STITCHES above his right eye. He takes a seat in a lone chair in the middle of the room.

He sits across from a desk with seven members of the PAROLE BOARD behind it. Among them is KEVIN GRACE, in his forties with a dry, scholarly quality about him. He mechanically peruses the relevant facts of Drake's FILE:

Name: Drake Paxon
Age: 28
Conviction: Rape - First Degree
Sentence: 20 Years
Years Served: 10
Disciplinary Infractions: 46

KEVIN

This being your first parole hearing, I'll give you a few pointers. When prisoners are released before the completion of the maximum sentence, it is usually for, and perhaps you've heard this term before, 'good behavior.' Forty-six disciplinary infractions in ten years does not constitute 'good behavior.' What happened to your eye?

DRAKE

Playin' basketball.

KEVIN

Playing basketball or getting beat up after starting a fight while playing basketball?

DRAKE

I didn't start it. It was... retaliation for...

KEVIN

A flagrant foul?

DRAKE

Something like that.

KEVIN

They don't call many flagrant fouls in the yard do they.

DRAKE

No sir.

Kevin stares at Drake reflectively.

KEVIN

I used to watch you play. My son went to Ashville. He actually played against you once. You were a hell of a ball player.

DRAKE

Thanks. Still am.

KEVIN

I'm sure you are. I'll bet you're the best player at Piedmont Correctional. And that's all you will be for exactly ten more years if you don't start behaving. See you next year.

DRAKE

That's it?

KEVIN

That's it.

Drake stands tentatively and walks out.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Kevin Grace enters WARDEN SHELBY KRANTZ' office. He is in his fifties; bitter but covered with an artificial charm.

WARDEN

Sit down Kevin.

KEVIN

Yes sir.

He hands Kevin a folder as he sits.

WARDEN

I got this today and they're looking for a guinea pig.

Kevin flips through the packet.

KEVIN

What for?

WARDEN

Help push the program. Try and, motivate state legislature to pad the budget, justify their fiscal policy and how much gets allocated to corrections. If it works, maybe it goes federal, who knows.

KEVIN

WC huh? My son went there... played a little basketball for 'em. They want someone from Piedmont?

WARDEN

They do. And they want a real criminal, violent offender preferably.

KEVIN

Why's that?

WARDEN

White collar criminals are not as prone to recidivism...and they're usually easier to rehabilitate.

KEVIN

Says who?

WARDEN

Studies. Polls.

KEVIN

The same polls that say you could unseat Senator Breyer should you choose to run?

The Warden smirks.

WARDEN

Them polls say alot don't they. Look, if this works, we come out looking like actual rehabilitators for a change. Rehabilitators get funding, respect and yes, even elected. So pick me a winner.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kevin Grace sits on his couch, sifting through a mountain of FILES. In time, he eventually reduces the pile to TWO FOLDERS. He holds them in his hands and contemplates them.

EXT. WORKOUT AREA - DAY

Drake POUNDS ON A HEAVY BAG while other INMATES LIFT WEIGHTS behind him. He is thin but cut and he has quick hands. Kevin Grace walks over and speaks to him from the other side of a barbed, chain-link fence. He is holding a FOLDER.

KEVIN

You're droppin' your left. That leaves half your face open. Maybe that's why your right eye's all cut up.

Drake stops working the bag, looks at Kevin and grins.

DRAKE

Actually, my eye's all cut up because a three hundred pound yeti kicked me in the head. But you're right, I do drop my left.

KEVIN

What's your in-house record?

DRAKE

Thirteen and twenty-two.

KEVIN

Stellar. But that's only thirty-five fights...my file says forty-six.

DRAKE

That's one on one. Sometimes the other guys like to join in, you know. And my record's a little worse when they do.

He grins again and then starts working the bag again.

DRAKE

That why my hearing was so short? Because of the fights?

KEVIN

Yes and no. No one ever gets out for 'rape one' at their first hearing. But you'll have a chance next year. A remote chance...but a chance...if you can behave yourself.

He slides the folder underneath the fence. Drake stops working the bag, walks over and looks at it.

DRAKE

What's this?

KEVIN

A new state program...and if all goes well, you'll be my posterchild. There's also GED paperwork, a college application.

DRAKE

I don't understand...

KEVIN

Pell grants have always been available to ex-convicts for educational opportunities and they don't discriminate against any type of conviction...not necessarily something I agree with. Piedmont is working with Western Carolina State University to provide a bridge from prison to college. Should you get accepted, you would start school immediately after you're paroled.

Drake stares at him in disbelief.

KEVIN

However, it is my job to grant parole to convicts who I think have been rehabilitated. So if you get in one more fight, I will not be convinced that you are. And your ass will stay right here.

DRAKE

But if I...behave?

KEVIN

Then maybe you get out. And if you get your GED, maybe you go to college. There would obviously be conditions; community service, urine tests, psychotherapy.

Drake looks at him, his face awash with apprehension.

DRAKE

What makes you think I wanna go to college?

KEVIN

Maybe because before you came here, you were a B student who got an eleven hundred on his SATs. Maybe because Western Carolina has a Division One program and a coach who likes walk-ons. Or maybe because when you die, you want to look in the mirror and see a man that was more than just the best basketball player at Piedmont Correctional.

Kevin walks off and Drake looks down at the folder.

INT. MESS HALL - EVENING

Drake and PATRICK MCBRIDE inch along the cafeteria line. Patrick, overweight and in his forties, is a congenial loudmouth.

PATRICK

You can't ball with the bruthas in here man. You just can't. They're gonna fuck with you and they're never gonna respect you and no matter how good you are, you're never gonna be their boy. And if by some fuckin' miracle you do become their boy, you piss off your own so you're fucked either way.

DRAKE

It's just basketball man.

PATRICK

And this is just prison. How many fuckin' times have I told you? And every time, you come back all banged up. In the real world you may be able to shatter racial boundaries with your cross-over and inspire ebony/ivory harmony with your jump shot like a fuckin' Steve Nash Messiah or something, but not in here. In here you're just another white bitch and when you go to the rack, they are gonna put you on the asphalt every time.

DRAKE

So...what then?

PATRICK

So fuckin' stop dude. Play handball or something, stay away from 'em and do your time. Unlike me, you got more paroles comin' to you so straighten your shit out. It don't matter what I do, I'm gonna die in this place anyway. But that's alright. I kinda like it here.

Patrick is elbowed in the head and immediately dragged into a brawl that has rapidly enveloped the entire mess hall. It is a frenetic mosaic of punches, flying food trays and sprawling bodies. Two SHOTGUN BLASTS pierce the air but the violence persists, swallowing Drake and Patrick.

INT. CELL BLOCK - NIGHT

The Warden, bookended by two correctional OFFICERS, walks down the center of a cellblock. The inmates stand at attention inside their cells with the doors opened.

WARDEN

To say that I expect better behavior from convicted felons would be giving you all a great deal of undue credit. But when I do not get what I deem to be acceptable behavior from the animals that occupy my prison, consequences must follow. Seventy-two hour lockdown.

The doors SLAM SHUT and the Warden and his subordinates walk out of the cellblock. They pass Drake and Patrick's cell.

PATRICK

Three fuckin' days man. Unreal.

Patrick notices the folder Kevin gave Drake on the bed.

PATRICK

What's that?

DRAKE

Nothing.

Drake dribbles his basketball while Patrick picks up the folder and starts flipping through it.

PATRICK

Pell grant forms, undergraduate application for Western Carolina State University? What is this shit? You doin' this?

DRAKE

I don't know. Maybe.

He dribbles more tenaciously, becoming increasingly anxious.

PATRICK

Maybe? Shit man, might as well give it a shot.

DRAKE

What am I gonna be a thirty-year-old freshman who just happens to be a convicted rapist? I wouldn't even stand a chance.

INMATE (O.S.)

Shut up with that fuckin' dribblin'!

Drake pounds the ball to the ground and then stops.

PATRICK

Looks like you got a chance right here. You don't take it, that makes you a pussy. You a pussy? You never struck me as a pussy. You've gotten your ass kicked by every con in this cage but I ain't never seen you back down. Did you just become a pussy? Are you like...a born-again pussy?

DRAKE

Call me a pussy again, see what happens.

PATRICK

Fill it out.

DRAKE

No.

PATRICK

Fill it out.

DRAKE

You want me to fill it out?

PATRICK
Fill it out.

DRAKE
Fine, I'll fill it out.

Drake grabs the folder from Patrick and opens it.

PATRICK
That's a good pussy.

Drake drops the folder, jumps on Patrick and drags him onto the floor. Patrick, who has fifty pounds on Drake, quickly gets him in a headlock and tightens the grip. Even though they are both laughing, Drake can barely breathe.

PATRICK
Come on, give your daddy some sugar.

DRAKE
Get off me.

PATRICK
Come on beautiful. What happens in Piedmont stays in Piedmont.

DRAKE
Get the fuck off of me!

Patrick lets him go and rolls off.

PATRICK
Cocktease.

Patrick wheezes and grunts as he pulls himself onto the top bunk. Drake sits down and a wave of hope washes over him.

DRAKE
I heard the coach at Western Carolina likes walk-ons.

PATRICK
Walk-ons? For what? Basketball?

DRAKE
Yeah. And when I stop and think about it, that's uh, that's the only reason really.

PATRICK
Reason for what?

DRAKE

For me to get out of here. Gettin'
another chance to ball...that might
be all I got left in me.

Patrick does not respond. Drake grabs the folder off the floor and starts flipping through it.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT - 1998

Jezzie Phelps runs out of the bedroom, topless, carrying her shirt. She is crying hysterically as she fights through the living room, which is packed with partying students.

JEZZIE

Move! Move! Get the fuck away
from me!

She runs out and SLAMS THE DOOR behind her. The party dies and people stare at each other in shock. Drake emerges from the bedroom; naked with SCRATCHES on his neck and chest.

His face is consumed with an indecipherable cocktail of emotions as he looks at everyone in the party. He is about to say something when nausea strikes. He rushes into the bathroom, SLAMS THE DOOR and we hear GAGGING SOUNDS.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT - 1998

Six POLICE OFFICERS barge into the house; the party is still in progress but has thinned out considerably.

OFFICER

Where's Drake Paxon.

One drunk, petrified GIRL motions to the closed bathroom door and the officers make a b-line for it. Inside, he finds Drake passed out on the floor; vomit lining the toilet seat.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT - 1998

The cops drag Drake out of the front door. He is barely conscious, clad only in a pair of jeans, and cannot walk on his own. Dried vomit is caked to his face as the officers throw him in the back of a cop car and SLAM THE DOOR.

INT. CELL - NIGHT

Drake lies in his bed wide awake. He sits up in his bed, gazing out into the quiet, slumbering cellblock. His eyes are heavy with sleep deprivation and issues unresolved.

Moonlight seeps into his cell, illuminating the folder on the floor. He looks at it for a few moments and is about to pick it up when he hears Patrick TALKING IN HIS SLEEP.

PATRICK

Again. Again. Come on, make it count faggot. All you got, come on. That's it. Now it's your turn fuckhead.

Drake stands and gently shakes Patrick who is lying with his back to Drake. Patrick is breathing heavily, his voice cracking with a restrained rage.

DRAKE

Hey. Hey, wake up man.

His eyes are slightly open and it is unclear if he is awake or sleeping. His anger is palpable but detached; trancelike.

PATRICK

Come on, you can do better than she did, can't you? Get that belt off. That's it. Again. Again. Turn it around, use the buckle to...yeah. Again! Again!

Drake shakes him harder and Patrick stops talking.

DRAKE

Hey. Hey. You're dreamin' again.

Breathing heavily, Patrick nods and grunts but does not turn to face Drake.

DRAKE

Same dream?

Patrick nods again, the expression on his face unchanged.

PATRICK

I'm gonna have the same fuckin' dream for the next fifty years. Then I'll die...right in this cell...And then I'll have it forever...when I see that fucker in hell.

Drake looks at him with concern but there is nothing he can say. He pats him on the back and sits back down on his bed. As he listens to Patrick's breathing slow down, he picks up the folder and grabs a pen off a bedside shelf. He stares at the forms briefly and then starts writing.

INT. CELL BLOCK - DAY

The DOORS SLIDE OPEN, ending the lockdown.

OFFICER
On the line!

A bitterly sarcastic CORRECTIONS OFFICER addresses the inmates as they emerge from their cells and stand at attention in a row.

OFFICER
Hope you enjoyed your little
vacation. What say we try and
behave like good little monkeys
from here on in, huh? Line moves!

The inmates all exit to their right.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Drake shakes a few defenders and drains a thirty foot jumpshot. When he goes back on defense, Crawford sets a moving pick on Drake, sending him crashing to the ground.

CRAWFORD
Get up bitch. Step yo. Step.

Drake eyeballs him, his eyes filling with rage. He stands up and is about to swing when he turns and walks off the court.

CRAWFORD
Where you goin' faggot? Get your
bitch ass back here All-America.
Cheerleader rapin' mutha-fucka.

The inmates laugh and jeer at him as he walks off.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Drake practices ballhandling drills, removed from the rest of the prison population. A basketball game is in progress but he stays away. Some inmates lift weights, others sit on bleachers; reading, smoking, watching Drake.

The oak trees looming over the yard have begun turning orange and some of the inmates are wearing heavier clothing. Drake works on a variety of moves; cross-overs, spin moves. He works vigorously and methodically while Patrick watches.

INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Warden and Kevin Grace watch Drake working out through the window of the Warden's office.

WARDEN

You should have given them a few options.

KEVIN

You never said anything about options, you asked for a guinea pig, I picked him.

WARDEN

And why exactly did you pick him?

KEVIN

He was a smart kid and he's got...something.

WARDEN

And what might that be?

KEVIN

He's a hundred fifty pounds and he's fought cons twice his size. He never backs down.

WARDEN

So what does that prove? That he's violent and stupid?

KEVIN

That he's a fighter. And that no matter how many times he loses, he's got...something inside him that tells him...

WARDEN

That tells him what?

KEVIN

That he still might win.

The Warden shakes his head.

WARDEN

How long's he been playing by himself.

KEVIN

Two months. No infractions.

Unimpressed, the Warden shrugs and sits behind his desk.

KEVIN

It's a step in the right direction Warden. The Parole Board likes steps.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Drake works on his ballhandling drills by himself and he is showing subtle signs of improvement. The oak trees have shed their leaves; the sky greyed by the first days of winter. A group of inmates have gathered on the basketball court and some stare at Drake. Crawford shouts to him.

CRAWFORD

Yo we need one more, come get some. Come on faggot. What, you scared?

Drake ignores them and continues working on his cross-over.

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY

Monitored by a GUARD, Drake sits in an empty board room taking an exam. The cover of the test reads:

North Carolina General Equivalency Diploma

EXT. YARD - DAY

Snow falls; two inches having already accumulated. Drake shoots baskets while Patrick rebounds for him. Patrick is visibly irritated as Drake drains shot after shot after shot.

PATRICK

You done yet man? This is like the blizzard of the century and you wanna ball. Come on, you never miss any way. (yelling) I can't feel my fucking hands!

DRAKE

You know what you sound like?

PATRICK
What? What do a sound like?

DRAKE
You sound like a pussy.

PATRICK
Fuck you.

DRAKE
You do man. You sound exactly like a pussy. Not even a normal sized pussy though, you're like a megapussy. A superpussy even. Do you have superhuman pussy powers.

PATRICK
I'm goin' inside?

DRAKE
Why? To warm up your pussy?

Patrick hurls the ball at him and grabs his crotch in a vulgar fashion before heading inside. Drake blows on his hands to warm them and continues shooting.

EXT. YARD - DAY

The snow falls even harder and a foot has accumulated. No longer able to dribble a ball, Drake zig-zags across the court sideways; a drill aimed to improve footwork on defense. His face is beet-red as he slides sideways, rapidly exhaling clouds of breath. The Warden watches through his window.

INT. CELL - DAY

An INMATE roles the MAILCART past a row of cells. He throws an ENVELOPE on the bottom bunk of Drake's cell. Patrick gracelessly dismounts the top bunk and opens the envelope.

He reads the letter and smiles. He searches around the cell but does not find what he needs. Suddenly, a realization.

PATRICK
(shouting) Ira! Get in here!

INT. CELL - EVENING

Drake enters his cell and sees the OPENED ENVELOPE and its contents on his bed. He picks up the LETTER and it is the results of his **GED Exam**.

He has easily passed every section of the test and A GOLD STAR OF DAVID has been attached to the letter, held in place by a piece of USED CHEWING GUM. Drake grins.

INT. CELL BLOCK - DAY

Drake, carrying his basketball, enters a cell and hands the gold Star of David to IRA, a scrawny, wily forty-year-old.

DRAKE

Thanks Ira.

IRA

Not a problem. Pretty funny joke though huh? A gold star!

DRAKE

Yeah, funny joke. I'll see ya.

IRA

Really fuckin' funny. It was Pat's idea though. I can't think of shit that clever. Hey, you get a chance to wash this?

Drake is already gone.

EXT. YARD - DAY

The trees have started budding and the sun shines on Drake, who sweats through defensive slides and ballhandling drills. The other inmates mill about; lifting weights or loitering.

INT. MESS HALL - EVENING

Drake and Patrick inch along the cafeteria line. They watch the television set mounted in the corner of the room. Duke is playing UCLA in the Final Four. Drake's eyes fill with regret and he turns away.

INT. CELL - NIGHT

Patrick grunts as he struggles to climb onto the top bunk.

DRAKE

Maybe, you know, we should just... switch...till we get you on some sort of exercise regiment.

PATRICK

Fuck off, I like the top. Besides,
after tomorrow, I'll have this
place to myself.

Drake shakes his head.

DRAKE

It's not happenin' man. I never
heard back from the school, I ain't
seen that guy on the parole board.
It's just...it' not happening.

PATRICK

Well, even if it don't, you done
good man.

DRAKE

Bullshit.

PATRICK

You have. Got your GED, got in the
best shape you been in in years.
You gave yourself a chance in hell.
That takes balls when you're in
this place.

Drake contemplates this but says nothing and closes his eyes.

INT. PAROLE BOARD CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Drake sits in a chair opposite a table with Kevin Grace, the
Warden, six members of the parole board and another MAN.

KEVIN

Drake, I've asked the Warden and
this gentleman to join us. This is
Dean Harold Kelly from Western
Carolina University.

Drake nods awkwardly in the DEAN'S direction.

KEVIN

Due to what, for all of us, is an
unprecedented situation, we are
going to somewhat abandon normal
parole hearing protocol and just
talk. Okay?

Drake nods, his body tense and rigid.

KEVIN

We would like you to start by
telling us what you did to get sent
here?

Drake shakes his head. He wants to respond but he is
conflicted. Finally, he looks at them and replies.

DRAKE

Honestly...I really don't know.

INT. POLICE STATION - LATE NIGHT - 1998

Drake is shirtless and inebriated as they take his MUG SHOTS.
Another OFFICER takes photographs of the TWO LONG SCRATCHES
spreading down from his neck to his chest. A DOCTOR combs
one of the scratches with a Q-TIP.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATE NIGHT - 1998

Jezzie lies on a hospital bed, her feet in stirrups, her eyes
red from crying. A DOCTOR inspects her groin area, takes a
semen sample and puts the findings in a PETRI DISH.

DOCTOR

There's some inflammation down
here, are you in any pain?

Jezzie barely manages to shake her head 'no.'

DOCTOR

Now you say you scratched him, do
you remember with what hand?

Emotion consumes her and unable to speak, she simply raises
her right hand. The doctor takes it and, using an
INSTRUMENT, scrapes the underside of her finger nails,
putting the findings in another PETRI DISH.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATE NIGHT - 1998

Drake sits, his head lying on the steel table. Two DETECTIVES
ask him questions; a CAMERA in the corner records everything.

DETECTIVE

Since you're eighteen, we are not
required to have your parents here
when we question you. But you do
have the right to an attorney so...

DRAKE
I don't need a lawyer.

DETECTIVE
So you are officially waving your
right to an attorney?

DRAKE
Yeah, sure.

He lifts his head up and he is a drunken mess. There is
vomit on his face and his bloodshot eyes are barely open.

DETECTIVE
You know why you're here?

DRAKE
I don't know...because I'm a drunk
minor?

DETECTIVE
You know Jezzie Phelps.

He frowns and buries his head in his arms.

DRAKE
Oh, shit man.

DETECTIVE
'Oh shit man' is right. Care to
tell me what happened tonight?

Drake laughs with exasperation.

DRAKE
Yeah, I'm guilty man. I'm a rapist
and she'll tell you the same.
There...you happy? I may be a
rapist but she's fuckin' nuts man.

DETECTIVE
You raped her?

DRAKE
Over and over again.

He laughs again, the video camera recording every word.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY - 1998

Drake meets with his attorney, CHRIS FOREMAN, a serious and
solemn man in his forties. Chris takes notes, Drake paces.

CHRIS

Drake, they have you on camera, saying, quote, "you're guilty" and "you're a rapist" and now you're telling me...what...exactly? What happened?

DRAKE

I don't know what happened! I don't fucking know!

Drake is enraged and confused, unable to stand still.

CHRIS

You don't know?

DRAKE

I don't know! I was drunk as shit, I can't remember anything. What, you never blacked out? I can't remember a goddamn thing. I know I didn't rape her though.

CHRIS

Then why did you say you did?

He gets in Chris' face, desperately trying to explain.

DRAKE

Because she is sixteen and seventeen is the age of consent. Every time we had sex, we'd joke that I was statutory raping her. We would joke about it! She was my girlfriend for three months!

CHRIS

But she's not anymore.

DRAKE

No, we broke up. She cheated on me with one of my friends so then I slept with one of hers. But yeah, we broke up.

CHRIS

She had sex with one of your friends...first?

DRAKE

Yeah. So?

Chris shakes his head and closes his notebook.

DRAKE

What? What's the problem?

CHRIS

Motive is the problem. Your skin under her nails is a problem. Your semen in her considerably distended vagina is yet another problem. And I can't put you on the stand with the "I was drunk and I don't remember shit" defense. So Drake, you have 'problems,' plural. And you might have too many of them.

INT. PAROLE BOARD CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Drake stares at the men behind the table.

DRAKE

I don't know what's worse...spending eleven years hating yourself...or hating what has become of your life and not even knowing if it's your fault.

Dean Kelly looks at him thoughtfully before addressing him. He is a majestic man but has a paternal air about him.

DEAN

Do you believe in second chances?

Drake nods.

DEAN

Do you believe that we should give you a second chance?

Drake hangs his head, every muscle in his body clenching as emotions well up. He raises his head, his eyes filled with tears. He nods again; with conviction and a dash of hope. They eye Drake in silent judgement; the tension excruciating.

INT. CELL - DAY

Drake leans against the wall while Patrick paces angrily.

PATRICK

That sucks! That fucking sucks!
That is such bullshit!

DRAKE

Why is it bullshit?

PATRICK
It's bullshit obviously because...
because, what the hell am I
supposed to do in here without you?

DRAKE
(smirking) You have Ira.

PATRICK
Fuck Ira. I don't want Ira. Fuck
Ira.

Ira pokes his head into the cell.

IRA
Fuck me?

PATRICK
Yeah, fuck you Ira.

IRA
(laughing) You guys are whacked.
I'll see you at dinner.

Ira disappears and Patrick and Drake laugh. Patrick picks
Drake up and gives him a bear hug.

PATRICK
You pussy. You college pussy!

DRAKE
I know. Crazy.

PATRICK
It's, Jesus, it's college, what do
you do? How do you, do...that?
How do you...go to college?

DRAKE
I have no idea.

PATRICK
I guess you'll figure it out.

Patrick looks at him and the two are struck by the moment,
the gravity of the goodbye. Patrick opens his mouth and is
about to speak when Drake interrupts him and embraces him.

DRAKE
I know. I know all about it.

EXT. PRISON - DAY

After Drake exits the prison, the guard SLAMS THE GATE SHUT AND LOCKS IT. COACH JEFF BAUMGARTNER, a direct and deliberate man in his fifties, is waiting for him. He carries himself like a retired marine who has discovered his softer side.

COACH

Hi Drake. I'm Jeff Baumgartner. I coach the men's squad at WC. Dean Kelly told me you'd need a ride.

DRAKE

Yeah, I guess I do. Thanks

They shake hands awkwardly. Drake glances around at an outside world he has not seen in over a decade.

COACH

Is it like you remember it?

DRAKE

Not really.

COACH

Better or worse?

Drake looks around, lost in thought, almost in a daze.

DRAKE

Just different.

INT. CAR - DAY

Coach and Drake drive in silence, a tension between them.

DRAKE

So...what do you know...about me?

COACH

Everything.

DRAKE

And?

COACH

And what?

DRAKE

What do you think about me? And about all of this?

COACH

Haven't made up my mind yet.

Drake turns and gazes out at a foreign, frightening world.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Coach leads Drake down a dark hallway and his face lights up as they enter the basketball arena. It is empty and barely lit but Drake is awestruck. To him, it is the most beautiful site he has ever seen.

COACH

I figured this would be a good place to start the tour. It only seats about three thousand but it's a good crowd. Good fans.

Drake nods. He is beaming and Coach notices.

COACH

Drake, I know how good you were. And the Warden told me how hard you've worked to get in shape. But the reality is that...you're older than both my assistant coaches. So fairy tales and prison politics aside, you are gonna have to earn your way onto this team. Whether or not you do that is up to you.

Drake takes it in but does not reply.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Coach lets Drake into his dorm room and hands him the KEYS. Drake surveys the small, bare room with two TWIN BEDS.

DRAKE

Is my roommate gonna...know...

COACH

Yes. He's already been notified. He had a right to know. The entire staff knows too.

DRAKE

And the rest of the kids?

COACH

I don't know yet. There's going to be a meeting about it.

Drake nods and throws his backpack on one of the beds.

COACH

Go to registration in the morning
and see Carol Shapiro, your
advisor. She'll give you your
class schedule and your cafeteria
meal card. I guess your parole
officer will contact you about your
community service and everything
else you, uh, have to do. Here.

He holds out a wad of money. Drake shakes his head.

DRAKE

I can't take that.

COACH

Take it. Go into town, get some
clothes, toiletries, a good meal.

Despite his pride, Drake takes the charity. He fans it out;
it is several hundred dollars. Coach starts to leave.

DRAKE

Why are you helpin' me like this?

COACH

You kind of remind me of...someone.

He decides not to reveal the truth and switches gears.

COACH

Plus I uh, I messed up too once.
And someone gave me a second
chance. I'm grateful for that.

He walks out and closes the door.

INT. SALVATION ARMY - DAY

Drake plucks items of clothes off a rack and puts them in a
shopping cart; a pair of jeans, a few shirts, a pair of
shorts, socks, underwear and a pair of high-top sneakers.
The cashier rings him up and the total is: **\$48.97.**

INT. DRUG STORE - DAY

Drake fills a basket with deodorant, a razor, shaving cream,
shampoo and a bar of soap. He picks up a mesh bath sponge,
smells it and looks at it with curiosity and confusion.

INT. MCDONALDS - DAY

Drake sits in a booth, staring in awe at the BIG MAC in his hands. He sinks his teeth into it and inadvertently MOANS in ecstasy. A FAMILY OF FOUR in the booth next to him watches him awkwardly if not nervously.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Drake walks through the town of Cullowhee. It is a quaint, scenic town with a population of seven thousand, nestled between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Tuckaseegee River.

As he enters the equally picturesque campus, Drake strolls casually. He looks around; unfamiliar with his surroundings but seemingly at ease with them.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Drake puts his new clothes into his dresser.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Drake showers in one of the six showers occupying the shared bathroom. He is the only person there.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Drake lies in his bed, staring at the ceiling. He cannot sleep and he does not even seem to be trying to.

INT. REGISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Drake sits nervously, cleanly shaven for the first time in the film, wearing his Salvation Army Sunday Best. CAROL SHAPIRO enters and sits at her desk.

She is friendly, in her sixties and unintentionally condescending. She is anxious but trying to hide it.

CAROL

So classes start Wednesday which means your roommate Brandon will probably get there at some point this weekend. You got your meal card, you know where the cafeteria is? In the University Center?

DRAKE

Yeah, I'll find it, thanks.

CAROL

Okay, so here's your mailbox key, mailroom is also in the University Center, in the basement. Now, I know this is a lot to adjust to so if you need anything, don't hesitate to call, okay?

DRAKE

Okay. Thank you...Mrs. Shapiro.

CAROL

Call me Carol.

Drake nods and smiles awkwardly as he stands to leave.

INT. MAILROOM - DAY

Drake retrieves the letters from his mailbox and reads them. He is visibly irritated with the contents of one of them.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Drake walks down a residential street, looking at the house numbers. He eventually finds #131 and he sees a SIGN that reads: **Dr. Joan Miravito PhD.**

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Drake sits on a couch, noticeably uncomfortable, speaking with DR. JOAN MIRAVITO. She is in her mid-thirties, sarcastic and speaks with a New York accent; a rarity in these parts. She has an edge to her; the bitterness of someone who has been burned in life.

JOAN

Have you spoken to your parents?

DRAKE

My adoptive parents. No, not since the judge said 'guilty.' I lost my ride, they lost their meal ticket. Then I guess they...lost interest.

JOAN

Is it good to be out?

DRAKE

Strange.

JOAN

Are you scared?

DRAKE

Sure. Scared that if I screw up even once, I'll get sent back.

JOAN

So don't screw up.

Drake grins and relaxes just a little bit.

DRAKE

Folks at Piedmont tell you about me?

JOAN

Yes.

DRAKE

You must think I'm a piece of shit.

JOAN

I don't judge my patients. Do you think you're a piece of shit?

DRAKE

I don't really know what to think about myself.

JOAN

Well, that's why we're here. Maybe we can figure that out.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Drake enters his room to find a blizzard of activity. FOUR PEOPLE STACK AND UNPACK BOXES. Eventually, everyone notices Drake standing there. Among them is BRANDON HILL, a jokey and boyish freshman who stands at six foot, nine inches tall.

BRANDON

You Drake?

DRAKE

Yeah. Hi.

BRANDON

I'm Brandon. These are my parents and my sister Kiah.

His PARENTS nod hello, feigning politeness but not at all happy to meet him. KIAH; spunky, nine, is less reserved.

KIAH
You go to school here?

DRAKE
I do.

KIAH
How old are you?

DRAKE
I'm...eighteen...obviously.

KIAH
You don't look eighteen.

DRAKE
I have a glandular problem.

KIAH
That sounds made up.

BRANDON
Shut up Kiah. It's good to meet
you baby.

Brandon walks over with a big smile and shakes Drake's hand; the pressure dissipating somewhat.

INT. DORM ROOM - EVENING

Brandon's family says goodbye to him before leaving, closing the door as they do. Brandon and Drake are now alone.

BRANDON
Glandular problem huh?

Graham grins and shrugs his shoulders. They eye each other; the tension between them is severe.

DRAKE
So, uh, you wanna get this over
with? You wanna tell me how pissed
you are that you got a con for a
roommate? You wanna ask me if I
did it, anything like that?

Brandon stares him down inquisitively.

BRANDON

Actually, I was just gonna ask you
if you were hungry.

Drake exhales and flashes a hint of a grin.

DRAKE

Starving.

INT. CAFETERIA - EVENING

The cafeteria swarms with activity. STUDENTS scream with elation as they greet friends. Drake is nervous and out of his element. He feels like everyone is staring at him.

He watches as the STUDENT in line ahead of him listens to music while texting on her cell phone and ordering food at the same time.

DRAKE

Are all kids today like this?

BRANDON

Pretty much dog. Feels like home though huh? On line waitin' for shitty food, three hots and a cot with a closet for a bedroom, all that noise.

DRAKE

What are you an asshole?

BRANDON

(laughing) Pretty much dog. Get used to it.

DRAKE

(grinning) I will.

A pretty GIRL gets on line behind Brandon and he flashes her a seductive smile.

BRANDON

I'm Brandon Hill, power forward, power lover and I will, if given the opportunity, make you a woman, my woman...over and over and over again...till you can't even walk.

Appalled, the girl eventually walks off line.

BRANDON
(yelling) I'll make you talk to God
baby. Think about it.

DRAKE
That usually work?

BRANDON
Not really. But you throw enough
shit against the wall, some's gotta
stick.

Drake laughs.

INT. SHED - DAY

GARY, a sweet and slow man in his sixties, walks Drake
through a work shed cluttered with landscaping tools and
garbage cans.

GARY
Most of it's garbage. Pick up
garbage, empty garbage. There's
four cans in Honeysuckle Park,
another six in Riverside Park along
the Tuckaseegee River. Just empty
'em and put in fresh bags before
you make your rounds with this...
your new best friend.

Gary hands Drake a LITTER STICK; a broom handle with a spike
at the end of it.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Drake walks through Honeysuckle Park, stabbing loose trash
with his litter stick and stuffing it into a garbage bag.

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE - EVENING

Drake urinates into a cup while a DOCTOR stands behind him.
He screws the cap on the cup and hands it to him.

DOCTOR
Thank you. We'll see you next
week, yes?

DRAKE
Yeah.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Dean Harold Kelly stands in the front of a lecture hall. The seats are filled with PROFESSORS and other STAFFMEMBERS. Coach Baumgartner sits among them, as does Joan Miravito, who is involved in the discussion.

PROFESSOR 1

The students have a right to know. Especially the freshman, some of whom are only seventeen years old.

PROFESSOR 2

The issue here is whether or not we tell the entire student body.

PROFESSOR 3

Which I think we should. When a sex offender moves into a new neighborhood, its residents are notified. The students are residents of this campus that is essentially their neighborhood and more specifically his dormitory.

DEAN

He is already a registered North Carolina sex offender so it's not as if we're concealing his identity. The details of his record are public domain so we could never be accused of concealing...

PROFESSOR 1

Yeah but this isn't about covering our butts Harold, it's about doing right by the students of this university.

JOAN

Is the university required by law to notify the student body?

DEAN

No. It's an administrative decision. So we will vote on it, here and now. But before we do, Coach Baumgartner...please.

Dean Kelly nods at Coach, who stands up and opens the door in the back of the room. Drake enters tentatively and the two walk past a whispering staff to the head of the auditorium.

COACH

This is Drake Paxon. He has asked to say a few words and we would both appreciate it if you would at least listen. Drake.

Drake is nervous and speaks at a barely audible level. He never lifts his head to look at the faculty and does not even notice Joan sitting among them.

DRAKE

Thanks. I, uh, I know most if not all of you don't want me here. I know none of you would trust me alone in a room with your daughters or sisters or wives and I know what some of you would do to me if you knew you could get away with it. But I just want you to give me a chance. I haven't been in a situation where I've actually had to ask for help in a long time but here I am...asking. I just want to get a degree, maybe play a little basketball and...start over. So please...help me do that.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Coach ambles into his living room. His wife Vera is knitting while watching television. In her fifties, there is something haunting about her, a wound that never healed.

VERA

How'd it go?

COACH

Fine.

VERA

What was the meeting about anyway?

COACH

There's a new student who uh, just got out of prison. It was about him.

VERA

Prison? For what?

Coach is reluctant to answer but eventually does.

COACH

Rape.

Her jaw drops and she stares at him in disbelief.

COACH

Yeah. Some new program... 'jail to college' kind of thing. Faculty's gonna vote on whether or not to tell the students about his record. He wanted to say a few words to 'em so I went to... support him.

VERA

You? Why the hell are you supporting him?

Coach stalls but eventually has to come clean.

COACH

He uh... he might play some basketball for us.

VERA

You're kiddin' me? You're not. What... why the hell would you want someone like that on your team?

He ponders various responses and decides to tell the truth.

COACH

He reminds me of Mikey.

She hangs her head; the life draining from her.

COACH

He does. And, after everything he's been through and I've been through... I feel like, I don't know. Like I need to, like we both need to... to get it right. Like, maybe this time we can get it right, you know?

She glares at him with disapproval. Disgusted, she gets up and walks out.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Drake stares at the Windows display on the screen of Brandon's computer. He is utterly confused.

DRAKE
What is this?

Brandon, who is standing behind him, erupts into hysterics.

DRAKE
Seriously man, what is this?

BRANDON
It's Windows man.

DRAKE
Windows into what?

BRANDON
How long was you away for?

DRAKE
Eleven years.

Brandon laughs harder still. He can barely speak.

BRANDON
You don't, yeah but before you went
away, shit man, you never used the
internet before?

DRAKE
I...well...I heard of it.

Brandon falls to the floor, howling with laughter.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

Drake works out by himself, conducting a medley of ballhandling drills, working on his defensive slides and taking jumpshots from every spot on the floor.

CUT TO:

Drake sits at center court, catching his breath. After a moment, he lies on his back, staring up at the rafters.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Drake walks down the street and stops when a group of STUDENTS run in front of him and enter a BAR across the street. Drake slowly starts walking towards it.

He looks inside and it is packed with STUDENTS. MUSIC and LAUGHTER come from within and Drake's face is tense, conflicted. He takes a step towards the bar but then stops. He turns and walks away quickly, if not desperately.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Drake sits among a class full of STUDENTS. Some look at him curiously but none with animosity. He smiles awkwardly at the GIRL next to him. Drake's jaw drops when Joan Miravito enters the room. She notices Drake and grins as she takes out a notebook.

JOAN

Hello, hello. I'm Dr. Miravito, welcome to Ethics 101. Since I'm late, I think we'll just skip the foreplay and find out if everyone's in the right room. Carrie Atkins.

CARRIE (O.S.)

I'm here.

JOAN

Yes you are. Hello Carrie. Paul Bukowski.

PAUL (O.S.)

Here.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Joan mediates a debate between several students.

STUDENT 1

Well, terrorists believe what they're doing is moral and that it will help them get to heaven. So who are we to say they're wrong?

STUDENT 2

Because it is. Certain things are just wrong. Killing is wrong. Rape is wrong. End of story.

Drake shifts slightly in his seat and Joan notices.

JOAN

Many philosophers attest that in matters of ethics, there is no such thing as an absolute...that all things are subjective.

STUDENT 2

Even rape?

Joan looks over at Drake again. His head is down.

JOAN

I think we'll end on that note...before the gloves really come off. See you Friday.

After the class files out, Drake approaches Joan.

JOAN

Did you choose your schedule or was it chosen for you?

DRAKE

They chose it.

JOAN

Ethics class on your first day of school in over a decade and the conversation finds its way to rape. That's almost funny.

DRAKE

Almost.

JOAN

I assume Coach told you how the staff voted.

DRAKE

He did. I was...pretty relieved. What are you...I didn't know that you...

JOAN

That I would be your teacher? Me neither. I don't get my attendance sheets in advance.

DRAKE

So, you're a shrink and a teacher?

JOAN

Double majored in philosophy and psychology, got my PhD after I started teaching here. I have office hours on campus as well as my private practice which, given the size of this town, doesn't really keep me all that busy.

He nods, though he is noticeably uncomfortable.

JOAN

And don't worry, what we say in session stays there. You remember when I told you that I don't judge my patients?

Drake nods again.

JOAN

I don't judge my students either. You work as hard as anyone else, your grades will reflect it. But if you don't do the work, I'll flunk your ass just the same.

DRAKE

Okay. I'll uh, I'll try not to disappoint you.

JOAN

You probably will. Most people can and do when given ample opportunity.

She smiles; he grins back.

JOAN

I'll see you Friday.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Drake sits in a class with a LABORATORY in the back. PROFESSOR LAWRENCE, monotonic and dull, addresses the class.

PROFESSOR LAWRENCE

Wednesdays will be lectures and Fridays will be labs. There will be some exceptions but that'll be the usual schedule. I'll break you into groups of four and those'll be your lab groups for the entire semester. Any questions? Good. Group one...

CUT TO:

Drake and three STUDENTS congregate around a LAB TABLE. They introduce each other and Drake is noticeably uncomfortable. He shakes hands with his group but then stands aside awkwardly as they converse among themselves.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Drake walks into the gym dressed in his Salvation Army workout garb. He is in stark contrast to the ten PLAYERS, including Brandon, dressed in matching black and red practice uniforms that are warming up on one side of the court.

Nine other PLAYERS, dressed in regular gym clothes, warm up on the other side of the court. Coach spots Drake standing there with a confused look on his face and jogs over to him.

COACH

I almost had to start without you.

DRAKE

Sorry. Class ran late.

COACH

How's it going so far?

DRAKE

It's...it's alot. I guess it'll take some getting used to.

COACH

I'm sure it will. Why don't you go ahead and warm up with the other walk-ons. We'll start in a few minutes.

DRAKE

Thanks.

Drake stretches briefly and then walks over to join the nine other walk-ons. They shoot around but none of them speak. After a few minutes, Coach BLOWS HIS WHISTLE.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Coach runs the walk-ons through a series of drills. They shoot three-pointers off ball racks and engage in dribbling and defensive slide drills. Though the oldest, Drake is the most talented of the group.

The try-out culminates in a five on five scrimmage and when it concludes, Coach blows his whistle and calls them over. They are all soaked with sweat and breathing heavily.

COACH

Great job everyone. That's some really good workin.' Now, ten of our twelve roster spots are already filled...which means that even though ten of you gave a hell of an effort here tonight, based on your skills and our needs, only two of you will make the team. So thank you and good luck. If you made the team, you'll get a call.

Coach walks off and the ten players disperse without a word.

INT. DORM - NIGHT

Drake limps down the hall of his dorm, MOANING in discomfort, carrying his backpack. He gets to his door and there is a TUBE SOCK on the door knob. He looks at it curiously before opening the door and stepping inside. He stops when he sees Brandon and a GIRL having sex.

DRAKE

That's my bed.

BRANDON

Yo, get the fuck out of here man!
Sock on the door! Sock on the door!

Brandon frantically covers the girl's face and breasts with his hands. Drake is frozen; disoriented and confused.

DRAKE

Sock on the door?

BRANDON

Sock on the door! Sock on the door!

DRAKE

Okay, sock on the door.

BRANDON

Sock on the door!

Drake finally backs out of the room and shuts the door.

INT. LOUNGE - NIGHT

Drake sits in the lounge area, reading through a LITERATURE TEXTBOOK.

A drunk STUDENT walks up the stairs and stops to chat with Drake. He is a terribly cheesy white kid who has seen too many rap videos.

STUDENT

Yo, what's goin' on dog? You studying already? Shit man, it's the first week of school, you studying? How old are you? Ahhh, who cares, you're young enough to pledge. I'm pledging. Fuckin' TKE bro! Tao Kappa Epsilon. Best frat on campus G. You wanna smoke a bong? I got a bong in my room and we'll fly stealth! Word! It's all about fabric softener dog. They won't know shit yo.

Drake stares at him, mouth agape. He cannot even respond.

COACH (O.S.)

He'll pass on the bong hits but thanks.

Coach is standing at the top of the stairs.

STUDENT

Oh shit. You a teacher?

COACH

No. But if you don't go sleep it off, I'm going to call your mother.

STUDENT

Oh snap, I'm off like a prom dress.

He scurries down the hallway and Drake cracks a smile.

DRAKE

I don't understand these kids man. I need subtitles when they talk.

Coach chuckles.

COACH

Hittin' the books?

DRAKE

Yeah.

COACH

Don't like your room?

DRAKE

No, it's fine but it's just that...do you know what a sock on the doorknob means?

COACH

It means your roommate's got a girl in the room and they're probably up to no good. You didn't know that?

DRAKE

I do now.

Coach eyes him for a moment, searching for the right words.

COACH

I was serious when I said that you would have to earn your way onto this team.

DRAKE

I know you were. I take it that uh, that I did not accomplish that.

COACH

Not exactly.

Coach looks sternly at him and Drake exhales; too disappointed to process this, let alone show it.

COACH

You...earned...a spot in the starting line up. The other coaches and I have never quite seen a handle as good as yours. Your shot, your eye on the floor, your 'D'...all the best we've got at the 'one' so you're looking like our starting point guard right now.

Drake is dumbfounded, unable to react.

COACH

Aside from Brandon and the assistant coaches, nobody on the team knows your story. They were in grade school when...that... happened. So I'll leave it up to you if you want to tell them. I'll let you get back to your, uh, what is that, American Literature. Tell Brandon not to contract any diseases. We need him this year.

He starts to walk away.

DRAKE

Hey Coach.

Coach turns and Drake opens his mouth but he cannot even verbalize his sentiments.

COACH

Don't even. Thank yourself. You did this. You worked, you fought and you got...you got something that maybe we both needed.

DRAKE

What's that?

COACH

A second chance.

Coach disappears down the stairs and Drake sits; a wide smile spreading across his face.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Coach enters his kitchen and Vera is chopping vegetables.

VERA

How'd it go?

COACH

Fine.

He sits down and the tension in the room thickens.

VERA

So how'd that guy do? What's his name?

COACH

Drake. He uh, he made it. He's...he's probably gonna start at point. He's got it, you know, everything you want a point guard to have. Everything Mikey had...

He stops himself from continuing but it is too late. She stops chopping vegetables and hangs her head. Silence follows; long, unbearable.

COACH

Say something.

VERA

What do you want me to say Jeffrey?
You want to hear how thrilled I am
that now we have a daily reminder
of a night I have spent the last
decade trying to forget?

COACH

It's not a daily anything for
you...you don't have to see him.
You're sure as hell not coming to
any games so...

Vera grows increasingly emotional as she speaks.

VERA

That was the deal. If I was gonna
have a chance at forgiving...at
forgetting...then I couldn't see
it. You knew that, you accepted
that. And I still can't. I can't
watch it, I can't talk about it, I
just can't. And I won't.

Coach nods, agreeing with her despite himself.

COACH

He really...he really does play
just like him.

She throws the knife into the sink and stomps out of the
room. Coach sits at the kitchen table and hears MUFFLED
SOBBING in the other room.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Drake picks up garbage with his litter stick. Several
STUDENTS walk by and he hangs his head with embarrassment.

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE - EVENING

Drake urinates into a cup and hands it to the doctor.

DOCTOR

Thank you. See you next week.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Drake and the other eleven members of the team plow through a
series of endurance drills; suicides, slides, sprints. Coach
addresses them as they work.

COACH

We run an offense I like to call
'Motion till you puke.'
It is an infinite stream of
backscreens, frontscreens,
sidescreens, picks, rolls and every
kind of fast break ever run on a
basketball court. As some of you
may know, there are a few other
colleges in the state of North
Carolina that tend to attract a
bulk of the talent. So pardon the
expression but what we lack in
skill, you bet your ass we're gonna
make up for in hustle.

He blows his whistle and the team comes to a stop. They are
all hyperventilating. Drake is exhausted.

COACH

Breathe. Now, most of you have
been working together since summer
mini-camp but we have two new
faces. Drake Paxon, Calvin Hodge,
say hello.

DRAKE

Hey.

CALVIN

Wussup.

COACH

This is a twelve man team and with
the offense we run, it will be just
that. We will have a second unit
and a third unit. Every man in a
uniform will see the hardwood come
gametime. So take a look around.
This is your team. Twelve...as
one.

EXT. GYM - NIGHT

Drake, Brandon, JIM and BYRON, who are also on the team, exit
the gym; laughing and joking with each other.

JIM

I'm hurtin' yo. Hurtin.'

BRANDON

You assed out already? Shit, my man here got more endurance than you and he's a senior citizen.

BYRON

What's your deal anyway? Thirty-year-old freshman? There's gotta be a story there.

DRAKE

Yeah, well, I uh...

BRANDON

He fucked up his knee and blew his ride. Few surgeries and a decade later, he's in college. Better late than never.

BYRON

Amen. You're here now baby. You're here now.

Drake flashes Brandon an appreciative grin.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Drake works with the other members of his biology LAB GROUP. They are DISSECTING A FETAL PIG and Drake is a little more at ease as he jokes around with his classmates. He picks up one of the pig's ORGANS and waves it in the face of a young WOMAN, who SHRIEKS and LAUGHS.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Drake is engaged in a discussion in his ethics class. As the debate progresses, he becomes increasingly animated. Joan watches him closely, pleased with his participation.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Drake and the team are exhausted as they run a play. Drake passes, runs through a series of screens and catches the ball at the top of the key where he takes a makes a three pointer.

COACH

That's it. Exactly like that. Now run it again.

CUT TO:

The team runs through a fast break drill. After a break fails to develop properly, Coach stops them. He moves the players around like pawns on a chessboard, instructing them.

COACH

The outlet pass does not start the fast break, the rebound does. The wings gotta be haulin' ass down the court the second we grab that rock. The outlet needs to follow the break, to catch up to the break. But it starts on the window pane. Go.

He BLOWS HIS WHISTLE and this time, the players hit their spots correctly and after two passes, Brandon catches the ball in the lane for an uncontested dunk. Coach claps.

COACH

That's it. That's it. There might be hope for you yet. You tired?

Everyone on the team nods and grunts 'yes.'

COACH

Good. Then run it again.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Coach sits in his office, watching tape of a basketball game on his television. Drake KNOCKS and enters tentatively.

DRAKE

You wanted to see me Coach?

COACH

Yeah, come on in.

Drake sits down and waits for Coach to finish with the TV.

DRAKE

That's Davidson?

COACH

Yeah. They like to run too so...it should be a shoot-out.

He shuts off the TV and looks at Drake.

COACH

I was just wondering...how come you are the way you are?

DRAKE

Excuse me?

COACH

You're a pass-first point guard, a dying breed these days. I'm just curious how you came to be that way?

DRAKE

Oh. Well, um, my adoptive parents were assholes. Maybe that had something to do with it.

Coach appears puzzled and Drake makes a conscious decision to open up to him.

DRAKE

They always put me last...or never at all...so maybe, I don't know. I always felt like my team was the closest thing I had to a real family so maybe I wanna put them first...or something.

Coach nods; understanding. A silence follows and Drake notices several PICTURES on Coach's desk. One is a family portrait of him, his wife Vera and their son MICHAEL.

DRAKE

That your family?

COACH

It was. Well, he's...he's not with us anymore.

DRAKE

Sorry.

COACH

It's okay. Happened a while ago. He'd be about your age by now.

Drake notices another picture of Michael in a WC BASKETBALL UNIFORM with Coach beside him.

DRAKE

He played for you?

COACH

Yeah. He was good. Had a great eye. Unselfish...just like you.

Drake grows increasingly uncomfortable with the intimacy.

DRAKE

Well, I should go. I have homework.

He starts to walk out but coach stops him.

COACH

Can I ask you something? You feel like you're, I don't know...like you're getting some distance between...that night...that place.

Drake hesitates but eventually turns to face Coach.

DRAKE

Yes and no. It's always, there, really. It's like...static...in my head. In my gut. I want it to go away but I don't really know where to put it. Or how.

Coach nods and Drake walks out. Lost in contemplation, Coach picks up the picture of him and his son. He looks at it forlornly.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

The gym fills with SPECTATORS. CHEERLEADERS psych up the capacity crowd as the DAVIDSON TEAM warms up.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Drake puts on his uniform and stares at himself in confusion and disgust. His shorts hang well beneath his knees.

DRAKE

You kiddin' me with these shorts?

BRANDON

(laughing) That's the way it is baby. What do you want? A pair of them John Stockton nuthuggers?

Drake rolls up the waste line of his shorts, making them shorter. Coach enters and addresses the team. Drake listens intently as he laces up his tattered sneakers.

COACH

Okay, we all saw Davidson's Cinderella run through the tournament a few years back;

(MORE)

COACH (cont'd)

it was very exciting, very inspiring, bla bla bla. But they are still the team to beat in our conference. So lets run 'em off the court and let's show 'em what the Western Carolina Catamounts are...the best kept secret in the Southern Conference. Get it in here.

The team huddles up with Coach in the middle, interlocking their arms. In synchronicity, they start bouncing, ebbing and flowing, almost like a circular heartbeat.

COACH

Let's go.

The team picks up speed as Coach psychs them up.

COACH

Let's go. Let's go. Let's go.

The team joins in; the chants increasing in speed and volume.

TEAM

Let's go! Let's go! Let's go!
Let's goooooooooooooooooooooo!

The team explodes and disbands.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

THE CROWD ERUPTS as the TEAM takes the court. Drake is awestruck by the crowd but tries not to show it as the team runs through their warm-ups. The REFEREE BLOWS HIS WHISTLE and the teams line up for TIP-OFF.

The game is a frenetic barrage of never-ending fast breaks and perpetual motion. It is a close game with both teams being evenly matched. Drake orchestrates the offense fluidly and efficiently; hitting the shots that come to him and distributing the ball as a point guard should.

Down three with a minute to go, Drake calls a play, passes the ball and after running through a series of screens, catches the ball for an open three pointer. He hesitates.

Instead of shooting, he passes to a teammate who drives to the basket and misses. At the other end, Davidson hits a three pointer and puts the game out of reach. The BUZZER SOUNDS and Western Carolina loses by six points. As the teams file towards the locker room, Coach pulls Drake aside.

COACH

You know that's your shot to take right?

DRAKE

Yeah, I guess.

COACH

No, no guessing. You gotta know. You gotta know that that's your shot to take just like you gotta know that this is your team to lead. There's no guess work involved. Got it?

DRAKE

Got it.

Coach exhales and lightens up a bit.

COACH

How'd it feel to be out there again?

DRAKE

I missed it.

COACH

I'm sure you did. Go hose off.

Drake nods and runs off.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - EVENING

Drake takes the lid off a garbage can, removes the bag and replaces it with an empty one. He continues walking along the river bank, the SETTING SUN reflecting on the water's surface. He stops when he sees Joan reading on a bench.

JOAN

Mr. Paxon. Starting point guard, master debater, janitor extraordinaire. You have many talents, what's your secret?

DRAKE

North Carolina Corrections...they really build a better man.

Joan snickers.

JOAN

I guess so. Nice game last night.

DRAKE

You went?

JOAN

Always do. You looked pretty sharp. A few cobwebs maybe.

DRAKE

Just a few.

JOAN

You shoulda taken that shot...at the end...you had a great look.

DRAKE

Yeah, I know. It's just uh, it's been a while since I had a game in my hands like that. Gotta work that muscle back into shape I guess. What are you reading?

JOAN

'Portnoy's Complaint' by Phillip Roth. You'd like it, it's all about masturbation.

Drake laughs.

JOAN

You're doing well in class. It's good to see you participating and fitting in...somewhat.

DRAKE

Yeah, it...just took some getting used to. You spend eleven years with criminals and you kind of forget to act around...normal people.

JOAN

Another muscle you have to 'work back into shape' I suppose.

She smiles and he grins back. Her edge softens and they share a brief moment, albeit an awkward one.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Drake is lying in bed reading a textbook when Brandon stumbles in. He is drunk and in high spirits.

BRANDON

You know, with three thousand girls at this school, I could fuck six hundred girls a year, that's three hundred girls a semester...and I still wouldn't get to all of 'em.

DRAKE

Yeah but it'd be a hell of an effort.

Brandon takes off his shoes and climbs into bed.

BRANDON

Can I ask you a...a personal question?

DRAKE

I guess.

Drake closes his book and braces himself for the question he knew he would have to answer eventually.

BRANDON

When's the last time you got some ass?

Drake exhales with relief.

BRANDON

Ain't I ain't talkin' about prison sex. I don't wanna know a damn thing about that.

Drake grins and tries to remember.

DRAKE

Umm, shit, not since before I went inside.

BRANDON

Who was it? Just some bitch?

DRAKE

No. She was uh, she was a good one. She was definitely a good one.

BRANDON

So look her up dog.

DRAKE

Nah, that's dead. That died a long time ago.

BRANDON

Yeah, well, you ballin' now. So you ain't dead. And don't worry, we'll get you another 'good one.' If there's any left by the time I'm through with 'em.

Brandon laughs at his own joke and climbs into bed as Drake re-opens his book.

DRAKE

You sure? There's only three thousand, I'd hate to put you out.

BRANDON

Nah, I got you, I got you.

Brandon closes his eyes to go to sleep but after a few moments, he opens them.

BRANDON

Can I...can I ask you another question?

Drake takes a deep breath and hesitates.

DRAKE

Yeah.

Brandon pauses, choosing his words carefully. He is about to say something when he stops himself and closes his eyes.

BRANDON

Nah, fuck it, I'm spent. Them white girls'll be the death of me. Tomorrow.

DRAKE

Tomorrow.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY - 1998

The Prosecutor questions Melanie Lamb on the stand. She is timid and struggling to keep it together emotionally.

PROSECUTOR

And the night you had sex with him, that was the very next day after Drake found out that Jezzie had cheated on him?

MELANIE

Yes.

PROSECUTOR

And at the party where this happened, were you drunk?

MELANIE

A little.

PROSECUTOR

And did you bring your own alcohol to the party or did someone give it to you?

MELANIE

No, uh, Drake got me a bottle. I had asked him to get me one.

PROSECUTOR

Which he did and then he got you drunk, just like he got Jezzie drunk the night he raped her?

Drake's lawyer Chris Foreman stands.

CHRIS

Objection. Speculation.

PROSECUTOR

I'll withdraw your honor. And Jezzie Phelps, the two of you were best friends before you had sex with Mr. Paxon, is that correct?

MELANIE

Yes.

PROSECUTOR

Before, but not after?

MELANIE

No. Not after.

She looks over at Jezzie who sits behind the Prosecutor's desk, staring coldly at her.

INT. DEAN SMITH CENTER ARENA - NIGHT

The CROWD erupts as the NORTH CAROLINA TARHEELS take the court for pre-game warm-ups. Drake and his teammates warm up on the other side of the court.

Drake is intoxicated by the enormous arena and the legendary light blue that encapsulates North Carolinian college basketball at its highest level.

TV cameras are everywhere, shooting a live, national, ESPN broadcast. A COMMENTATOR records his courtside pre-game segment as the teams warm up.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

Western Carolina's fast pace offense should be an interesting match-up for UNC, who employs a more methodical scheme at both ends of the floor. Though not as talented as previous teams, this is still a well balanced and well coached North Carolina squad. They are ranked twenty-third in the country so the Catamounts will have their hands full.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

We TIP OFF and the game is underway. Western Carolina seems unintimidated by their opponents and takes an early lead, fueled by fast breaks and a well-executed offense.

Drake leads the assault, gaining confidence as he displays the various facets of his game; deft ballhandling, a keen eye for the open players on the court and a solid jumpshot.

INT. STUDIO - NIGHT

At HALFTIME, two COMMENTATORS converse in the ESPN studio.

COMMENTATOR

And the catalyst for Western Carolina's surprising ten point lead has been twenty-nine year old walk-on, freshman point guard Drake Paxon. Yes, you heard me correctly, the twenty-nine-year-old walk-on freshman, who is leading all scorers with twelve points to go along with six assists, three rebounds and two steals.

COMMENTATOR

Who is Drake Paxon and where did he come from?

COMMENTATOR

Wherever he came from, it's a apparently a place where they finish highschool very late and play basketball very well.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

The second half of the game is underway. Western Carolina shows no sign of letting up, pushing the ball at every opportunity. UNC makes a run and trims the lead to four with two minutes remaining but then Brandon takes over.

He scores three baskets in a row, two coming off bullet passes from Drake. When the BUZZER sounds, Drake's team reacts as if they have just won the national championship. The final score: **Western Carolina 71 North Carolina 61**

INT. STUDIO - NIGHT

The two commentators analyze the game from the ESPN studio.

COMMENTATOR

This was not a game that the Tarheels lost but a game that the Catamounts won. They simply outplayed them and Drake Paxon was a big part of that.

The second commentator peruses a sheet of paper.

COMMENTATOR

He was a big part of that and during the commercial break, I was handed this by Scotty Armstrong, my producer, and it turns out that Drake Paxon is a former All American who was recruited by Mike Krzyzewski in 1998 but was convicted of rape during his senior year of highschool. He spent eleven years in prison prior to being paroled and starting school at WC this semester. I can't believe I'm reading this! A remarkable story here. Two months ago, he was in maximum security lock-up and here he is tonight, knocking off one of the elite programs in college basketball.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

The bus heads back to Western Carolina University and the team is still elated; YELLING intermittently and hardly able to stay in their seats. Drake, Brandon and several of his teammates are reliving moments from the game when Brandon's cell phone RINGS. He answers it.

BRANDON

Wuss up pop! UNC ain't shit pop!
 UNC ain't shit pop! You guys all
 watched it right?! Yeah, it was
 national baby, the whole world saw
 that! What'd they say? They did?

Brandon continues his phone conversation and his celebratory demeanor is replaced by whispers and dismayed concern. He hangs up the phone and his face is ghastly. Drake notices and nods at him inquisitively.

He motions to him and when Drake leans over, Brandon whispers in his ear. Drake's face turns ashen. He leans back in his seat and stares out the window; tormented by the news.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Drake exits his dorm tentatively and walks through campus. He looks cautiously at every STUDENT he passes, trying to ascertain if they know the truth about him.

He passes a group of STUDENTS and maybe they look at him and whisper, maybe they don't. He is paranoid of everyone he passes; suspecting that every student knows about his past and hates him for it.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Drake shuffles into Biology and the class is already broken up into lab groups. He spots his across the room and starts walking towards them when something stops him.

The kids in his group are all on their cell phones, texting and whispering among themselves. They stop abruptly when they see Drake. Their faces are tense and far from welcoming. Drake, having no choice, slowly walks up to them.

DRAKE

Hey. How uh, how's everyone doing
 today?

Nobody responds right away; the tension is dense and disquieting. One of the students breaks the silence.

STUDENT

Well, let's uh, let's get to it.

They get to work, trying to conceal their anxiety and fear.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - EVENING

Drake walks down the hall of the locker room and stops when he hears his irate teammates in an escalating argument.

BYRON

You fuckin' knew dog?

BRANDON

Yeah, I knew. Coach told me.

BYRON

Why didn't you tell us?

BRANDON

It wasn't none of your business, that's why.

JIM

It's none of our business? Who our teammates are is none of our business?

BRANDON

The guy's tryin' to do right yo. He's tryin' to fuckin' do right.

BYRON

This our team. Our team. We got a right to know if our startin' point guard's a fuckin' rapist. A rapist! That's the bottom, that's the worst of the worst! Ain't no piece of shit worse than...

Byron stops ranting when he sees Drake standing there. Everyone spots him and silence envelops the room. Drake leans against the wall and stares straight ahead as he speaks, shying from the eyes of his teammates.

DRAKE

Twelve years ago, my team won the North Carolina State Championship. Best night of my life. I was heading to Duke in the fall and hell, I was practically packed. After the game, I went to a party and I got really drunk. I woke up in a police station with puke on my face...I wasn't even wearin' a shirt. And when I was sitting in that holding cell, I smelled sex but I didn't know why...or where it was coming from.

(MORE)

DRAKE (cont'd)

I could smell it everywhere...and then I realized that the smell was coming from me but...I still didn't know why.

The team listens, though few look at him.

DRAKE

Then I said a few things I don't remember saying and the next day they told me I was being accused of rape. So...did I do it? Is that what you want to know? Did I rape my ex-girlfriend that night? I don't know. I'll never know. I was really drunk, I blacked out and I'll never know. I lived with that for over a decade in prison. And I'll probably die with it.

Drake exhales, fighting off the emotions flowing through him.

DRAKE

I'm sorry I didn't tell you but I'm just...I'm tryin' to go forward. And if I'm gonna do that, I can't be lookin' back. But if you guys want me gone...then I'm gone.

He starts to leave but stops and turns to add one more thing.

DRAKE

We beat the Tarheels man. UNC. I'll always have that and you uh, you guys gave it to me. So...thanks.

Drake walks out, passing Coach's office. The door is ajar and we see Coach inside, listening to every word.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - EVENING

Drake walks along the bank of the river and the SUN is about to set. He slumps into the bench; devastated and lost. After a moment, Joan walks over carrying a book.

JOAN

You tryin' to steal my sunset spot?

Drake tries to muster a casual response but is too upset. His state frightens her but she sits down regardless.

JOAN

What's wrong?

DRAKE

You watch the game on TV last night?

JOAN

I did.

DRAKE

That's what's wrong.

JOAN

Surprised it didn't come out sooner. Facebook, Twitter, twenty-four hours news...people were bound to...

She realizes that she isn't helping things so she clams up. After a few tense moments, Drake has a memory and comes to life somewhat.

DRAKE

When I was a kid, you had to drag me off the asphalt. You'd never catch me ending a game before it was pitch black. I'd always try to get in one more game before twilight closed out. If not a whole game, then one more point. If not a point, then one more shot. If not a shot, I'd settle for a fuckin' moment. Twilight...this time right here...it's do or die time when you're a kid. It's like nature's crunchtime you know? And we were always up against it. At least...I was.

JOAN

Do you feel like you're up against it now?

DRAKE

How's that?

JOAN

Like the sun isn't just setting on a basketball game...it's setting on your entire basketball career. It's setting on your life...and this last chance you've been given.

His body language shifts from nostalgic to defeatist.

DRAKE

It set already. I can't go back.

JOAN

Why not? What's stopping you?

Drake explodes off the bench in a rage, shouting at the top of his lungs. Joan cannot conceal her fear.

DRAKE

The same thing that has always stopped me! The same fucking thing that will always stop me! One night! One fucking night!

JOAN

Sit down. Right now. I will not talk to you like this. Sit down!

He stares at her, filled with rage. His fists clench as the anger peaks. He stares at her and she stares back; afraid but courageous. He exhales and sits back down. His anger subsides a bit and she breathes a little easier.

JOAN

That night's stopping you? Than you need to find a way to reconcile with it...and do the same with yourself.

DRAKE

And how am I supposed to do that?

JOAN

I don't know. Maybe you need to talk to that girl, try to make amends with her maybe. You never thought about that? You never attempted to contact her or write her when you were away?

DRAKE

I did. Once. She never replied.

JOAN

So go see her. It's been, what, eleven years, I doubt she still has a restraining order against you. Are you allowed to leave campus?

DRAKE

Yeah. But not the state.

JOAN

Well then, if she still lives in North Carolina, then you wouldn't be leaving the state, would you. Does she?

DRAKE

Maybe. But even if I went, then what?

JOAN

Well, for starters, tell her you're fuckin' sorry Drake. You need to start some kinda process of forgiveness. Chances are she'll never forgive you...but you need to at least try to forgive yourself.

He stares ahead in silence, unable to respond.

JOAN

But before you do that, I think you should go talk to your team. You need them...and they need you.

Drake offers no response so Joan stands and walks off.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Drake walks past a group of STUDENTS carrying his backpack. Maybe they notice him, maybe they don't. He can't tell. When there is a safe distance between them, Drake hears something that validates his suspicion.

STUDENT (O.S.)

You fuckin' rapist!

Drake does not respond to the words but they gnash into him like teeth. He keeps walking but is not long before he notices more eyes on him. And then more eyes. Eventually, it is one pair of eyes too many and he takes off running.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Joan lectures her class and there is an EMPTY SEAT where Drake usually sits. She glances at it before continuing.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Drake, distressed and still adrenalized, stuffs his toiletries and his limited wardrobe into his backpack.

He looks around and then throws his bag down in disgust. He sits on his bed; breathing heavily, torn in two directions.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Coach screams from the sidelines as the Catamounts, minus Drake, play GEORGIA SOUTHERN. They are losing by sixteen points and playing terribly.

COACH
Sloppy! Sloppy! Time out!

The REFEREE BLOWS HIS WHISTLE and the Catamounts walk over, dejected and tired. They huddle up and Coach is disgusted.

COACH
I don't understand. You never played this game before? You never ran the offense before? You're all over the goddamn place. Pull it together and play these last five minutes like you actually know how to play basketball. Stop embarrassing yourselves. Go.

The team disbands without an inkling of enthusiasm or confidence. Coach can only shake his head. Joan, watching from the stands, is noticeably dismayed.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Drake walks down the street with his bag and his basketball. He passes a PARK where six KIDS are PLAYING BASKETBALL. They are all twelve years old and playing with great enthusiasm.

Drake looks down at his basketball, running his hands over the years of scuff marks. He watches the kids playing and something resembling a smile spreads across his face.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Coach is in the middle of lecturing the team when he sees Drake walking into the gym carrying his basketball. Coach stops talking and the whole team turns to face him.

Drake shuffles towards them with small, insecure steps and he reaches them eventually. He stands there, dribbling his basketball, searching for the right words.

DRAKE

This game...this team...it's all I got. I need it. You. And I need you to need me. Please. Let me back on this team...please. And I promise, I'll take you to a place this school has never been.

BYRON

And where's that?

DRAKE

The Dance. I swear on my life, I will take you to The Dance.

He looks over the faces of his teammates and the coaches. Silence persists; thick and long. Coach steps forward.

COACH

Let you back on the team?

Drake nods humbly and Coach looks over the eyes of his team. They all nod or make a nonverbal gesture suggesting that they want him back. Byron hesitates but finally nods reluctantly.

COACH

You were never off it. Suit up.

Drake flashes a subtle smile laced with gratitude.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Drake and his team practice with a newfound intensity. They plow through offensive schemes and fast breaks with grace, fluidity and seamless cohesiveness.

MONTAGE - EIGHT GAME WINNING STREAK

Drake stands in the middle of his team huddle, psyching them up as they bounce and gyrate in their pre-game ritual. They are in a frenzy as they explode out of the locker room.

Throughout the montage, Western Carolina plays various teams of varying talent levels. Some of the games they win by wide margins and others they win by grinding it out.

Through it all, Drake emerges as a leader. He takes tough shots in the games clutch moments and he becomes more vocal, with his teammates when needed. At home games, the sold-out crowds gets increasingly vocal in supporting the Catamounts.

When on the road, fans are hostile, particularly towards Drake.

Some dress in black and white PRISON UNIFORMS and heckle him. Other's hold up signs like the one referencing Drake's jersey: **#11 = 11 year sentence for RAPE**

At one game, a fan pelts Drake with a pair of handcuffs during pre-game warm-ups. This rattles him and during the game he is on edge, not as focused as he usually is.

After a hard foul, he shoves a player to the ground. The scuffle is broken up before it can escalate but Drake is on the edge of losing control. Eventually, he pulls himself together in the second half and his team wins another game.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

The Catamounts battle Boston College in a thrilling game that goes to a second overtime. Drake barks out instructions in the huddle during the final moments of the second OT.

DRAKE

They're doublin' down on Brandon every time he gets the ball. The minute they load up on the blocks, Jim, Byron, hit your spots and it'll be wide open for you, I'm tellin' you.

On the very next play, Drake gets the ball to Brandon on the low post and he is double teamed. Byron floats to an open spot on the wing and Brandon finds him for an open jump shot. He makes it and moments later, the BUZZER SOUNDS and the Catamounts have won again.

Byron and Drake embrace and Byron smiles at him in approval. He is a believer now. They run to the locker room past a group of HECKLERS who SHOUT 'rapist' and 'pedophile.'

INT. STUDIO - NIGHT

Two COMMENTATORS discuss the BC game in the ESPN studio.

COMMENTATOR

BC the latest victim in this nine game Catamount crusade. Can anybody stop this team?

COMMENTATOR

I don't know but despite their streak, they are still in second place in the Southern Conference behind Davidson.

(MORE)

COMMENTATOR (cont'd)

However, with on-the-road victories against UNC and now Boston College, the Tournament Selection Committee has to be taking notice.

INT. DORM - NIGHT

Drake and Brandon wrestle playfully on their way down the hallway. They stop joking around when they see the word that has been painted on the door of their dormroom in red: **RAPIST**

BRANDON

I'll get a sponge out the bathroom.

DRAKE

Just...wait till tomorrow.

BRANDON

Fuck tomorrow. Muthafuckas.

Brandon is fuming as he takes off down the hall. Drake sits on his bed and stares at the floor; disheartened.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY - 1998

Jezzie weeps on the witness stand as the prosecutor questions her.

PROSECUTOR

And Drake was handing other people shots? Or just you?

JEZZIE

Well, other people too. But I was always first.

PROSECUTOR

And then when he had gotten you sufficiently drunk, he took you...

CHRIS

Objection, speculation.

JUDGE

Sustained.

PROSECUTOR

After you were drunk, he then took you into the bedroom?

JEZZIE

Yes. He said he wanted to talk, to apologize to me. So I went.

PROSECUTOR

And when you got there?

Jezzie starts crying but continues.

JEZZIE

He threw me on the bed. Said he wanted to...to fuck me one more time. He said he wanted me to fuck him and mean it. I tried to push him off and I scratched him but he, he wouldn't stop. He just, he just kept, he...

She breaks down and is unable to continue.

PROSECUTOR

And then he raped you?

JEZZIE

(quietly) Yes. Yes.

She is in hysterics and Drake can only burry his head in his hands.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Drake looks up to see Brandon finishing up on the door.

BRANDON

There it is. Good as new baby.

He shows Drake the clean door; a subtle pink tint remains.

DRAKE

Thanks man.

BRANDON

I got you.

Brandon closes the door.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A PROFESSOR hands out EXAMS and Drake starts his. He fills it out rapidly and seems to have a solid understanding of the information. The PROFESSOR watches Drake suspiciously.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Drake walks through the park, picking up garbage with his litter stick. He passes a group of kids who glare at him and make a concerted effort to walk far away from him. Though flustered, Drake continues with his labors.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - EVENING

Drake sits on the bench with his litter stick, in deep thought. He gazes out at the river, the SUN SETTING over it.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Drake urinates into a cup and hands it to the doctor.

DOCTOR

Thank you sir. And we'll...

DRAKE

See you next week, yeah.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Drake sits on Joan's couch in her office.

JOAN

You sure you want to do this?

DRAKE

Of course I don't want to do this.
But...I think I might need to.

JOAN

And you think you need to do it
now?

DRAKE

This is all a mirage, don't you get
that? College, basketball,
everything. I'm hiding from
it...and I can't do it anymore, I
just can't.

JOAN

I'm not saying you shouldn't...

DRAKE

But...what? Not now?

JOAN

This is a stressful time for you. Maybe right now, your focus should stay here for now.

DRAKE

Where?

JOAN

The Southern Conference Tournament. You win it, March Madness is a lock. Even if you finish second, you still have a good chance. It's been a while since you accomplished a goal, don't you think? And you made your team a promise.

DRAKE

So if we win the conference tournament, what, then I'll be ready to see her?

JOAN

That's simplifying a bit...but perhaps.

Drake nods, though not necessarily agreeing with her.

INT. CHARLOTTE BOBCATS ARENA - EVENING

MONTAGE

The Catamounts plow through the Southern Conference Tournament. In the first game, they blow out APPALACHIAN STATE by a margin of eighteen points. In the semi-final round, they play UNC GREENSBORO.

This is a more competitive game but Drake leads his team on a second half run and the Catamounts win by nine points. During the postgame wrap-up, a COMMENTATOR recaps the game.

COMMENTATOR

So another easy victory for the Catamounts which, including the regular season, makes it eleven straight. Now it is down to one game and a chance to go to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in school history and Davidson University is all that stands in their way.

INT. CHARLOTTE BOBCATS ARENA - EVENING

Drake sits on the floor at center court of the empty Bobcats Arena. He looks around; taking in the silence and majesty of the NBA arena. He cradles his old basketball and hangs his head in his lap.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY - 1998

Drake sits beside his attorney Chris Foreman and when the Judge enters, EVERYONE IN THE COURTROOM STANDS.

JUDGE

Be seated.

Everyone sits and so does the Judge. He glares at Drake, their eyes locked for a few beats. Finally, he speaks.

JUDGE

Will the defendant please rise.

Drake stands defiantly, never taking his eyes off the judge, who motions to the jury, who hands the BAILIFF the VERDICT. The judge reads it and hands it back, fixing his gaze on Drake once again. He smirks at Drake before he speaks.

JUDGE

How does the jury find?

The head JUROR reads the verdict.

JUROR

On the charge of statutory rape in the second degree, we find the defendant...guilty.

Drake listens but does not flinch.

JUROR

On the charge of sexual assault in the first degree, we find the defendant...guilty. And on the charge of rape in the first degree, we find the defendant...guilty as charged.

The juror hands the bailiff the verdict, who returns it to the judge. The judge continues glaring at Drake.

JUDGE

Young man, it will take a great deal of effort on your part to redeem yourself of this crime and I've seen nothing in your character to suggest that you can or will. So it is with some regret that I can only sentence you to twenty years at Piedmont Correctional Institution. You will be eligible for parole in ten. Court is adjourned.

He HAMMERS THE GAVEL.

INT. CHARLOTTE BOBCATS ARENA - NIGHT

Drake snaps to attention and glances around the empty arena. He stands and pounds the ball on the court with authority and purpose before walking off the court.

INT. CHARLOTTE BOBCATS ARENA - NIGHT

We TIP OFF and the championship game between Western Carolina and Davidson is under way. The winner is guaranteed a seed in the NCAA tournament. The loser is left in the ambiguous hands of the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee.

Drake leads the assault efficiently as the pace of the game perpetually quickens. Coach substitutes players in and out of the game like hockey line changes. In the final minutes of the second half, the lead changes with every possession.

Drake is tired but focused, as are his teammates. Coach calls TIME OUT with thirty-four seconds left; The Catamounts are down by one. The team huddles up.

COACH

Thirty-four seconds. Thirty-four seconds and one play to get to the Dance. It happens, right here. They're tired, they're tired. They're sick of our offense, they're sick of the motion so what are we gonna do?

DRAKE

Motion.

COACH

Motion right up their ass! We're gonna run 'Motion Six' for thirty seconds without makin' a move. Motion six over and over and over 'till that clock hits four seconds. Not one move till it hits 'four.' At 'four,' Drake, you go to the rack, keep it motion and something will present itself. When it does, you take it. You take it and you take this game. Catamounts on three. One, two, three.

TEAM

Catamounts!

The teams takes the floor and after the inbounds, Drake initiates a neverending stream of picks, rolls and passes. Each time, the ball ends up back in Drake's hands and they run the play again.

The Davidson players hustle to keep up with the non-stop Catamount offense. The clock ticks down and Drake catches the ball just as the clock hits four seconds. He has a quarter step on his defender and dribbles towards the rim.

When another defender steps in, Drake lobs a pass towards the basket. Brandon catches the alley-oop and dunks it as the BUZZER SOUNDS. Final score: **Western Carolina 75 Davidson 74**

Drake leaps into Brandon's arms and he hoists him in the air as if he were a trophy. The team celebrates and Coach joins them, rejoicing in their first NCAA Tournament berth.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Drake and his team walk into a PARTY that is in full swing. They are in high spirits as random STUDENTS approach them with congratulatory high fives and overzealous SCREAMS.

Someone offers Drake a beer and he declines. He is noticeably uncomfortable and by far the oldest person at the party. He scans the party for accusatory eyes and finds them everywhere.

Suddenly, an inebriated GIRL stumbles and falls on Drake, who catches her. She laughs sloppily and drapes herself on him, using him to keep her upright. She slurs when she speaks.

GIRL

Nice catch! You better not, don't move or I'll fall. And I don't want to fall.

Drake's discomfort grows. He glances down her shirt at her exposed cleavage and his eyes fill with a restrained lust. She hangs all over him, smiling through her drunken haze.

GIRL

You're cute. What's your name?

Two other GIRLS grab her, quickly ushering away from Drake. They glare at him as they walk off. Drake notices a group of GIRLS glaring at him and he looks in the other direction.

He spots two larger MALE STUDENTS eyeballing him and his level of discomfort peaks. The yelling, the chaos and the surly looks overwhelm him and he makes a decision.

DRAKE

B. I'm out.

BRANDON

What do you mean you're out?

DRAKE

I'm goin' home.

BRANDON

Yo, take a minute man, one fuckin' minute to feel good about this!

DRAKE

I'll see you later.

He scurries out and Brandon shakes his head.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Coach talks on the phone, still beaming from the win.

COACH

Yeah, how's it comin' along? Good. Good. (pause) So, uh, we won. We won, can you believe it?! We're goin' to the Tournament. It's, it's unreal. The kids deserve it, they played a hell of a game. Vera, I know what our deal is and all but...this is very special for me. And it, it would mean alot to me if...

Coach listens to her response and his elation falters.

COACH

I, I understand. Okay, that's,
okay. Um, yeah, I have a few
things to take care of then I'll be
home. Yup.

He hangs up the phone; devastated and defeated.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Drake types on Brandon's computer and after a few moments,
text appears on the screen:

Jiselle Phelps
215 Cornish Ave.
Hickory, NC 28721

Drake hits the '**Print**' icon on the computer.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Drake grabs his backpack and his basketball.

BRANDON

You're like Linus with that fuckin'
basketball dog.

Drake smirks.

BRANDON

You're really goin' home?

DRAKE

Yeah.

BRANDON

And you're gonna see...her?

DRAKE

Yeah. I gotta know. I just gotta.

Drake looks at Brandon; a silence envelops them. Finally,
they shake hands and Brandon pulls him into a bro-hug.

BRANDON

The Dance baby.

DRAKE

The Dance.

BRANDON
Make sure you get back for it.

DRAKE
I will.

Drake smiles and walks out.

INT. BUS - DAY

Drake sits, his basketball in his lap, gazing apprehensively out the window at the passing rural landscape.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Drake gets off the bus and looks around his home town of Hickory, where he has not set foot in nearly twelve years. A few CARS pass occasionally but most traffic is on foot.

The main street is quiet and friendly, with all the staples of rural North Carolina; a post office, a small market, a bank. Drake looks around tenuously and starts walking.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Drake walks onto an empty basketball court. He dribbles the ball and shoots on the rusted basket. The shredded nylon net hangs on by a thread. He holds the ball and remembers.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - EVENING - 1992

DRAKE, at the age of twelve, plays basketball with a group of other BOYS. We now recognize him as the boy from the opening scene. He is already sinking long jumpshots and displaying an advanced handle for someone his age.

DRAKE
Come on, one more game.

BOY
It's dark dude.

DRAKE
It ain't that dark. One more point then.

BOY
Drake, it's night.

DRAKE
Shut up, it ain't night. One more
point. Next point wins.

BOY
Fine.

Drake checks the ball and then dribbles through a crowd of
kids, scoring on a difficult, highly contested lay-up.

DRAKE
That was too easy. One more point.

BOY
You just said 'one more.'

DRAKE
And now I'm sayin' it again.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Drake grins. The court has aged; the lines having faded and
the rims rusted. Drake takes one more shot and then leaves.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Drake walks down the street and stops when he gets to a
house. The house is boarded up and a faded '**For Sale**' sign
lies on the ground. A multitude of emotions flash across his
face; nostalgia, pain. After one last glance, he walks away.

INT. DINER - DAY

Drake walks into a diner and sits at the counter. He starts
reading the menu and a thirty-year-old WOMAN walks over.

WOMAN
Hi there. Coffee?

DRAKE
No. Thank you. Just some ice
water for now...

He stops talking when he looks at her. He sees a familiar
face hiding behind the years of stress, the subtle greys and
the crow's feet. She recognizes him too.

DRAKE
Melanie?

MELANIE

Oh my god.

DRAKE

Oh my god.

MELANIE

You're...you're home.

DRAKE

I'm home. Well for today anyway.
How, uh, how are you?

The moment proves too much for both of them for casual conversation. She speaks softly; as if every sound and gesture she makes might offend the world at large.

MELANIE

I, uh, read about you in the paper.
A tiny little article, I almost
didn't see it at all. You're in
college, yeah?

DRAKE

Yeah.

MELANIE

Playing basketball?

DRAKE

Yeah. The world's oldest freshman.

A long silence as they both search for small talk.

MELANIE

So what are you, why did you, um,
come back?

DRAKE

I want to...well, I want to see
her, actually. See if I can't, I
don't know, make right some how.
You know how she's doin'?

MELANIE

Jezzy?

Drake nods and Melanie is taken aback for a moment.

MELANIE

She's uh, she's a mess the last I
heard. She's gone really. I mean,
she's here, but she ain't. She
been gone since...you know.

(MORE)

MELANIE (cont'd)

Then her momma passed on a year later and she spent some time in the hospital, couple hospitals I think. Heard she lives in a mobile home behind her parents' old house. Her brother Jeremy takes care of her.

Drake is overcome with guilt; and seemingly, so is Melanie.

DRAKE

But you ain't seen her?

MELANIE

Oh no. Jeremy comes in here all the time but...she never talked to me. Not after you and I...

Drake nods and Melanie's guilt kicks into high gear.

MELANIE

You know, I never forgave myself for not coming to see you or for never writing you. I hated myself...

DRAKE

Stop. I never wrote you either. I'm the one that pretty much broke everything. Me. Us. And there just, there wasn't any fixin' it.

MELANIE

Is there any fixin' it now?

DRAKE

For me? I hope.

She nods, choking back the guilt the best she can.

MELANIE

I uh, I still feel guilty. Always have. Like if we never did... that...that night, she would never...And then when I heard they let you out, I figured you found out what happened or the courts did or something. I wish I could have done something, I mean maybe I could have but who am I, you know?

DRAKE

Done something about what?

MELANIE

And I mean, by the time she told
people the truth, it was years
later, so what could I have done?

DRAKE

The truth about what?

Melanie's face turns ghostly white.

MELANIE

You mean, you don't know?

DRAKE

Know what?

Melanie freezes, too overwhelmed to disclose anything.

MELANIE

I think you should go talk to
Jezzie.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Drake walks down a residential street, carrying the PAPER he printed out in his dorm room. When he reaches the house, a flicker of familiarity comes over him. He glimpses into the back yard and spots a run-down MOBILE HOME.

Though apprehensive, he walks towards it. He reaches the door and is about to knock when he hears a WOMAN'S VOICE.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Come on in Drake.

INT. TRAILOR HOME - DAY

JEZZIE PHELPS, now twenty-eight, slumps in a shoddy couch. She is overweight and her hair is a greasy cluster of split-ends. The pretty girl she was is long gone. Though chain-smoking cigarettes, she is bordering on catatonic.

The trailer is littered with food, dirty plates, clothes and other forms of miscellaneous clutter. Drake stands in the doorway; disgusted and paralyzed.

DRAKE

How did you know...Melanie called
you, didn't she.

JEZZIE

Yup. Little slut. Still a slut that girl. Some people are like that...like a big slab of granite that can't ever change.

Drake looks her over and she is obviously not well. Her eyes drift about and at times, she smiles for no reason.

JEZZIE

Ain't seen you in a while? Where you been?

DRAKE

Prison.

JEZZIE

God, you were a great basketball player. A pretty good fuck too. How long's it been?

DRAKE

You and me? Twelve years. The night we won the State Championship. The night I...

His voice trails off and she looks into his eyes for the first time. A vacant smile spreads across her face.

JEZZIE

The night you what? The night you raped me?

Drake is silent and taken aback by her bemused expression.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT - 1998

Drake, Jezzie and his teammates inhale shots and SCREAM. Drake winces with disgust as Jezzie pours another round. She hands one to Drake and he shakes his head defiantly.

JEZ ZIE (V.O.)

That was a fun party. Everyone was all jazzed up about the game and we were just drinking and screaming. So much fun.

Jezzie starts kissing Drake's neck and WHISPERS in his ear. She persuades him to inhale the shot and he does. Then she licks the back of his neck and puts her hand on his crotch.

He cannot resist her and she leads him across the living room. Before entering a bedroom, she eyeballs Melanie across the room and flashes her a spiteful, victorious smirk.

JEZZIE (V.O.)

Every one was there. Even that little slut you fucked. But you were mine that night.

Melanie, dejected and unsure of herself, walks out of the party as Jezzie and Drake disappear into the bedroom.

INT. TRAILOR HOME - DAY

Drake is growing increasingly uncomfortable as Jezzie lights another cigarette. She is almost in a trance as she recalls.

DRAKE

Listen, I need to know what happened that night...

JEZZIE

Sshhhhhh, I'm swimmin' down memory lane right now. Swimmin'. And then, then I took you into that room and I said...you remember what I said?

DRAKE

I don't remember anything.

JEZZIE

I do. I said...

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT -1998

Jezzie shoves Drake on the bed and climbs on top of him.

JEZZIE

You better fuck me right now state champ.

DRAKE

(slurring) Jez...please.

JEZZIE

Okay, please fuck me. State champs, I can't believe it! You know how fuckin' horny I am right now? I wanna taste you.

She goes down on him and he allows it for a moment but he eventually pulls her off and shoves her across the room. She falls to the ground with a thud.

JEZZIE

What the fuck is wrong with you?

DRAKE

We're over. That's what's wrong with me.

Though extremely drunk, his disgust for her trumps all.

JEZZIE

Why? Because of Kyle? I told you, I was drunker than hell, I can't hardly remember what happened.

DRAKE

You fucked him twice, that's what happened. Now piss off. I never want to see you or talk to you again. You got it?

Jezzie's face goes blank; every drop of emotion oozing out of her. She walks towards him slowly; her voice equal parts seductive and desperate, though empty at the same time.

JEZZIE

I fucked Kyle and then you fucked Melanie didn't you? Yeah, you did...so...now we're squared. Come on baby, lets have one more night together. Give me one more night with my first.

She gently lies on top of Drake and starts dry-humping him.

JEZZIE

Fuck me once more. I want you to fuck me and you'd better mean it. Come on baby, fuck me one more time before you say goodbye.

She gently licks his neck and lips. Drake suddenly flips her over and rips her shirt off, the buttons tearing from the cloth. She gasps; in fear or in ecstasy, maybe both.

They tear the rest of each other's clothes off and paw each other aggressively. They have sex; rough, violent sex. Jezzie antagonizes him with a breathy whisper.

JEZZIE

Harder. Harder! Come on baby.
Haaaaarrrrdddeeeerrrrrrr! Aahh!

She SCREAMS and SCRATCHES HIM, her nails carving two wounds from his neck to his chest. He screams in pain but continues; their bodies writhing in violent harmony. Eventually he climaxes and collapses in a heap in the bed.

INT. TRAILOR HOME - DAY

Drake is amazed and horrified, hanging on every word as she lucidly recollects every detail of an evening he had forgotten entirely. She is in ecstasy as she remembers.

JEZZIE

You were mine that night. But I wanted you to be mine forever. (laughing) 'Forever'...that's actually a realistic time frame when you're sixteen. 'Forever' is possible when you're young, stupid and in love. But you didn't feel the same way I did about 'forever.'

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1998

Jezzie lies on top of him, looking down at him with codependency that is masquerading as love.

JEZZIE

Let's stop with all this bullshit baby. I, I love you and we belong together. We do. Now. Forever.

She bends down to kiss him but he stiffarms her face and pushes her off the bed and onto the floor. His face is one of drunken contempt without a hint of compassion.

DRAKE

I will never love you. Do you hear me? And just so you know, I had sex with Melanie...because I love her. Her. Not you. So get the fuck out of my life. Forever.

Jezzie starts SHAKING and SOBBING, in the early stages of a panic attack. She manages to get her pants and her bra on but collapses and starts weeping uncontrollably.

Drake, mildly concerned, walks over to her. She punches him in the eye and again in the stomach, sending Drake stumbling onto the bed. She starts SCREAMING; loud, piercing screams.

She explodes out of the bedroom and runs out of the party screaming. Drake lingers for a moment; drunk, confused, in pain. Naked, he wanders out of the bedroom to a house full of people silently staring at him.

INT. TRAILOR HOME - DAY

Jezy laughs as Drake stares at her in shock and disgust.

JEZZIE

When I was walking home, some woman picked me up. She asked what happened and I said I was raped. The next thing I knew, I was in a police station. The rest is kind of blurry.

She looks over at Drake, who is starting to fall apart.

JEZZIE

What's the matter super-star? Not what you were expecting to hear? Sorry kiddo. But you bit me and I bit back. Nothing you can do about it now. No tears required. We spilled that milk a long time ago. All you can do now is clean it up.

She giggles to herself. Drake is shaking, rage pulsing through him. He can barely speak.

DRAKE

Why? How? Answer me.

Jezy stares at him and smiles softly.

JEZZIE

Because I wanted... 'forever.' Part of me still thinks that's an actual time frame... 'forever.' Maybe it is.

Drake rushes towards the couch. Right before he reaches her...

JEREMY (O.S.)

Hellooooooooooooo.

JEREMY appears in the doorway holding a bag of groceries. Drake stops in his tracks and looks at him.

JEREMY

Oh, you have a visitor. Hi there.

Jeremy enters and crosses to the kitchen where he starts putting away groceries. He is an exuberant and charming man but oblivious to the tension in the room.

JEREMY

I'm Jezzie's brother Jeremy. You an old friend or something? It's nice of you to stop by. She hardly ever gets any visitors. What's your name pal?

Drake glares at Jezzie, who just sits there, inhaling and exhaling smoke. She is an emotional void, an apparition.

DRAKE

I was just leaving.

JEREMY

Um, okay. You don't have to.

Drake walks out and closes the door behind him.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Drake SLAMS THE DOOR of a phone booth on the side of the road, locking himself inside. He SCREAMS but the sounds are muted by the glass encasement. He falls to the ground; his body convulsing with violent sobs.

He struggles to catch his breath and elbows the booth. He elbows it again and the large pane of glass CRACKS but does not shatter. He weeps for the reality that was and the life that has become.

He eventually calms down and even though the tears continue flowing, his breathing regulates. From his knees, he picks up the receiver, inserts a handful of quarters and DIALS A NUMBER. The phone RINGS three times and JOAN ANSWER IT.

JOAN (O.S.)

Hello.

DRAKE

I uh, it never even. She made it all up, I never, she, she, I never, I never. I didn't do it.

(MORE)

DRAKE (cont'd)
 I didn't, I never raped her. I, I
 never even, I never...

He drops the phone and it dangles. We hear JOAN'S VOICE calling his name as he breaks into sobs once again.

JOAN (O.S.)
 Drake? Are you there? Drake?

EXT. BUS STATION - EVENING

Drake stumbles down the road, barely able to walk. Every ounce of life has been sucked from him. He eventually reaches the bus station and shuffles inside.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Drake rides on the bus, watching his hometown pass by his window. Everything is different now; barren and hopeless.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

The bus pulls into a station and the man in the seat next to Drake gets off, leaving his NEWSPAPER on the seat. Drake notices the cover of the sports page. It reads: **The Bracket**

Drake grabs it and flips to a SPREAD of the **NCAA Tournament Bracket**. When his eyes reach a certain point, something registers and his stone-faced expression changes slightly.

He drops the paper on the seat and we see that the first seed in the **Raleigh Bracket** is **Duke University**. And in the **First Round**, they are matched up against **Western Carolina**.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

It is early in the morning and Drake walks through the quiet campus that is beginning to show subtle signs of life. He is exhausted, drained, broken. He eventually reaches his dorm.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Joan takes attendance in ethics class.

JOAN
 Kelly Oswalt.

KELLY (O.S.)
 Here.

JOAN
Drake Paxon. Drake Paxon.

She looks at the empty chair where he usually sits. She swallows the concern that wells up and moves on.

JOAN
Michael Renowitz.

MICHAEL (O.S.)
Here.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Coach sits at the kitchen table, WRITING A NOTE. When he finishes, he places a TICKET next to the note. It reads:
NCAA Tournament - First Round - Duke VS Western Carolina

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - EVENING

Drake sits on a bench, watching the SUN SET over the river. His basketball sits beside him. Joan walks over, picks up the basketball and sits down.

JOAN
Thing's got some milage on it.

Drake is entranced and unresponsive. Joan puts down the ball and studies him for a few moments.

JOAN
Missed you in class today.

Still no response from Drake.

JOAN
You wanna tell me what happened?

DRAKE
She made it up...all of it. I broke her heart so to get me back, she made up a story. A pretty good one too.

JOAN
I'm sorry.

DRAKE
So am I.

EXT. GYM - EVENING

Coach talks with Brandon in the front of a BUS. The other members of the team are already on board.

COACH

You don't know about anything that's been going on with him?

BRANDON

Naw man. Well, he did, he did go home after the Davidson game. He went to...shit...he went to see the girl that he, you know...

COACH

He did? What happened?

BRANDON

I don't know. He came back and didn't say much. He was kinda fucked up.

COACH

What does that mean?

BRANDON

Means he was fucked up, like shit went wrong or something. Last I seen him, he said he was goin' down to the water.

Coach paces and admits the truth despite himself.

COACH

This team doesn't win without him. He's the engine...and this team just does not run without him. I need...we need him. We need him.

Coach stands, lost in thought. Brandon stares at him.

COACH

You got his gear?

BRANDON

Yeah, I got it.

COACH

Then get on the bus.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - EVENING

Joan and Drake sit on the bench in silence.

JOAN

So what now?

Drake shrugs indifferently. This irritates Joan.

JOAN

What does that mean? You're gonna give up? Stop goin' to my classes? To all your classes? Gonna stop playin' basketball too? Maybe you can do something to violate your parole so you can go back to prison.

DRAKE

What are you doing? I just told you I did eleven years for a crime I didn't commit and...what are you doing? What's wrong with you?

JOAN

Sorry but sympathy's not my thing. And neither is bullshit so tell me what you're gonna do Drake? Sit here and feel sorry for yourself?

Her lack of sympathy bewilders and enrages him.

DRAKE

What the fuck is wrong with you? I just found out that I just lost...

JOAN

Get over it.

Drake stands up and starts pacing.

DRAKE

...that I just lost the last eleven years of my life...for nothing.

Joan gets up and follows him.

JOAN

Get over it.

DRAKE

For nothing!

JOAN

It's over.

DRAKE

For nothing!

JOAN

Yeah, you lost eleven years...now
you got the rest of your life.

DRAKE

What's the point?

JOAN

What's the point? Because you're
not a fuckin' victim Drake. That's
the point.

DRAKE

Fuck you.

He turns around and starts to walk off. She follows him.

JOAN

Yeah, fuck me. Fuck you, you
little pussy.

He stops and turns, glaring at her.

JOAN

None of this is your fault right?
You never did anything wrong in
your life?

DRAKE

Not to deserve this. Not eleven
years in a fuckin' cage!

JOAN

Maybe...but you've gotta move on
Drake. That's all you can do here.

He stares at her, resisting every word.

JOAN

This is where you choose! Right
here, right now! This is the
moment where you determine the
trajectory for the rest of your
life. And you're running out of
time Drake. You see that?

She motions to the picturesque sunset. The sun is reaching
its lowest point in the sky, and its most colorful.

JOAN

It's beautiful, isn't it? Well,
that's you. That is you. The sun
is setting on your life and you got
one more chance to do something
with it. So what's it gonna be?
What's it gonna be Drake?

His body slumps and he hangs his head. All the resolve and defiance has drained from him. She grabs the basketball off the bench, hands it to him and walks off; leaving him alone with the setting sun.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - NIGHT

The bus pulls to a halt, its HEADLIGHTS SHINING out over the benches lining the river. Drake is still on the bench, shivering and cradling his ball. Coach gets off the bus, walks over to Drake and without a word, sits beside him. Drake listens as Coach takes a deep breath and opens up.

COACH

Last time we had a shot at gettin'
to the dance was in 1999. We had a
good squad with good point guard.
But we lost in the finals of the
S.C. Tournament and our point guard
didn't have a very good game.

INT. BAR-NIGHT

MONTAGE of images. Coach sits on a bar stool. A YOUNG MAN sits down beside him. The bartender pours a shot. Coach inhales it.

COACH (V.O.)

After the game, I made him come to
a bar with me and with each drink,
I relived a play he made that
contributed to our losing.

INT. ARENA-NIGHT

MONTAGE of images. The young man from the bar makes a pass that is intercepted. He takes a shot and misses it. He passes to a player. Coach is on the sideline shaking his head.

COACH (V.O.)

He'd missed an open shot, drink.
He made a crucial turnover, drink.
(MORE)

COACH (V.O.) (cont'd)
 He passed when he should've shot,
 another drink. Whenever I lost, I
 drank and I drank hard.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - NIGHT

As Coach gets deeper into the story, the pain rises to the surface.

COACH
 I drank real hard that night and
 when I was good and drunk...I drove
 us both home. He wanted to walk
 but I wouldn't let him.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

MONTAGE of images. Coach's car swerves down a rural street. The car flies off the road. A TREE...and then A CRASH. We see a shattered, blood-stained windshield. MICHAEL BAUMGARDNER lies in the passenger seat, unconscious, his face covered with blood. Vera collapses to the ground, weeping.

COACH (V.O.)
 Then I uh...wrapped my car around a
 tree about a block from my house.
 When I came to...my son was dead on
 the seat beside me. There was so
 much blood that I couldn't even see
 his face. My wife didn't believe
 in divorce so she stayed with me.
 She didn't talk to me for a year
 but she stayed.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - NIGHT

Drake listens as Coach finishes this awful story.

COACH
 She ain't watched me coach
 since...and I ain't had a drink
 since. Every day I live with what
 I did. But in alot of ways, the
 person that did that ain't the
 person that's sittin' here right
 now. So whatever happened that
 night with you...whoever you were
 then...that ain't the person that's
 here now.

Drake fights back tears and they have not even noticed that Brandon has walked over and is standing in front of them.

BRANDON
You alright dog?

Drake responds but does not look at him.

DRAKE
I know what happened that night B.
So ask me. Ask me if I did it.

Brandon stares at him but does not respond.

DRAKE
Go ahead.

BRANDON
Did you do it? Did you...rape that
girl?

DRAKE
No. I didn't. I know that now.

The entire team has gotten off the bus and now stands behind Brandon. Drake is aware of them but does not look at them.

DRAKE
Before I went away, I signed a
letter of intent to go to Duke.
And the whole time I was in prison,
Coach K never came to see me. He
never...wrote to say, 'sorry you
won't be playing for me' or
anything. I know it's stupid
but...that always felt like a slap
in the face.

BRANDON
So here's your chance.

DRAKE
Chance to what?

BRANDON
Slap him back.

Drake looks up at him, his eyes meeting his roommate's for the first time.

DRAKE
Slap him back?

Brandon smiles.

BRANDON
Slap that muthafucka back.

DRAKE
Yeah?

BRANDON
Yeah.

Drake stares at him; reflecting, toiling. Finally, a hint of a grin spreads across his face.

DRAKE
Let's go.

Brandon smirks at him inquisitively.

BRANDON
Lets' go?

DRAKE
Let's go.

BRANDON
Let's go.

DRAKE
Let's go.

Drake gets off the bench and members of the team circle around Brandon and Drake who are one-upping each other in volume and enthusiasm as they psych each other up in their pre-game ritual.

BRANDON
Let's go.

DRAKE
Let's go.

COACH
Let's go.

DRAKE
Let's go.

Coach has joined the circle and one by one, the rest of the team joins in, interlocking arms until they are a gyrating huddle, ready to explode.

TEAM
Let's go! Let's go! Let's go!
Let's go! Let's go! Let's go!
Let's gooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!!

The huddle disbands and they rush onto the bus, pulsating with exuberance and confidence.

EXT. RALEIGH ARENA - NIGHT

FANS file into the Raleigh RBC Center for the game between Duke and Western Carolina. A COMMENTATOR narrates the opening of the prime-time CBS broadcast.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

The wait is over, March Madness is upon us and CBS has it all, total coverage up until and including the Final Four in Detroit, two weeks from tonight. But the pilgrimage to Detroit starts here in Raleigh, the journey to the Final Four begins...right now.

INT. RALEIGH ARENA - ARENA

Drake leads the Catamounts onto the court and the Catamount FANS in attendance jump to their feet. They start their warm-ups and after a few moments, DUKE UNIVERSITY takes the court.

They jog out with the confidence of a basketball dynasty. COACH MIKE KRZYZEWSKI struts out; calm and dignified. He meets Coach Baumgartner at center court and they shake hands. Drake eyes Krzyzewski spitefully from across the court.

While warming up, he glances around at the same arena where he won the high school state championship twelve years earlier. The crowd is immense and the battery of courtside CAMERAMEN and REPORTERS create an unparalleled electricity.

The Catamounts are David in a land of Goliaths and the whole world is watching. The REFEREE BLOWS HIS WHISTLE and the two teams huddle up. Krzyzewski addresses the Blue Devils.

KRZYZEWSKI

This is a well conditioned team and they are going to try and run us out us out of our scheme. Do not let that happen. They are going to push the basketball so be ready for it.

CUT TO:

Coach Baumgartner addresses the Catamounts.

COACH

We are gonna run at every opportunity. And when they get tired, we're gonna run some more. And when we get tired, that's when we're really gonna start running. Don't force the issue...but force the issue, you understand? Just because the world is watching, that's no reason to stop playing our game. Alright? Catamounts on three. One, two, three...

TEAM

Catamounts!

At the teams take the court, Coach turns around and glances into the crowd. Directly behind him, there is an EMPTY SEAT in the first row. A flicker of sadness registers but he shakes it off and turns his attention towards the court.

The intensity in the arena swells as the REF TOSSES THE BALL in the air. Duke wins the tip and the pace of the game is the Catamounts speed from the outset; a perpetual fast break.

Drake and his teammates are composed and focused despite the crowd and pressure. The Duke FANS are peppered with HECKLERS who shout at Drake, some dressed in PRISON UNIFORMS.

Duke is still a talented, well-coached team, and they answer the Catamount assault shot for shot; sometimes with the longball, sometimes by pounding it inside.

Drake runs the offense effectively and takes the shots when they present themselves but he seems to be holding back; his best, most aggressive basketball still inside him.

Krzyzewski calls a TIME OUT and the Duke players huddle around him. The Catamounts lead the Blue Devils by four points with six minutes remaining in the first half.

KRZYZEWSKI

We have to slow them down, we are playing right into their hands. You box out on defense? Box out on offense too. Put your ass into them before they even have a chance to start running. Bump 'em, slow 'em down...one step, two steps. Stop the break before it starts.

The Ref BLOWS HIS WHISTLE and for the next six minutes, the momentum shifts towards Duke and the pace slows to a crawl.

The continuous bumping and subtle shoving Duke employs slows down and frustrates the Catamount players.

As the frustration mounts, the Catamounts start shoving back. The trash-talking intensifies in direct proportion to the physicality of play. Drake grows increasingly angry, pushing back harder and harder.

On one play, when a Duke PLAYER drives to the basket, Drake clotheslines him. The player crashes to the ground and a SKIRMISH ensues. Without a punch thrown, the two teams are separated. The REFEREE pulls Drake aside.

REFEREE

This ain't prison, you pull that
shit again, you're out of this
game, you hear me?

Drake nods and the Ref calls a FLAGRANT FOUL. The Duke player makes both foul shots and Duke gets the ball back. On the ensuing possession, Duke makes a three pointer and the first half comes to a close with Duke leading by ten points.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Krzyzewski addresses his team. He is firm and composed.

KRZYZEWSKI

You see the difference? They can
not play with us when we play our
game. Our game. You saw it the
last six minutes, a fourteen point
swing in our favor.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Coach Baumgartner addresses the Catamounts. He is upset and on the verge of coming unglued.

COACH

If you continue letting them push
you around, you will lose this
game, I guarantee you. Are you
scared of them?

TEAM

No.

COACH

Then act like it. They got into
your heads. Get 'em out.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

KRZYZEWSKI

This is not a basketball team that loses in the first round, is it?

TEAM

No!

KRZYZEWSKI

This is the third ranked team in the country. Is this is a team that loses in the first round?

TEAM

No!

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

COACH

Drake, what'd that ref say to you? This ain't prison?

Drake nods.

COACH

You're a hundred fifty pounds of piss and vinegar, how'd you play in prison? Afraid?

DRAKE

No.

COACH

Then this is prison. There's no fear, there's no hesitation, there's nothing but everything. Everything you got on every play, got it?

DRAKE

Got it.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

KRZYZEWSKI

Give me twenty minutes of Duke basketball, nothing more. This is our game to lose gentleman.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

COACH

This is our game to win! This is
our game to win! Now go win it.

INT. RALEIGH ARENA - NIGHT

The Ref BLOWS HIS WHISTLE and the second half is under way. Play is even more physical but Western Carolina matches them shot for shot and shove for shove. Drake is more aggressive but under control and composed.

He drives to the basket with determination, displaying the fearlessness Coach demanded of him at halftime. Western Carolina trims the lead to four points with three minutes remaining and Coach pulls Drake aside emphatically.

COACH

You can get to the rim on these guys you see? When you break this defense down, they gotta help, they gotta converge. That opens things up. So if they give you an inch of a seam, tear it open. Tear it open!

Drake nods and runs off. When play resumes, he continues taking the ball to the hole and either finishing himself or finding his teammates for open jumpshots or dunks.

With a minute left in the game, the Catamounts are down by two. Duke has the ball and Western Carolina needs a stop. The Duke POINT GUARD milks the SHOT CLOCK and with ten seconds left, he passes to the wing.

The player catches it, fakes a jump shot and drives to the basket. He is about to dunk the ball when Brandon comes out of nowhere to block the shot emphatically. Brandon saves the ball and while falling out of bounds, CALLS TIME OUT.

TWENTY-TWO SECONDS remain on the GAME CLOCK. The Catamounts huddle up and Coach draws up a play on the DRY-ERASE BOARD. The team listens intently; sweating, breathing heavily. After he puts down the board, he grabs Drake by the jersey, displaying a fire and an intensity he has never shown before.

COACH

Look at me. This is your team. This is your shot. This is your game. This your life. This is your fucking life Drake! You take it and you take it now!

The Catamounts take their spots on the floor; focused and unafraid. The Referee hands Byron the ball and he inbounds to Drake who dribbles to the top of the key. He eyeballs the GAME CLOCK and when it hits TEN SECONDS, he starts his move.

He crosses over, then crosses over again. That creates the separation he needs to start his drive. He cuts through the lane and when the defense collapses on him, that leaves Brandon alone on the wing.

Drake ascends towards the rim and at the last moment, fires a no-look pass to Brandon. Drake never stops and runs towards the corner. Brandon waits for the defender to get on him, fakes the shot and dribbles towards the baseline.

He picks up his dribble and elevates towards the rim. As three defenders leap to contest the shot, he rifles a pass along the baseline to Drake, who catches the ball in the corner with BOTH FEET PLANTED BEHIND THE THREE POINT LINE.

He takes the shot and the ball soars towards the rim. All eyes are fixed on it as it falls through the rim, snapping the nylon net. Half the crowd explodes; the other half dies.

Coach Baumgartner collapses into his chair as the Assistant Coaches rush the floor to join the Catamounts in celebrating. Several Duke players crumble to the ground in tears.

Krzyzewski, ever-dignified, walks over and shakes Coach's hand. He is still sitting, incapable of standing up. Brandon and Drake embrace as the fans flood the court. Joan is in the stands; SCREAMING and JUMPING UP AND DOWN.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kevin Grace watches the game in his living room. He shakes his head and smiles; in disbelief but also in approval.

INT. TRAILOR HOME - NIGHT

Jezzie sits on the couch in dead silence, facing the television that is turned off. She stares into space; a ghost in a void, oblivious to the world around her.

INT. CATERING HALL - NIGHT

Warden Shelby Krantz wades through a crowd of people shaking hands and kissing ass. RED WHITE AND BLUE SIGNS all over the catering hall read: **Shelby Krantz for the U.S. Senate '12.**

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

Patrick and other INMATES watch the game on a television mounted in the corner of the mess hall. Amidst the vocal and mixed reactions of the convicts, Patrick quietly exhales and sits down; a quiet air of contention on his face.

INT. RALEIGH ARENA - NIGHT

Drake separates from his teammates and runs over to Krzyzewski, stopping him. He grabs his hand and shakes it, perhaps a little too hard.

DRAKE

You remember me Coach?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI

I do.

DRAKE

Well, now you can remember this.
Good game.

Drake grins and runs off to rejoin his team in the chaotic celebration. Krzyzewski lingers for a moment, humbled. He eventually turns and walks off the court.

Coach remains seated, his head down, staring at the floor in shock. SOMEONE kneels in front of him and gently lifts his head. It is Vera. She holds his face in her hands and the two stare at each other.

She whispers something to him and he buries his head in the nape of her neck and starts sobbing. She embraces him as the pandemonium behind them reaches its zenith.

Brandon and Byron hoist Drake onto their shoulders and walk him over to one of the baskets. Coach, having finally gotten up, makes his way through the chaos, slaloming through hugs and high fives from the members of his team.

When he reaches the basket, Drake and him exchange a long, warm look, savoring the moment. Coach holds out a pair of scissors and Drake takes them. He cuts down the net, holds it up and SCREAMS. The entire arena erupts with applause.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - EVENING - 1992

Drake, at the age of twelve, plays basketball with his friends. The sunset is in its final stage; barely any light remains.

DRAKE
Come on, one more point.

BOY
We've been playin' for three hours.

DRAKE
So what's one more?

BOY
It's one more after three hours.

DRAKE
Exactly, one more.

BOY
Fine, next point wins.

The boy checks the ball to Drake who dribbles right, pulls up and drains a jump shot.

DRAKE
Too easy. One more.

BOY
Dude, come on.

DRAKE
Stop whining. One more. Next point wins.

BOY
I just said 'next point wins' and that was the next point.

DRAKE
And this is the last point.

BOY
It's night time dude.

DRAKE
No, it ain't. Look there's still daylight there. Next point wins.

BOY
Fine.

DRAKE
Alright. Last point. Ball in.

The boy checks the ball to Drake. Drake eyeballs the kid guarding him and speaks with a calmness and maturity that is way beyond that of a boy his age. He is a grown man, speaking through the mouth of a child.

DRAKE

Last point, last game, last chance.
This is the moment that will be
etched into your mind until your
final breath. This is everlasting.
This is the rest of your life.
This is...forever.

Drake smiles and shoots. The ball soars towards the rim and we BLACK OUT. Over a BLACK SCREEN, we hear THE SOUND OF THE BALL SNAPPING THE NYLON NET.