

A GOOD EXAMPLE

written by
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Depictions, Descriptions, and Dialogue, are true.

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"Coaching Life" by Lawrence Whitener

FADE IN:

CAPTION: *"The best thing to give your child, a good example."*
--Benjamin Franklin

EXT. BUSH HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Modern two-story brick building with beautiful landscaping and a stone sign saying, *George Bush Secondary*. New luxury cars are parked in front of it.

A vintage Cadillac DeVille parks near main entrance. Engine continues to *knock* after turned off, then belches blue smoke.

BRIAN "COACH" BLACK, Caucasian, 40s, small paunch, in a *Bush* t-shirt embroidered *Wrestling Coach*, exits from car's smoke.

INT. BUSH MAIN LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

New paint, carpeting, and plush couches with paintings above makes this look like a corporate lobby. Coach enters.

Class bell *rings*. BUSH STUDENTS, wearing new hip clothes, exit their classrooms orderly talking in low voices.

Coach smiles nodding to them as he enters the Main Office.

INT. BUSH PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Wood-paneled, leather chairs, plaques, awards, and pictures with dignitaries, are on walls. Oak desk's nameplate reads, PRINCIPAL THOMPSON, Caucasian, 40s, fit-for-age, in a \$1,000 three-piece suit who sits behind his opulent desk reading a manilla folder. His intercom *buzzes*. BUSH SECRETARY is heard.

BUSH SECRETARY (FILTERED)
That coach is here. He wants ...

Secretary is cut off by Coach opening Principal's door wide.

COACH
This is the season we take it all.
Have a great year, know I will.

Coach *raps* his knuckles on the doorframe, then closes door.

THOMPSON
Thanks. Know I will, too.
(drops file in trashcan)
Now.

EXT. ADAMS HIGH SCHOOL - SIMULTANEOUS

Prison-type brick building signed *Quincy Adams Secondary* is covered in gang graffiti. Older cars are in its parking lot.

Police cruiser parks in front. School Resource Officer, SRO, 30s, professional ponytail, in full police uniform, exits and locks car. She adjusts her weapons-belt, then enters school.

INT. ADAMS MAIN LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Bare cinderblock walls, no pictures, trash and dirt on floor.

Bell *rings*. ADAMS STUDENTS in old clothes exit classrooms to loud *commotion*. They ignore SRO as she enters Main Office.

INT. ADAMS PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - IMMEDIATELY

A former small classroom. No awards, just cheap screen-print pictures. All its furniture is big, used, and mismatched.

A regular teacher's desk, cluttered, has a nameplate reading, PRINCIPAL BASS. She is Caucasian, 50s, 1970's silver-blonde hairdo, frumpy, in a K-Mart skirt-suit. She sits queen-like fingernail *tapping* a large pellet-pistol on her desktop.

J.T. ROUMAINE, Haitian-black, 17, short, 103 pounds, ragged Afro, scar down one cheek, wears torn second-hand clothes. He enters followed by SRO holding onto his back-belt. Both sit.

Desk-phone intercom *crackles* static as BASS SECRETARY speaks.

BASS SECRETARY (FILTERED)

Incoming.

MAGDALENA ROUMAINE, 35 but looks 50, has been broken by life. Haitian dark-black, short and rotund, she *shuffles* in wearing dilapidated leather sandals and a faded *Sari*. She sits with both hands tightly-folded in her lap and head down.

BASS

Your son continues to be a problem.
He disrupts class, is rude to his
teachers, and today, brought this.

Bass holds up the pellet-gun. Magdalena snaps her head to JT.

MAGDALENA

How is it you come to have this?

JT

Traded somebody somethin'.

SRO
What'd you trade?

JT
Somethin'.

BASS
Who'd you trade?

JT
Somebody.

BASS
Even though it is a pellet-pistol,
it's still considered a weapon. Is
there any reason this Officer
should not take your son to jail?

Years of bare existence enable Magdalena's rehearsed tears.

MAGDALENA
We cannot survive, without him.

Bass *sighs*, then motions to SRO who cuts JT's plastic cuffs.

BASS
This is the final warning young
man. You are now on Probation. One
more serious incident, and I will
ask the School Board to expel you.

JT smiles the smile of a future criminal with no conscience.

INT. ADAMS ACTIVITIES DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Tiny, cramped, messy, and dirty, with sports gear everywhere.

Nameplate on metal desk reads *Adams Activities*. JIM JACOBS, Caucasian, 50s, alcoholic red-nose, high-and-tight, in *Adams* t-shirt embroidered *Athletic Director*, writes cramped behind his desk surrounded by trash and floor stacks of old files.

TOM LEGG, Caucasian, 40s, very fit, very short, crew-cut, in an *Adams* t-shirt embroidered *Head Football Coach*, enters and falls into a bright-yellow vinyl double-lounge chair. He looks at Jacobs raising one eyebrow, And --? Jacobs shrugs.

INT. BUSH ACTIVITIES DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

Full bookshelf, team pictures, plaques, awards, and framed *Winning Football Team* newspaper clippings cover its four walls. Its large clutter-free desk's nameplate says, *Bush Activities Director*.

JANE ERIE, Caucasian, 30s, short, pageboy-haircut, wearing a pant-suit, sits dwarfed behind her large desk talking to AMOS LANDMARK, African-American, 30s, military-muscular in a suit, who sits across from her in one of two arm-chairs.

COACH
(enters, is surprised)
Who are --? Where's John? I'm ...

ERIE
(motions Coach to sit)
We all know who you are. John was promoted to Assistant Principal at North County. I'm his replacement.

Coach sits in the second chair. He and Landmark side-glance.

COACH
Good for him, he earned it. Look forward to working with you, Ms --?

ERIE
Coach Landmark here is a Junior Olympic Wrestling Coach and ...

COACH
"And" you're not passing up any opportunity to put an Olympic credential on your new Roster.

Coach turns to Landmark smiling with his hand out. Landmark ignores Coach and continues to talk directly to Erie.

LANDMARK
Thought I picked my own staff?

ERIE
You do! --Mister Black, you have always been out-of-school personnel. Whereas, Coach Landmark, is now a teacher here.

LANDMARK
Should I leave you two alone?

ERIE
No! --All coaching positions have been filled for this season. Sorry.

COACH
No you're not, or you wouldn't be doing this one week before practice. I already put up flyers.

No response. Coach stands with hand down to Landmark.

COACH

Enjoy their winning season.

LANDMARK

Maybe we'll meet across the mat.

They hold-on testing strength glaring into each other's eyes.

Erie *slams* an empty cardboard box on top of her desk.

Landmark releases, shaking his hand. Coach smiles, then grabs Erie's box and exits. Landmark and Erie *exhale* relieved.

EXT. BUSH HIGH PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Coach tosses his now full box in back seat and gets in. He starts car, but stares ahead in silence. Moment, then he goes berserk and *pounds* on dashboard three times in sheer rage.

COACH

"Stupid --ugly --failure!"
You said that to me everyday,
Mother. Every, God, Damn, day.

Coach tears-up, then backs out slow.

CAPTION: *Based on their True-American story.*

INT. NORTH COUNTY VICE PRINCIPAL OFFICE - LATER SAME DAY

A small round table with two chairs is catty-corner to a new executive desk with nameplate, *North County Vice Principal*.

JOHN RITTNER, African-American, 40s, balding, in a dark suit, works at his desk. *Knock* on his closed door, then it opens.

Coach, dressed same from Bush, enters and falls into a chair.

COACH

Congrats on the promotion.

RITTNER

Thanks, happened fast. What's up?

COACH

Your replacement replaced me.

RITTNER

Look, you did great things for the kids over there, but come on, this can't come as a complete surprise.

COACH

Sure it can. Why'd she fire me?

RITTNER

You get the job done, no question there. But you also buck the system and speak your mind, often. Some people can take offense at that.

COACH

"Some?"

RITTNER

Most. Any leads?

COACH

Didn't know I needed "any," so if this is it, thanks for everything.

Coach stands. Rittner opens the door. They shake and Coach exits. Rittner closes his door, then shakes head and *sighs*.

RITTNER

Had to give them my honest opinion, buddy. For your sake --and theirs.

EXT. COACH'S SUBURBAN HOME - LATER SAME DAY

Coach drives through a clean middle-class neighborhood.

A NEIGHBOR waves. Coach half-hearted waves back, then parks in the two-car driveway of a single-floor brick Rambler with lots of shrubs, flowers, and manicured green grass.

Coach exits car, pulls off his now "ex" school-shirt with an athletic-shirt under to throw in same *Bush* cardboard box. He drops his head, grabs the box, and slinks into his house.

INT. COACH'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Living Room with oversized furniture, antiques, knickknacks, family pictures, and fireplace separated from a narrow walk-through kitchen with a door down to its finished basement.

The kitchen wall-phone *rings*. Coach enters and hurries to answer it. Rittner is not heard.

COACH

What! ...John? ...So soon? Where?
...Know of it. When? ...Tomorrow?
...What time? ...Uh, okay, sure. --
Hey, thanks for the assist.

Coach hangs up, pulls a VCR-case out of box, and studies it.

EXT. ADAMS HIGH GYM PARKING LOT - NEXT DAY

Coach parks in front of its Main Gym. He exits wearing a dress shirt and tie then scans the run-down campus worried. Engine still *knocks*, quits, exhaust *explodes* a black cloud of smoke. Coach exits through the smoke imitating *Rod Serling*.

COACH

"There's a sign-post up ahead."

EXT. ADAMS MAIN GYM LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Coach tries, but all doors are locked, so waits outside. MALE STUDENT exits. Coach catches Student's door, and enters.

INT. ADAMS MAIN GYM LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Dirty with paper trash on floor. Wall-clock is broken at 12. No trophy-case or pictures. Nothing to show school pride.

Coach is not impressed, then walks to an old wooden door signed *Activities Director*. Its first "c" was scratch-added at the bottom so now looks like a long "s." He *knocks* once.

INT. ADAMS ACTIVITIES OFFICE - IMMEDIATELY

Jacobs sits behind his desk in same shirt leaning back with hands behind his head. Legg sits same on the lounge chaise. A plastic chair now sits in only open area on crowded floor.

Coach enters. Jacobs hand-motions to the plastic chair.

JACOBS

Take a seat.

Coach sits in the chair. It *wobbles* bad. Coach studies it.

COACH

Where, the compactor?

Jacobs and Legg side-glance wary at each other.

JACOBS

I'm Jim Jacobs, Athletic Director.
This is my Assistant and Head
Football Coach, Tom Legg. We heard
what you accomplished over there.
Gonna try and do the same here?

COACH

Do my best, sir.

LEGG

Your "best" ain't needed, not here.

JACOBS

Half our students are E.S.L., other half are in gangs.

COACH

Broken homes, give us broken kids.

JACOBS

We'd prefer to use teaching staff, but none of them will volunteer for wrestling duty again.

COACH

"Volunteer, duty?" You make this sound like a military assignment.

LEGG

Fire in the Hole!

Legg makes a "pulling-pin" hand-motion, then throwing his imaginary grenade out the door. Jacobs *laughs*.

JACOBS

You work at the Post Office?

COACH

City Carrier for years. I take a college class yearly to make me eligible to coach under the school system's "Higher Education" clause.

LEGG

What are you taking?

COACH

A beating!

(no response, *coughs*)

Economics. Getting my third.

LEGG

"Third?" Degree?! Why aren't you certified as a teacher?

COACH

Unlimited wants versus limited resources. I can't afford to be.

JACOBS

Can you "afford to be" here, by three-thirty, everyday?

COACH

Off at three. How many come out?

LEGG

Bring your book.

JACOBS

Coaches are paid to keep school property safe. If I can't find one, I'll cancel their season. Done it before. Let me know by tomorrow.

COACH

Can let you know today.

Coach stands offering hand. Jacobs hesitates, then shakes.

JACOBS

I'll have your contract tomorrow.

Coach nods and exits closing the door.

JACOBS

Funny guy.

LEGG

Only I ain't laughin'.

INT. COACH'S DINING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Coach sits at the dining table studying his *Economics* book.

SUSAN BLACK, Asian-American, late 30s, enters from work in a skirt-suit then drops her purse and keys on foyer's bookcase.

SUSAN

Hi honey, how'd it go?

COACH

Captured Market.

SUSAN

We can certainly use the money.

COACH

They said not to bring my "A" game. Told me their students are losers.

SUSAN

I know how you love a challenge.

COACH

Yeah, I do, don't I? Know what, I am gonna' build a winning team over there. So there! What's for dinner? Whatever you wanna' make-make. I'm getting ready --for my test.

INT. ADAMS ACTIVITIES OFFICE - NEXT AFTERNOON

Jacobs and Legg dressed same, sit as before. Plastic chair is now gone and door open. Coach enters dressed as before, but now holding a worn-torn brown-leather briefcase.

Jacobs floats a contract through air to Coach who drops briefcase upright on floor to catch. He signs, then hands contract back. Legg tosses Coach a keyring with two keys.

LEGG

One for wrestling gym, other for
boy's locker room. Need a tour?

COACH

We learn by learning.

Coach exits *chuckling*. Legg and Jacobs look at each other.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Room is dark. End-of-school bell *rings* echoing outside. Door unlocks and opens. Automatic overhead dome lights come on.

Coach enters. His chin drops, then his briefcase.

Trash, forgotten clothes, unused sports equipment, clutter the dilapidated wrestling mats that are creased and cracked. A huge dented green baseball Batting Cage with torn drooping side-nets takes-up half the room. Coach *slide-whistles*.

COACH

The Wrestling, Hall of Shame.

Coach grabs a damaged broom on the floor and begins sweeping.

JT enters in earlier clothes dragging a stuffed pillowcase.

JT

You our new babysitter?

COACH

Name --?

JT

J.T.

COACH

What do the initials stand for?

JT

J --T.

COACH

O --K. How many years on the team?

JT

I'm Captain, of a sinking ship.

COACH

Then start bailing.

Coach tosses the broom to JT who drops his sack to catch it.

They stare as poker players. JT folds and starts sweeping.

Two Asian male students step in doorway, watch, and *whisper*. TUNG, 16, 135 lbs, muscular, in torn jeans and t-shirt exits while CHEN, 17, 125 lbs, wiry, in new jeans and t-shirt with a new gym-bag watches his friend leave, then turns to JT.

CHEN

What, are you doing?

COACH

Same thing you're doing. Get a trashcan and pick up trash.

CHEN

But I'm Co-Captain?

COACH

Then try harder.

Chen's mouth falls open as he looks to JT for support who shrugs and keeps sweeping. Chen drops his gym-bag to drag in a trash can from outside then side-kicks trash over to it.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - LATER SAME DAY

Room is now clean and neater. Coach took off dress shirt and tie to a t-shirt. He watches Chen and JT doing Jumping Jacks.

BILL DRUMMOND, Caucasian, 40s, stocky, clean-shaven, a huge bald spot, wearing gym shorts and *Adams* school-shirt, enters.

Coach holds out hand. Drummond doesn't shake it. Coach reads Drummond's embroidered school-shirt as, *Head Wrestling Coach*.

COACH

I thought, you were my assistant?

DRUMMOND

That's a good one. I work with J.T.
You can roll with Chen.

COACH

But others are coming, *right?*

DRUMMOND

"Others?!" Two for two. J.T!

JT gets on all-fours in Referee's Position. Drummond gets on him in *Top Position*. JT *slaps* the mat twice and both wrestle.

Coach is stunned, holds up pointer-finger to Chen, and exits.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE WRESTLING GYM - CONTINUOUS

Coach exits gym, walks one way, reverses for a few steps, then stops with hands-on-hips and looks straight up.

COACH

Fine, fine. I get the whole "Life is a Test" thing. And I'm not asking for a cheat sheet, but --.

(arms outstretch up)

How about a freakin' memo?!

Coach *raspberries*, then reenters wrestling gym shaking head.

INT. ADAMS BOYS SHOWER BAY - THAT NIGHT AFTER PRACTICE

Open 8' x 8' shower stall with eight shower heads that *drip* constant. Tiles are chipped and moldy. Roaches scurry about.

Drummond is gone. Chen and JT shower. We can now see JT has multiple long scars across his chest and back.

A huge American cockroach runs across the floor. Both jump.

CHEN

What do you think?

JT

Could be our new heavyweight.

CHEN

Not roach, Coach. I don't like him.

JT

Don't know, don't care, don't matter. This is my last year.

A toilet *flushes* and their streams decrease in cold water.

JT/CHEN

Hey-a!

Coach appears around shower-bay opening first apologetic, then is caught off-guard staring at all of JT's scars.

COACH

Sorry guys, didn't --cicatrizacion?

JT

Who you callin' sicko?

COACH

No, "cica" --same as scarifying.

CHEN

He's "scary-fying" all right.
Especially at night!

JT hits Chen on his shoulder, hard. Coach exits *laughing*.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Coach exits the store eating a donut, then sees Chen with JT walking towards him out of the night.

COACH

How do you get home after practice?

CHEN

No late-late buses, so we walk.

COACH

I drive this big ole' tank to carry
equipment and wrestlers. Get in.

JT

I can take care of myself!

COACH

Uh, we all can? Doesn't mean we're
supposed to.

JT shakes head. Coach and Chen get in car and drive away.

JT enters the store scanning guilty like he's being watched.

INT. JT'S FIRST SHELTER APARTMENT - LATER SAME NIGHT

Windowless one-bedroom with a small kitchen of chipped metal cabinets on a faded wall. Great Room has a torn couch with stuffing coming out of it. Its only single floor-lamp is on.

Magdalena, in same *Sari*, stands folding a huge pile of clean clothes into piles. She does not acknowledge JT entering.

JT sees his brother RAYMONE "RAY" ROUMAINE, 13, Haitian light-black, skinny, unkempt Afro, also with a scar down one facial cheek who is on his knees in the kitchen with hands behind his head like arrested. JT *sighs*. This is normal life.

JT

What'd you do now?

RAY

Mom says I smarted-back.

MAGDALENA

Did I say you could talk?!

JT slips candy-bars inside Ray's shirt whispering.

JT

Share.

(to Magdalena)

I'll get dinner!

JT exits. Magdalena folds more. Ray *moans*.

INT. ADAMS ACTIVITIES OFFICE - NEXT AFTERNOON

Jacobs sits behind his desk. Legg and Drummond sit on the double-lounge. All wear their embroidered *Adams*-shirts.

Coach enters in gray sweats. *When in sweats, Coach always wears a stopwatch and whistle on lanyards around his neck.*

COACH

Left a little something out of my
job description, guys.

Jacobs pulls a Styrofoam cup out of desk-drawer and *spits* black chewing-tobacco juice in it. Coach's eyes open wide.

JACOBS

Drummond had a job change making it
hard for him to get here on time.

LEGG

This keeps his status as "active"
so he's not a rehire next year.

COACH

Equitable Distribution. You split
your budget, on two head coaches.

JACOBS

Don't make this a problem, okay.

COACH

Well it's not "okay", okay? I do
have a problem. Who's in charge?

DRUMMOND

Me, when I get here.

COACH

Then you take JT. Got it, gotten past it. What about the rest?

LEGG

Rest a' what?

COACH

Rest of the kids I'm recruiting?

JACOBS

Good luck with that.

COACH

So I can coach the rest?

DRUMMOND

Rest a' what?

JACOBS

Look, Bill's been here four years, fits in perfect. You've been here four minutes, ain't even tryin'.

COACH

H-o-w?!

LEGG

Show up by three-thirty, unlock and lock up, ride their bus to meets.

JACOBS

That's it.

COACH

"That's it?!" So don't even try to find 'em, just f 'em before we forget 'em.

JACOBS

Lose the attitude, coachy. We're all on the same team.

COACH

That's what I'm trying to build?!

JACOBS

Save the *Coach of the Year* routine for good kids. All of ours are bad.

COACH

Never met a bad kid, just bad parents.

JACOBS

Fine, Quixote. You can try fixing windmills. Just make sure you don't cost the school nuthin'!

COACH

I never work --towards "nuthin'."

Coach exits. Drummond, Jacobs, and Legg, look at each other.

INT. COACH'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Their king-size bed takes up most of the room. Coach and Susan sleep back-to-back on it under covers.

Alarm clock on nightstand reads, 4:00 a.m. It begins *beeping*.

Coach hits alarm's snooze-button. Room is quiet, then he *snores*. Susan reverse mule-kicks him in butt. He cries out, yawns, then stretches sitting up sleepy-quoting *USPS Creed*.

COACH

"Neither rain nor snow --

Coach gets out of bed wearing an old yellowed t-shirt and gym shorts. He stretches more, then stumbles in master bathroom.

COACH

nor gloom of --."

Coach stubs a toe inside. His mumble-cursing *echos*.

COACH (O.S.)

Yight! --X#@%.

INT. JT'S FIRST SHELTER BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Only three old bunk-beds barely fit around stained drywall. Two frames are faded-wood with third of red metal tubing.

Their donated bare mattresses have no sheets or pillows, just old wool olive-green Army blankets. Buried under the blankets are six thin Haitian siblings fast asleep. Three Boys; JT, Ray, and an UNNAMED BROTHER, 9, along with Three Girls; UNNAMED SISTER, 10, UNNAMED SISTER, 12, and MARTINE ROUMAINE, 14, dark-pretty with long black silky hair.

JT *yawns* huge, stretches, then sits-up in a torn yellowed t-shirt and gym shorts. He drops both shoulders having already given up on having any chance of a "good" day.

JT
Another gloomy day.
(stretches)
"Wish I may, wish I --."

JT shuffles barefoot out into the adjacent hall's bathroom and stubs a toe inside it. His mumble-cursing *echos*.

JT (O.S.)
Yight! --X#@%.

INT. COACH'S USPS MAILROOM FLOOR - LATER SAME MORNING

Huge open concrete warehouse floor that *echoes* everything.

Thirty canvas wheeled-totes are lined up against a wall as FIVE USPS CLERKS, all ages and ethnicity, uniformed, toss packages into totes as they walk back and forth *chatting*.

Thirty metal tables have cubbyhole shelving on top used by 30 USPS CARRIERS, uniformed, all ages and ethnics, mostly men with beer bellies and bodybuilder legs, stand *Casing Mail*.

Carriers pull down their own cased-mail to line-up in plastic trays on flat carts, then push their full carts to exit two large swinging-doors. It is Nietzsche's "organized chaos."

Coach, in USPS long-pants uniform, shirt, and tie, stands in front of his numbered *Route Table* casing mail by hand into cubbyhole street-names under numbered slots. He's fast.

USPS SUPERVISOR, African-American, 30s, in USPS dress shirt and striped tie, comes to Coach. Both yell over room's *din*.

SUPERVISOR
Stevens, Out! Half His Route?!

COACH
Can't! Wrestling! Sorry!

Supervisor moves on miffed. Coach cases faster smiling big.

INT. ADAMS MAIN OFFICE - THAT AFTERNOON

Open area with a long front counter. TWO ETHNIC WOMEN, 30s, in dresses, sit at messy desks talking on their desk-phones.

ANITA, Hispanic, Latin-styled hair, attractive, in a colorful dress, sits at the front desk and hangs-up her receiver.

Coach enters in USPS uniform holding his brown briefcase.

Anita points to a wire basket marked *MAIL* at end of counter.

COACH

What's your largest E.S.L. group?

ANITA

Uh --Hispanic?

Coach opens his briefcase and lays a flyer on the counter.

COACH

Can you translate this in Spanish?
What's your second largest group?

ANITA

Uh --*Vietnamese*?

COACH

Do you have a teacher that could
translate my flyer into that?

ANITA

Sí, but --no coach has ...

COACH

No problemo. I'm usually first
through the door. Gracias.

Coach smiles exiting. Anita stands and goes to flyer.

ANITA

"First through the door" --
usually gets hit by it.

INT. ADAMS ACTIVITIES OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jacobs writes at his messy desk. Loud *knock* makes him *spit* black tobacco juice into his cup, then hide it in drawer.

JACOBS

Leave a message!

Coach enters wearing blue sweats and now, wrestling shoes.

COACH

Okay if I move all the equipment on
our mats into its storage closet?

JACOBS

What? No! Baseball still uses it to
practice off-season while leaving
room for Cheerleader practice.

COACH

What? Wait. We have Cheerleaders
and Baseball during "our" practice?
But I'm recruiting more kids?

JACOBS

Yeah, I saw your V.C. flyers.

Legg enters angry strangling a handful of Coach's flyers.

LEGG

How many?!

COACH

Thirty-three each in three languages. Need an abacus?

LEGG

Abba-what? No! And when you taking them down, not-so-funny boy?

COACH

Friday. Thanks for the head-start.

(to Jacobs)

Sir, could Cheerleaders practice in the hallway? Other schools do that. Keeps them safe from being rolled-up on and hurt.

JACOBS

"Hurt, safe?" Hmm, ask their coach. But if she says "No" --that's it!

LEGG

You don't waste time making change.

COACH

And you don't change, no time, what a waste.

Coach full-salutes, about-faces perfect, and march-exits.

LEGG

What is wrong with that guy?

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Drummond is not present. Tung has come back. Tung, Chen, and JT are dressed for practice. They sit cross-legged *chatting*.

Coach enters and makes overhead circling motion with finger.

COACH

Circle, Up!

The Three go to stand around Coach who gives thumbs-down.

COACH

Take a knee, gentlemen.

The Three *grumble* like geriatrics getting down on knees.

COACH
(turns same thumb up)
One knee only, please.

The Three complain even louder getting up on one knee.

COACH
This is your position when we talk.

JT
About?

Three loud gunshots *echo* down the hallway.

COACH
That! Everyone in the storage room
now! Stay there till I get back!

JT, Tung, and Chen, watch Coach exit, then horse-around.

EXT. ADAMS MAIN GYM ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Coach kicks same exit door open as tires *burn* rubber. He watches a muscle-car disappear up through the parking lot.

COACH
If you got that much aggression --
Come Out For Frickin' Wrestling!

STUDENTS hiding nearby reveal themselves.

MALE STUDENT
Who the hell are you?

COACH
Your new wrestling coach. Don't
curse, please.

Coach grabs same door handle he exited, then both eyebrows go up seeing three fresh bullet holes through its wired-glass.

COACH
(as *Rod Serling* again)
Next stop, The Demilitarized Zone.

INT. ADAMS MAIN GYM LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Coach enters to see Jacobs and Legg talking nonchalant.

COACH
Want me to call the cops?

JACOBS

"We" contact the police, after we
interview "our" students. Got it?

LEGG

Can already tell you what they'll
say, "No āb-lay Eng-lay!"

Jacobs and Legg *laugh* as Coach walks past them mumbling.

COACH

Shoulda' asked for Hazard Pay.

INT. ADAMS BOYS LOCKER ROOM - THAT NIGHT AFTER PRACTICE

Metal half-lockers are dented with handles broken off. Its
wooden benches were carved into. Floor tiles are chipped.

Tung sits on a bench in street clothes rubbing sore muscles.

JT and Chen enter wet with towels around their waists.

CHEN

Working at the Post Office musta'
got him used to bein' shot at.

JT

Stupid to run out there. Don't do
no good. Can't change what is.

TUNG

Hurry up guys! Coach is waiting to
take us home. You heard what he
said about doing our homework.

JT and Chen *snap* their wet towels at Tung chiding him.

INT. JT'S SECOND SHELTER APARTMENT - LATER THAT EVENING

New bare cement walls with a great room and same layout.
Multiple opened boxes, couch, lamp, and a new piles of
clothes with Magdalena folding, are all the same.

JT enters and side waves at Magdalena with no response then
sees Martine on her knees with hands behind her head *crying*.
She looks up with a three-inch scar across her forehead.

MARTINE

My knees hurt, momma.

MAGDALENA

One hour more!

JT *cracks* his neck, then exits apartment.

EXT. ADAMS MAIN GYM PARKING LOT - NEXT DAY

Coach parks and exits car now wearing a USPS shorts-uniform holding his briefcase. He examines earlier gym-door window.

Its bullet-holes wire-pane has been replaced with new glass.

COACH

School Board don't want that --on
their Evening News.

Coach spins and walks across parking lot to Main Entrance.

INT. ADAMS SRO OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Former storage room has a metal desk and a folding chair. A group-graduation police officer picture is on the wall above SRO who sits in full uniform behind a desk writing a report.

Coach, still in USPS shorts-uniform, steps in her doorway.

COACH

Any leads?

SRO

On --?

COACH

Last night's drive-by.

SRO stands slow like *John Wayne* adjusting her weapons-belt.

SRO

What --"drive-by?"

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

FIVE NEW WRESTLERS, all ages and ethnics, are in t-shirts and gym shorts. Only Four roll with JT, Chen, and Tung. Fifth New Wrestler, CHIGNA, Mexican, 18, gang-tattoos all around neck, stands with arms folded watching all like a vulture.

Coach enters now wearing blue sweats and wrestling shoes.

COACH

Circle, Up!

JT, Chen, and Tung, encircle Coach to get on one knee. Four New Wrestlers meander over to get down on one knee. Coach glares at Chigna, who shrugs, then also gets down on a knee.

COACH

It takes three things to succeed in sports! Will power, good coaching, and parental support. You already have the first two. I'll be calling your homes to get you the third.

JT

Won't be phoning my home, E.D.
Don't have none.

ALL *laugh*. Coach gives a *Let's Go* clap. Chen and JT stand facing the Others. All wrestlers begin doing Jumping Jacks.

CHET ATKINS, 30s, in baseball cap and *Adams* t-shirt reading *Head Baseball Coach*, enters holding a bat over one shoulder.

COACH

There you are! Got a minute?

Coach holds the door open. Atkins exits as Coach follows.

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY OUTSIDE WRESTLING GYM - CONTINUOUS

Coach and Atkins exit gym. Coach extends a hand.

ATKINS

I won't be Assistant again!

COACH

What, uh, no, I'm not asking?

Coach *wiggles* his open hand. Atkins shakes it suspicious.

COACH

I'm expecting more kids, so we need more room. Is there any way you'd let us take down your Batting Cage?

ATKINS

My players need to keep in shape!

COACH

"Shape" huh? How many on your team?

ATKINS

Nine on the field.

COACH

No. I mean, on your whole team?

ATKINS

"Nine on the field?"

COACH

Ahhhh, got it. Since we run a lot,
how about they practice with us? I
guarantee they'll steal more bases.

ATKINS

"Steal more --?" Nah, couldn't ...

COACH

Look, I'm concerned they'll hurt
themselves on its metal. Let me
take it down for now. If no other
kids come out, I'll put it back up.

ATKINS

Awwwww, man? Alright, for say a
week. But after I swing-away today.

Both re-enter wrestling gym. Coach's *whistle* is followed by
Atkins *cracking* bat. Both sounds *echo* down the empty hallway.

EXT. ADAMS GYM PARKING LOT - THAT NIGHT AFTER PRACTICE

Coach exits in sweats carrying brown briefcase. He walks to
his end parking spot and freezes. His car was *Tagged* in magic
marker. Large ornate letters, *MS*, are beside a smaller number
1 over number 3. Their *MS-13* gang-symbol covers entire hood.

COACH

Finishing compound and elbow grease
should take it out. After --I show
the School Officer. And yes, Mary
Stupidos, you're acting thirteen.

The Eight Wrestlers exit building to see his car's graffiti.
Chigna smiles quipping in a thick smart aleck accent.

CHIGNA

Someone don't want you here, *esé*.

COACH

That's because they don't know me --
but they will. Let's roll.

Seven Wrestlers cram themselves into Coach's car as Chigna
shakes his head walking into the shadows. Coach studies him.

INT. ADAMS ACTIVITIES OFFICE - NEXT AFTERNOON

Jacobs sits one-finger typing on computer's unsteady vintage
keyboard. Door *bursts* open. Legg storms in. Jacobs *sighs*.

JACOBS

What's he done now?

LEGG

He moved all the room's equipment
into storage, then put up posters.

JACOBS

"He" took down the Batting Cage?

LEGG

No, Atkins did.

JACOBS

Atkins took down his batting cage,
then put up his wrestling posters?

LEGG

No, "He" did!

JACOBS

Which "He?!" Ugh, go to practice.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - SIMULTANEOUS

Cage is now gone. Mats are flat, repaired with duct tape, and clean. A mop and bucket of dirty water stands in the corner. Motivational posters are duct-taped high on all four walls.

Now 13 Wrestlers, original Eight Wrestlers, and FIVE BASEBALL WRESTLERS in *Baseball* t-shirts and shorts. ALL mill about.

Coach enters in sweats and gives overhead *Circle-Up* sign. The Eight Wrestlers jog to encircle Coach and take a knee. The Five Baseball Wrestlers emulate them. Chigna strolls over and takes a knee casual. Coach talks to them like a preacher.

COACH

Weee Bee-lieve, what we're told!
Doesn't always mean it's true.
Single Leg Drill!

Wrestlers line-up in Stance facing the long padded-wall.

COACH

Hit It!

Wrestlers drop forward on one knee with heads turned to side hitting the wall with both forearms held up to a single loud *thump*, then pop back up into Stance running-in-place.

COACH

You're Stupid!

Wrestlers who moved expecting *Hit it*, jump back up to jog.

JT

No I'm Not!

Coach charges JT to stand threatening hands-on-hips then ...

COACH

No, you're not. --Hit It!

Wrestlers drop forward to *thump*, then pop back up running.

COACH

Gentlemen, none of you are stupid,
or bad, or a failure, or anything
else people tell you. You are only
what you believe you are. --Hit It!

Wrestlers drop forward to *thump*, then pop back up running.

COACH

When a stranger calls you a name,
it doesn't hurt. But if someone you
really care about does --ouch.
Thoughts, when coupled with
emotions become a belief. --Hit It!

Wrestlers drop forward to *thump*, then pop back up running.

COACH

A belief held long enough, becomes
a habit. And as we all know, habits
are hard to break. --Hit It!

Wrestlers drop forward to *thump*, then pop back up running.

COACH

But this whole habit-thing works
both ways. If you believe you are a
winner, you will be. --Hit It!

Wrestlers drop forward to *thump*, then pop back up running.

COACH

What are you?!

Coach fast-whistles. Wrestlers go on automatic dropping to
thump, then back up run-yelling. All their actions REPEAT.

WRESTLERS

Winners?

(tweet, thump)

Winners!

(tweet, thump)

WINNERS!

Jacobs enters and his mouth falls open at the pandemonium.
Coach gives a long *whistle*. Wrestlers stop, breathing hard.

COACH
J.T., wall touches!

All Wrestlers line-up shoulder-to-shoulder in sprinters-stance, then take off running to the other wall, touch it, and run back to touch their home wall. All actions REPEAT.

Jacobs motions Coach to exit. Both do as Coach points to JT.

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY OUTSIDE WRESTLING GYM - CONTINUOUS

Jacobs finger-counts wrestlers inside as door self-closes.

JACOBS
What --are you doing?

COACH
Keeping them and school equipment safe. You saw how many came out.

JACOBS
"Safe?" Yeah, right. Okay, but did you clear this with Drummond?

COACH
Couldn't, can't, haven't seen him.

JACOBS
"Haven't seen --?!" Since when?

COACH
Since our only meeting. Hey, I'm just doing what you told me.

JACOBS
And more. That's a lot of kids.

COACH
Want me to deport some?

JACOBS
Yes. No! Wait. What about their --?

COACH
Grades? I expect all my kids to be on the Honor Roll, so they have to show me quarterly Report Cards.

JACOBS
No, I meant --"Honor Roll?!" Them?

COACH

Well, to be honest, here --all C's
would be a good start.

JACOBS

"All C's, them?" No one has ever --
(walks away in shock)
uh, I gotta' go call Drummond.

COACH

Would you put half-a-dozen physical
forms in my mailbox? And I need the
school's Sports Doctor number!

Jacobs exits muttering to himself waving a hand, *Yeah-yeah.*

EXT. ADAMS GYM ENTRANCE - THAT NIGHT AFTER PRACTICE

Coach exits in sweats *whistling* and hugging his briefcase. He walks around the building's far corner to side parking lot which is dark. Tagging is now buffed-away on Coach's hood.

FIVE GANGMEMBERS, Latino teens, jump on Coach. Coach rams his briefcase in First Gangmember's stomach who collapses, then fast-executes *Arm-Drag/Trip*, *Sag/Ankle Trip*, *Snapdown/Trip*, and a *Fireman's Carry/Throw* on the other Four Gangmembers to end up with his back against the building and both hands up.

First Gangmember Coach pushed down now stands, flicks open a spring-assist knife and steps into the light. It's Chigna.

COACH

You?! The drive-by? My Tagging?
(straightens)
Being mean, is not the same, as
being tough.
(drops hands)
Life's all about choices, son. Try
making better ones.

The Other Four Gangmembers stand to flip-open their knives and step forward threatening. Chigna closes his *laughing*.

HISPANIC

El gringo wants to save the world.

Other Four Gangmembers *laugh* and pocket their knives as they and Chigna walk backwards into the night shadows.

Coach picks up his briefcase, brushes it off, then yells.

COACH

You're still on the team, right?!

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY OUTSIDE SRO OFFICE - NEXT AFTERNOON

Coach exits Office wearing new sweats, then calls back in.

COACH
No, not filing charges, just FYI.

Coach hears *crowd-commotion* and runs to it around a corner.

INT. SRO'S ADJACENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Coach rounds corner to see STUDENTS urging on FIGHTER ONE and RICHARD GUNNER, both Caucasian Seniors, who are angry-boxing.

Coach plows between both, grabs their throats in *Ranger Chokeholds*, and pushes their backs against lockers, *whang*.

Fighter One chops Coach's hand loose and runs away.

Gunner grabs Coach's choking-wrist and twists. Coach steps behind Gunner, bear-hugs him, and bends backwards lifting Gunner's feet off the floor. Gunner flails his legs.

COACH
Calm down. Everyone feels helpless
when their feet leave the ground.
(puts Gunner down, faces)
That's the point. Nice wrist
control, Mister --?

GUNNER
Gunner, Richard Gunner.

Students shake their heads disappointed and meander away.

SRO comes around the corner. Coach sees SRO and throws an arm around Gunner's neck and grabs it in a headlock.

COACH
I'll walk you to practice --Dick.

Coach escorts Gunner away using the headlock. SRO smiles.

INT. ADAMS ACTIVITIES OFFICE - ONE WEEK LATER

Jacobs stares at his computer, then *spits* black-juice in his cup. Legg enters and falls into the lounge chair. Jacobs drops his head shaking it, then looks up at Legg, *And --?*

LEGG
He went to the Basketball Coaches
and asked for their Cut Cards.

JACOBS

Let me guess, called those kids
inviting them to come out for his
"new" wrestling team. Any more?

LEGG

Three. Wait? Sixteen?! Do we have
that many uniforms? I'll have to
inventory. What a pain in the --.
Any word from Drummond?

JACOBS

Drummond's boss has him traveling
for a month so it's just --him.

Legg makes, *Gimme*, hand-sign. Jacobs tosses him a bottle of
aspirin. Legg opens, drops a tablet in his palm, then *slaps*
same forearm to pop the pill up into his mouth. Jacobs nods
and Legg tosses bottle back. Jacobs does same with a pill.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - SIMULTANEOUS

Now 16 Wrestlers. Previous Twelve with Gunner now permanently
replacing Chigna. In addition, THREE BASKETBALL WRESTLERS,
short, ethnic teens in school *Basketball* t-shirts and shorts.

All Sixteen are down on one knee lined up in front of Coach,
wearing tan sweats, who holds up a 12" square pine board,
pulls out a black magic marker, and tosses both to JT.

COACH

Write one word on that, that best
describes your life.

All Wrestlers *mumble* thinking, write, then pass board on.

Coach walks behind like a *General on Review*, then steps in
front to take back board and marker. He reads their answers.

COACH

Can't say, ahhh, "hard." Gentlemen,
life is not easy. Guess what? --Not
supposed to be! What is the one
thing you can control in any fight?

JT

Yourself?

COACH

Exactly! Everyday, someone or some
"thing" is going to try and stop
you from achieving your goal. Your
job is to find a way over, under,
around, or my favorite, through it.

Coach pivots 90° into Fighting Stance, holds their board out in front, drops it, and air-break punches it sending the two pieces flying. ALL are impressed. Coach points to new poster.

COACH

What's the requirement to succeed
in any sport, and life?

Coach looks at J.T. who looks away. Coach looks at Gunner.

GUNNER

"The will to win means nothing,
without the will to prepare!"

COACH

Exactly. Gentlemen, pre-pair.

The Sixteen Wrestlers scramble to pair-up in *Standing Stance*. Coach blows his whistle. All wrestle. JT flips Gunner onto his back. Coach runs to jump on his belly sliding to them.

COACH

When on your back, your only job is
not to get pinned! How? HOW?!

FOURTEEN WRESTLERS

One, Shoulder, Up!

COACH

Keys open doors, gentlemen! The
Key here, is to jam your palm on a
hip, wedge its elbow into the mat.

Other Fourteen Wrestlers break wrestling to circle around. Coach places Gunner's palm on its hip, then its elbow in the mat creating solid support. JT tries, but can't *Pin* Gunner. Coach blows a long whistle and stands. JT and Gunner break.

COACH

Don't quit and the period will end.
Fight for a second chance, always,
and you'll get it. Never, Give, Up!
(points to another poster)
Gentlemen, focus all your emotions
correctly for "Positive Power!"

All, except JT, rote-read hand-written poster's quote aloud.

WRESTLERS

"Don't get mad, Get motivated.
Don't get angry, Get aggressive.
Don't get even, Get ahead."

COACH

Wrestle smart, gentlemen. Change!

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY OUTSIDE WRESTLING GYM - NEXT AFTERNOON

FOOTBALL PLAYERS, in gear and cleats, *click* down the hall.

BRODIE BLISS, African-American, 17, 6', 250 lbs, in pads and practice uniform, stops at a water fountain to drink, a lot.

Coach enters wrestling gym in his USPS shorts-uniform with briefcase, then walks backwards out to stare at Brodie. He drops his briefcase upright to *clap-rub* his palms together.

COACH

You're --our heavyweight.

BRODIE

You're --our Karate Coach.

Brodie exits *clicking*, but trips over the outside door's threshold to fall through it. Coach does an *Irish Jig*.

EXT. ADAMS FOOTBALL FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Legg is about to start Practice when he sees Coach in USPS shorts-uniform with bright-white muscled legs reflecting.

LEGG

Bet dogs love seeing those coming.

COACH

That's why I run it. Got a minute?

LEGG

For you? No. What's up?

COACH

Give me a big guy with no balance
at the end of your season, and I'll
give you back at the end of mine --
a three-point-stance blitzkrieg.

(walks back into school)

Call your counterpart at my old
school! Ask what I gave him back!

Legg tries to blow his whistle, but can't, so it, *thweets*.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - ONE WEEK LATER

More motivational posters and exercise stations around walls.

Coach enters in cammo sweats and wrestling shoes, turns on lights, then opens double-doors of equipment-packed storage room and turns on a boombox inside. Rock music *plays*.

Drummond enters dressed in *Head Coach* shirt and gym shorts.

COACH

No offense man, but these kids need someone in their lives that has the time to care. You can't right now.

DRUMMOND

And I don't like you either!

COACH

Hey, I'm not putting you down, just stating a fact. Take a break, let me coach them this season.

DRUMMOND

I'm still their Head Coach!

COACH

Then act like one! Do what's best for them, not you!

The Sixteen Wrestlers enter dressed for practice and freeze. Drummond is surprised by how many, then recovers as a bully.

DRUMMOND

J.T., get down! Chen and all you "new guys" --you're own your own.

CHEN

Coach Drummond, uh sir, uh, we appreciate all you've done but, we're really coming together for the first time as a team and --

JT

We talked about it and, we'd kinda' like for things to stay, as is.

Drummond is speechless, glares at Coach, then storms out.

Coach hand-motions for wrestling. ALL pair-up. He *blows* his whistle and watches them proud.

COACH

Now, "*they*" are one.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Irish violin and cello music *plays* on overhead speakers as JT leads Wrestlers in *Jumping Jacks* with arms flailing, but their feet are doing the three dancing steps of an *Irish Jig*.

Jacobs and Legg enter and stop dumbfounded by the *Riverdance*.

LEGG

What the hell?

Legg *blows* his whistle. ALL Wrestlers run to Both and get on a knee. Legg and Jacobs look at each impressed, then recover.

JACOBS

Coach Drummond has requested a
leave of absence for this year.

COACH

Everyone run the halls!

JT and Chen lead Wrestlers to exit jogging. Coach turns off the stereo. Room is uncomfortable-silent, then...

LEGG

You made Bill quit!

COACH

We only make ourselves give up.

JACOBS

He still gets paid.

COACH

I get paid in more important ways.
(no response, surprised)
Wow, you guys really forgot why you
became teachers?

LEGG

To have summers off?

JACOBS

So you're cool with being
responsible for --everything?

COACH

Always was.

Jacobs and Legg exit. Coach turns on radio. It plays a famous Solo-Rap song, *Can't Touch This*. Coach *Top Rock* break-dances.

BRODIE

Hey, grass-flopper!

Coach turns to see Brodie in shorts and a *Football* t-shirt. Coach break-dances more animated. Brodie watches him, *WTF?*

INT. COACH'S DINING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Coach sits at the dining table creating a T-Ledger on graph-paper next to his open *Economics* book.

Susan enters from work wearing a dress and colorful scarf.

SUSAN
"Lucy, I'm home!"

COACH
Hey sweetie, how was your day?

SUSAN
Not bad. How was yours?

COACH
"Not bad." Drummond quit.

SUSAN
Can you finally hire an Assistant?

COACH
No, but I do need help. There is this college student, former high school champ, but he's not on his university team. Think I know why.

EXT. LOCAL COLLEGE - NEXT MORNING

Sprawling university campus. COLLEGE STUDENTS walk to class.

ERIC KING, African-American, 20s, short, muscular, in jeans and college t-shirt, wearing backpack, walks on a sidewalk.

Coach, in USPS long-pants uniform, pulls over his *USPS* Jeep.

COACH
ERIC! Eric King!

King stops. Coach puts on Hazard lights and jogs to King.

KING
Now this is Special Delivery.

COACH
What? No. I'm the Head Wrestling Coach at Adams High. I saw you wrestle at State. You're good.

KING
Was.

COACH
Will be again. You're graduating as a teacher. Want to start early?

KING
What, with you, at Adams? No way. I'm already set to Student Teach. Besides, I don't wrestle, period.

King jogs away angry. Coach stands hands-on-hips yelling.

COACH

I know what your dad did! This is about life, not wrestling! These kids have no one else! Help them!

King enters a building. Coach *sighs*, then drives away.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - ONE WEEK LATER

Now 17 Wrestlers. Previous Sixteen plus now Brodie in his *Football* t-shirt, gym shorts. JT and Chen lead All in P.T.

Coach enters in olive-drab sweats and wrestling shoes, then *blows* whistle. All stop in unison with hands down at sides.

COACH

Gentlemen, remember what I said about how to get good grades?

WRESTLERS

Just, Show, Up!

COACH

That's right, just show up --and pay attention! Well, tomorrow your Interims come out. Bring them to practice. All C's or better or --. Also, this is the last week to turn in Physicals. Basketball, Baseball, Football, you're good. All the rest, a doctor must clear you as fit in order to participate.

(notices their torn shoes)

And from now on knuckleheads, wear your tennis shoes only when we run.

J.T.

Why, Refs let us wrestle in these?

COACH

Okay, but why would you want to?

(points to own shoes)

These are lighter and made to grip the mat. Everyone has or can buy a pair, right?!

(no response, drops head)

No one --has wrestling shoes?

JT

"No one" --can afford them.

Coach looks up, puts on a "happy face" and *claps*.

COACH

O-kay. One crisis at a time.
Physicals! When I call your name,
outside. Tung!

Tung, sweating profuse, hangs his head to exit behind Coach.

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY OUTSIDE WRESTLING GYM - CONTINUOUS

Tung slumps against a wall. Coach senses something's wrong.

COACH

Son, my job is to help you succeed.
Your job, is to tell me how.

A tear rolls down Tung's cheek.

COACH

Hey, hey, it's okay. What's wrong?

TUNG

My dad said we can't afford it.

COACH

Oh, is that all? Go splash water on
your face and get back in.

Tung's mouth falls open as he stumbles to the water fountain.

Coach looks straight up shaking his head *grumbling* something.

INT. SPORT DOCTOR'S OFFICE - LATER THAT WEEK

Coach, in USPS long uniform, enters with JT, Gunner, and Tung, in worn jeans and t-shirts. Coach points, *Sit*. They do.

Coach hands FEMALE NURSE, 30s, normal, in uniform, behind the open sliding-window, three folded forms from his back pocket.

DOCTOR, Asian, 40s, short, fit-for-age, in a lab coat, puts his Stethoscope in a side pocket as he exits an exam room.

COACH

Hey, Doc! You offer any kind of
school employee discount?

DOCTOR

Heard of you from my Adams parents.
There'll be no charge today.

COACH

Great! Know any athletic shoe reps?

EXT. TOWNHOUSE RENTAL COMPLEX - LATER THAT DAY

Coach in USPS uniform with mailbag across chest and shoulder, runs around a corner *Fingering-the-Mail*. He takes stairs two-at-a-time to each door-slot and lifts its lid to "shoot" mail inside. He stops at the last door and lifts cover slowly to gently insert the mail. It's yanked out of his hand from the other side by a DOG heard inside *growling* and *chewing* it up.

COACH
Certified.

Coach jumps off the stairs then freezes seeing Chigna with his earlier Four Gangmembers sitting in same drive-by *muscle-car* drinking Mexican beer, pointing, and *laughing* at Coach.

Coach jogs past their car saying in Spanish, "No, I don't want to save the world," then continues on in English.

COACH
No, no quiero salvar el mundo --
Just those that let me!

Chigna and his Four Gangmembers are open-mouth speechless.

Coach runs to his USPS Pinto-hatchback. Cardboard trays of mail are seen through its back window. He jumps in throwing his now empty bag into the back, then drives away.

INT. COACH'S USPS PINTO AT A RED LIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Coach pats his Economics book laying in passenger seat.

COACH
I'm ready --for my test now.

Loud *screeching* of tires. He looks up in rear-view mirror.

COACH
Pop quiz.

Rear *collision*. White's Pinto is knocked forward. No airbag, he's saved by seatbelt. Mail in back *explodes* all around him.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Radio *plays* music as 15 Wrestlers warm up. Chen and JT enter laughing, then see Coach, still in same USPS Uniform, who sits in a plastic chair now wearing a medical cervical collar. The Pair are open-mouthed shocked.

Coach stares forward blank, grimaces, then closes his eyes.

INT. COACH'S LIVING ROOM - THAT EVENING

Coach opens his eyes now sitting in a wing-chair, still dressed same, reading his now-damaged Economics book by holding it with both arms straight-out in front of him.

Susan enters from work, drops purse, sits in chair next to him and puts a hand on his knee. Coach doesn't look at her.

SUSAN

Thanks for calling me from the hospital. How are you, what happened with work?

COACH

Emergency Doc says I strained my neck and put me out on sick leave. I get a C.T. scan tomorrow. But since everything happens for a reason, this gives me time to work on some projects for the kids.

SUSAN

Listen, I know your "think through the pain" thingie. Are you telling me and the doctors everything?

Coach puts pointer-finger to his lips and silently *shushes* her then holds book out at arms-length again. He grimaces.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - DAYS LATER

A cafeteria-table is open with shoe boxes stacked on it.

Head Custodian WASHINGTON, African-American, 60s, grey hair, in school-patch janitor-coveralls, nods at Coach and exits.

Coach, in sweats, is hunched-over with "bags" under his eyes. He shuffles to a SHOE REP wearing his company's logo t-shirt.

Seventeen Wrestlers enter. Coach makes a low circling hand-gesture. Wrestlers gather around him and Shoe Rep on a knee.

SHOE REP

They're not brand new, but no one leaves here today, without a pair.

Wrestlers rush the shoe-table like it's Christmas.

This is first time we see JT smile.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - LATER THAT DAY

Table is now folded-up against a wall.

Shoe boxes with their old sneakers inside have the wrestler names written on the outside. The boxes are neatly stacked.

Wrestlers wear their first wrestling shoes admiring them.

Coach hands a check to Shoe Rep who exits with his shoe-cart.

Coach points to a cardboard box near the wall. JT looks away.

COACH

Always look a gift horse in the mouth?

JT

Never seen a horse, let alone its "gift."

Wrestlers *laugh* as JT retrieves the box and turns it upside down. T-shirts with printing fall out. Their fronts say "*Save Appalachia Kids*" overtop silk-screened Piedmont-mountains.

TUNG

"Apple-lay-cha?" That us?

CHEN

South America, stupid.

JT

North America, stupido.

COACH

You get, what you don't pay for.

Wrestlers take-off old to put on new t-shirts. Brodie's is too short so his belly hangs out its bottom. All point at him *laughing*. Coach tosses magic-markers to eight Wrestlers.

COACH

Pair, Up! You're with me big guy.

Sixteen wrestlers pair-up, eight with, and without markers.

COACH

Draw the Pinning Area on your partner's back. This is a test.

Coach tries to put on a t-shirt, can't, closes eyes in pain.

INT. NEUROSURGEON'S EXAM ROOM - NEXT DAY

Coach opens eyes now in paper dressing-gown on an exam table.

SURGEON, Indian, 40s, in lab coat, enters with MRI films and slides them into a wall Viewbox. He reads with a *Hmmmm*-tone.

SURGEON

X-rays, CT-Scan, Ultra-sound, and now MRI, do not show any bulges or abnormalities in your cervical vertebrae. This "pinch" --is in your neck only?

COACH

Yes. Hurts to walk, sit. I can't sleep, can't even tie my own shoes.

SURGEON

The Spine is like an electrical conduit, signals can get re-routed. Let's try something. Stand up.

Coach stands slow grimacing. Surgeon walks behind him.

SURGEON

Bend forward, forearms on table.

COACH

(bends over table slow)
Not gonna' do that exam are you?

SURGEON

You may experience, a slight pinch.

COACH

It is "that exam!"

Doctor looks for the sweet-spot on Coach's Lumbar area, then hammer-fists once on the L-5. Coach *screams* flying forward.

SURGEON

I'm scheduling a Lumbar M.R.I. I'll give you a Cortisone shot in your lower back and some ice packs to help freeze the nerves plus a cane.

Coach, recovering with hands-on-back, backs away cautious.

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY OUTSIDE WRESTLING GYM - THAT NIGHT

Loud crowd *noise* from inside the adjacent Main Gym echoes.

Coach, in dress shirt and tie, now leans on a medical-cane talking to, FIRST RIVAL COACH who's dressed same. Ice pack hangs out of Coach's back waistband. Both shake, then First Rival Coach exits. Coach leans on the wall exhausted.

CAPTION: *First Meet - Home*

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Seventeen Wrestlers meander in ill-fitting mismatched vintage wrestling uniforms. Brodie wears his *Adams Phys-Ed* t-shirt.

Coach shuffles in on his cane, sees "homeless" team, and taps cane's tip on wall-mat. Wrestlers semi-circle taking a knee.

COACH

Your team is called --PRESIDENTS.

Coach aims cane at a poster of Richard Nixon pointing like *Uncle Sam* with caption under "Real Presidents Don't Quit!"

COACH

This is your first meet. They don't have a Heavyweight, so Brodie, you'll just have your hand raised.

BRODIE

I like this sport.

COACH

Their coach also let me match you based on experience, not weight.

(gathers strength, yells)

Objective!

PRESIDENTS

Pin to Win!

COACH

Definition!

PRESIDENTS

Control both shoulders, tops or Scapulae on mat for two seconds!

COACH

Only way to get pinned?!

PRESIDENTS

Give, Up!

COACH

Gentlemen, wrestling is the only sport where you can lose in points and still be the winner. When you refuse to give up, you defeat your opponent's goal. Are you ready?

PRESIDENTS

Sir, yes sir.

COACH

I don't believe you.

PRESIDENTS
Sir, Yes, Sir!

COACH
(aims cane at door)
They --don't believe you.

PRESIDENTS
HELL YES, SIR!

COACH
Gentlemen, do not curse. Annnnd --

Coach holds cane out in front. Wrestlers go hands-in with cane's tip. All hands/cane go down, then up, to release.

COACH/PRESIDENTS
WRESTLE!

JT circles a finger over his head and jogs out of the room. Presidents *clap* following JT jogging out-of-circle in order.

When alone, Coach falls back against a wall and slides down.

INT. ADAMS MAIN GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Old wrestling mats are taped down together in center of the gym. Opened folding-chairs line both mat's opposite ends.

Parent-Student SMALL CROWD from both schools sits in stands.

Earlier *Can't Touch This* music begins playing through P.A. Presidents enter jogging in single-file, form a circle on the mat's ring, then do Jumping-Jacks in sync. They pair-up to do *Fireman's Carry* and *Head-Hip Throws* in time to the music.

Small Crowd gives *ovation*. FIRST RIVAL WRESTLERS watch *Uh-oh*.

Jacobs and Legg sit at Head Table impressed by team spirt.

Coach shuffles-in and sits *tapping* his medical-cane to music.

MUSIC-MONTAGE: Wrestling matches show see-saw scores as FIRST REFEREE in uniform raises Winners hands. Presidents wrestle with passion, win, and yell encouragement. Tung curses.

TUNG
Hell yes we're ready!

Tung slap-covers his mouth with hands glancing at Coach who gives "thumbs-down". Tung drops doing push-ups, counting.

TUNG
One, two, three, four, etc.

Coach pushes his cane-tip on Tung's butt giving resistance as he looks for Tung's parents, then closes his eyes in pain.

EXT. EARLIER COLLEGE CAMPUS - NEXT DAY

Coach opens his eyes sitting in a wheelchair next to a bench.

COLLEGE STUDENT, 20s, in glasses, sits on the bench reading.

King is walking to class, recognizes Coach, and double-takes.

COACH

Car accident. Herniated disc needs surgery. Other coach quit. I can't show moves to the kids. How can they learn? Will you help them?

King walks away disgusted. Coach *yells* at him like a father.

COACH

Everyone else has quit on them! You know what that's like!

King stops, drops shoulders, shakes head, then walks back.

Coach rolls wheelchair next to College Student who gives him medical-cane and climbs into wheelchair. They shake hands.

COACH

Thanks, buddy. See? You made the difference. Take care, don't quit.

(turns to King)

Desperate people do --.

(shuffles away)

Ahh, come on.

KING

The cane a prop, too?!

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - THAT AFTERNOON

Coach shuffles-in on his cane now wearing sweats. Presidents stand in rigid silent formation, then break to *clap* and *cheer*. Coach gives thumbs-down sign. Wrestlers take a knee.

COACH

Brodie, what do you do when life puts an obstacle in your way?

BRODIE

Over, under, around or, *my personal favorite* --through it!

COACH

Gentlemen, I have to have surgery
so meet, all-of-the-above.

Coach quick-blows *whistle*. King enters dressed in sweats.

COACH

Coach King is a State Champion. Has
he already earned your respect?

PRESIDENTS

Sir, yes sir!

COACH

Prove it!

Presidents scatter to pair-up in Stance. Coach scans for
correct positioning, then blows his *whistle*. ALL wrestle.

JT takes down Tung hard who then keeps yelling in pain.

TUNG

Ow, OW, OWWWW --!

COACH

(blows *whistle* long)
J.T. outside! --Coach King!

Coach tosses his whistle to King, then limps out angry on his
cane. JT *could-care-less* follows outside.

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY OUTSIDE WRESTLING GYM - CONTINUOUS

JT exits with hands-on-hips. Coach leans-in to him on cane.

COACH

What, is going on with you?

JT

What'd ya' mean?

COACH

That's just it, you are "mean." You
enjoy hurting others. Why?

JT

Part of the sport.

COACH

No! Legal Pain is different. We
don't hurt others because we can.

JT

Coulda' fooled me.

COACH

What?! --Oh, okay, now I get you.
(leans-in whispering)
*Just because someone hurts you,
doesn't mean "you" have to pass it
on. Think on it --*
(palms JT in chest hard)
till it hurts!

JT rocks back on his heels, then goes to water fountain.

Whistle inside. Tung run-exits headed for same fountain.

COACH

Didn't see your folks at our meet?

TUNG

What? Oh, uh, dad works two jobs.
Mom, she, we --don't have a car.

COACH

Of course you don't. --Don't worry.
We'll find a way to get your mom to
your matches.

Coach sees the Cheerleaders practicing and hobbles to them.

JT overheard Coach's offer and stares at Tung who stares back surprised. Both reenter wrestling gym looking back at Coach.

INT. DOWN SAME HALLWAY OUTSIDE WRESTLING GYM - CONTINUOUS

TEN ADAMS CHEERLEADERS, all ethnics and grades, practice.

COACH GREEN, late-20s, fit, in sweatpants, whistle in mouth-corner, reads a clipboard of routines. She sees Coach and *spits* out her whistle.

GREEN

Nice cane, Hop-Along. Too much
noise? Want us to move again?

COACH

What? No. Thanks. Have you seen how
many came out?

GREEN

Yep. Heard they're better in class
now, too. Whatcha want this time?

COACH

Was hoping some of your athletes
would cheer at our meets?

GREEN

You're the first male coach to ever
call them "athletes."

COACH

I see how hard they work.

GREEN

Ladies! Any of you want to cheer at
a --a wrestling game?

COACH

Meet. Wrestling meet.

GREEN

Whatever. Well?!
(no response)
Not a request!

TWO CHEERLEADERS raise their hands barely, not too happy.

COACH

Great! I'll put a copy of our
schedule in your mailbox.
(turns to walk away)
Thanks, ma'am.

GREEN

HEY!

Coach turns back. Green glares at him then *spits* in the water
fountain, wipes mouth with back of hand, and scratches butt.

GREEN

Do I look like a "ma'am?"

COACH

Not now.

GREEN

Alrighty then.

COACH

(shuffles away *chuckling*)
Can't build a team here, huh?
Just watch me.

INT. COACH'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Susan sits propped-up in bed reading. Coach exits master
bathroom wearing gym shorts and a hooded-sweatshirt, up.

SUSAN

Pain any better?

COACH

Goes and comes. But everything's
coming together for the kids. Hope
I can get some sleep. Night.

Coach slowly gets down on floor next to the bed to lay on his back. A pillow and a blanket are there. Susan's hand, slides down to cover him with another blanket. He looks up grateful.

COACH

Thanks.

INT. ETHNIC GROCERY STORE - SIMULTANEOUS

Small independent grocery store in a low-rent strip-mall. All lights flash then HISPANIC FEMALE MANAGER announces over P.A.

MANAGER (FILTERED)

We are now closed. Please bring
your purchases to the cashier at
the front of the store. Gracias.

JT walks to its Exit-door wearing a hooded-sweatshirt, up.

A MALE CUSTOMER stands outside the locked *Enter-Only* door.

Exit door self-opens for JT. Male Customer scoots past him down an aisle. Manager follows Male Customer. JT exits.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - CONTINUOUS

JT turns corner and while walking, pulls out a plastic bag, *snap-fluffs* it open, and pulls food products from parts of his clothing to place in the bag. He looks up grateful.

JT

Thanks.

INT. PRIVATELY OWNED RESTAURANT - NEXT DAY

It's raining. Coach, wearing a wet USPS Jacket, shuffles in on his cane into the well-furnished prosperous restaurant.

RESTAURANT OWNER, 30s, balding, slight paunch, dress slacks and restaurant's logo *Polo*-shirt, points to end of the bar.

COACH

You the Manager?

OWNER

I'm the owner. Need a signature?

COACH

Yes sir, on a check. I'm the head wrestling coach at Adams High.

OWNER

Oh, I thought --? Hey, I used to wrestle. What, what "check?"

COACH

Saw you at the NCAA Finals, that's why I'm here. Our kids need you.

OWNER

You were there? Who, needs what?

COACH

Saw you take fourth. Impressive. Iowa's tough. We need your help.

OWNER

Dan Gable sure knows how to coach. Wait. Who's "we?"

COACH

Had lunch with Gable awhile back, funny stories, especially about Blatnick. He told me you were dependable. Can we count on you?

OWNER

Wish I'd known Dan was in town. Wait. Count on me, for what?

COACH

Made a deal with a uniform vendor, at cost, but we need a Sponsor.

OWNER

"Check, uniform, Sponsor?"
(points at own chest)
Me?

COACH

(shakes his hand vigorous)
Could "we" get that check, now?

INT. SECOND RIVAL SCHOOL LOCKER ROOM - ONE WEEK LATER

Presidents are in a different school's locker-room admiring their brand new school-color uniforms with satin-jackets.

CAPTION: *Second Meet - Away*

Coach shuffles in on cane followed by King. Both wear ties.

JT

Get what you don't pay for, huh?

Presidents turn around showing Restaurant's Logo on back with circled neon-lettering "*For a Champion Meal, Eat Here.*"

COACH

Gentlemen, statistics show whoever gets the first Takedown wins. So for those wrestling their first time tonight, like Brodie --

Brodie steps-out from others now wearing new fitting uniform.

COACH

"Play Ball." Football that is.

BRODIE

Now I really like this sport.

COACH

Gentlemen, right off the whistle, run at your opponent and jam your head in his stomach. Your momentum will knock him off-balance. Your key phrase for tonight is, "Big T."

BRODIE

"Tackle?!" I love this sport!

KING

But don't lock hands around his waist once you're down on the mat!

COACH

Right. JT, Chen, make warm-ups sharp. Gentlemen, cheer for your teammates. Remember to --Have Fun!

JT

You heard Coach, follow our lead and stay in sync. Circle, Up!

All except Coach form circle hands-in that go down then up.

PRESIDENTS/KING

Wrestle!

Presidents jog out led by King. When alone, Coach falls back against a locker, slides down onto bench, then pulls an ice-pack out from under his back waistband. It's thawed and limp.

INT. SECOND RIVAL'S MAIN GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Huge modern gym. A radio *plays* Disco-Funk music through P.A.

Newer Parent-Student BIGGER CROWD sits in the stands along with Susan, Magdalena, and now TUNG'S MOM.

Presidents jog-in to form a circle around mat. JT and Chen go back-to-back to lead all in exact-formation exercises as the Presidents Two Cheerleaders do routines on their sideline.

SECOND RIVAL CHEERLEADERS do their Routines much better as their own SECOND RIVAL WRESTLERS watch both.

King takes it all in still not sure. Coach shuffles in.

MUSIC-MONTAGE: During matches Presidents yell "Big T!" Their teammate then sprints head-down to bowl over their Opponent.

Tung's Match Result: SECOND REFEREE, in uniform, holds up Tung's hand as winner. Tung searches the stands, then smiles seeing HIS MOM jumping up and down *clapping* and crying next to Susan who *claps* excited as Magdalena politely *claps*.

Brodie's Match: He wipes his feet like a bull in the ring, then charges his SECOND HEAVYWEIGHT head-down and knocks the wind out of him who falls backward. Brodie jumps on top of him stomach-to-stomach. Second Referee *slaps* mat loud, *Pin!* Both stand and Second Referee raises Brodie's hand. All Presidents rush onto mat to *Big-T* Brodie. ALL fall *laughing*.

On their sidelines, Restaurant Owner dances happy-feet.

King looks at Coach, now smiling. Coach nods, then *winces*.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - NEXT DAY

Coach shuffles in on his cane wearing sweats. King in shorts and t-shirt exits. Presidents *clap* and *cheer*, then get quiet and look at Chen who looks to JT. Coach senses concern.

CHEN

Coach, you take us home after practice and Mrs. Coach brings our moms to meets.

JT

No coach has ever done that for us, so we were kinda' wondering, if you do it, you know, just so we'll win?

COACH

I do it --because I'm supposed to.

PRESIDENTS

"Supposed to?!"

COACH

Think on it. Think on why we're
"supposed to" help each other.

(blows *whistle*)

Coach King is coming back in now.
Pay attention, say out-loud, your
first impression of him.

King now reenters stooped over, hands in pockets, shuffling
feet, looking down, lost and meek.

JT

Limp.

CHEN

Loser.

BRODIE

Lunch.

COACH

Well that's how most of you walk in
here everyday. Do it in here, and
you'll do it --out there.

King exits to re-enter walking fast with purpose, head up,
back straight, and stops with hands on hips, *I'm in charge*.

JT

Cool.

CHEN

Confident.

BRODIE

Collected. --Like me.

COACH

Everyone step out and think about
what you want the world to see when
you walk into any room. Show me on
the outside, what I've already seen
on your inside. Go out, and come
back in --winners.

Presidents stand and file out. Door closes. King looks at
Coach, then smiles huge. Now, he's a Teacher. Door opens.

INT. ADAMS ACTIVITIES OFFICE - SAME DAY AFTER PRACTICE

Jacobs works at his desk *spitting* tobacco juice in his cup.
Knock on his door. He puts the spitting-cup in a drawer.

JACOBS
Closed for repair!

Coach opens door, shuffles-in, then grimaces hard.

COACH
You wanted to --*see* meee?

JACOBS
Back still bothering you?

COACH
Still back there. What's up?

JACOBS
Tell me about your new volunteer.

COACH
He shows moves, carries stuff, runs errands, helps me till recovery.

JACOBS
When's your surgery?

COACH
Soon as my insurance agrees.

JACOBS
Well, let's you and me agree. I'm concerned you're not a team player.

COACH
Ironical metaphor since I built one where you said ...

Jacobs true frustration explodes as he *palms* his desk hard.

JACOBS
What are you doing here?!

COACH
What I'm supposed to?

JACOBS
Which is?

COACH
Get kids to believe.

JACOBS
In --?

COACH
Themselves.

Jacobs offers tobacco pouch to Coach who holds a hand up.

COACH

No tobacco, alcohol, or caffeine.

JACOBS

There, right there, that's why I don't trust you! Drummond will be back next season and he, we, don't think you will work well together.

COACH

By then you'll have a real team and King will be a Certified Teacher.

(turns, turns back)

Sir, what about all the work orders I've turned-in on the boy's leaking showers? Spigots won't turn off. The mold and roaches are unhealthy.

JACOBS

(spits in cup annoyed)

Don't know, don't care. Up to The District Office. Get used to it.

INT. ADAMS CUSTODIAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Washington, dressed same, sits in a student desk reading a newspaper. He never looks up. Coach shuffles-in on cane.

COACH

How long does it take School Maintenance to fix leaky pipes?

WASHINGTON

Budget-cuts only allow them to respond to emergencies, so --never.

COACH

"Never?!" Uh, so what's a "plumbing emergency" exactly?

WASHINGTON

Open Pipes. You know, where water is "openly" coming out of them.

COACH

So if a spigot just leaks, it's not fixed. But if it breaks off --?

WASHINGTON

Then they'd have to replace it in order to turn it off.

COACH

Ahhhh, got it. Uh, do you have a toolbox? I need to "fix" something.

WASHINGTON
(points without looking)
Just make sure to bring it back.

Coach opens a large red toolbox on a small table near the door, takes something, then exits.

Washington flips pages *humming* the Meet's earlier rap song.

INT. ADAMS BOYS SHOWER STALL - MOMENTS LATER

All shower heads are *dripping*. The bay is humid with wide black mold in its grouting. Even bigger roaches scurry about.

Coach steps on the slimy floor, then lifts a shiny steel ball-peen hammer and talks like the famous Latino movie-gangster.

COACH
"Saaay 'ello, to my lil' friend."

Coach hits a spigot breaking it off. *Clink!* Water gushes out the wall's now open pipe. He *screams* in pain from the effort.

COACH
Aieeee!

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY OUTSIDE BOYS LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Coach's screams *echo* inside the shower-bay five more times.

COACH (O.S.)
Clink! Aieeee! -*Clink!* Aieeee! etc.

INT. ADAMS CUSTODIAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Coach shuffles in wet, drops hammer in tool box, and closes lid with cane. Washington still reads and doesn't look up.

COACH
Uh, I just noticed the boys shower bay has --Open Pipes.

WASHINGTON
"Just noticed" huh? How many?

No response. Washington looks overtop his newspaper.

WASHINGTON
All of them? All at once?
(goes back to reading)
Guess I'll have to call in an
Emergency Work-order.

Coach exits. Washington pushes on desk phone's speed-dial. It dials on speaker. He turns a page *singing* earlier lyrics.

WASHINGTON

"I told you homeboy, you can't touch this" etc.

INT. JOHN RITTNER'S OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Rittner, in dress shirt and tie, sits at desk writing. His suit-jacket hangs on a coat-rack. *Knock*. His door opens.

Coach, in dress shirt and tie, leans-in on his cane.

COACH

Got a minute?

RITTNER

Brian! How's the back?

Coach slowly sits in a chair. Rittner sees his pain.

COACH

Heard, huh? Still off work, having surgery, ow, this weekend.

RITTNER

Congrats on winning. What's up?

COACH

Heard you received more new mats.

RITTNER

"Heard," huh? Yep, double-order error so had to accept the two new ones. Lucky we have the budget.

COACH

"Lucky." But you already got a new set last year. School Board rules say you're only allowed two. Right?

RITTNER

"R-i-g-h-t?" Soooooo --?

COACH

"So" our mats are literally falling apart. Any chance you might --?

RITTNER

I'll call Transportation and send our old ones over.

COACH

Thanks John, you're The Man.

RITTNER

Glad to help. Hey, is it true you got Eric King to come assist?

COACH

Took some convincing, but yeah.

RITTNER

Shame his dad was so hard on him to always win, then abandoned them after he lost Nationals.

COACH

Coaching others will show Eric his true worth.

RITTNER

Good luck with your surgery. You are making a difference over there.

Coach exits. Rittner smiles imitating *The A-Team's* "Hannibal Smith" using pen as a cigar leaning back, hands-behind-head.

RITTNER

"I love it when a plan comes together."

INT. ADAMS MAIN OFFICE - LATER SAME DAY

Anita, in a bright dress, stands at main counter reading.

Coach enters same from Rittner-meeting and goes to her.

COACH

May I ask a question about J.T?

ANITA

Normally I could not talk about a student, but he is special. Que?

COACH

I drive him home after practice. His family seems to move a lot?

Anita motions Coach to lean closer. He does. Both whisper.

ANITA

They live in shelter apartments.

COACH

"Shelters?" You mean homeless?!

ANITA

The church sponsors his family. You'll have to ask their párroco.

Anita writes a note and slides it to Coach. He reads, pats her hand, and exits. Anita makes *Sign-of-the-Cross* after him.

INT. A CHURCH LOBBY - LATER THAT DAY

It's raining again. Coach enters on cane wearing wet *USPS* jacket. A foot *slips*. He recovers mumble-cursing in pain.

COACH
(looks straight up)
Sorry.

He listens, then follows *thud*-noises into The Chapel.

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - CONTINUOUS

PASTOR, African-American, 40s, tall, large, in a dark suit, drops hymnals in pew-slots, *thud*. He sees Coach's jacket.

PASTOR
Mailboxes downstairs.

COACH
You're sponsoring my wrestler.

Pastor's hymnal misses its slot to now *thud* on the floor.

PASTOR
Oh, I thought --? You mean J.T?

COACH
He is one pissed-off young man.

Paster picks up the dropped hymnal to insert in its slot then hand-motions, *Sit*. Both sit in same pew facing each other.

PASTOR
His mother dropped out of school to marry at age twelve. She had eight children, but only brought the six youngest to America on a one-year *Work Visa*. That was five years ago. J.T.'s two older brothers had to stay behind in jail. His family was brought to one of our Services. We've been helping them the best we can ever since. Illiteracy and poverty often go together, so his mother can only get menial jobs cleaning laundry.

COACH
Both parents are without education?

PASTOR

Yes. Add alcohol to the equation,
and abuse is usually the result.
That's why she left him.

COACH

"Left?" Where's the father now?

PASTOR

Gone to a better place.

COACH

How'd J.T. do in school back there?

PASTOR

His father didn't believe in school
so kept J.T. out. Did teach him how
to steal though. Seen his scars?

COACH

He has them all over. So --?

PASTOR

"So" the men in his country don't
use knives. They carry machetes.

Paster uses a thumb to make multiple "cuts" on himself.

COACH

J.T.'s dad, as punishment, cut his
children --with a machete?!

PASTOR

That's what his father did to him.

Coach slides away from Pastor in disbelief.

PASTOR

Only three ways to come out of
child abuse; victim, survivor,
perpetrator. J.T's father chose the
latter. Which did you choose?

COACH

Took a long time and a lot of
shrink money, but --? How --?

PASTOR

That why you take such a personal
interest in your students lives?

COACH

I need permission from their
guidance counsellor to do that. Do
you know J.T.'s?

PASTOR

Name is Thompkins but her Principal doesn't like staff getting involved in students personal lives. Would you like to pray on it?

COACH

(as George C in "Patton")
"Every God Damn day."

Pastor reacts, *Excuse me*, then both bow their heads.

INT. ADAMS GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT - LATER SAME DAY

Stacked folders are on file cabinets in a 5' x 6' windowless office. Nameplate on jumbled desk reads, *Guidance Counselor*.

TERESA THOMPKINS, Caucasian, 40s, tousled hair, wrinkled black dress with large dandruff flakes on both shoulders, works at an antique computer surrounded by hoarder-clutter.

One *knock*, then door opens and Coach leans-in on his cane wearing sweats. Both his wrestling shoes are untied.

COACH

Can we talk about a wrestler?

THOMPKINS

You can. Which one?

COACH

(sits in chair slow)
J--ow--T.

THOMPKINS

I'm limited in discussions about students. Is he in trouble?

COACH

Probably. But for now, what is his educational background?

THOMPKINS

He has lots of potential, but keeps acting-up in his L.D. classes.

COACH

"L.D.?! " He's Learning Disabled?

THOMPKINS

Assessed in Middle School as E.S.L., but came to us rated L.D.

COACH

But English is his --? I don't under --? Wait. He's a Senior. Is he scheduled to graduate?

THOMPKINS

No. He'll receive a ...

COACH

Certificate of Completion?! That's useless in the real world.

THOMPKINS

Well, I wouldn't call it ...

COACH

Might as well be. He'll never be able to get into a university.

THOMPKINS

No one in his entire family has graduated high school, let alone college, so ...

COACH

"So" he'll exit our educational system without an education, won't be able to find a good-paying job, and wind-up going to jail like his two older brothers.

THOMPKINS

Your over-concern is inappropriate. I decide what is proper procedure.

COACH

"Procedure?!" What is wrong with this place? Administrators, you, all hide behind "The Seven Rules of Bureaucracy" like they're a good thing. Why is everyone afraid to get involved and make any real difference in these kids lives?

THOMPKINS

There are legal rules to follow that protect every school system. If you were a certified-teacher, you would have been taught that.

Coach stands, looks down at his shoes, then puts one out.

COACH

The School Nurse ties my shoes because I can't right now. She's off today. Is it possible you'd --?

Thompkins stares insulted, then ties his shoes angry-fast.

COACH

See how easy it is to help others?

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Coach, in sweats, lies on his side reading *Practice Plans*.

King blows quick-whistles for Presidents doing *Monkey Rolls*.

Jacobs enters. King blows a single long whistle.

KING

Water break, two minutes!

Presidents exit running. Jacob sees something and points.

JACOBS

Why are you laying --? What is that?!

Hanging on back wall is 4' x 8' framed painted plywood board of each Wrestler's name with their wrestling record so far.

COACH

I bought the wood and J.T. made it in Shop for extra credit.

JACOBS

That's why I'm here.

COACH

There was a nail up there already!

JACOBS

What? No. J.T. I'm here about J.T. He's in Detention again.

COACH

(*sighs* like Jacobs)
What's he done now?

JACOBS

Disrupting class. But this time, the Principal wants to suspend him.

COACH

"Suspend?!" Coach King, take over!

King nods. Coach struggles up with cane and shuffles-out.

JACOBS

(sniffs air, scans)
Hey, this place smells --nice?

INT. ADAMS PRINCIPAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Principal Bass, in a skirt-suit, works behind her small desk.
Knock on her open door, then Coach enters winded and in pain.

BASS
You okay?

COACH
Not really. I understand there's
been another incident with J.T.?

BASS
He's with the S.R.O., yes. But not
in jail --yet.

COACH
School system has a Mentor Program,
right? Release J.T. to me, and I'll
work make sure he never is.

BASS
"Mentor?" *Hmm*, interesting. There's
a form to fill-out, also Background
Check. That all takes time.

COACH
I already have F.B.I. clearance.

BASS
(looks up surprised)
As a coach! --And you personally
guarantee he'll straighten out?

COACH
Might have to clip his wings a bit,
but he'll fly straight.

BASS
My secretary will get you the form.
Fill it out and sign it. I'll call
the Officer to release him to you.

COACH
Thanks, you won't regret it.

Coach exits. Bass goes back to writing, then *chuckles*.

BASS
I won't. --You will.

INT. ADAMS SRO OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

SRO sits at desk doing paperwork. JT sits across smiling.

Phone *rings*. SRO answers. Bass is not heard.

SRO
Resource Office ...What?! ...To
who? ...You sure? ...Copy that.
(hangs up, to JT)
An angel is watching over you.

JT
Must be doing it from afar.

Coach opens the door and leans-in on his cane. JT smirks.

COACH
Wipe that grin off your face!

Coach motions. Both exit. SRO goes back to writing.

SRO
Lost, still not found.

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY OUTSIDE SRO OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

JT is walking away fast. Coach realizes he scared JT.

COACH
Hey, I get why you're angry, okay?
I didn't have the best childhood
myself, that's why I just stuck my
neck out to become your Mentor.

JT
I take care of myself!

JT walks away. Coach *bangs* his cane's handle on a locker. JT
turns defensive with hands up like he expects to get hit.

COACH
Awww man, look. No one's supposed
to be afraid all the time. You
don't have to like me, just trust
that I want to help you. Trust me,
until I give you a reason not to.

JT
(walks away mumbling)
That won't take long.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Jacobs is gone. Presidents are doing *Round Robins*. JT enters
and jumps in. Coach enters, falls in a chair, and makes
circle-up sign. King *blows* his whistle. ALL circle-up.

COACH

Anyone notice our next opponent's head coach sitting in our stands at last week's meet?

(no response)

Well, they have a meet tonight, so I'll be there. Everyone be ready to learn new counters tomorrow.

KING

Starting a rivalry?

COACH

Finishing. Gentlemen, never start a fight, but if your opponent does, finish it. Get Set!

Presidents pair-up in *Referee's Position*. Coach gives King a *cut-throat* sign at JT. King nods and gets on top of JT. Coach blows whistle. King throws in near-leg for a head *Guillotine*.

JT

Ow, Ow, Owwww --!

COACH

Stop, Hurting, Yourself!

INT. ADAMS MAIN GYM - THAT FRIDAY NIGHT

CAPTION: *Third Meet - Home*

Rittner's now transferred shin-new wrestling mats are taped down in center. Metal folding-chairs line its opposite ends.

Student-Parent BIGGEST CROWD is in the stands with Susan, Magdalena, Tung's Mom, and now TWO MORE ADAMS MOMS. All Moms now wear the President's same satin warm-up jackets.

Coach and a THIRD RIVAL COACH, both in ties, shake hands, then Third Rival Coach exits to his team. Coach cane-shuffles to Jacobs and Legg who are kicking at edges of the new mats.

JACOBS

You got us new mats for free?

LEGG

And uniforms. What are you?

COACH

Conscientia. Latin for "having a conscience." Anybody else here got one?

Gym radio *plays* Hip-Hop/Rap music through its P.A.

Presidents enter dance-jogging two-by-two to music's beat.

Original Two Presidents Cheerleaders are joined by THREE MORE CHEERLEADERS. All Five do sharp routines on their sideline.

Jacobs and Legg hurry excited to sit behind their Head Table.

Coach shuffles to sit with King on their sideline chairs.

MUSIC-MONTAGE: Matches show Presidents control their THIRD RIVALS and Pin-To-Win. Adams Moms in stands go *ecstatic*.

Brodie's Match Result: His hand is raised by THIRD REFEREE in uniform, who then exits mat with Brodie's 3rd RIVAL OPPONENT.

Presidents with Cheerleaders run onto the mat to join Brodie. All group-dance to music. King runs onto mat to join-in.

In the stands, Susan and the other Three Adams Moms, except Magdalena, wave their arms high in sync to the music.

On the sidelines, Restaurant Owner is a "funky-dancer."

At Head Table, Jacobs and Legg bob heads in sync to music.

Coach sees all, smiles, then closes his eyes in sharp pain.

INT. COACH'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NEXT NIGHT AFTER SURGERY

Second bed is empty. Monitor beeps. Coach opens his eyes in a bed wearing a gown with I.V. tube in. Susan sits next to him reading a book. She sees he's awake and puts her book down.

SUSAN

How you feeling sleepy-head?

COACH

Huh? Oh. Hurts, but it's the kind of pain you know is gonna' heal.

Surgeon from office-exam enters dressed same.

SURGEON

How you feeling, man-of-the-match?

COACH

Vise-lock pinch is gone, so feeling is coming back in that leg.

SURGEON

Pinching, numbness? You had Sciatica and did not tell me?!

SUSAN

It's okay Doc, he does that.

Surgeon rolls Coach onto his side, checks sutures, then rolls him on his back again. Coach's eyes and mouth are wide-open.

COACH

Hey Doc, how about a memo first?

SURGEON

Our goal is to get you on your feet as soon as possible. Stand up.

COACH

Get outta' here --literally.

SUSAN

Big baby.

Coach *growls* at Susan, then grabs Doctor's arm to sit up. Coach stands slow, is surprised. He holds onto Surgeon's arm, walks across room and back, then sits. He smiles big.

COACH

Not bad. Other than feeling like there's a hole in my back.

SURGEON

How do you think I got in to scoop out its Nucleus Pulposus?

SUSAN

"Hole?!" That has to mean no contact sports, like wrestling?

SURGEON

Regular light stretching, I'll give you handouts. But absolutely no hard physical exertion of any kind!

COACH

Doc, seriously, a memo?

SUSAN

How long?

SURGEON

Minimum a year. I'll send the Nurse in every two hours to help you walk. Check-out in the morning. Call me if any complications.

COACH

(offers hand, they shake)
I, I just wanna' say "thanks" --
for fixing me.

INT. COACH'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NOW MIDNIGHT

Susan is gone. Coach is propped-up in bed on pillows watching TV drinking from a juice-box. A shadow moves in the doorway.

COACH
So soon?! Ever thought about
becoming a wrestling coach?

KING
Not till you limped into my life.

King enters holding a bright pink balloon.

KING
Gift shop is closed. Saw this
floating on the lobby ceiling.

COACH
You get an "I" for improvising.
That has to be thirty foot high.

KING
I, I just wanna' say "thanks" --
for fixing me.

King offers hand. They shake. Coach covers it with free hand.

COACH
Fixing kids, fixes us all.

NURSE enters, sees pink balloon, holding hands, and exits.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - THAT MONDAY

Coach, in sweats, enters walking slow but upright with no cane. He is carrying a video case. Presidents cheer. Coach gives thumbs-down. All take a knee including King.

COACH
Gentlemen, any negative experience
becomes a positive one if you learn
from it. Throughout life, you will
have challenges thrown at you that
are bigger, stronger, and more
experienced than you. When that
happens, learn from them to be
ready for your next event. --Chen,
how many Team Points for a Pin?

CHEN
Six?

COACH
J.T., how many for Technical Fall?

JT
Five?

COACH
How many Team Points did we win by?

KING
One.

COACH
Tung, you were on your back almost the whole time. What did you learn?

TUNG
How to get my butt beat!

Presidents *guffaw*. Coach never breaks his stare with Tung.

TUNG
Never give up.

COACH
Yes! Never quit. Once learned, that lesson will stay with you forever. Uh, outta' curiosity, how did you get off your back that last time?

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. ADAMS MAIN GYM - PREVIOUS MEET

Tung is being man-handled by his THIRD OPPONENT. Tung's nose bleeds, bad. Third Referee *blows* his whistle.

THIRD REFEREE
Injury Time-Out! One Minute!

King runs onto mat with first-aid kit and tilts Tung's head back while pinching the bridge of his nose to insert gauze tube-plugs. Coach follows to stand over Tung looking down.

COACH
You can't beat this guy.
(stunned response)
But what you can do, is make him earn every single friggin' point. Your will against his. Don't give him what he wants. Finish it!

Third Referee hand-motions, *Up*. King pulls out nose-plugs. Tung's bleeding has stopped. Tung stands, then nods at Coach who nods back and leaves mat followed by King carrying kit.

Referee restarts both standing. Third Opponent takes Tung down into a *Half-Nelson/Inside Crotch*. All seems lost when Third Opponent suddenly arches his butt high into the air. Now briefly free, Tung rolls over to his stomach smiling.

RETURN TO.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - PRESENT PRACTICE

All look at Tung waiting for his answer.

TUNG
I bit him.

ALL
You what?!

TUNG
I tried to get the Ref's attention, but couldn't. The jerk put his fat belly over my mouth. I couldn't breathe. That's not legal, right?

KING
Nope, can't "choke" your opponent.

TUNG
He started it, I finished it.

COACH
Yeah, well, let's not do that again. Biting is illegal, too. So how many team points did you cost?

TUNG
Five.

COACH
(waits, no response)
Come on guys, do the math.

JT
Tung won our meet!

Presidents erupt in *cheers*. Coach opens his case to retrieve a VHS shoulder-camera. Wrestlers stare at it like an alien.

COACH
Gentlemen, we learn by watching.

Coach hands camera to King who examines it like Christmas.

COACH
Now, who wants to be --a Star?

All Presidents hold hands up, then King. Coach papa-smiles.

INT. COACH'S CAR - THAT NIGHT AFTER PRACTICE

Coach drives. JT sits in front. Coach *clears* his throat.

COACH
You will win Districts.

JT
Lè ti poul fè dan.

COACH
When chickens have teeth? Why?

JT
Soumoun.

COACH
I'm not meddling in your affairs
uninvited! What's going on?!

JT
Depòtasyonk.

COACH
Deported?! All of you? When? Why?

JT
Trè byento.

They ride in silence. Coach tilts his head, then stares up through windshield. His brow furrows and both eyebrows move like he's having a conversation. He shakes his head twice, stares up through windshield again, opens mouth to argue, *sighs*, then nods resigned. He *clears* his throat in disbelief.

COACH
Wanna' stay?

JT
Where? Here? Who wouldn't? All I
ever wanted to be was a winner at
something, but now --?

COACH
Say "Hi" to your mom.

Coach stops at JT's now third shelter-apartment. JT exits. Coach watches JT enter, then looks up at the night sky.

COACH
You sure about this?

INT. COACH'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Susan wears a robe reading in wing-chair. Coach enters house and sits in wing-chair next to her, lost in thought.

SUSAN

How was Practice, and the kids?

COACH

Huh? Oh, fine, fine. They're all fine. *I'm not.*

SUSAN

Coming down with something?

COACH

Yeah, consciência. --I told J.T. he'd win Districts.

SUSAN

Was he excited?

COACH

Soumoun.

SUSAN

"No?!" Why not?

COACH

Depòtasyon.

SUSAN

Back to Haiti?! That's awful! He has potential. He's a good kid.

COACH

I know. That's our problem.

SUSAN

"Our?"

COACH

Uh, sweetie, this is kind of hard to explain, but I, you, we, uh, we're supposed to --*take him in.*

SUSAN

But you said we could never have children! You said you were afraid because of what your mom did to you, afraid you might do the same to --that's what you said?

COACH

I know, but ...

SUSAN

"But" what? I had to make peace with that decision, and now you suddenly changed your mind?!

COACH

Wasn't me that changed it.

SUSAN

What, you suddenly had an epiphany?

COACH

Well actually, yeah, my first.

SUSAN

What? Wait. Are you serious?

COACH

Hey, I didn't ask for it, okay! All I can tell you is, we were told to.

SUSAN

"Told to" what? By whom?

Coach looks away, then slow-points straight up.

SUSAN

Why are you point --? No, come on?!

COACH

Hey, I'm not making this up.

SUSAN

Gonna' build a baseball diamond?

COACH

Now you're just being mean.

SUSAN

We hardly go to church, I don't under --? Why him? Why now?

COACH

If I knew the answer, honey, I'd tell ya'. All I know is, I heard a voice, it was not my own, and we're "supposed to" do this. Okay?

SUSAN

Not really. You sure about this?

COACH

Asked and answered. --Twice.

EXT. POST OFFICE REAR LOADING DOCK - NEXT MORNING

Carriers load mail-trays in USPS *Jeeps* and *Ford Pintos*.

Coach exits the huge swinging doors, goes to a pay-phone on the wall, holds up a business card, and dials card's number covering his other ear. Voice on other end is not heard.

COACH

Ruby! It's Brian. How are you?
...Great. Can we meet for lunch?
It's really important ...That's
fantastic! Today? ...Yeah, same
place ...Thanks again, see ya'.

Coach hangs-up and goes to re-enter, but gets hit by a door swinging out. He stumbles backwards, then looks straight up.

COACH

One door opens, got it.

EXT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - LATER THAT DAY

Coach parks a *USPS Pinto* and exits in USPS long-uniform.

RUBY DEE, BBBW, 30s, in a suit, comes to Coach. Both hug.

COACH

If I tell you a sad-sad story, can
you furnish it with a happy ending?

RUBY

You're scaring me, Brian.

COACH

That's okay, "scarifying" myself.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - LATER SAME DAY

Presidents are sparring. King rolls with JT. Coach enters wearing sweats and blows *whistle*. ALL get on one knee.

COACH

Our next match is against my old
school. They will be doing *Head-Hip*
Throws and *Sit-Out Granby-Rolls*. We
will be learning, all the Counters.

KING

How do you know what they'll do?

COACH

Anybody see the movie "Patton?"

No response. Coach turns up radio. It *plays* Techno-Rap music. Coach taps a foot, realizes he can dance again, and does.

King raises both eyebrows. Presidents just shake their heads.

INT. COACH'S CAR - THAT NIGHT AFTER PRACTICE

Coach and JT ride alone. Coach *clears* his throat.

COACH

Know what a Guardian is?

JT

Some of the guys have 'em. Why?

COACH

We'll have to go to Court, which is why I need to come in and talk with your mom tonight. Is that okay?

JT

Why you wanna do this for me, mon?
(no response, incredulous)
You're "supposed to?!"

Coach looks up through windshield grumble-nodding sarcastic.

INT. JT'S THIRD SHELTER APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Basement windowless apartment. No kitchen, just refrigerator and stove on unpainted wall. Great Room has same couch and lamp. Multiple boxes are unpacked again. Magdalena sits sad.

Door opens. JT enters with Coach is shocked by their squalor.

COACH

Evening, ma'am. I, we, my wife and I, would like to give your son a safe place to live until he graduates high school here.

MAGDALENA

Live with who, you?! I mean, I want this for my son, yes, but why would you --? You are adopting him?

COACH

No! Just "guarding" him. I met with a Probation Officer and for us to do that legally, you must give up all parental rights in Court.

MAGDALENA

I am his mother. Is this something
your wife wishes to take from me?

COACH

No! Absolutely not. She and I are
not doing this to "take" J.T. We
only want to help him. But our Law
says he can only have one Guardian.

MAGDALENA

What would he call your wife, and,
can he come home if he wishes?

COACH

Whatever he wants, and absolutely.

Magdalena knows when to seize opportunity, crocodile tears.

MAGDALENA

He helps us so much! I do not
believe we can survive without him.

COACH

J.T., please go to the car and get
my briefcase.

Coach tosses his keys to JT who exits. Coach recognizes her
"need to" and is not pleased by it, but understands why.

COACH

Exactly how much do you need to
"survive without him?"

MAGDALENA

Five thousand dollars. American.

COACH

What?! I don't have that kind --?!
Five hundred cash now, then I mail
you a hundred a month for a year.

MAGDALENA

Pale menm! What is it I must do?

COACH

I'll drive you and J.T. to Court in
the morning. Bring your passports.

MAGDALENA

But all expired five year ago?

COACH

Already asked, they won't tell.
It's just an I.D. to them.

JT enters and hands briefcase to Coach who sets it down.

MAGDALENA
Tomorrow business, tonight
personal. You must meet his
brothers and sisters. J.T.

Magdalena *claps*. JT exits down hall. Coach inhales, exhales
slow knowing his life is changing forever, then follows JT.

INT. JT'S THIRD SHELTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bunk beds are as before with Martine, Two Sisters, Ray, and
Younger Brother, all sitting in hand-me-down clothes on beds.

JT enters and proudly sits on his mattress *patting* it.

JT
This is mine. It's nice.

COACH
"Nice?!" Uh, *nice*, to meet you all.

Siblings smile genuine innocence and wave. All of them have
one long thin scar somewhere on their faces. Coach cringes.

COACH
I must leave, but I'll be back
tomorrow. Can I bring anything?

SIBLINGS
Candy!

JT exits down hallway. Coach follows with his head down.

INT. JT'S THIRD SHELTER BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Moldy tiles, no medicine cabinet, wall-mirror cracked. Dirty
dishes are in its stained sink. Roaches scurry over them.

Coach enters with head down, realizes he went the wrong way,
steps back, sees all, is horrified, then looks straight up.

COACH
One door closes. Got that, too --
now.

INT. JUVENILE COURT - NEXT DAY

Small courtroom of two tables and a witness stand.

Ruby in suit, Magdalena in *Sari*, JT and Coach in ties with dress shirts, all Four stand behind the Defense Table.

JUDGE, 50s, in judicial robe, sits behind his high Bench with hands steepled, then looks at his wrist-watch miffed.

COUNTY ATTORNEY, late 20s, in suit, rushes in to stand behind his Prosecution Table and opens briefcase. Papers spill out.

JUDGE

Why'd your office file an emergency
appeal over a Consensual Transfer?

County Attorney can't find his prepared notes, so wings it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY

Granting custody for a child who's
in the process of being deported
would open the floodgates of
illegal student immigration.

JUDGE

Coach Black, do you wish to become
your student's Guardian so he can
remain in this country?

COACH

No, sir.

JUDGE

Then why are we all here?!

COACH

To give this child a chance, "the"
chance, to have the opportunity to
succeed that all kids should have.

COUNTY ATTORNEY

Again your Honor, we believe this
specific case has potential costs.

JUDGE

Coach Black, will you pay all costs
for the child's upbringing?

COACH

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE

Why would you give him all this?

COACH

The only thing I can give any kid,
are the chances, I never got, sir.

JUDGE

And do you anticipate or will you apply for any remuneration, ever, from the State in that regard?

COACH

If you're gonna' do something right, do it all the way, or don't do it at all, your Honor.

COUNTY ATTORNEY

That's not the issue, your Honor.

JUDGE

Then let me enlighten "the issue," Counselor. When a regular citizen is willing to step-up and take in a less fortunate child when no one else will, then the State has no business interfering. Custody remains transferred to The State. And as Chief Justice of this Court, parental custody is again sustained and transferred to Brian Black as said child's only legal Guardian.

(strikes gavel, to JT)

Never give up, boy. I should know. My son's a wrestler.

INT. ADAMS GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT - THAT DAY BEFORE PRACTICE

Thompkins, in same dress, works at her computer with her hair now in a bun. Knock on her door. Coach enters in sweats and sits in a chair next to her desk. She continues typing.

THOMPKINS

If this is about J.T., I've already spoken with our Principal and can now only answer parent questions.

COACH

What about Guardians?

THOMPKINS

Of course. Wait. Are you think ...?

COACH

Way past "thinking." Done doing.

THOMPKINS

But why would you --I mean, that's, *admirable*. How can I be of service?

COACH

We met with a Juvenile Officer who expedited our court hearing today.
(hands her Court documents)
I am now J.T.'s Guardian, so I have to change his School Parent forms.

THOMPKINS

Correct, as the courts and school systems do not share information. So you'll have to go to our E.S.L. Office where his file is held.

COACH

Would you mind calling them and setting up an appointment, please? I, we, have a ticking deadline.

Thompkins sits stunned. Coach makes a Now circle with his pointer finger. Thompkins *harrumphs*, then *dials* her phone.

INT. ADAMS LOCKER ROOM - THAT DAY AFTER PRACTICE

Presidents are changing into street clothes *chatting*.

CHEN

You really moving in with Coach?

JT

We take my family to the airport on Saturday, then I go home with him.

CHEN

This Saturday? Man, that was fast. He must really like you.

Presidents circle to congratulate JT who's lost in thought.

INT. BUSH'S LOCKER ROOM - NEXT NIGHT

Presidents, in new uniforms, *shake* each others arms-out. Some do push-ups off the benches. JT sits alone with head down.

CAPTION: *Fourth Meet - Across The Mat*

Coach and King enter in suits to *wolf-whistles*. King motions everyone to sit on their benches. All do. Coach is upset.

COACH

Gentlemen, their "Olympic" Coach will not meet with me to set your Line-Up. Know why? Because they're better than you!

CHEN
"Better?" How?

COACH
Their teachers drive Porsches,
yours drive P.O.S.'s.

Presidents chuckle, *True*. Coach loses it.

COACH
You think this is a joke, because
they do?! We stood outside their
locker-room. They're taking bets
how many points they beat us by.

BRODIE
What's the Spread?

Coach *slams* a fist into a locker-door denting it. Its metal
bang echoes. All are shocked.

COACH
Gentlemen, decide now, right now,
how you want to exit --their room!

Coach storms out. King is frozen. Silence, then JT stands
with a hand out. Everyone stands with one hand on top of his.

JT
Coach brought us this far. If they
disrespect us, they disrespect him.
Let's win this for --

King steps into circle. All hands go down then back up.

PRESIDENTS/KING
COACH!

Presidents and King get fired up.

INT. BUSH MAIN GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Student-Parent BUSH CROWD is maximum. Some BUSH PARENTS smile
at Coach who waves back. He looks across the mat and most
BUSH WRESTLERS nod at him. He nods back as a proud teacher.

Susan sits in the stands with Magdalena, Tung's Mom, and now
ALL PRESIDENTS MOMS, in President jackets, who wave wild.

Susan *blows* Coach a kiss but he fumble-catches it reacting to
Head Table because John Rittner, in suit, sits there smiling.
Coach goes to and shakes John's hand two-on-one surprised.

COACH
John? What are you --?

RITTNER

She had a meeting. And since I know
where everything is, she asked me
to cover. Surgery went well I see.

Coach quick tap-dances, then squints in detective-mode.

COACH

"She had a meeting." *R-e-a-l-l-y?*

RITTNER

Well, okay, I called her. I needed
to see this in person. Are you
really adopting your 103?

COACH

Guarding, just till he graduates.

Radio *plays* earlier Techno-Rap through P.A. Presidents enter
jog-step dancing and circle the mat, then do perfect P.T.

All Ten Adams Cheerleaders now attend and do a hot routine.

BUSH WRESTLERS watch them. BUSH CHEERLEADERS get jealous.

JT is first to wrestle so is doing *Granby Rolls* on the mat.

RITTNER

That him, the smallest? At least
you'll save on food.

COACH

Don't know, haven't seen him eat.

Both *laugh* and shake hands, then Coach goes to team-bench.

INT. PRESIDENTS BENCH AT BUSH MEET - IMMEDIATELY

Presidents finish warm-ups and exit the mat to pair-off doing
Pummeling Drills on sidelines. JT stands stoic. Coach goes to
and massages JT's shoulders from behind.

COACH

I believe in you --
(whispers in JT's ear)
even when you don't.

This is the second time we see JT break into a real smile.

INT. BUSH MAIN GYM - LATER THAT EVENING

Team Scoreboard shows 36-36. Flip Cards at Head Table show
6-6. Third Period of Heavyweight match is about to begin.

Gym echoes with *screaming* by ALL on their feet. Coach stands on his side motionless, arms folded, with an intense stare.

BRODIE'S LAST CHANCE: He sets in *Top Position*. BUSH REFEREE blows whistle. BUSH HEAVYWEIGHT *Sits Out*. Brodie *Under-Hooks* opponent's arm and *Chin-Locks* with other hand pulling chin to opposite shoulder and flattens-out backwards onto his own stomach pulling Bush Heavyweight's back down to the mat.

KING
(rockets out of chair)
YES!

LANDMARK
(stops pacing, yells)
They been doin' that to us all
night! All, Night! Come On!

Bush Referee falls on his stomach and horizontal flat-waves one-hand three times counting three seconds for *Back Points*.

PRESIDENTS
One, two, three! Got Back Points!
Behind! Behind! Get Behind!

Bush Heavyweight kicks over to his stomach. Brodie swings horizontal walking on tip-toes to follow and stay on top.

LANDMARK
Nooooooooo! Don't let him control
you like that! Escape! Reverse!

Bush Heavyweight stands. Brodie goes with him. Bush wrestler does a *Standing Granby Roll*. Brodie *Bear Hugs* and rolls with him. Both roll back to *Referee's Position* with Brodie on Top. Bush Heavyweight *Sits Out*. Brodie *Chin-Locks* pulling him down to back again. Bush Referee falls on stomach count-waving.

LANDMARK
I didn't coach you to lose!

King drops to push-up position watching Bush Referee count.

Coach leans-in as his eyes go to slits.

PRESIDENTS/KING
Hold him! Hold, Him!

Basketball scoreboard *buzzes* ending match. Brodie rolls onto his back. Coach hand-motions to JT and Chen. They run out on mat to help Brodie stand then *Parade Rest* behind him.

Bush Referee stands between the sweating Heavyweights holding both their wrists looking at the Head Table.

Landmark runs to Rittner ranting unintelligible who listens nodding, then keys the P.A. It *squelches*. Bush Crowd reacts.

RITTNER (FILTERED)
Sorry folks, in all the excitement,
I may have missed a point. Please
bear with me as we sort this out.

Bush Referee goes to Rittner. They consult back and forth.

Landmark paces in front of the table. Coach remains frozen.

Rittner writes, then nods to Bush Referee who returns to mat.

RITTNER (FILTERED)
Final Team Score is 36 to 39.

Pin-drop silence. Rittner is flustered, then announces.

RITTNER (FILTERED)
Sorry. Presidents Win!

Bush Referee holds up Brodie's hand. Gym *explodes*. Presidents and King jump around with arms raised. Both Cheerleader Teams cry. Restaurant Owner beats his chest like *King Kong*.

Landmark's arms and chin fall, then he fumes out of gym.

COACH
LINE, UP!

BUSH ASSISTANT COACH, African-American, short, military-look, 20s, lines-up Bush Wrestlers. Both teams walk past each other shaking hands. Coach is last to shake Bush Assistant's hand.

COACH
(as *George C. Scott* again)
Tell that "magnificent bastard, I
read your book!"

Bush Assistant Coach tilts head, *Huh*, then walks away.

CHRIS HAMMER, Bush Wrestler, 17, 135 lbs, comes to Coach.

COACH
I see you took my advice and went
to Wrestling Camp over the summer.

HAMMER
Yep, worked on the Head-Hip Throw.

COACH
Only took four years for your body
to catch up with your talent. I
predict you'll win Districts.

HAMMER

Me, "win," really? Any more advice?

COACH

Add cross-country running to your training, helps build wind.

Hammer shakes hands with Coach, then joins Bush team exiting.

While Presidents give high-fives, Rittner comes to Coach.

RITTNER

You know, it almost seemed, your wrestlers knew what his would do?

COACH

Well, I did train most of them.

RITTNER

Yes, but he would have re-trained?

Coach cranes his neck scratching under his chin.

RITTNER

Briiiiaa --? What'd you do?

COACH

When a coach makes a training video showing the world his two favorite moves, don't be surprised if ...

RITTNER

"Video?!" Wait. Landmark sent in a VCR tape with his application.

COACH

Hey, I asked if I could take some "old" training videos with me.

Rittner *laughs*, hits Coach on the back knocking him forward.

COACH

John, thanks again, but I have to get to our bus. We're stopping for ice cream on the way back.

RITTNER

Parents signed Field Trip forms?

COACH

Yes, sir. All signed in secret.

RITTNER

So your kids don't know they're going? How'd you know they'd win?

COACH

Didn't need to, already earned it.

Coach fist-bumps Rittner, then exits gym with Presidents.

RITTNER

I knew you could help them, buddy --
but all this?

INT. COACH'S LIVING ROOM - NOW MIDNIGHT

Susan, in robe, sits in a wing-chair reading a magazine.

Coach enters and falls into second wing-chair exhausted.

SUSAN

Congratulations. Did you know you
stood like a statue the whole time?

COACH

Huh? Oh. This was kinda' special to
me, to see if I'm really a good --.
(smiles proud)

Man, I love these kids, they won't
quit. And thanks for going back to
get J.T.'s mom. Did she say why --?

SUSAN

She missed the team bus? No, but it
almost seemed as if she didn't want
to be there tonight.

Both sit quiet as the antique pendulum wall-clock *ticks*.

SUSAN

After your dad died, your mom gave
you a pretty hard time, right?

COACH

She always hated me, that much for
sure. Never knew why. Where'd that
come from?

SUSAN

You were on your own after that?

COACH

Pretty much. And pretty angry about
it. I've blocked most of those
memories. Why ask now?

SUSAN

(closes book)

I need to know. What changed?

COACH

When you're empty inside, I mean,
you've got a big hole in your heart
where love should have been, only
two things can fill it.

(holds Susan's hands)

The second is when I met you. The
first, is what I used to win my own
matches like JT does now. Hate.

SUSAN

Do you "hate" God?

COACH

Did, for a long time. But the S.O.B
just out-loses you. I'm still sad,
and scared most of the time. But no
adult has the right, and no child
should ever hear, their own parent
scream at them --

(tears up)

"I wish you were never born."

SUSAN

It's okay.

COACH

Doesn't work that way, sweetie. But
helping kids, at least makes it
feel that way.

Wall-clock's ticking strikes 12. Its bells *chime* same.

INT. COACH'S BASEMENT - THAT SATURDAY MORNING

The Rec Room has a Big Screen TV facing a couch and recliner.

Coach, Susan, JT, walk to far back corner to set their boxes
on a twin bed. A small desk has a *Commodore 64* computer. A
self-standing closet is next to a free-standing chalkboard.

COACH

Okay, this is where you live. You
have your own bathroom, an outside
exit, and we won't come down
without your permission. All good?

(no response)

Good. Unpack and settle-in. Lunch
is upstairs in an hour.

JT

(sees his first sheets)

Is this -- "The American Dream?"

COACH

Or nightmare. All up to you.

JT gets emotional. Susan pulls on Coach's arm.

SUSAN

Need you upstairs.

COACH

But I was gonna' watch T.V.?

Susan gives Coach a *Shut-Up* glare. Both exit upstairs.

JT hugs his "first pillow" elated, then eyes narrow.

JT

Nuthin's free.

INT. BARBER SHOP - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Old-style barber shop upgraded with FOUR PRETTY HAIRSTYLISTS, 20s, females, in smocks. Three of them cut THREE MEN's hair.

A huge pile of black hair is on the floor around JT's barber-chair as Fourth Girl, BRANDY, African-American, buxomly, her smock unbuttoned over a low-cut dress, steps back to admire.

JT

Never had a store-bought one. Mom trimmed it sometimes with a bowl.

BRANDY

(picks at finger-tips)

Your hair's so brittle, its ends stuck in my fingers. What kind of shampoo do you use?

JT

Lava.

COACH

Hand soap?! We'll get you shampoo. Need anything else? Toothpaste?

JT

Baking Soda works good.

COACH

Toothbrush?

JT

Fingers don't wear out.

Brandy pulls off JT's cutting-cape.

JT's wearing new jeans, dress shirt, and dress shoes. He puts on new sunglasses. He looks at himself in the wall-mirror.

JT
I make this, look good.

INT. BUSY PHARMACY STORE - LATER THAT DAY

Large retail chain. CUSTOMERS pay CASHIERS at registers.

Coach pays a CASHIER as JT holds two full plastic bags. Coach takes receipt, *snaps* fingers, and goes to store's Counter.

ASSISTANT MANAGER BARRY, Caucasian, 30s, stands behind it in shirt and tie. He knows Coach and is very friendly.

BARRY
Hey, Coach. How can I help you?

COACH
Hey Barry. Wife gave me a coupon,
forgot to use it. She'll check.

BARRY
I can refund it here.

JT leans on counter. Barry takes the coupon then turns mean.

BARRY
What do you want?!

JT
Uh, nuthin'? From no one.

BARRY
Then get away!

COACH
JT, I forgot milk. Would you run
back and get a gallon, please?

JT jogs away. Coach motions Barry, *Come closer*, who does.

COACH
Ever read "Charlotte's Web?"
(no response, quotes)
"Prejudice is a great time saver.
You can form opinions without
having to get the facts." That kid
you were just so rude to, he's with
me now.

Barry *gulps*. JT jogs back with a milk gallon.

COACH
Barry'll ring you up. Won't you --
(straightens Barry's tie)
Bare-eee?

Coach gives JT a \$5 bill. JT hands to Barry who counts change back into JT's hand who stuffs in his pocket as both exit.

BARRY
Come again. Both of you!

EXT. STORE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Coach and JT walk to car. Coach stops, *snaps* fingers.

COACH
Five dollars for a two dollar fifty-cent bill. Without looking, what's the difference? Simple subtraction.

JT
Subtracting ain't simple! You making fun of me?

COACH
No. I'm learning all about you. Read me the shampoo label instead.

JT
You are making fun of me!

COACH
I'm trying to help you! But you have to help me to do that.

JT hesitates, then gets out shampoo bottle to read aloud.

JT
"The-- you-- to --the --you --"

COACH
Stop. Give.

JT tosses the bottle to Coach who reads same label aloud.

COACH
"Know the hair you have, to get the hair you want."
(glares at sky *mumbling*)
Let's go home, Einsteinian. We've got a beaucoup bunch of work to do.

JT and Coach enter car and drive away.

INT. COACH'S BASEMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Coach, JT, and Susan, sit on couch watching TV.

SUSAN
How'd you like dinner?

JT
Never had cow, uh, beef, uh --?

SUSAN
Stroganoff. There's some left.

JT jumps up excited, then freezes looking for Coach's approval. Coach nods. JT runs upstairs.

SUSAN
Great kid. But he seems so off-balance, like he's unsure of us.

COACH
Give us some alone-time, please.

Susan nods. JT runs down the stairs eating out of the pan. Susan exits upstairs patting JT's passing shoulder.

INT. COACH'S BASEMENT - LATER SAME EVENING

JT and Coach now eat cookies and drink milk watching a comedy movie. A scene makes JT burst-laugh causing him to blow milk out his nose. Coach turns off the TV with its remote.

COACH
Funny. I especially like the part where you blew milk out your nose.

JT
(wipes nose with sleeve)
You saw that?

COACH
I see a lot. May I ask a question?
(no response)
Do you think I'm some kind of weirdo? That we want something?

JT
Yeah. No! I don't know. I just --.
Why are you really doing this?

COACH
All I'm going to do, is give you opportunity. Know what that word means?

JT

"A set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something?"

COACH

Yep. Up to you to decide what to do with it. Only one catch --.

Coach stands and holds out a hand. JT stands wary, then takes Coach's hand. Coach holds on firm.

COACH

Never lie to me. Deal?

JT

That's it? That's it?! "Deal!"

Both shake hands, bond, then let go. Coach *laughs* exiting.

COACH

I've taught a lot of kids, and you, "Alberta," are very, very bright. So nighty-night, sleep tight. It's Spring Break. You've got ten days, to catch-up on five years. Revelry is at o-six hundred. Stand ready.

Coach closes upstairs door. JT looks around, then smiles.

JT

Nuthin's free. But for all this, I'll pay.

INT. COACH'S BASEMENT - NEXT MORNING AND THROUGHOUT DAY

Vintage clock-radio comes on *playing* R&B Hip-Hop music from the comedy they watched previous night. JT stretches smiling.

TEACHING MUSIC-MONTAGE: JT works at computer as Coach stands behind him teaching and praising. JT does not smile.

Susan brings them food and drink, then exits. They stop to eat lunch. Coach tosses JT a book.

COACH

First line.

JT

"It --was --the ...?"

COACH

Stop. Feed your brawn. Your brain will have to wait.

INT. COACH'S BASEMENT - NIGHT INTO NEXT DAY INTO NIGHT

LEARNING MUSIC-MONTAGE CONTINUES: Coach tutors JT using the blackboard to diagram sentences. JT tries to quit, throws his pencil, holds head-in-hands. Coach pats JT's back. Day blurs into night. Susan brings them food again. Coach tosses same book to JT who opens it to now read confident.

JT

"It was the best of times. It was
the worst of times." I can relate.

Both *laugh*, then go back to eating and learning.

INT. ADAMS GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT - SPRING BREAK IS OVER

Thompkins, in different dress, works at her computer. Door *knock*, then Coach enters dressed in black sweats smiling.

THOMPKINS

You have your first official act as
his Guardian.

Coach falls into a chair as his smile turns upside down.

THOMPKINS

He was disrespectful to a teacher,
again. She wants him in Detention.
It's his seventh time this year.

COACH

It'll be his last.

Knock, then JT enters in new gym shorts and school t-shirt.

JT

You wanted to see me, Miss --?

COACH

No! I do. Sit.

JT sits worried across from Coach.

COACH

Ms. Thompkins, would you excuse us
for a moment? And may I have two
blank pieces of paper, please?

Thompson hands Coach two pieces of printer-paper and exits.

JT

English teacher ordered me to read
out-loud. I said "No." She said I
had to, so I said "Bite ..."

COACH

Stop.
 (leans in whispering)
It's okay to fall, I'll catch you.

JT stares blank. He wants to believe.

COACH

A person can only help someone who already wants to help themself. I always knew you wanted to be a better person, that's why I took you in. But adopting you has no bearing on your citizenship because you're over sixteen. Right or wrong, you already have a family. So I chose not to take away your history, heritage, or last name.

Coach writes on both papers, puts one behind, holds both up.

COACH

What's this say?

JT

Uh--my first name?

Coach moves second paper on top of first indicating, *Now?*

JT

Your last name?

COACH

That's the only name, they see now.

JT

Oh, I didn't --*sorry*.

COACH

Don't apologize to me, go do it to your teacher then get to Practice.

JT

(stands, opens door)
 Won't happen again, sir.

JT exits. Thompkins enters surprised at "sir" and sits.

COACH

The amount of knowledge J.T. has absorbed in ten days is amazing. He is not learning disabled. But with illiterate and abusive parents who kept him out of school for five years, it's no wonder he acted-out.

THOMPCKINS

He was kept out of school for ...?

COACH

See?! This is exactly what happens when schools don't get involved with their students. J.T. is ignorant, not stupid.

THOMPCKINS

I never said ...

COACH

Sure about that? The System did. And since it's a new semester, I, we, we want to Main Stream him.

THOMPCKINS

What? No! That's impossible, his ego won't stand ...

COACH

"Ego?!" A judge already decided I'm the only adult legally responsible for his ego, so let's go.

THOMPCKINS

Your wishful thinking is just that.

COACH

My wish is for him to get a quality education. So it's my thinking to go up the chain-of-command to make that happen. Your only concern, how high do you want me to go?

They stare as poker players. She folds, then begins typing.

THOMPCKINS

This requires changing teachers, and he'll need to got to Summer School so he'll need a tutor.

COACH

He's got me, and a computer.

THOMPCKINS

How is he transporting to us now that he lives out of our District?

COACH

My wife will drop him off in the morning on her way to work. I'll bring him home after practice.

Coach exits. She pantomime's sarcastic his last sentence.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - NEXT DAY

JT leads all, including King, in P.T. Coach enters. King gives circle-up sign. All do on Coach and take a knee.

COACH

Do not lie, gentlemen. But if you choose to lie, and it is a choice --

(holds up one finger)

One. You will get caught. Not a question of if, only when.

(holds up second finger)

Two. Whatever your punishment was going to be, will now be worse. Add both together, and your solution will always equal --do, not, lie.

(looks at each)

You will screw up, that's normal.

You will get caught, that's life.

When you do, do not lie. Got it?

All Presidents nod as one. Coach *claps* "Wrestle."

INT. COACH'S CAR - THAT NIGHT AFTER PRACTICE

Coach is driving. JT rests with head back and eyes closed. He sneezes. Coach feels his forehead. JT *slaps* his hand away.

COACH

Forehead's warm. Who's your doctor?

JT

Never had one.

COACH

"Never had --?!"

(shakes fist at sky)

I'll make appointments for check-ups at both my doctor and dentist.

JT

Why? Voodoo works fine.

Coach *slams* on the brakes pulling car over. Traffic *honks*.

COACH

"Voodoo?!"

JT

What? Everyone does it?

COACH

In the Caribbean, chiefly in Haiti!

JT

What's your problem?

COACH

My problem is I'm a problem solver!
And you, my dear boy, are now my
problem. Look, communicating with
the dead in order to accomplish a
task is Bravo Sierra. Got it?
(holds out a hand)
Your gri-gri, now!

Coach wiggles his hand. JT removes a leather-strip necklace around his neck and hands it to Coach. Hanging on the strap is a tiny well-aged leather pouch. Coach examines it.

COACH

What do you use the amulet for?

JT

To put spells on teachers.

COACH

(*chuckles* breaking tension)
Okay, we've all been there. But the
word "JuJu" means fetish which
means the object is worshiped for
supposed magical powers.

JT holds out his hand. Coach holds out both fists. JT taps one fist. Coach opens it. Nothing. JT taps second fist. Coach opens it. Nothing. Coach reaches behind JT's ear to pull back the amulet. JT takes it and tries it put back over his head. Coach *sighs* sad. JT stops, then hands amulet back to Coach.

COACH

When we get home, we'll untie the
knots of your past by burning this.

JT

Everything is changing too fast.

COACH

"Welcome to the party, pal." Get
plenty of rest tonight. Because
tomorrow, you're getting all new
classes, new teachers, and new
books which means "real" homework.

JT

Why are you so sure I can do this?

COACH

Because you never gave up on your self or your dreams. Don't now.

JT

You're gonna' make me work my ass off aren't you?

COACH

(smiles, drives on)

Yep. And since it's such an itty-bitty thing, how about you earn \$100 for every "A" and \$50 for every "B" on your report card. That way, you'll earn some fun-money.

JT

Except I won't have any time, for any fun. What about a "C?"

COACH

Food on your plate. And you're going to Summer School too, yahoo.

JT

Just shoot me.

COACH

Hey, it's not just a job, it's an equal-opportunity adventure!

Coach *laughs* hard. JT doesn't get the joke.

INT. COACH'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Susan cooks at the stove. Coach and JT enter house.

JT goes directly past Susan to basement door.

JT

'Night.

SUSAN

No dinner?

JT

No energy. Plus, your cooking's a little bland.

Susan looks at Coach. Both *laugh*.

SUSAN

Okaaaaay. Guess we all have to make some adjustments around here.

JT starts downstairs.

SUSAN

Take your new shoes with you!

JT grabs a pair of bright-white Hi-Tops off an antique sewing machine trying to hide them as he goes downstairs.

COACH

Hold on there, sparky. Let me see.

JT hesitates, then hands shoes to Coach who examines.

COACH

Where'd these come from?

JT

Gift-horse?

COACH

With the price tag still on? Sure
they weren't Five-Finger Discount?

JT looks away. Coach steps-in close as an authority figure.

COACH

Look, I get you did what you had to
to survive, but that was then. From
now on, come to me first. Got it?

JT nods, then looks up with puppydog-eyes.

COACH

What's the worst someone can say if
you ask?

JT.

No?

COACH

So ask.

JT.

Can I --?

COACH

NO!

(to Susan)

Keep dinner warm.

(to JT)

Come on, we're returning these.

Wall-phone *rings*. Coach answers it joking.

COACH
Social Services.

Caller is not heard. Coach listens intent, then scowls.

COACH
Where are you? Exactly?

EXT. COACH'S CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

Coach and JT pull up in front of earlier 7-11. Standing next to its outside pay-phone is Gunner in a hoodie. He gets in their back seat. He's been crying.

INT. ADAMS PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Bass wears an inexpensive business suit with scarf as she writes at her cluttered desk. Knock on her door.

BASS
Appointments only!

Coach enters in black sweats. Bass doesn't look up.

BASS
Or not. Take a seat.

Coach sits. Armchair rocks wobbly. Coach rocks chair more, opens mouth, then *snaps* it shut. Bass doesn't look up.

BASS
Still undefeated, congratulations.
And you took in J.T., good for you.

COACH
A student called me last night.

BASS
(stops writing, drops head)
Name?

COACH
Richard Gunner.

BASS
(slams pen down angry)
Out of all the --! His Stepmom's a whacko. She sued my Assistant Principal last year.

COACH
I wasn't here last ...?

BASS

You're not thinking of getting involved with her?!

COACH

"Him." His parents died in a car accident last year, so his Aunt ...

BASS

What did you do?!

COACH

Nothing! He'd run away. J.T. and I took him home and convinced him to finish school. He asked if ...

BASS

No, absolutely not! I've only got two years before I retire and I am not spending them in court!

COACH

Are you telling me not to ...?

BASS

Ordering! Do not get involved with another student's personal affairs!

COACH

And if he calls again?

BASS

Hang up.
(goes back to writing)
And good luck Saturday. Go, Adams.

COACH

Where students come second.

No Reaction. Coach exits. Bass pushes her phone's buttons to sound of automatic *beeping* of numbers on its speaker, then...

JACOBS (FILTERED)

Athletics.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Coach enters. JT and Gunner stop talking to look at Coach who shakes his head. Gunner runs out permanently. JT looks at Coach who *sighs*, then gives circle-up sign. All take a knee.

COACH

Gentlemen, Saturday is your first Quad. The other three schools are powerhouses and will beat you up.

Two Presidents *cough*, a third *sneezes*. Brodie *blows* his nose into his shirt-tail. Coach looks straight up with palms out.

INT. COACH'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Coach and JT enter. Susan greets them with an envelope.

SUSAN

This came for J.T.

Susan hands the letter to JT who opens and reads silent.

SUSAN

Says it's from the I.N.S.?

COACH

What the heck do they want?

JT

Not what, whom. As in, "For Whom the Bell Tolls." It tolls for me.

JT hands the letter to Coach. Susan reads over his shoulder.

JT

Nice while it lasted.

COACH

Hold on Hemingway, let me finish.

JT

Finish what, pretending?! It says they're coming for me in ten days!

COACH

Hey, if I have to stand on our porch with a freakin' shotgun, they are not, taking you away! Okay?

Susan and JT look at each other, then hug. Coach folds the letter and puts it back in envelope. He taps it in a palm thinking, then smiles devious rubbing his palms together.

COACH

"Whoever controls the media, controls the mind."

SUSAN

Why are you quoting Jim Morrison?

J.T.

Lead singer of "The Doors" who died in a Paris bathtub at age 27?

Coach and Susan turn surprised to JT who looks behind, *What?*

EXT. HUGE SHOPPING MALL - NEXT DAY

Multi-level busy shopping center. SHOPPERS go in and out.

TV CAMERAMAN, SOUND TECH, and FEMALE REPORTER approach Coach who is in a dress-shirt and tie with flyers and a clipboard.

COACH

Thanks for coming.

Flag on side of Cameraman's camera reads, *News Channel 8*. Reporter turns to her Cameraman and Sound Tech who signals, *Go*. She takes a reporter's stance holding her microphone.

REPORTER

We're standing at the mall with a local high school coach who became Guardian to one of his athletes.

(holds mike to Coach)

How long has he lived with you?

COACH

Long enough to know he's a bright, polite, earnest kid that deserves a shot at The American Dream.

REPORTER

Why are you here?

COACH

After being awarded custody by the State, the Court, and then School System, we received a letter that our Government wants to take him.

REPORTER

Immigration and Naturalization Service wants to deport him?

COACH

They want to try.

REPORTER

You're going to fight them?

Coach glares at the camera lens like a *W.W.E.* wrestler.

COACH

"Gonna' annihilate 'em."

Coach turns to gives his flyers to SHOPPERS asking them to sign his petition. They do. Reporter holds up a flyer.

REPORTER

This is News Channel Eight
reporting one parent's desperate
fight to save their child's future.

Cameraman nods, then Sound Tech nods. Reporter turns to exit.

COACH

Whoa, whoa, whoa! You're leaving?

REPORTER

Have another interview.

COACH

More important than helping a kid?

Coach puts his petition in front of her. She begs off.

COACH

Don't tell me, tell him --you don't
care about his future!

Reporter *sighs*, then signs his petition.

JOURNALIST walks up with tape-recorder, camera, and note-pad.

COACH

"The Journal" newspaper, right?
(hands her a flyer)
Thanks for coming.

Reporter's Cameraman and Sound Tech turn to exit.

COACH

Whoa, Whoa, Whoa --!

INT. U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON - NEXT DAY

Coach, in a suit with a legal envelope, waits in antechamber.

Congressional AIDE, 20s, in shirt and tie, opens its door.

AIDE

The Congressman will see you now.

Aide escorts Coach to an ornate office door and opens it.

AIDE

The gentleman you wanted to meet.

Coach enters. Aide closes the door.

INT. INNER CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Almost a replica of Bush Principal's Office, just different pictures. CONGRESSMAN, 40s, wearing a pin-strip suit with a power-tie is on the phone. He motions for Coach to sit.

Coach sits in an antique chair and notices it rocks. He takes a *U.S. Congress* matchbook out of a souvenir-ashtray and puts it under a chair-foot. Congressman watches him and hangs up.

CONGRESSMAN

Quite a P.R. nightmare you stirred-up in just twenty-four hours.

COACH

Watch what happens in forty-eight.

CONGRESSMAN

Did you know the current I.N.S. Director was my college roommate?

(no response)

Would you take our word this will all be settled quietly in a month?

Coach tosses his thick envelope onto Congressman's desk.

COACH

Made copies, all Registered Voters.

CONGRESSMAN

What do you want?

COACH

Him! He's a great kid who's been beaten up by life, literally, so he's earned a second chance. Come on, it's the right thing to do. It's, the "American thing" to do.

CONGRESSMAN

(quotes I.N.S. Regulations)

"Does he have any immediate family members who are U.S. Citizens?"

(no response)

"Does he qualify under First Preference --1, 2, 3, or 4?"

(no response)

"Have you checked his E-4 status?"

(no response)

"Are you his employer?"

COACH

Uh, I pay him?

CONGRESSMAN

"Did you recruit for this job and not found any willing, able, qualified U.S. workers instead?"

(no response)

"Is he a person of extraordinary ability in the arts, sciences, education, business, or athletics?"

Coach *snap-finger* points animated on "athletics."

CONGRESSMAN

(presses intercom on)

Call Jack at I.N.S and ask about "Employment First Preference" then bring in a blank Visa petition.

(disconnects smiling)

Faster then entering the Green Card Lottery, huh? You sure about this?

Coach goes thumbs-up to the ceiling going higher and higher.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - THAT AFTERNOON

Coach enters. JT and Chen stop talking and look at Coach who gives double thumbs-up. Chen announces to the Presidents.

CHEN

He's staying!

Presidents run to congratulate JT who looks at Coach and pantomimes, "*Thank you.*"

INT. ADAMS MAIN GYM - THAT SATURDAY

Old and new wrestling mats taped down at either end of gym. Four sets of folding chairs line the sides of both mats. Two Scoring Tables of Jacobs and Legg, with Atkins and Green.

CAPTION: *Quad Meet - Home*

"A" and "B" RIVAL SCHOOLS wrestle on the far old mat *yelling*.

"C" RIVAL SCHOOL WRESTLERS, sit on chairs along the near mat. They're strong, healthy, and mean, hitting fists into palms.

Two Referees, 30s, military-fit, in uniforms, with whistles and flip-discs. FAR REFEREE works the far match, NEAR REFEREE stands in center of the near mat with arms-folded waiting.

Now just 16 Presidents again as Gunner is gone permanently. ALL sit in warm-ups in the bleachers looking sickly. King sits with them wearing a shirt and tie, then *sneezes*.

All Ten Adams Cheerleaders look sick and do sloppy routines.

Coach leans inside a gym door and motions for Presidents to exit. All do along with King.

INT. ADAMS MAIN GYM LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

King and Presidents enter shuffling, *sniffling* and *coughing*.

COACH

What is going on? We should have beaten that last team. Brodie, you could have won your match if you had just tried. Explain.

BRODIE

(*coughs* congested)
I got the Flu, Coach.

COACH

Really? Anybody else here too sick, to wrestle a hundred-percent today!

ALL hold up a hand. Near Referee opens gym door to lean-out.

COACH

Ref, I need to talk to the next head coach. Please get him.

Near Referee exits for moment, then opens door to lean-out.

NEAR REFEREE

He said "No" so let's go.

COACH

Sir, I need to talk to him!

Near Referee shakes head and hand-motions for All to enter.

COACH

At least let me talk to my guys.

NEAR REFEREE

Sixty seconds.

COACH

Who wants to wrestle?

All President's hands go up, including King's. ALL *sneeze*.

NEAR REFEREE
Now Coach, decide!

Coach drops his head, nods, then herds All to enter gym.

INT. ADAMS MAIN GYM - CONTINUOUS

"C Rival Wrestlers" stand on their side of mat. Presidents sit on theirs. King goes to work the VHS-camera.

JT takes off his warm-up, *coughs*, goes to center of mat and wobble-stands. "C-OPPONENT" struts out. They don't shake. JT struggles against "C-Opponent." Score see-saws until down to final seconds with JT on his back losing by three points.

Coach jumps-up in his mat's corner knocking over his chair.

COACH
Don't Quit! Don't You EVER QUIT!

JT lets out a powerful *grunt* and *Back Bridges* lifting his "C-Opponent" off him to spin on top. Scoreboard's *buzzer sounds*. All Stand. Coach *whistles* to Near Referee, then does *Reverse circle-sign* and taps two fingers onto his own shoulder top. Near Referee nods and throws two fingers up then two more at Score Table. Legg points to JT. Near Referee holds up JT's hand as Winner. JT drops to a knee. Coach helps him off mat.

NEXT "C" OPPONENT goes to center of mat. He's an animal.

Coach hand-signals to "C" Rival Coach, *Let's Talk*, who waves both hands, *Get Lost*. Chen trips and Coach catches him. Near Referee signals to Coach, *Let's go*. Coach *sighs*, then gives the *throat-cut* hand-sign. Near Referee comes to Coach.

NEAR REFEREE
You forfeit this match?

Coach gives *throat-cut* sign again, then spreads all fingers.

NEAR REFEREE
Presidents --Forfeit the Meet!

Legg and Jacobs jump up at their table. Jacobs is speechless with arms out, *WTF?!* Legg is feral and *pounds* on table-top.

"C" Rival Coach *explodes* shaking his fist at Coach.

INT. COACH'S BASEMENT - THAT NIGHT

All lights are off. JT is dead-asleep in his far-corner bed.

Coach sits in the recliner watching their Quad's video with sound off. Coach studies Brodie's match with his first "A-OPPONENT." He sees something and sits-up ramrod-straight. Coach rewinds, watches again, rewinds, then freeze-frames. He stands and goes to TV-screen to study its still-picture.

STILL CUT: Brodie is on his butt trying to do a *Switch* with A-Opponent behind him on his knees *Bear-Hugging* Brodie tight. Far Referee stands behind both unable to see the illegal hug.

COACH

How'd you miss locked-hands?

Coach hits *Play* and watches Brodie turn onto his stomach as A-Opponent *Rides* him until their match ends. Far Referee raises A-Opponent's hand. Brodie's head drops disappointed. Video pans to zoom-in on Coach near the stands talking and laughing with Adams Moms. His back is to the mat not paying attention.

COACH

(quotes Bible, Proverbs)

"A man's pride, shall bring him low." And I'm feelin', mighty low.

INT. ADAMS WRESTLING GYM - THAT MONDAY

King is not present. Presidents mill about still sick and *coughing*. Coach enters in sweats and blows *whistle*. He gives thumbs-down. Presidents take a knee.

COACH

I watched our video. You, did not lose your first match. I did. I missed a Holding Call on Brodie by not paying attention. So before we can move on, I have to apologize, for not being there, for you.

Presidents mumble, then nod forgiveness. Coach smiles.

COACH

I'm proud of you guys, really proud. You should be too, always.

King enters in street clothes and looks at Coach. Something is wrong. Legg enters doorway and motions for Coach to exit.

COACH

Take over.

KING

Not like this.

Coach furrows his brow at King as he exits behind Legg.

INT. ADAMS ACTIVITIES OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jacobs sits at desk, puts tobacco in cheek, and chews.

Door opens. Legg enters and sits in lounge chair. Plastic chair is in the middle of room again. Coach sits in it.

COACH

Flu hit the team hard. You saw I tried to talk to the other coach.

JACOBS

Doesn't have to talk to you! But did to his Principal, who filed a complaint with the Superintendent.

COACH

Who filed? "His Principal?" Or yours?

LEGG

No coach has ever forfeited a meet!

COACH

Still hasn't, J.T. won.

Jacobs brandishes a three-ring binder high like a trophy.

JACOBS

Coach Legg put together a detailed journal on all the dangerous Moves you've been coaching.

COACH

A what of what?! May I see it?
(takes binder and reads)
"Japanese Whizzer, Russian Sag, Suicide Cradle, Bear Hug Throw."
All legal moves and taught safely.

JACOBS

Everything in there sounds unsafe!

COACH

No more than a Blind-Side Tackle?

LEGG

Says you coached that, too!
(grabs binder to hug)
You'll get a copy, at your Hearing.

COACH

Gotta' be kidding me. You're gonna' take me before the Superintendent?

JACOBS
State League.

COACH
You trying to get me fired?!

JACOBS
Missed the point --

LEGG
already are.

COACH
But there's only two weeks until
Districts, then Regionals, and then
the season's finished?

LEGG
Nope, you are.

COACH
My, God.

JACOBS
He can't help you --

LEGG
not in public schools.

COACH
If this goes before the School
Board, I'll be banned for life!

JACOBS
Then resign today, right now.

Jacobs floats a resignation letter to Coach who catches it.

LEGG
Think we wouldn't figure out who
vandalized the boy's showers?

JACOBS
Know how much that cost? Good, bye.

LEGG
And good riddance.

SRO appears in the doorframe looking officially stern.

COACH
Can I at least say good-bye?

SRO
No.

COACH

In battle, "Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."

SRO

Sun Tzu, boo hoo.

Coach signs resignation letter, but holds onto it tight.

COACH

News Channel Eight is filming our human interest story tonight which would be a perfect time to go on-the-record about your not reporting a drive-by shooting and the use of alcohol and tobacco products on school grounds by Administrators.

Feels like the *OK Corral* showdown. SRO adjusts weapons belt.

JACOBS

Or?

COACH

Give me the binder, please.

Coach holds out his signed resignation letter. Jacobs looks at Legg who hands binder to Jacobs who trades it for letter.

COACH

If you want to see who's really hurting these kids --.

Coach takes mirror off the wall and stands it in his chair.

COACH

Channel 8 will be filming us at our Winter Sports Awards.

Coach exits holding binder being escorted out by SRO.

Jacobs pulls his liquor bottle out of desk drawer, sees his Rudolph-red-nose and blotchy complexion in the mirror's reflection, then drops bottle with cup in his trashcan.

INT. ADAMS AUDITORIUM - TWO MONTHS LATER

A hanging banner above the stage reads, *Winter Sports Awards*.

Bass, Thompkins, Legg, and Jacobs, in suits, sit on folding chairs on the stage next to a lectern. Jacobs, now without a red nose and complexion back to normal, goes to it.

Earlier Channel 8 Cameraman films Adams Parents and Students, all dressed-up, sitting in packed audience-seats. Susan in a dress with Coach and JT in shirt and tie, also sit there. Cameraman turns to and his camera light lights-up, the stage.

JACOBS (FILTERED)
Most of you know our star athlete,
J.T. who became our District and
Regional wrestling Champion while
remaining an Honor Roll student.
J.T, come on up here.

JT hops onto stage. Jacobs waits for *clapping* to die down.

JACOBS
The Booster Club has voted you --
(as a game show Host)
Most Valuable Player!

Jacobs hands JT a plaque still a Host. Camera *flashes* go off.

JACOBS
And --they are paying --your first
semester's --College Tuition!

Jacobs hands JT a large ornamental check. They shake. More camera *flashes*. Audience goes wild giving a standing *ovation*. Jacobs sits. He, Legg, Bass, and Thompson, *clap* politely.

Cameraman zooms-in on JT who has an ear-to-ear grin holding the plaque and check. Susan and Coach step into the aisle. JT runs to them for a group hug. Cameraman zooms-in on them as Coach looks over their shoulders at the back wall.

In the back, Pastor stands beside Chigna. SRO is on other side eyeing Chigna. Restaurant Owner, Anita, Green, Rittner, and Washington, are there, too. ALL are smiling and *clapping*.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COACH'S LIVING ROOM - MANY YEARS LATER

Coach and JT, dressed casual, older, enter and sit in the wing chairs, get comfortable, then Break The Fourth Wall.

COACH
I never coached again. But was
elected state Wrestling
Commissioner eight times where I
tripled our number of wrestlers.

J.T.
I graduated high school, college,
then became a U.S. Citizen.

COACH

The church found a Sponsor for his sister Martine who came back to become the second in their family to break the poverty cycle.

J.T.

Gunner never graduated. Raymond went to jail. We don't know where they are. I became a General Contractor. At my wedding, I announced Susan as "my second mom."

COACH

And now you're the proud papa of seven kids. Talk about commitment.

JT

Remember when you asked me to choose a name other than "Coach?"

COACH

You wanted to call me, "Dad" and told me to call you, "Son."

JT

Can I change that to --Gramps?

COACH

It's like that is it?! Fine "Old Man," let's wrestle-off for it.

Coach and JT stand into stance, lock-up, then circle each other out of the room. Sound of their *scuffle* in the kitchen until something *breaks*. Silence, then both whisper.

COACH/JT (O.S.)

Don't tell mom.

SUSAN (O.S.)

I heard that!

FADE OUT.

SUGGESTED END CREDITS SIDE-PANELS

1) Archive News footage of *Channel 8's* real Interview along with their Sports Awards presentation coverage. 2) *Channel 54's* broadcast of 1995 Regional Tournament where they talk about "Coach now sitting in the stands watching his son." 3) 1995 *U.S. Postal Record* magazine article about them, and 4) *Fairfax Journal* newspaper story "*Wrestling Life and Winning.*"