

WRITTEN BY RUDI O'MEARA

MAJOR



BASED ON THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

"THE FASTEST BICYCLE RIDER IN THE WORLD"

BY MARSHALL W. "MAJOR" TAYOR

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Written by

Rudi O'Meara

Based on the Autobiography:

"The Fastest Bicycle Rider In the World"

By

Marshall W. "Major" Taylor

EXT. VELODROME - DUSK

A vast open-air arena lined with stands packed to the steel rafters with FRENCH SPECTATORS dressed in all-black.

SUPER: VÉLODROME BUFFALO, FRANCE | AUGUST, 1908

In grainy hand-cranked BLACK AND WHITE, a lone AFRICAN AMERICAN CYCLIST sprints toward us down a wooden track in eerie SLOW MOTION.

RADIO COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

(English accent)

Track cycling, the first truly international spectator sport, now draws crowds putting those of any other athletic pursuit to shame. And here at The Vélodrome Buffalo, the birthplace of racing, a crowd of over ten thousand has gathered to see some of the world's best riders put themselves and their machines to the test.

Closer and closer the Black cyclist rides, with a pack of WHITE CHALLENGERS burying themselves just to keep up.

RADIO COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

A ghastly contest in which most participants go queer in the head and strain their powers until their faces become hideous with the tortures that wrack them. This is not a sport. It's brutality. Days and weeks of recuperation will be required just to put these racers right once again.

A fluttering finish tape SNAPS taut across the track before us as the cyclists slowly draw closer and closer.

RADIO COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

And it's likely that some of them will never recover from the strain.

His face a contorted mask, the lone Black rider BLASTS toward the tape like it's barely even there.

Like he can't even see it. Won't even acknowledge it.

TITLE CARD:

M A J O R

EXT. CYCLE SHOP - DAY

Vivid FULL-COLOR.

The same Black cyclist, now much younger, pilots a steel road bike through a bustling pack of GRIM PEDESTRIANS moving in tight clusters down a crowded city sidewalk.

SUPER: INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA | SIXTEEN YEARS EARLIER

As he pedals, his eyes closed, his mind elsewhere, we can't help but notice his now entirely untroubled air.

Less wracked by the agony of pursuit. Free.

And, as he weaves through the crowd with an almost balletic grace, all we hear is his own SONOROUS VOICE.

But from years later.

Weary and colored by bittersweet reverie.

MAJOR (V.O.)
That's it, right there.

Meet MARSHALL W. "MAJOR" TAYLOR. A champion in the making.

He's wearing form-fitting short pants and a heavy woolen military officer's coat, open at the chest.

A major's coat. Confederate, not Union.

MAJOR (V.O.)
The *feeling*.

Prim ladies in hoop skirts and whalebone corsets grip the stolid arms of their puritanical white suitors as Major glides in and amongst them.

Like he's entirely alone in a universe of his own creation.

MAJOR (V.O.)
Ain't nothing like it. At all.

Across the sidewalk, in the window of a palatial cycle shop, dangles a gleaming gold metal on a brilliant blue ribbon.

The light from it dances across Major's closed eyelids like the beam of a distant lighthouse as he rides.

MAJOR (V.O.)
And all the accolades in the world,
all the prize money, the purses...

A paunchy man in a seersucker suit emerges from the cycle shop, flips a sign on the door from open to closed, pauses.

Eyes on Major.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 ...even the satisfaction of knowing
 full-well that you beat the *entire*
 field fair and square...

The man on the doorstep, TOM HAY (30s) watches Major with an almost possessive pride.

He lifts his hand, taps his chin with the flat tip of the brass key to the store, smiles.

An idea forming.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 ...doesn't compare. Not by a mile.

Hay's eyes drift to the gold medal hanging in the window and he leans out, snatches it up, SLAMS the door shut.

The BUSY DIN of the city rushes in.

HAY
 C'mon kid. Let's git.

Major, as if roused from a dream, nearly t-bones a BROAD-SHOULDERED BANKER (40s) with a handlebar mustache.

BANKER
 (venomous)
 Watch it, boy.

All instinct, Major swerves clear, drops a foot to the ground, skids to a stop.

MAJOR
 (to Hay)
 Shift's over, sir?

Hay charges toward him, grips him by both shoulders.

The medal in his meaty paw still catches the light.

HAY
 How many times I gotta tell you?
 Call me Tom.

Devious, showman's grin.

HAY (CONT'D)
And, nope. Not quite.

Hay spins, thrusts the medal into his own pocket, rumbles past Major, gestures for him to follow.

HAY (CONT'D)
I got a *brilliant* idea.

Major looks to the now empty store window, then back to Hay as he disappears around the nearest corner.

PRE-LAP: A blaring SOUSA MARCH being played by a brass band.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - DAY

Hay leads Major (still wearing his military coat) through a mostly white crowd of WELL-DRESSED SPECTATORS.

HAY
Where the hell'd you get that
bicycle of yours, anyway?

Major draws a nervous breath.

HAY (CONT'D)
Wait. Scratch that. Don't wanna--

In the distance, the CHEERING of an eager crowd.

MAJOR
I came by it fair and square, if
that's what you mean.

Hay bats a hand his way, picks up the pace.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
It was a gift. From the Southards.
Parents of my best friend growing
up. A white boy.

HAY
You don't say.

MAJOR
Daniel. My Daddy worked for...

Hay bounds past a ticket window, disappears.

Major slows.

A BORED TICKET TAKER (20s) just stares at Major blank-faced.

HAY (O.S.)
 (from off)
 Well, c'mon now. Step on it.

Major, jolted, jogs past the ticket taker, pushes his fixed gear bike past the booth and through a white archway festooned with red, white, and blue garlands.

Up ahead, Hay slows. Turns back around.

HAY
 Don't tell me they paid you to be his plaything.

MAJOR
 Playmate.

HAY
 Same difference.

Over Hay's shoulder: a handful of AMATEUR RIDERS cluster at an impromptu start line on a grassy pitch.

Behind each rider stands a young man in a black suit, steadying each bicycle by their seat posts.

To their right: a stern RACE MARSHAL (40s) loads a small pistol with a single round.

Hay reaches a hand out, guides Major with him through the arch and down onto the turf.

HAY (CONT'D)
 Ever seen a road race, boy?

MAJOR
 I'm sorry?

Major tries to politely wriggle free.

But Hay grips him commandingly by the shoulders.

HAY
 Stop apologizing.

He SLAPS Major firmly between the shoulder blades.

HAY (CONT'D)
 We'll give you a good fifteen minute handicap on Walter Marmon, the scratch man.

Major STAMMERS, petrified.

MAJOR
 ...I...I...I...

As the band BELLOWS on in the background, Hay smiles, burnishes the buttons on Major's marshal jacket.

HAY
 You can trick ride to shill cycles at the store, son. Sure as you're born. But can you go the distance?

MAJOR
 The distance? I don't even--

HAY
 Just pedal up that road a little ways. It'll please the crowd.

Major looks to the grandstands. All white faces.

HAY (CONT'D)
 You can come on back home if you get *tired*.

From just behind Hay, the race marshal SHOUTS:

MARSHAL
 Racers ready?

HAY
 Go on now. Show ol' Marmon there what's what for me.
 (broad grin)
 Arrogant little WASP.

Major looks from the grandstands toward the stone-still cluster of racers beside him.

At the center of the bunch, a debonaire young man, WALTER MARMON (20s) sits with one leg draped lazily over the top bar of his bicycle.

Square jaw. Cleft chin. Piercing eyes. High cheekbones. The picture of entitlement and white privilege.

Hay taps Major's epaulets, steps back, winks.

HAY (CONT'D)
 Don't let me down... *Major*.

CRACK!

A start pistol fires.

Marmon snaps to attention. All of the other riders take off.
Major just stares.

HAY (CONT'D)
Well, now? Go on...

As Marmon sprints away, Major leaps onto his bike, pedals hard. Gravel and sod go flying.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Major, chasing Marmon, pilots his bicycle through narrow cobblestone streets lined with SCREAMING SPECTATORS.

Their SHRILL VOICES whip past as quickly as their distorted, mostly white faces bleed by.

Cheering? Jeering? It's hard to tell.

But on Major rides as the crowd blurs into a monochrome sea of nothingness.

Each crank stroke, each wheel revolution WHIRS in time with the POUNDING of his heart.

WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH.

The road takes a hard bend to the right.

And Major BLASTS past Marmon, heads toward a series of loose hay bales marking the way across the cobbles toward a small park lined with tall trees.

The rest of the field struggles to keep up.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Major, GASPING, stands out of the saddle, crushes his way up a steep rise, bends left, and barrels (alone) onto a small dirt path through the trees.

No spectators now. Just the trees ripping by, casting long shadows across the gravel.

Light, dark. Light, dark. Light, dark.

The strobe effect of the shadows is dizzying. Like being trapped inside a giant spinning Zoetrope.

And, over it all, Major's GRAVELY VOICE enters once again:

MAJOR (V.O.)
I'm ashamed to say now how much I
coveted that gold medal.

Instead of slowing down, instead of flagging, Major simply lowers his head, grits his teeth, tucks in his piston-like knees, and cranks.

MAJOR (V.O.)
Almost as ashamed as I was
exhausted back then.

EXT. CITY OUTSKIRTS - AFTERNOON

The sun now lower in the sky, Major sprints his way down another narrow street lined with spectators.

By his face we can tell. He's done. Cooked. Spent.

MAJOR (V.O.)
All I could hear in my head as I
rode was Hay's voice telling me to
turn back, quit.

His coat is now drenched with sweat and his face is salt-crusted. Riven with blinding desire.

MAJOR (V.O.)
But that made me want to go the
distance even more.

But as he pumps away with all his diminished might, a pack of BLACK CLAD RIDERS (in suits, not cycling togs) ride directly at him from the opposite direction.

MAJOR (V.O.)
To be seen as an equal. No matter
how much it cost me physically.

Confused, Major slows slightly, looks up.

MAJOR (V.O.)
Or mentally.

We recognize one of the riders. It's Hay himself.

HAY
Boy, oh boy oh BOY!

As he speeds toward Major, he clutches the gold medal from his storefront window in one hand.

HAY (CONT'D)
 You're a full *mile* ahead of the
 field, boy! But the scratch man,
 Marmon, he's closing fast!

The gold medal shines brightly in the sunlight as he and his crew wash past Major in blur.

HAY (CONT'D)
 You've got this, son.

With sweat stinging his eyes, Major again gets out of the saddle, bears down on his pedals.

Momentarily reinvigorated but running on fumes.

As he weaves his way over the cobbles with heavy, heavy legs, we hear his VOICE once last time:

MAJOR (V.O.)
 The sight of that medal gave me a
 hunger I'd *never* experienced.

The crowd is getting thicker and thicker as he rides.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 Before or since.

Instead of JEERING, they seem to be CHEERING.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - DUSK

With Marmon now swiftly gaining on him, Major sprints with every last ounce of strength past more hay bales and more SCREAMING spectators.

Up ahead, at the same starting line from earlier, stand two clusters of MEN IN SUITS.

Between them, a silk ribbon flutters in the wind.

Major ducks his head, looks back toward Marmon. The two men are only feet apart.

Just a bicycle's length separates them. Maybe less.

Marmon, red-faced and in agony, taps his deepest reserves to catch his unexpected rival.

Major, sucking down air, looks to the stands.

For the briefest of seconds, all of the spectators (formerly decked out in formal Victorian garb) appear to be dressed in the menacing white robes of the KKK.

Hoods and all.

Major, terrified, locks his eyes onto his front wheel, cranks harder... harder... harder still.

Until: WHOOSH!

He blasts through the ribbon, crosses the finish line mere seconds (six to be exact) ahead of Marmon.

Major skids and swerves before crashing hard into a row of bales and collapsing to the ground in a heap.

Marmon, full of fury, hurtles past him.

MARMON

That's the first, last, and *only*
time you beat me, buck!

Major, bleeding, rolls over, squints into the setting sun.

MAJOR

(to himself)
Could crumble the color line all
the way down to the dirt...

Marmon rides on, fuming. Defeated.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

...and still not be able to dine in
their dining room.

EXT. GRANDSTANDS - SAME TIME

In the bunting-lined grandstands, a mustachioed middle-aged white man in a brown wool suit lowers a pair of binoculars.

BIRDIE

Interesting.

Meet: LOUIS DE FRANKLIN "BIRDIE" MUNGER (30s), a pugnacious plain dealer with the broad shoulders and trim frame of a former competitor. A winner.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Very interesting indeed.

He caps his binoculars, lets them dangle from his neck as he runs a hand over his thick walrus mustache. Genuinely moved.

Next to him, a PRIM DOWAGER (60s) sneers:

DOWAGER

What the devil's that spade trying
to prove? And to whom?

PRE-LAP: Hurried FOOTFALL and DISTANT CHEERING.

EXT. DOWNTOWN INDIANAPOLIS - AFTERNOON

A well-dressed man we haven't met yet rushes down a narrow alleyway clutching a sheaf of loose papers.

SUPER: **THREE WEEKS LATER**

Major, looking nervous as hell, jogs behind him in a white jersey with a solid band of black across the chest.

He carries his bicycle by the top bar as he runs.

CATTERSON

Why I let Hay convince me this was
a good idea I'll never know.

Catterson (30s) skids to a stop, peers around a corner, gestures for Major to duck in behind him.

Above: the sky is full of slate-gray storm clouds.

CATTERSON (CONT'D)

Okay. Soon as you hear the start
gun, ready yourself. Let the pack
pass on by. Fifty-one men, minus
yourself. Fall in behind 'em. But
hang back, rest up. When they
discover you're in the race with
'em, they'll try and make it mighty
disagreeable for you.

Major nods, struggles to ignore his thundering heart.

CATTERSON (CONT'D)

Seventy-five miles out to Matthews,
some of it rough. Farmland.
There'll be some club men out in
Marion to pace the leaders.

Catterson locks eyes with Major.

CATTERSON (CONT'D)

Dunno if you can depend on them, if
you know what I mean.

He smacks Major with the bundled papers in his hand.

CATTERSON (CONT'D)

Beat the lot of 'em and here's the deed to your own lot out on the edge of town. No questions asked.

And, with that, he gallops swiftly away.

Major swings one leg over his bike, grips the bars, tries and fails to clear his mind before:

BANG!

A distant start pistol fires. Then, more CHEERING.

All we see of the pack of riders are a series of fast-moving shadows sweeping across Major's face as his chest rises and falls, rises and falls.

Then he pulls his bike closer, kicks a foot in, reaches behind himself, pulls something from a pocket in his jersey.

A coin that glints in the dim light.

He lifts the coin to his lips, kisses it, then bends to tuck it into his right shoe.

Under his heel. For good luck.

MAJOR

(quietly, to himself)

Please, Lord. Guide and protect me.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - LATE AFTERNOON

Now in the thick of the pack and being battered by a heavy downpour, Major soldiers on through the muck.

Angry and drenched WHITE RIDERS frantically jockey for position, doing whatever they can to box Major in, force him to crash, keep him off his line.

WHITE RIDER #1

No way in *hell* are you gonna make it to that goddamn finish line alive, you hear me nigger?

Major, out of the saddle, swerves to miss a deep puddle, nearly locks bars with another rider.

WHITE RIDER #2

Watch it, fool.

A third rider lifts a hand from his bars, WALLOPS Major in the sternum with a closed fist.

WHITE RIDER #3
 Turn back now or I will kill you my
 fuckin' self.

But instead of fading back, Major lays it on harder.

In a deft flurry of motion, he cuts through the riders,
 sprints away from them down the rain-sodden dirt road.

Above: a BLINDING FLASH of lighting. Then, seconds later,
 the DEAFENING RUMBLE of thunder.

But Major can't see it, can't hear it. Blocks it all out.

EXT. WILLOW GROVE - LATER

The sky is now a deep blue/black as Major takes a sweeping
 bend onto a section of road with a seemingly endless grove
 of weeping willows on the left.

And a vast cemetery of leaning headstones on the right.

Slowly, his LEATHERY VOICE creeps in over the sound of the
 WIND RUSHING BY:

MAJOR (V.O.)
 As I was just beginning to figure,
 sometimes fear's the only thing to
 pace you on to victory.

As the graves WHIP past, he narrows his focus - knowing full
 well that if the other riders catch him he'll be done for.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 Problem was, when you get out ahead
 on your own, that same fear ends up
 drafting on you. Gaining ground.

Another lighting FLASH. Another PEAL of thunder.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 Chasing you home.

As the swaying willows to his left wash by, Major looks back
 to the road behind him.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 Winning.

He's in the clear. No sign of anyone.

Then he looks left again.

Now hundreds of BLACK MEN in cycling costumes identical to his hang from every willow tree like gruesome garlands.

Each one appears to have been beaten, lynched, and hung from the neck until dead.

MAJOR (V.O.)
But only if you let it.

Major looks away and the young men vanish.

As he stands on his pedals, struggles for more speed, Major looks down to his bottom bracket.

Sees that his feet now bare and bleeding.

His ankles are chained. Locked together by a pair of bloody steel manacles. Slave's chains.

FLASH. Another bolt of lightning and it all disappears.

Then, another RESOUNDING BOOM.

MAJOR (V.O.)
Only if you listen.

Major settles back down, lowers his head to the stem of his bicycle, pedals for his life.

EXT. MARION, OUTSKIRTS - LATER

The sky clearing and the rain finally stopped, Major races through rutted dirt streets spent and running on adrenaline.

Up ahead: a cluster of LOCAL RIDERS wait with their bikes at the ready. The amateurs on-deck to pace the leaders in.

Fearing more violence, Major slows slightly, tries to pick a line through them.

But the riders, all white, hop onto their machines and take off ahead of him in two bunches.

He catches them quickly, readies to evade.

But one them flashes him a crazily elated sidelong grin.

LOCAL RIDER
Oh my LORD! You're a good goddamn
hour ahead of 'em! A goddamn HOUR!!

Like a well-oiled machine, the pace crew stitches together around Major to form a tight echelon.

LOCAL RIDER (CONT'D)
 C'mon. Tuck in. Only twenty miles
 left! Catterson's gonna catch hell
 for this. Hay too. But you're gonna
 damn well win, my friend! You hear
 me? You're gonna--

FLASH. SIZZLE.

The screen goes all-white.

MAJOR (PRE-LAP)
 Fact is, back then, I didn't
 rightly know how to stop.

EXT. MARION, TOWN SQUARE - DUSK

The scene before us slowly re-materializes.

Major, soaked to the core, stands at the center of a modest
 town square next to Catterson clutching the deed to his
 newly-won building plot.

Across from them, a HOODED PHOTOGRAPHER lifts a second
 magnesium flare.

But before he can fire it, Birdie himself steps in, crosses
 toward Major wearing the same binoculars around his neck.

BIRDIE
 I've seen you win twice now, kid.

FLASH. SIZZLE.

Major doesn't blink. Can't.

Behind the photographer, all three menacing riders from
 earlier stare threateningly back at him.

Their faces, unlike his, are caked in dried mud and grime.

Followers, not leaders.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 First time, I thought it was a
 trick. Second time...

He thrusts a hand out, swaps a quick look with Catterson.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 ...I realized it wasn't. It was a
 problem. For them.

Major narrows his eyes, warily takes Birdie's hand.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
And an opportunity. For me.

Birdie shakes his hand firmly.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Louis de Franklin Munger.
(broad smile)
But you can call me Birdie.

Catterson backs away, knows when he's beaten.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Ever ridden a velodrome?

Major wags his head, lets go of Birdie's hand.

MAJOR
Never actually been in one, sir.
Not allowed.

Birdie sizes him up one last time, just to makes sure.

BIRDIE
To hell with all that nonsense. The
sir bit especially. C'mon.

PRE-LAP: The THUNDEROUS STOMPING of leather soles on wood.

INT. CAPITAL CITY VELODROME - NIGHT

From daylight to darkness.

Over the sound of the STOMPING, a track announcer BARKS over a large conical acoustic megaphone hanging above a darkened, smoke-filled arena:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Ladies and gentlemen of
Indianapolis, may I present to you
Mister Walter Sanger!*

HOOTS and CHEERS wash over the WELL-DRESSED SPECTATORS packed into the stands of a vast indoor velodrome with a steeply pitched, ovoid wooden track.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Undoubtedly one of the greatest
bicycle riders of our era.*

Down on the track, SANGER (20s) powers down behind a pace rider on a smoke-belching motorcycle.

His thighs are massive. Not a sinew out of place. Face like like a Greek god sculpted of white marble.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*And holder of a new one mile track
 record, clocking in at two minutes,
 eighteen seconds!*

Another massive wave of APPLAUSE ripples the stands as, unexpectedly, we see Birdie hustling Major down the rickety stairs that lead to a line of track-side dressing rooms.

BIRDIE
 Now, don't get cocky, yeah? Just
 ride your race. Keep a clean line.
 Head down. Elbows in.

Major is dressed again in the same tight-fitting jersey with the black band across the chest.

Hints of dried mud up still streak up the back as he carries his bicycle over one shoulder behind Birdie.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 The minute they see you out on the
 track with a white lead-out, all
 hell's gonna break loose.

Major, frightened, says nothing.

INT. CAPITAL CITY VELODROME, DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

As Birdie keeps watch, Major ducks into a dressing room, hurries toward another closed door, pauses, looks back.

BIRDIE
 You wanna show 'em? Show 'em.

Beyond the door, the CHEERING fades.

MAJOR
 Wait. You're not coming out with--

Birdie spins on his heels to depart.

BIRDIE
 Nope.

MAJOR
 Sir, I--

Birdie turns back around, grins.

BIRDIE
Birdie, please.

MAJOR
I ain't never done this.

BIRDIE
Yeah, that's kinda the point.

MAJOR
But, I don't--

Birdie steps up, lifts a hand to Major's chin, taps it.

BIRDIE
Listen, time's time. Black or
white, don't mean a thing.
(beat)
Just keep on riding like you know
the result and we'll be just fine.

Birdie winks, departs into the darkness.

With him gone, Major looks suddenly rocked. All of his brash young confidence quickly eroded away.

This was a terrible...

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Oh, hold on now. I'm just learning
that we have a...*

Major draws a breath, lowers his bicycle to the floor.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Apparently we have a challenger.

He closes his eyes, reaches back, pulls the same coin from his pocket, kisses it again, slips quickly it into his shoe, grips the knob of the door to the track with one hand.

MAJOR
Lord, protect and guide me. Steady
my hand. And strengthen my will.

Major throws the door open, steps out into the light, mounts his bike, and pedals slowly down a steep wooden ramp.

Two young WHITE RIDERS on a steel tandem wait for him down on the track, apparently at Birdie's prior urging.

INT. CAPITAL CITY VELODROME, TRACK - NIGHT

Track-side, Sanger looks up just as a beastly hail of BOOS and EPITHETS rains down from the stands.

The announcer, though, powers on:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Fresh from his, well, unexpected win over local favorite Walter Marmon, young buck Marshal W. "Major" Taylor will be attempting to beat Mister Sanger's recently established record paced, it seems, by two other local riders on a tandem for a flying start.

A hush washes over crowd. Even the brass band falls silent.

As the two white pace riders take off down the track ahead of Major, the formerly buzzing grandstands are so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

The only sound that fills the dead air is the STEADY HUM of Major's solid rubber tires as they swiftly pick up speed over the glistening, narrow planks.

The silent spectators blur together as Major lowers his head, takes the first bend, looks to the tandem, veers further up the banking track toward the top rail.

Ahead of him, the tandem does the same.

Further on, the start line looms.

Next to it: a paunchy RACE TIMER (50s) in a straw boater stands with a stopwatch at the ready.

Next to him: a RACE OFFICIAL (30s) aims a start gun skyward.

The tandem swerves back down onto the straightaway, crosses the start line.

BANG! It's on.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Birdie was only half right. Time is time. But Black and white...

Major tucks his elbows in, crushes the pedals as the tandem ahead of him picks up speed.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Would that it were that simple.

His eyes downcast to the track bleeding by below him, Major sees his front wheel near the rear wheel of his lead-out.

BAHWHRRRRR.

A terrifying touch of rubber-on-rubber.

The tandem veers left. Major wobbles briefly, nearly falls.

MAJOR (V.O.)
I think we both knew then that even
if, by some miracle, I could break
the track time on the mile...

As he regains his balance, all Major can see are the hand-painted letters of sponsor signage FLASHING hypnotically by.

MAJOR (V.O.)
...all I'd get out of it was the
satisfaction.

The tandem sticks to the inside line. Major follows.

MAJOR (V.O.)
The pride of proving I could make
good as a sprinter on one of the
toughest tracks in the country.

Major looks right, back up into the stands.

There he is: Birdie watching through the same binoculars.

Protectively. Patiently. Proudly.

MAJOR (V.O.)
That was ample enough pay for me.

Major looks ahead again, makes an almost imperceptible adjustment, stays in the slipstream, grits it out.

MAJOR (V.O.)
At the time, anyway.

Everything slows down.

Major swerves right, accelerates unexpectedly, pulls up next to the anxious white boys on the steel tandem.

As they watch, terrified of losing their line, Major overtakes them both. His speed is dizzying. Super-human.

MAJOR (V.O.)
At the time.

With his wheel a flickering blur and his legs rising and falling like pistons, Major sprints for the line.

He can almost taste it. Knows he has it.

BANG! The finish gun fires.

Major, FLASHES past the stunned race timer.

The timer lowers his stopwatch, can't believe his eyes.

Major, barely winded, sits up, looks to the infield, finds Sanger there, still standing track-side like Zeus, nods.

For the briefest of seconds, Sanger's face morphs into that of Marmon's. Same eyes. Same entitled arrogance.

The same man, full of aggrieved fury.

Then, over the megaphone:

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Well, folks, hold onto your seats.

Major shakes his head, looks back to Sanger. Suddenly, he looks nothing at all like Marmon.

Instead, Sanger smiles, nods calmly. Almost admiringly. Time-tested champion to first-time record holder.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
But we have another new track record at two minutes, eleven seconds!

Major, momentarily shaken, lifts a hand from his bars, tentatively tips an imaginary cap Sanger's way.

And, just as he does, a barrel-chested BLOWHARD (50s) in a tight-fitting linen suit, thrusts a thick stack of dollar bills into Sanger's hands.

His ill-gotten prize money.

Major looks away, continues pedaling, knows full-well he won't see a dime.

No matter how much he might have wanted (and deserved) it.

BARKER (PRE-LAP)
All aboard for Newark, Trenton, and Philadelphia! Track three!
(beat)
Track three!

INT. PENN STATION - DAY

Under the graceful arched glass and steel roof of this palatial commuter station, Birdie bobs and weaves purposely through the crowd.

Two harried ASSISTANTS (20s) struggle to keep up with him.

Each man carries a greasy duffel full of heavy gear and a glimmering steel track bike over their shoulder.

BIRDIE

No, kid. I don't care about all that junk. I wanna know what you *actually* want.

Major, now wearing an ill-fitting wool suit, follows.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

What fundamentally *eludes* you? What would you sacrifice everything just to get a grip on?

Major slows, tries to gather his wits.

The white crowd washes hurriedly past him.

MAJOR

Well, sir...

Birdie stops dead, wheels back around.

BIRDIE

C'mon now.

His assistants carry on quickly, saying nothing.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Birdie. I'd have to say...

BIRDIE

Yeah?

MAJOR

Respect.

BIRDIE

Respect?

MAJOR

To be seen as, well, as a man. Not just a Black man. Not a colored man. A man. Plain and simple.

(MORE)

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 (deep breath)
 Like anyone else. When I come into
 my own, that is.

A broad grin washes across Birdie's face. He nods, runs a hand over his bristly mustache.

BIRDIE
 Well, okay then.

MAJOR
 That and the feeling.

BIRDIE
 Of victory? That's what I'm--

MAJOR
 No, the *feeling*. Of riding. Just riding. Being free to fly.

Birdie draws a breath, ponders.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 Winning, the prize money, the accolades... I don't ride for that.

BIRDIE
 Uh-huh.

MAJOR
 I ride to feel it. And, well, I guess, to be seen. As a peer.

Birdie steps up, places his hands on Major's shoulders.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Well then... know this, kid.
 (beat)
 You keep riding for me, and the whole wide white world will be rooting for your downfall.

Major looks left, sees a door marked: WHITES ONLY.

Birdie spies it too, leans even closer.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 They'll expect you to fail. Underperform, bend under pressure.

MAJOR
 I--

BIRDIE

But, when you don't bend, when you succeed, like you did against that brute Marmon, they'll hate on you. Question your methods. Hold you up to an impossible double-standard.

MAJOR

That's--

BIRDIE

That's why we've gotta make every victory outsized, overwhelming.

Major blinks, takes this in.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Down to the very last ounce, you and your machine will need to be, in a word, *perfect*.

Birdie finally steps back, winks.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Can you do that for me?

MAJOR

(quietly)

I think I--

BIRDIE

Don't think, kid. Know.

Pedestrians speed past them.

Birdie's assistants are long gone.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

It's six days. Six days and nights riding in circles 'til your legs forget they belong to you. Eat on the fly. Sleep in snatches. And pray my men wake you up before the field takes a lap you can't get back. Half the riders all doped on strychnine and worse just to keep their eyes open. And when they finally crack, and they all do, it ain't graceful. They go down hard. Bones, boards, bodies everywhere. Crowd loves it. Calls it sport. Truth is, it's a war of attrition dressed up like a race.

(MORE)

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 And the only question by the end is
 who's still got enough of himself
 left to keep the pedals flying.

Major nods. Strains to keep his face a mask of calm.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Now, I can handle the machine part.

He finally turns to go.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 But you my boy, body, heart, and
 soul... The rest is up to you.

Major stutter-steps off after him.

MAJOR
 Wait. What do you want?

Birdie quickens his pace.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 What's... What's in it for you?

BIRDIE
 Five percent of every prize purse.
 And, of course, cycle sales. Just
 like ol' Hay but better. Direct.

MAJOR
Beyond the money.

Birdie slows again, turns back around.

BIRDIE
 I just miss winning, kid. Not that
 I did much of it in my day.
 (beat)
 And I hate seeing talent wasted.

Birdie shoots him another sly wink, shuffles off backward.

Major just watches him disappear into the sea of whiteness.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Show me your drubbing of Marmon
 back in Indy wasn't a fluke, and
 you'll have my respect at the very
 least. That's for damn sure.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, PADDOCKS - DAY

Birdie trails his assistants through a thick crowd of fellow IMPRESARIOS prepping their NERVOUS RIDERS.

SUPER: MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NEW YORK | DECEMBER, 1896

Smoke hangs low in the air like an icy fog that Birdie blasts through like an ice breaker at sea.

BIRDIE

Feels nice not hawking second-rate frames with cheap lugs trick riding out in front of that store in his ridiculous costume, huh?

Major stumbles after him, wide-eyed.

MAJOR

I beg your--

BIRDIE

Never beg, kid. Only borrow. When you absolutely must.

Through various half-open doors we catch glimpses of young WHITE CYCLISTS jabbing themselves with long syringes, guzzling tiny pills, and inhaling from glass vials.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Said strychnine for the cramps. Cocaine for endurance. Amphetamines to stay awake.

(beat)

When we finally get you over there, if we do - big if - I have a hunch you won't be the *only* one on the track who's hallucinating.

Birdie turns, makes a beeline toward a dingy dressing room.

Through a nearby archway down to the arena, we hear an eerie STOMPING mingled with CATCALLS and SCREAMING.

It's an unholy din from an over-eager crowd.

MAJOR

Over where, sir?

Birdie slows, holds the door open.

BIRDIE
 Europe, kid. Take on the best of
 the best. Maybe even Jacquelin
 himself. But Taunton first.

One of his assistants tosses Birdie a white wool jersey. He catches it without even looking.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Then Worlds. Then Nationals. See
 how you fare in both. Clean up here
 and fare well over there against
 the real champions, and you'll come
 back to this backwater with money
 enough to chart your own course.
 Invest smart. Not down in Tulsa. On
 Wall Street. And you'll be set for
 life, my friend.
 (broad smile)
 Set. For. Life.

MAJOR
 Invest? How much?

BIRDIE
 All of it. Minus my cut, our
 expenses, money for promotions...

Birdie shoves Major the rumpled white jersey.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Now, change up. Ditch that terrible
 suit. Meet me down on the track.

Major STAMMERS.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 You want respect? Ride like
 lightning and they'll have no
 choice but see you as their peer.
 (beat)
 Hell, maybe even their superior.

Birdie turns, carries on. Major just watches.

MAJOR
 (under his breath)
 Who's he think he is, Moses?

BIRDIE (O.S.)
 (from off)
 I heard that!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, INFIELD - NIGHT

Inside the vast, smoke-filled, dimly-lit arena, the atmosphere is electric.

Thousands of RABID SPECTATORS fill every seat in the house from the floor to the rafters.

Down on the infield at the center of the oval, COACHES in bowlers and suits prep their RIDERS as idling steam-driven motorbikes belch fumes.

BIRDIE

Now, take it nice and easy at first. Stay close to the bunch but keep clear. And, for God's sake, put all that holier-than-thou fight against prejudice to the wayside for now. In this deal, it's performance not politicking that matters, right?

Major, in a new white jersey with the word "COMET" embroidered diagonally across the chest, just nods.

He's brimming with second thoughts.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Dismount when you need fuel. Don't let your mind tell you you don't. Your body's the boss, yeah?

MAJOR

Yep.

BIRDIE

Watch out for Cooper. Word is Marmon's been bankrolling him just to take you down. Says it's personal. Wants you broken. So don't count on your sprint saving you. By the end, odds are it'll be gone like more than half the field.

A PACER in leathers hops onto one of the motorbikes, slips down his goggles, takes off onto the track.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

If you go down, get up. Frankie and Bill will have you covered with machines if you need 'em. And, if you want out and I'm not here, do whatever they say. They'll time your sleep, keep you fed.

Major draws a long, slow, deep breath. Runs a hand down the top tube of his bike while mouthing a silent prayer.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

And put the five grand out of your head too. You're here to finish, not to prove something. Winning doesn't matter. It's going that distance that counts.

Major grips his bike by the saddle.

MAJOR

Thank you, Birdie.

BIRDIE

For what?

MAJOR

Believing. In me.

Birdie gives him a gentle shove.

BIRDIE

Just remember what you did to that entitled S.O.B. Marmon and you'll be just fine. Now go. Show 'em all what you're worth, yeah?

Major swings a leg over the top bar, reaches back, pulls the coin from a pocket in his jersey.

Another cyclist rolls up next to him just as he kisses the coin, bends, tucks it into his shoe.

The other cyclist, EDDIE "CANNON" BALD (20s) just stares. His hair is greasy and jet black. Parted down the middle.

MAJOR

The 1890 Morgan Silver Dollar. Nicknamed the "Comet" because of a striated die gouge right down the coin's face.

Major slips his foot into a pedal cage, pushes off.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Sometimes even the imperfect things can be beautiful.

As he glides away onto the gleaming planks, the massive crowd CHEERS. Bald narrows his eyes, marks his man.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, TRACK - CONTINUOUS

Steadily picking up speed, Major pilots his machine slowly further and further up the steep pitch of the track as a thicket of COMPETITORS jockey for position.

Up ahead, the pace moto bathes them all in faint blue smoke as the SCREAMING CROWD whips by in a haze.

All we hear is the DISTORTED CACOPHONY of the crowded arena.

Flashbulbs explode like HAND SLAPS. Rubber wheels roar like GUTTURAL SCREAMS. Human voices SQUEAL and WHINE, blending together into surfeit of PASSING EPITHETS.

It's a terrifying, haunting SEA OF NOISE until:

BANG!

A RACE OFFICIAL down on the infield fires the start gun.

And they're off.

We stick with Major as he, in the drops, falls in behind a tight cluster of fellow riders, lets his nerves dampen, tries to block out the RACKET.

But it's still there, still prominent, as he sweeps through the first turn, accelerates onto the straightaway.

His breathing steady, his eyes locked on Bald's wheel before him, Major pounds out a relentless cadence, one pedal revolution after the other.

WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH.

It's almost hypnotically easygoing at first. Until, a slight touch of wheels three riders up: BUZZ. SHOUTING.

Then, a heavy SMACK, as a single rider hits the deck, skids, spinning on his back upward across the track.

Another rider hits his body sidelong, flies over the bars, smashes headfirst into the planks.

Bald swerves wide. His elbow catches Major in the ribs. Major wobbles, looks down to his pedals.

Both feet are trapped. Locked into their cages.

He veers left, nearly takes out another rider just as the first man to crash hits the top rail, tumbles like a rag doll into the crowd and disappears from view.

The pack settles, tries to regain, focus-up.

Major, his every nerve jangling, picks up the pace, gets clear, hits the next curve low and fast.

Four more riders slip in behind him.

WHIRRRRR.

They take the curve blisteringly, arc down to the flats just in time to see the first rider, unconscious in a bloodied tangle of terrified fans.

Major looks, doesn't want to, sees that the rider's torn jersey matches his own. Same embroidered letters.

And his face is no longer white. It's black.

It's him.

But in a millisecond, he's gone again as Major shakes it off, dials back the pace ever so slightly, lets himself be passed by one rider, then another.

Is he losing his nerve already?

No.

Instead, Major wisely falls in behind them all to draft, get his head back into the game, settle.

As his knees rise and fall with each firm pedal stroke, Major's eyes narrow. His mind begins to slip elsewhere.

MAJOR (V.O.)

I thought that if I could just out-suffer them, maybe they'd have to finally see--

BUZZZZZZZZZZ!

The sound of another terrifying touch of wheels rouses Major back to the now. To the race at hand.

But, unlike during the ten-miler back in Indiana, he's far behind Bald, stuck in the bunch, bleeding time.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Yeah, not so much.

Major nods to himself, gets up out of the saddle, taps all the strength he can summon, speeds off.

MAJOR (V.O.)
Turns out, a man can ride himself
into oblivion chasing something he
was never meant to catch.

Bald watches helplessly as he passes.

The surly crowd CHEERS.

But it sounds less than human. Almost reptilian. Terrifying.

INSERT MONTAGE:

Still to the HAUNTING BLARE, we watch the six-day race play
out in rapid succession:

-- Major slows, looks, swerves toward the infield,
dismounts, throws his bike toward a waiting COACH --

-- Major dumps a copper ladle full of ice water down onto
his head as another ATTENDANT massages his legs --

-- Major wolfs down hard boiled eggs and guzzles milk from a
frosty bottle as the coach watches on --

-- Major tosses and turns on a tiny cot inside a cramped
dressing room as the attendant times his fitful sleep --

-- Major remounts his machine, waits for a good gap, powers
back out onto the track and into the thick again --

-- Major dismounts again, spent, throws his bike toward the
coach, stumbles to the water tank, gulps from the ladle --

END MONTAGE.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, DRESSING ROOM - MORNING

A claustrophobic horse paddock turned dressing room.

SUPER: FOUR DAYS LATER

With his back to a tattered wall calendar with five
successive days x-ed out in black grease pen, an utterly
tapped-out Major HOWLS toward the attendant, FRANKIE (30s):

MAJOR
Where is he?! Where's Birdie?!

FRANKIE
Out chasin' investors, last I--

MAJOR
I can't do it! I CAN'T!

The coach, BILL (20s) snaps the grease pen in one hand.

BILL
C'mon now, kid. You gotta. You're
already a good what...

FRANKIE
Fourteen hundred, sixty miles in.

Major, his legs cramping and his mind melting, hobbles away,
SMASHES his hands into a brick wall.

BILL
You're gonna sell us a *billion*
bicycles! Can't quit now.

MAJOR
I'm cooked. Can't sleep. Can't eat.
Can't see straight. You've gotta
let me off. Gotta let me--

Frankie lifts his hands, slowly crosses the room.

FRANKIE
It's three in the morning, kid. I
can't call Birdie now. But I can
call the doc.

MAJOR
What the heck good's that gonna do?
I need out. I'm DONE!

Frankie looks to Bill, then to a leather satchel across the
room. Bill nods back, crosses toward the bag.

FRANKIE
I'll call the doc. But I need you
back out there. Just for a few more
laps until he can get here, to keep
you from being DQd. Yeah? Can you
do that for me?

MAJOR
Then I can quit? Go home? Stop?

Bill fishes something out of the bag, turns, grabs a nearby
half-full glass of water, heads for the door.

FRANKIE
Sure, kid. Sure. Then you can stop.

Frankie gently but forcefully guides Major away from the
brick wall and toward the open door.

Major's trembling knuckles are bleeding.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Just go at your own pace. Stay off the deck. And I'll signal you to come back in when he's here.

MAJOR

Why isn't he here? Why isn't Birdie--

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, PASSAGEWAY - SAME TIME

As Frankie pulls Major out of his dressing room, the FEROCIOUS ROAR returns - even at three o'clock in the A.M.

FRANKIE

What'd he tell you, kid? When he's out, you listen to us. Yeah?

MAJOR

(delirious)

Where'd he go? Why would he leave me like this?

Ahead of them, Bill dumps a small paper sachet of white powder into the glass of water. It FIZZES.

He gives the cloudy water a swirl with his greasy pinky finger, hands the glass back to Frank.

And, as he does, we catch a faint glimpse of a familiar figure in the distance.

It's Walter Marmon himself.

Frank doesn't notice, lifts one of Major's bloodied hands, slips the FIZZING glass into it.

FRANKIE

Take this. It'll calm your nerves until the doctor gets here.

MAJOR

What... What is it?

BILL

Medicine.

Major, bleary-eyed, looks to Bill uncomprehendingly.

FRANKIE

Costs sixty-five Dollars an ounce. It'll get your hands steady.

(MORE)

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
Keep your legs loose. Make you feel
like a million bucks.

Major looks into the swirling vortex of liquid. Hesitates.

BILL
C'mon. Down the hatch.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, TRACK - LATER

Major, having somehow found a second wind, BLASTS across the track like a madman.

His eyes are glassy and crazed. And his face is a study in rabid, unhinged, maniacal determination.

Every sound now is gone. Just DEAFENING SILENCE as he roars down the hardwoods like a demon.

Like a whirlwind.

Famed riders from all over the world disappear into his slipstream almost as if they're standing still.

But instead of watching them go, he looks down at his front wheel as it spins and spins and spins.

Like it'll never ever stop. An eternal, unending revolution.

CRRRRACK!

All of the hundreds of electric bulbs in all four of the massive conical light fixtures suspended from the steel girders above suddenly shatter.

Glass falls from the ceiling like hail as the entire velodrome is plunged into total darkness.

Other than one light.

Out ahead of Major's wheel: a ropey, bright orange, flickering ribbon of flame that extends into the distance.

Like a burning fuse. Like a tightrope set ablaze.

Major powers across it as everything else just fades into oblivion. It's only him now. Him and his machine.

One pedal stroke after the next along a burning razor's edge spanning a vast pit of blackness.

SMASH!

All the lights come back on - just as Major nearly t-bones the top rail.

Stunned senseless, he yanks the bars left, barely misses the rail, skitters across the abruptly empty track, looks down toward the infield.

It's entirely empty now too. Abandoned.

Major tries to slow down, clear his head, get a grip.

But then, from behind him: a BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAM!

He looks back to see a LONE FIGURE in the golden silk robes of a Klu Klux Klan Grand Dragon bounding loudly down the track toward him hefting a glinting silver dagger.

All instinct, Major LEAPS from the saddle, POUNDS the pedals with all his strength, SPRINTS away like lightning.

Black lightning.

BANG!

SUPER: EIGHTEEN HOURS LATER

An unseen race official fires his pistol.

And Major, terrified, skids across the broken finish tape just behind seven other riders.

As the rest of the utterly pulverized field crosses the line and collapses in exhaustion, Major continues ripping on along the track like his life depends on it.

Unstopping and unstoppable. Unable to slow in the slightest.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, GRANDSTANDS - SAME TIME

Up in the stands, surrounded by STUNNED WHITE FANS, a young Black woman in a green dress lowers a pair of opera glasses.

Her stance mirrors Birdie's back at the fairgrounds in Indianapolis. After Major's first win.

Same sense of awe. Same swelling, irrevocable pride.

DAISY

Well I'll be good goddamned.

Her eyes are riveted to Major as he continues ROARING down the track. The only man, the only Black man, still riding.

DAISY (CONT'D)
That's just...

Meet: DAISY VICTORIA MORRIS (20s). An indomitable mixed-race socialite standing solo in a sea of blandness.

DAISY (CONT'D)
...amazing.

She quickly SNAPS her opera glasses closed.

Two rows up, Walter Marmon glares at the track. Thwarted.

WAITER (PRE-LAP)
Et voilà.

INT. STEAKHOUSE - DAY

Shaved and showered but still haunted and spent, Major digs into a massive t-bone inside a posh, club-y steakhouse as a spindly WAITER (50s) retreats with a silver cloche.

MAJOR
No Birdie. You're wrong.

Across the table, not eating and a little mortified by the spectacle of Major's voracity, Birdie crosses his arms.

BIRDIE
I am?

MAJOR
No wonder you ended your cycling career running into a horse.

BIRDIE
Damn thing backed into me!

Major swallows, grabs his milk, guzzles it.

MAJOR
Winning doesn't matter. Perfection doesn't matter. It's not about the time or the trophies. Riding. That's all that matters. The feeling when you finally break through the pain, all the struggle. And everything just goes quiet. All those hundreds of people screaming at me. I can't even hear 'em. Can't even see 'em. Don't even know they exist. Every time I get on the bike, that's what I'm looking for.
(MORE)

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 And, tonight, I thought I'd lost
 that for good.

Major finally takes a greedy gulp from his glass of milk.

BIRDIE
 You wanted to be seen. This is what
 it costs. This is the price.

MAJOR
 I want more, Birdie. I wanna make a
 difference. For the future. And I'm
 not gonna let anyone, not even you,
 stand in my way.

Birdie nods, uncharacteristically chastened.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 What was it? In the packet?

BIRDIE
 Bicarbonate of soda, on my mother's
 grave. Nothing more, I swear it.
 Cost me a nickel.
 (changing tact)
 Eighth place after Hale? Not bad,
 kid. I *knew* you had it in you.

MAJOR
 Where were you?

BIRDIE
 Working. For us.

MAJOR
 I'm never doing that again, ever.

BIRDIE
 Agreed. Now, we gotta get you back
 to Worcester. Prep for Taunton.
 Find you a good woman.

Major wags his head side-to-side. *No thanks...*

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Show the experts that the six-day
 grind hasn't put an end to your
 sprinting game.

Major doesn't answer, cuts more steak. Maybe he's out?

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
It's an old trick. A placebo. To
get your mind thinking--

MAJOR
I saw a man. On the track. With a
knife. *Chasing* me.

BIRDIE
Well, racing eighteen hours
straight without a wink'll do that
to you, I suppose.

Major looks down. His face softens slightly.

MAJOR
Eighth place, huh?

BIRDIE
Can't win 'em all. Or can you?

Major forces a smile, takes another greedy bite.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Ain't got long to get you in shape
for Worlds. Build your bankroll--

MAJOR
Not until they let me race on
Saturdays instead of Sundays. Not
on the Lord's day, Birdie.

BIRDIE
Your piety's gonna cost me a pretty
penny, kid. A pretty penny indeed.

EXT. WORCESTER CITY STREETS - DAY

All alone on his machine as day breaks over the sleepy town
of Worcester, Massachusetts, Major speeds across the cobbles
like a man on a mission.

A man fully committed now to proving himself not only to
Birdie but to the wider white world as well.

Up ahead: a tiny gap between two brick buildings.

And beyond the gap: a narrow street that rakes steeply
upward at nearly an 18% grade.

Breathing steadily, Major grinds his way through the gap and
uphill. His cadence drops as does his speed. But, just like
he did amid the chaos of The Garden, he presses on.

No crowd. No cheering. Just the GUSTING of his breath as his bike wags side-to-side up the seemingly impossible slope.

Grimacing, he looks up, sees the summit.

And, at the crest: a mirage.

The same young woman, Daisy again, now clutching a pink parasol and wearing a broad-brimmed Victorian hat.

She stands at the summit, staring at Major as he climbs toward her as if magnetically drawn.

Like he's a miraculous mirage. *What the devil are you...*

PREACHER (PRE-LAP)

Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars...

INT. BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Major, now wearing a much more finely-tailored suit sits in a pew with his eyes affixed to the back of Daisy's hat two rows up as a Black PREACHER (60s) bellows from the pulpit:

PREACHER

..."From there I will bring you down," says the LORD.

Daisy turns, looks back, eyes Major discretely, nods as if attempting to underscore the Lord's word.

Major looks away, barely listening.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord.

Daisy shifts in her pew, eyes forward once again.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

Be assured, he will not go unpunished!

Major lets his eyes drift her way again. Spellbound.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

As pride goes before destruction...

The preacher steps from the pulpit, descends the stairs, strides down the aisle past Daisy, pauses.

Then he turns his gaze toward Major, as if addressing him and him alone:

PREACHER (CONT'D)
 (quietly)
*...and a haughty spirit goes before
 a mighty fall.*

Major looks to him, blinks. Lets this begin to weigh on him.

DAISY (PRE-LAP)
 They may cheer, but never for you.

EXT. JOHN STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, GROUNDS - MORNING

Major stands opposite Daisy as a fine crowd of BLACK PARISHIONERS mingle making POLITE SMALLTALK behind them.

Daisy, fearless, thrusts her gloved hand out. He takes it, looks like he doesn't know what to do with it.

DAISY
 And it's the height of frivolity to go through all that exertion just to turn back around and ride down the same hill all over again.

MAJOR
 I beg to differ, ma'am...

Daisy grips his hand firmly. Confidently.

DAISY
 Daisy. Daisy Victoria Morris.

Major shakes her hand stiffly.

MAJOR
 Well, Daisy, sometimes exertion is the only way to prove your worth. I ride because I love it. The strain. Achieving the impossible.

DAISY
 The *impossible* huh?

She lets his hand go, eyes him up and down again.

DAISY (CONT'D)
 You do know that I walked up that self-same little hill entirely under my own power.

Major reaches up, tries to loosen his starched collar.

She grins playfully.

DAISY (CONT'D)
In a hoop skirt and a whalebone
corset, no less.

Major clears his throat, searches for words.

DAISY (CONT'D)
I saw you. In New York. At The
Garden. The Six Day thing.

MAJOR
You, uh, you did?

She nods, not relinquishing eye-contact. Not even blinking.

DAISY
Was raised there. Had to go back.
See to my Daddy's final affairs.

MAJOR
Oh, I'm... I'm sorry.

DAISY
Don't be. He was proud. And poor.
Never a good combination.

She turns, breezes past him toward a white picket gate to
the stairs leading down to the street.

DAISY (CONT'D)
And, as for *proving* your worth...

Daisy pauses. He just stands there, watching her.

DAISY (CONT'D)
Welcome to Worcester, young man. A
fiercely abolitionist city where we
don't tend to care quite so much
about what the less *colorful* people
in the world think of our worth.

She holds the gate open for Major as if trying to shake him
out of his stupor.

DAISY (CONT'D)
Well c'mon, then.

Major finally stumbles her way, fully transfixed.

DAISY (CONT'D)
And here I thought you were
supposed to be fast.

EXT. PARK, GAZEBO - LATER

Daisy and Major circle each other alone inside of a birdcage-like, ornate, all-white gazebo as cherry blossoms drift through the humid summer air.

Major, tongue-tied and sheepish, twirls his "comet" Silver Dollar down the knuckles of his left hand as he walks.

DAISY
They *paid* you?

MAJOR
No, my parents.

DAISY
To be his playmate?

MAJOR
His friend. And, yeah. He *was* my friend. My best friend.

DAISY
A white boy?

MAJOR
Mm-hmm. And then they moved away. Left for Chicago. Left me in the lurch. All by my lonesome.

Major's face shifts. Darkens.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
I've never really fit anywhere. Not with our folks. Not with them.

DAISY
Now, that I understand.

MAJOR
Funny. When I talk to you, it doesn't feel like I need to be something else.

DAISY
You don't. Don't have to prove anything to me.

Major brightens, veers her way.

MAJOR
Well, anyway, it's on to Taunton next. Then Montreal. If I'm lucky.
(MORE)

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 Heck, maybe even Jacquelin. Fastest
 man alive, bar none.

DAISY
 And they'll just... let you in? To
 the *World* Championships?

MAJOR
 Dunno. Gotta get fit, make a good
 showing first.

Their shoulders nearly touch.

DAISY
 And of course what's his name--

MAJOR
 Birdie.

DAISY
 Birdie thinks this is a good idea?

He reaches out, almost takes her hand again, hesitates.

MAJOR
 I'm ready for it. Ready for anyone.
 Unlike back in New York.

She slows, leans closer. Their lips are only inches apart.

DAISY
 Speaking of, how'd you sleep? In
 the race. The six-day?

MAJOR
 About as well as I imagine I might.
 When you're around.

Daisy closes her eyes, lands a gentle, polite kiss on his
 cheek. Then another. Harder.

He stumbles backward, breathless.

DAISY
 Seventeen hundred miles?

MAJOR
 Seventeen hundred, thirty two.

Daisy grins, steps back, keeps walking.

DAISY
 On a goddamn bicycle...

He looks as though he wished he'd kissed her back.

MAJOR

How you end up here anyway?

Daisy runs her hand over the ivory balustrade, half wishing he'd kissed her back as well.

He mirrors her movements, opposites attracted.

DAISY

Well, when Daddy passed...

She trails off. It's still a fresh wound, no matter how much she'd prefer to pretend otherwise.

DAISY (CONT'D)

He was white. Mama was Black. She sent me here to stay with my Aunt and Uncle. Reverend and his wife.

Daisy slows, turns back toward Major.

DAISY (CONT'D)

Take it from me. No amount of desperate striving can ever change the way they look at you.

He purses his lips, forms a counterargument.

DAISY (CONT'D)

But you can try, I suppose.

Major smiles, thinks he can prove her wrong.

MAJOR

Oh, I will.

She lets her eyes run up and down him, as if realizing this very well might be the one. The one for me.

Quite possibly forever.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

At Taunton first. Then Montreal.

(beat)

You should come.

Something in her face shifts. A hint of doubt.

BIRDIE (PRE-LAP)

Preserving the sport, my eye.

EXT. CHARLES RIVER CYCLE CLUB, PADDOCK - DAY

Major chases Birdie quickly through a dusty paddock full of GRIZZLED MECHANICS and their ANXIOUS RIDERS.

SUPER: TAUNTON, MASSACHUSETTS | SEPTEMBER, 1897

Birdie clutches a rumpled broadsheet as they walk, READS aloud and full of disdain:

BIRDIE

*Per the esteemed Isaac B. Potter,
President of The League of American
Wheelmen, Taylor's entry has been
officially refused at Louisville,
Kentucky and throughout the entire
South on account of his color.*

This is unwelcome news to Major who stoically strides through the crowd avoiding eye-contact.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

*"We're not excluding him," he says.
"We're protecting him."*

Birdie smashes the broadsheet closed between his fists.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

*They've drawn the color line. It's
only white riders. Down South.
Everywhere next.*

Every other rider traces Major's path with a stern gaze.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

*This is my fault. I never should've
let you to race against--*

MAJOR

Enough. Can I ride here or not?

BIRDIE

Well, yeah. For now.

MAJOR

And in Montreal?

BIRDIE

Sure, but--

Major roughly SNATCHES the paper out of Birdie's hand, SNAPS it open again, READS:

MAJOR

Taylor now ranks among the fastest men in this country. But the racing men are envious of his success and prejudiced against his--

Major shoves the paper back at Birdie.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Tell me something I don't know.

Birdie nods, folds the paper closed, steps closer.

BIRDIE

Turns out, Marmon's moved on to building so-called horseless carriages. But he's still betting *mightily* on anyone who can restore the racial order.

Birdie turns, chucks the paper into a nearby bin, walks on.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

If you know what I mean.

Major just stands there, a roiling sea of burgeoning rage.

MAJOR

Horseless carriages? Good riddance.

BIRDIE (O.S.)

Precisely.

EXT. CHARLES RIVER CYCLE CLUB, TRACK - MOMENTS LATER

Struggling to clear his head and regain his focus, Major speeds silently down the track as other riders deliberately keep their distance.

One in particular stands out. This is W.E. BECKER (20s) a barrel-chested bear of a man with a face seemingly forged of cold steel and fists like weathered boulders.

His eyes are locked on Major's wheel and his legs pump in time with his. A bitter, menacing rival to be sure.

But Major stays within himself. Tries to imagine that he's the only man on the track, not just the only man of color.

As his breath regulates, Major powers swiftly and gracefully up and down the banking track to ensure a healthy buffer.

Becker mirrors his movements almost exactly. Like a predator meticulously tracking prey.

Up ahead, we see a flurry of action spark up in the infield. Everyone knows what it means, picks up the pace.

BANG!

The start gun fires. And the race begins in earnest.

Major, aiming to save his legs, just watches as Becker and a number of other riders swoop down to the inside line, greedily drafting off of the man before them.

Instead of following, Major keeps a high line.

MAJOR (V.O.)

I thought, if I could endure it, I
could break it. But maybe it was
the other way around?

Becker looks back through the crook of his arm, slows slightly. The man behind him swings wide right, nearly sideswipes Major.

Major, momentarily shaken, powers past him, takes a turn only inches away from Becker.

The two men swap a quick glance. Major nods.

Let's do this.

Becker edges right, looks like he's going to deliberately take Major out, broadside him.

But Major doesn't flinch, doesn't budge.

Instead, the two riders jockey for position.

Then the rider ahead of Becker cuts wide, enters the next turn high on Major's right.

A third rider gives way for Becker, throws his bike directly out in front of Major's.

All three riders surrounding him deliberately slow.

Major is boxed-in. Unable to pass, shedding speed.

Thinking fast, he lifts his head, opens up his chest to catch the air, creates instant drag.

This knocks him almost a length back, and he quickly YANKS his bars right, enters the next flat far clear of the nearest rider.

And, as the bunch enters the next turn, Major unexpectedly swerves all the way up to the rail.

Only Becker and the second rider follow him up, still trying to keep him boxed in.

But as all three of them near the top of the track (Becker just to his left and the other rider just in front of him), Major leans an elbow out onto the top of the rail.

It skids along the heavily-lacquered wood, steadies him.

MAJOR
(to Becker)
Go ahead. I dare you.

Becker eyes him nervously. *What the hell are you...*

MAJOR (CONT'D)
Yeah, thought so.

Abruptly, Major stabs his bike forward into the rear wheel of the man ahead of him, normally a suicidal move.

Everything slows down.

The rider ahead of him wobbles, hits the rail, nearly goes over it and down.

MAJOR (V.O.)
Birdie thought maybe the prejudice
I faced might've stayed down South.

In self-preservation mode, Becker SWERVES left just as they all dip toward the flats and pass the grandstands.

From out of nowhere, an unseen fan tosses a fistful of SILVER PENNY NAILS out onto the track before Major.

Major thinks fast, WEAVES right, barely misses them.

MAJOR (V.O.)
Nope. Instead, Marmon made sure it
showed up everywhere I rode.

As the thrown nails JANGLE, glinting, across the track behind him, Major swivels his head just in time to catch a brief glimpse of Daisy there in the stands.

Everything speeds back up.

With an open window of track before him, Major ducks low to his bars and turns on the gas, leaving Becker in his wake and drawing a ferocious ROAR from the crowd.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 They never stopped trying to ice me
 out. Take me down. Injure me.

Up ahead: only one rider remains. It's Tom Butler again.

But Major's lost too much time. There's not enough room to
 bridge the distance, much less sprint for the line.

Still, Major SHREDS his way across the boards at a dazzling,
 seemingly impossible clip until:

THWAP. The finish ribbon snaps taut up ahead.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 When all I ever wanted was a square
 deal. An even field to ride.

And the only remaining rider out in front of Major THRUSTS
 his bike through it.

RIIIIIPPP!

Butler breaks the ribbon with Major just inches back.

Major glides in behind a victorious Butler as a brass band
 on the infield launches into "DIXIE".

The overtly racist soundtrack to Major's recent miraculous
 top placements.

But Major tries to let this wash off his back like the wind.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 And all the money? It just
 disappeared as fast as I made it.

Up in the stands, Daisy bleeds by again with a mixture of
 pride, concern, and revulsion painting her face.

He smiles her way. She grimaces back before:

SMASH!

Becker SLAMS his bike into Major's with all his might, sends
 him instantly to the deck. Major's bicycle goes flying.

The crowd GASPS. The band falls discordantly silent.

Becker LEAPS off his bike, TOSSES it clear, THUNDERS across
 the boards toward a stunned Major.

BECKER
 You black sonofabitch!

Birdie, up in the stands, leaps to his feet, SHOUTS:

BIRDIE
Ignore him, Marshall!

BECKER
(up toward Birdie)
Fuck you, has-been.

MAJOR
That all you got?

BIRDIE
(still to Major)
You're above this!

Major slowly pushes himself to his feet again.

MAJOR
Above it, under it. Funny how I'm
always the one pedaling through it.

Becker, in a rage, SURGES forward, grabs Major by the neck.

FLIPS Major backward off his feet.

POUNDS his bare skull into the boards: THUD. THUD. THUD.

DAISY
(from the stands)
Stop it! STOP!

Major, bleeding from one ear only GURGLES as Becker, bathed in sweat, steadily chokes him out.

But, as he does, his face momentarily morphs into that of Marmon's - the face of the first man he bested.

Same haughty air of irrevocable white privilege.

MAJOR
(barely audible)
I beat you fair and square.

THE SCREEN SLOWLY GOES RED.

Silence. Then:

HABERDASHER (PRE-LAP)
Every time you win, they look at us
even harder.

INT. HABERDASHERY - DAY

Major stands on a wooden plinth surrounded by tall mirrors as a Black HABERDASHER (50s) takes his measure.

It must be sometime before Becker. Before Taunton. Before the ban. Before Marmon bankrolled the color line.

Daisy looks on from behind. Pride mingled with concern.

DAISY

They've always been looking. Now's the time for him to change up what they're seeing. Right?

Major lets his eyes drift to her reflection. He nods her way confidently. She winks back. Love and shared purpose.

MAJOR

How do I look?

DAISY

Uncomfortable. But indomitable.

Then, over it all:

DAISY (PRE-LAP)

No, no, no! Birdie, DO something!

EXT. CHARLES RIVER CYCLE CLUB, INFIELD - DAY

His neck still darkened by Becker's vice-like grip, Major finally GAGS and GASPS back to consciousness.

Daisy cradles him in her arms as Birdie, in the distance, violently SHOVES a race official nearly to the ground.

BIRDIE

Unsportsmanlike? Try fucking murderous, you pompous ass!

Daisy covers Major's oddly pale face with desperate kisses and terror-fueled tears.

DAISY

I... I thought we almost lost you.

Major tries to clear his throat, his quaking lips glisten with his own dark red blood.

MAJOR

How... How... long was I out?

Her chest CONVULSING, Daisy gently rocks him back-and-forth.

DAISY
 Fifteen minutes, baby.
 (back toward Birdie)
 Fifteen miserable MINUTES!

Birdie, still in a shoving match with the officials, doesn't hear this at all.

Down on the ground, shielded from the blazing sunshine by the brim of Daisy's lacy hat, Major smiles beatifically.

MAJOR
 I was pretty much perfect. Up 'til just then, huh?

Her chest spasms, equal parts terror and relief.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 Sorry I didn't win it for ya.

DAISY
 (over her shoulder)
 Birdie...

Birdie gives the race official one last shove.

BIRDIE
 (to the official)
 I don't want him disqualified. I want that bastard banned for life!

Major, bleary-eyed and bloody, looks to the stands.

Sees Marmon himself staring down at him cradled by Daisy there on the infield like an unworthy Pietà.

BIRDIE (PRE-LAP)
 You gotta put him outta your head.

I/E. PULLMAN DINING CAR/OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY

Major and Daisy sit opposite Birdie inside the lavish whites-only dining car of a northbound train.

Daisy is again dressed to the nines. Major, his neck still bruised, looks conspicuously out of place. And he knows it.

Birdie, his face partially obscured by another broadsheet, seems none too pleased to have Daisy along for the ride.

BIRDIE
 Even though what happened was, well, unconscionable. A travesty.

Both Daisy and Major looks around anxiously.

Birdie doesn't clock it.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Time to focus instead on McLeod,
McDuffee, and McCarthy. And the
Butler brothers. Strangest thing
I've ever seen. Like they can read
each other's goddamn minds.

A nervous looking white WAITER (30s) hovers in the distance.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Every last one of 'em will try and
pocket you. Keep you off your line.
Slow you down. That's why you gotta
get out early. Pick your own path.
Stick close to your lead-out.
Especially in the half-mile.

The waiter steps up, COUGHS.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

With any luck, the fans up there'll
keep themselves civil. Not that any
of the riders, American, French,
German, or Canadian for that matter
will cut you any slack.

The waiter draws even closer, CLEARS HIS THROAT.

Birdie finally looks up.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

(to the waiter)

Ah. Yes.

Birdie drops his paper, grabs a menu from the table as Major
and Daisy swap a furtive glance.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Three lobster cocktails. The spring
chicken for me. Roast tenderloin
for my friend here. And the salmon
for the young lady. A half bottle
of the St. Julien. Two glasses and
a bottle of milk for that one. As
cold as you can--

WAITER

I'm sorry, sir.

BIRDIE
And an Old Saratoga on the rocks
for yours truly.

The waiter leans down toward Birdie.

WAITER
They can't be here.

Birdie SIGHS theatrically.

WAITER (CONT'D)
Belong in the *colored* car, sir.

BIRDIE
How much longer to the Canadian
border, my friend?

WAITER
Sir, I don't--

BIRDIE
Feel free to delay our order until
we cross. Until then, the Rye on
the rocks if you please.

WAITER
I...uh...

Birdie tosses the menu, lifts his paper again, rolls his
eyes toward Major and Daisy.

BIRDIE
Service these days.

Daisy glares at Birdie. He loudly SNAPS the paper taut.

The waiter finally withdraws. And, as he does, every other
eye in the car slides toward Major and Daisy.

Looks of shock and scorn from every white face.

DAISY
Where's the money, Birdie?

Birdie slowly lowers the paper once again.

BIRDIE
Invested.

MAJOR
Daisy, this isn't...

DAISY
 (still to Birdie)
 And what are you trying to do, get
 us both killed? Lynched? Murdered?

Birdie looks to Major. Major looks away.

MAJOR
 She's right. Change will come.
 Whether Marmon wants it or not. But
we'll be the ones to make it.

Major stands, reaches out to take Daisy's hand.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 Respect ain't worth much if it
 costs you the feeling.

Helpless to argue the point, Birdie just watches them go.

EXT. QUEEN'S PARK TRACK, INFIELD - DAY

Down on the dry grass at the center of a vast oval lined
 with some 18,000 well-dressed CANADIAN FANS, Birdie leads
 Major through a crowd of TRAINERS and COACHES.

SUPER: MONTREAL, CANADA | AUGUST, 1899

Major is dressed in form-fitting wool short pants and the
 same jersey he wore back at The Garden.

MAJOR
 We were fine in the proper Pullman.

BIRDIE
 Please.

Birdie veers toward the track as a cluster of cyclists speed
 by in a flash.

Seven hulking steam-driven motorcycles ROAR past as well,
 each having just dropped their riders.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Don't you ever call that car proper
 again. You belong wherever you want
 to belong. Question that, let these
 bastards beat on you, and, well,
 all that business will only serve
 to get in both our ways. No matter
 what she or Marmon says about it.

From the track behind them: a SHRILL SQUEAL.

Both men turn in time to see one of the massive motorcycles clip the rear wheel of another motorcycle and then SKID downward across the track.

A GASP goes up from the assembled teams as the moto nearly takes out two cyclists and then hurdles end-over-end off the track and into the infield.

Men in wool suits flee in every direction as the motorcycle flips and tumbles, shedding parts.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Goddammit.

The limp body of the moto's leather-clad driver skids across the gravel and grass before crumpling into a twisted heap at the foot of a cluster of hay bales.

Silence washes over the crowd as the spooked cyclists on the track slow to a dead stop.

Major, stunned, looks to the grandstands where we can barely make out Daisy staring. Eyes full of fear.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
That was our lead-out man for the
half miler.

MAJOR
But...

Birdie starts off toward the mangled remains of the upside-down motorcycle as it belches out smoke.

Both wheels spin unevenly. Violently bent out of true.

BIRDIE
C'mon. Time's a wastin'.

EXT. QUEEN'S PARK TRACK, VELODROME - DAY

As MEDICS rush the fallen moto driver away on a white stretcher soaked through with blood, Major stands over the top bar of his bike.

Next to him: seven other riders wait at the start line.

The nearest two, NAT BUTLER (20s) and his brother FRANK BUTLER (20s) size Major up with identical coldness.

BRUMM. BRUMM. BRUMM. BRUMM. SCREECH.

Birdie, still in his suit coat but now wearing glass goggles, pulls up before Major on the battered motorcycle.

BIRDIE
 (loud)
 Now, focus-up.

More motos swerve down from the outside lane and then slow to a stop before each of the other riders.

Pale blue exhaust washes over every cyclist.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Just stick close to the roller.

He points a bare hand down toward the bent roller bar behind the tweaked rear wheel of the motorcycle.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 No matter what happens, don't back off, don't slow down, until I give you the signal to bolt, yeah?

Major nods, grabs his leather-wrapped drop bars, kicks his left foot into a pedal cage, lifts his rear wheel.

Then he remembers. Pulls the coin. Kisses it. Tucks it in.

MAJOR
 You sure the money's fine?

BIRDIE
 Yeah. I think. Now, listen.

Birdie REVS the engine as a PAUNCHY LINE JUDGE (50s) steps up, loads a broad-barreled start gun.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 The only way to show people like that sonofabitch Becker or fucking Marmon is to beat 'em at their own goddamn game, right?

Major nods. Birdie looks ahead, exhales slowly.

LINE JUDGE
 Racers ready?

Head wags all up and down the line.

LINE JUDGE (CONT'D)
 One lap to pace. On your mark. Get set. GO.

Birdie guns the gas, throws the clutch. The moto PEELS out. And Major, head down, eyes ahead, takes off after it.

Only the Butler brothers can match his pace at first.

And, together, all three motos and all three riders speed down the track.

From above and behind them: barely discernible APPLAUSE.

Birdie, his wheels wobbling, looks back.

BIRDIE

That's it. Closer. CLOSER.

Major tucks his elbows in, lowers his head, looks to the bent roller spinning crookedly just inches away from his front wheel.

Birdie accelerates. Major keeps close as his chest rises and falls in time with the pumping of his knees.

As they bend through the first turn, then back out onto the straits, a fourth rider TOM MCCARTHY (20s) rips past the Butler brothers and into second place.

Birdie looks right, locks eyes with McCarthy's lead-out driver, gives his own moto full gas.

For half a second, Major, distracted, falls back, slows outside of Birdie's slipstream.

McCarthy, eyes down, powers past him with his front tire nearly rubbing against the roller at the back of his moto.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Put Becker out of my mind?

The massive crowd washes by in a blinding blur.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Easier said than done.

Birdie SHOUTS from the motorcycle before him:

BIRDIE

GO now! GO!

Birdie swerves right, nearly takes out McCarthy's lead-out man, veers up the steeply sloped final turn as Major, free to fly, crosses the start line in a flash.

Off goes the start gun: BANG!

Every other rider ditches their moto and falls swiftly in behind Major.

There's McCarthy and both Butler brothers - all nearly three lengths behind Major.

No more exhaust. No more ROAR of engines. Just dead silence and the hint of a TICKING stopwatch.

At first, Major's pace seems entirely unbeatable. But then he looks back, sees the pack hot on his heels, seems to momentarily lose his focus. Lose his will.

He shakes his head, bends through the first turn with his legs burning and his mind still stuck on Becker.

On Marmon. On the whole white world arrayed against him.

As Birdie fades into the distance behind the pack with all of the other motorcycles, Major finally shakes it off.

Pedals, pedals, pedals for the line.

One rider after another dashes to find his slipstream, can't keep up. Can't keep pace.

Major senses it. Sees the tape taut up ahead.

Pours every ounce of strength into it. Races. Free.

SNAP.

He breaks the ribbon first.

Thunderous APPLAUSE.

Both McCarthy and Butler finish less than a foot behind him.

He's done it. He's beaten the best of the best at the most dangerous and grueling race on the docket.

Over the CHEERS and WAILING of the crowd:

TRACK ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

*At a time of one minute, two-fifths
of a second, the half-mile World
title goes to... Tom McCarthy!*

Major, still pedaling, looks back, sees an equally surprised McCarthy cranking along just behind him.

TRACK ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

*And, in second place due to a lead-
out violation, the Worcester
Whirlwind, Mister Marshall "Major"
Taylor at an adjusted time of--*

DAISY (PRE-LAP)
It's not damn well worth it!

INT. BICYCLE FACTORY, OFFICE - NIGHT

Major, back after his beating by Becker, sits with his feet in a bucket of ice and a towel wrapped around his neck.

Daisy, paces like a caged panther behind him.

DAISY
You're gonna... You're gonna get
him *killed* out there!

BIRDIE
Fucking Marmon. Paying off the
field to keep us from--

DAISY
I. Don't. CARE!

BIRDIE
The only way is to win at Worlds.
Marmon can't touch us there.

Birdie looks to Major.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
You can do that, right?

Major nods slowly. It takes effort. Hurts.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
He wins the *world* title and that's
our golden ticket to the European--

MAJOR
(hoarse)
Sundays, Birdie. Sundays.

BIRDIE
I know, I know! I'm workin' on it.

Birdie loudly SCREECHES his chair out, stands.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
(to them both)
Paris, London, Berlin, Amsterdam.
Europe loves a novelty, kid. Let's
make 'em choke on it.

Birdie leans in close to Major, puts his hands on his shoulders. Gentle and almost fatherly. Full of love.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
The World only changes when
somebody forces it to.

Major looks to Daisy.

She wavers briefly, agrees with Birdie to her dismay.

MAJOR
(to Daisy)
Riding, racing... This is all I
know, Daisy. All I'm good at.

DAISY
That's the problem! Another hunk of
gold isn't gonna change a thing.

MAJOR
You know I don't ride for that.

BIRDIE
Please, Daisy. Trust us on this.

DAISY
Trust you? You act like you're his
self-appointed white savior. But
you *abandoned* him out there on the
track. To die!

BIRDIE
Listen. Listen. He only turned pro
a year ago. And he's already taken
home *fifteen thousand* Dollars in--

DAISY
This isn't about the money.

Birdie stares at her, momentarily exasperated.

BIRDIE
Well, then...

He turns back around toward his desk, grabs a small silver
canister from it, flips it over in his hand.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
...you could give this a shot.

He tosses the canister toward Major. He catches it deftly.

MAJOR
What is it?

BIRDIE
Insurance.

Silence. Then:

MAJOR (PRE-LAP)
But I don't... understand.

INT. QUEEN'S PARK TRACK, LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Still stung by the galling second-place judgment in the first event of the World Championships, now it's Major who paces inside a claustrophobic locker room.

The cramped space looks more suited to horses than men.

BIRDIE
Maybe it was my fault, kid. Maybe I did lead you for too long. Maybe I did cut off McCarthy's man...

Birdie rips the glass goggles from his neck, tosses them up onto a grimy wooden table.

Daisy stands in the distance with her arms crossed. She wants nothing to do with this any longer.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Mistakes happen. Results matter.

Major finally looks to him, draws a breath to speak.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
If you want out, wanna cut your losses and beg off the mile, fine. We head back home. Try and figure a way back onto the circuit in the States. Find some other way onto the European schedule.

MAJOR
No.

Major slows, looks to Daisy. Her face says it all:

DAISY
THIS is a mistake. All of it. Becker. This. Everything.

MAJOR
I ain't quitting.

DAISY
Marshall, please...

Major turns back toward Birdie.

MAJOR

We came here to *prove* something.
And I don't care if they think you
cut off McCarthy's lead-out. I beat
all those riders. Every single one.
Fair and square.

Daisy steps closer to him, reaches a hand out to spin him
back around toward her.

DAISY

Don't you get it? Don't you see?
The deck is stacked, Major. Stacked
against you and me. Even him.

Major tries to shore up his will, stand firm.

DAISY (CONT'D)

They don't want you to win. They
just want you to prove, once and
for all, that a Black man can't--

BIRDIE

Daisy...

She wheels around to face Birdie.

DAISY

You're just using him like all the
rest. You let him get beaten
senseless by Becker just for the
ink, for the press. The headlines!

BIRDIE

I did no such--

DAISY

For all we know, you fouled his
race today on purpose for the same
damn reason. Blasted bicycle sales!

MAJOR

That's *enough*.

DAISY

(back to Major)

All either of you want is the
goddamn limelight.

Through the door behind her, the track announcer's VOICE:

TRACK ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*And now, ladies and gentlemen, the
 marquee event, the competition
 you've all been waiting for.*

Major's eyes drift from Daisy to Birdie and back again.

TRACK ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*The standing-start one mile World
 Championship race.*

DAISY
 Obadiah 1:3-5.
 (paraphrasing)
*The pride of your heart has
 deceived you. Who'll bring you down
 to the ground?*

She RUSHES toward Major, tries to catch his eye.

DAISY (CONT'D)
 You will, Major. Not the Lord. Not
 me. Not Birdie. Not Marmon. Not
 that bastard Becker. You.

BIRDIE
 Don't listen to her. You take the
 mile, and there's no way Marmon can
 stop us. Ever. You hear me?

Major turns away from them both.

DAISY
 Don't do this, Marshall. Please.

BIRDIE
 Use your rage, kid. Take their
 records. And *smash* 'em.

EXT. QUEEN'S PARK TRACK, VELODROME - DUSK

Back out on the track, now without a motorized lead-out,
 Major balances on his bike with a familiar cluster of riders
 ready to pounce.

To his left and right: both Butler brothers and two more
 rail-thin riders, McLEOD (20s) and D'OUTREION (20s).

Each man's machine is held steady by a YOUNG BOY (teens) in
 a straw hat and a seersucker suit. Each one is white.

The same line judge from earlier lifts his start pistol.

BANG!

Nat Butler is the first off the line. Major and the rest of the bunch nip quickly in behind him.

Elbows fly. Tempers flare. But the pace is glaringly tentative. As if no one wants to jump too early.

And, as the pack enters the first turn, Major lowers his head again, tries to remain as compact as possible, lets his mind begin to drift.

MAJOR (V.O.)
She was right. Every win did just
paint a bigger target on my back.

Distant CHEERING slowly squelches his spoken realization.

Major looks right. Catches a momentary glimpse of none other than Walter Marmon up there in the stands.

Seated two rows ahead of Birdie and Daisy. Of all the luck.

MAJOR (PRE-LAP)
I just... I can't quit.

INT. MODEST HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Major sits at a narrow wooden desk in a pool of lamplight filling a page of ivory paper with ink from a fountain pen.

MAJOR (V.O.)
I don't know who I am anymore, when
I'm not out there.

Atop the page before him the words: **My Dearest Daisy.**

MAJOR (V.O.)
That is, until I see you seeing me
just as I am.

Major pauses, lets the ink dry, folds the sheet of paper, tucks it into his shirt pocket unfinished.

PRE-LAP: A perilous, breathless, collective GASP.

EXT. QUEEN'S PARK TRACK, VELODROME - DUSK

THUD.

A rider's elbow catches Major in the hip, knocks him SKIDDING dramatically off-course.

Major bobbles, still hopelessly nearly two lengths behind Nat Butler, looks down. Stays balanced.

The pace is frantic. Desperately fast.

Wheels touch. Handlebars bang. Flying pedals gash the calves and shins of adjacent riders.

But nobody feels a thing. All that matters is the finish.

From out of nowhere, McCleod kicks hard.

With a massive turn of speed, he passes Butler just as he enters the final bend.

Major looks ahead, sees daylight, leaps from the saddle, gives it all he's got.

EXT. QUEEN'S PARK TRACK, GRANDSTANDS - SAME TIME

Nestled in among the CHEERING throngs, Birdie and Daisy watch with bated breath.

DAISY

My father had every chance.
Squandered each and every one.

Birdie lifts his eyes from the track, looks to her with a dawning realization. *Oh, that's why you fight so hard...*

DAISY (CONT'D)

I just don't want that for him.

Birdie nods slowly. *Okay, I get it. But--*

A CHEER goes up from the crowd. He turns, SHOUTS:

BIRDIE

YES. YES. YES!

Daisy closes her eyes, crosses her arms. Can't look. Won't.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

C'mon! It's ALL yours, kid!!

Two rows ahead of them, Marmon shakes his head in disgust.

MARMON

Now that's just a straight-up waste of chain grease, if you ask me.

BIRDIE

Fuck you *and* your bankroll, Marmon.

EXT. QUEEN'S PARK TRACK, VELODROME - SAME TIME

Buoyed as if he can almost hear Birdie over the ROAR of the crowd, Major stomps on the pedals.

His bike SWINGS side-to-side as he, out of the saddle, sprints like a madman for the line.

McLeod looks briefly back. But it's too late.

Major WHIPS past him, takes the race by a wheel's length.

And this time, instead of "DIXIE", a brass band leaps into a stirring rendition of "THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER" as Major rockets down the empty track all alone.

Sitting up, arms out, tears streaking down his cheeks, Major searches the stands for his coach and the love of his life.

There's Birdie, rushing down to meet him on the track.

And then there's Daisy with her back to us, leaving the grandstands in protest.

BIRDIE (PRE-LAP)

Bullshit.

INT. WINDSOR HOTEL, TEA ROOM - AFTERNOON

Inside a posh salon full of STERN BUSINESSMEN and their OVERDRESSED WIVES, Birdie nurses a cup of coffee amid a mountain of telegrams.

Major sits opposite him looking entirely out of sorts. Not victorious. Not a champion. An outsider still.

Everyone else in the place is white.

BIRDIE

The first Black man named *World* Champion in any sport minus Canadian boxer George Dixon. And what does the press say?

MAJOR

Doesn't matter, Birdie.

BIRDIE

They call you The Black Streak. Dismiss your victory as a fluke. Say McLeod should've won the race outright. Claim you barged him. Locked bars. Fouled his--

Major SLAMS his palm down onto the table, lifts the newspaper, crumples it in his fist.

MAJOR

I thought I'd feel different. That somehow it'd mean more. But it doesn't. I feel just as... angry as I did before.

(beat)

Even now. At the pinnacle.

Birdie drops his telegrams, stares at them.

Major looks away.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Daisy's right. Maybe all we achieve won't ever change the way they see me. The way they remember me.

BIRDIE

Remember you? You're the World *goddamn* Champion. And they won't even let you race Nationals.

Major inhales slowly. Knows what has to happen. And why.

MAJOR

Fine, I'll do it.

Birdie looks up, confused.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

If it'll get me in. If they'll let me ride, fine.

Birdie just stares.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

The lotion. The bleach. I'll do it.

Birdie lays his hand down on top of the papers before him.

BIRDIE

Are you--

MAJOR

The boy whose parents paid mine to play with him, to ride with him, Dan Southard, my best friend...

(deep breath)

...there was a gym in our town. A YMCA gym. That's where I first met that old monster prejudice.

Birdie narrows his eyes.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
All I could do was watch him and
his pals through the windows. Made
my heart ache like...

Major locks Birdie in his gaze.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
I don't ever wanna feel that again.

BIRDIE
If we do this...

MAJOR
...I ride Nationals. And work my
way to Jacquelin. The end.

He looks away, perhaps sensing this is a mistake.

INT. WINDSOR HOTEL, ROOM - EVENING

As the sun sets through the thick glass windows behind him,
Major sits on a wicker cane chair with his shirt off and his
hands on his lap.

BIRDIE
When's she back?

MAJOR
I dunno.

BIRDIE
Don't you think--

MAJOR
Just get on with it, Birdie.

Birdie approaches with the same tin of bleaching cream. He's
got a thick black rubber glove on one hand.

BIRDIE
It may hurt. Says it'll burn.

Major closes his eyes, grips his thighs.

MAJOR
Do it before I change my mind. Or
Daisy changes it for me.

Birdie, having second thoughts himself, uncaps the tin as
Major says a silent prayer.

BIRDIE

Say the word and we'll stop.

He sets the lid down on a nearby dresser, dips two gloved fingers into the thick white cream, draws out a heaping dollop, hesitates momentarily.

MAJOR

Goodness, it smells like...

Birdie paints a broad swath across Major's forehead.

A breathless second passes.

A door opens behind Birdie. Daisy steps in, horrified.

DAISY

(toward them both)

What have you DONE?!

Major's eyes BOLT open.

And he represses a blood-curling scream.

EXT. KING'S COUNTY TRACK - DAY

In airless silence, Major, his face blistered and his hair burnt a surreal orange, stands over his machine amid murderers row of the sport's preeminent star riders.

SUPER: MANHATTAN BEACH, LONG ISLAND | TWO MONTHS LATER

Everyone's there: MICHAELS, COOPER, EATON, SIMMS, FREEMAN.

Each are in peak fitness and ready to take any other man down, Major especially.

Up in the bleachers, Birdie and Daisy stand shoulder-to-shoulder. He seems hopeful. She seems angry. Repulsed.

Major closes his eyes, crosses himself with one hand.

But then he reaches back, pads his pocket, finds it empty. No Silver Dollar. No good luck charm.

Still burnt, still likely hearing himself scream out in agony, Major just looks blankly down at his front wheel.

The START MAN raises his pistol, fires: BANG.

Shoulders THUD. Knees SMASH. Men SHOUT as each rider barrels off the line and down the track.

Off his mark and instantly at the back of the pack, Major, for the first time, looks beyond his depth.

A man with zero hope of beating the field.

But, instead of giving in, instead of giving up, he turns within. Buries himself deep.

MAJOR (V.O.)

I believed at the time that there were no mental, physical, or moral attainments that were too lofty, too unattainable, for a Black man to accomplish...

Hips down. A light, quick motion of the ankles. Maximum efficiency. Minimal drag. A graceful celerity of movement.

MAJOR (V.O.)

...if granted a fair and equal opportunity. Marmon be damned.

And all we hear is his CLANGOROUS HEARTBEAT as he strains to see a clear path through the pack.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Naive? Maybe. Impractical? Sure. But sometimes...

Then, out ahead beyond the finish line: WHOOSH!

A massive wooden cross at the center of the empty track BURSTS INTO FLAMES.

It must be a good sixty feet tall. The light is ghastly.

Apocalyptic.

And it blots out everyone else ahead of him. Each A-list rider pedaling in time fades to a ghostly silhouette.

Vaporous. Ephemeral. Intangible.

Beatable.

MAJOR (V.O.)

...you gotta fight fire with fire.

Major kicks his cadence up, slips in between Gardiner and Freeman, then Eaton and Simms.

Each ghoulish phantom WAFTS past him like a misty morning brume buffeted by a heavy gale.

Then, there he is. Little JIMMY MICHAELS (20s) headed toward the finish tape.

Ahead and above him, the burning cross rages.

Major PLOWS headlong past Michaels, BARRELS beyond the foot of the burning cross, SNAPS the tape first.

And, just like that, the cross vanishes.

Extinguished as if solely by the force of his slipstream.

And, instead of applause --

PRE-LAP: "THE WEDDING MARCH" on pipe organ.

PREACHER (PRE-LAP)

I now pronounce you man and wife.

ENT. BAPTIST CHURCH, STEPS - DAY

Kitted out in their wedding day finest, Daisy and Major burst through the doors to their home church and tumble down the stairs together amid a hail of rice and well-wishes.

At the foot of the stairs, the only white man present, Birdie watches with an almost fatherly pride.

As his protégé and his occasional sparring partner step into a regal horse-drawn carriage, Birdie reaches into his jacket, pulls out a hankie, dabs at his eyes.

Where real tears gather.

BIRDIE

(to himself)

Now, *that's* what I'm talking--

PRE-LAP: HOOOOOONNNNNKKKK!

The sound of a luxury ocean liner's steam engine.

MAJOR (PRE-LAP)

Told you I had it in me.

EXT. LIDO DECK - NIGHT

Wrapped in heavy wool blankets, Birdie and Major sit alone on wooden deck chairs under a jet black sky dotted with stars as the moonlit sea rushes swiftly by.

Gold light glints from the band around Major's ring finger.

BIRDIE

If I recall correctly, I asked you
if you had it in you.

Major's face has healed slightly. But his hair still bears
the scars of Birdie's ill-fated attempt at masking his true
identity. His essence.

His blackness.

Birdie lifts a smoldering cigar, takes a slow pull. The
orange glow paints his face warmly.

He offers Major the cigar. Major declines.

MAJOR

When do we race Jacquelin?

BIRDIE

Soon enough. Soon enough.

A languid moment of silence passes between them.

MAJOR

I wanna take him on *my* terms.

Birdie takes another draw, exhales slowly.

BIRDIE

Well then do.

Major shoots him a slow sidelong glance.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Don't ride for him though.

(beat)

Ride for you.

Major draws a breath to speak.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

And congrats, by the way.

Birdie points to the gold band glinting in the moonlight.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

Daisy's a good woman. And strong.

Birdie doffs ash from his cigar.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

I got a hunch you two might not
need me clinging to your coattails
much longer, all things considered.

MAJOR
Listen, I've been meaning to--

BIRDIE
Sure, you might be on the edge of becoming the brightest star in the biggest sport on the entire planet.
(deep inhale)
But don't do what I did.

Major cocks his head, gazes at him quizzically.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Gotta have a *plan* for your next act. A fall-back. Something to lean on when your spark sputters. You know what I mean?
(beat)
Daisy's right. And she deserves more. Better. For the long haul.

He stabs his cigar out in a nearby ashtray.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Go in with me on the wheels. For automobiles. They're a sure--

MAJOR
You kidding me? What do I know about rubber? Patents?
(beat)
Manufacturing?

BIRDIE
Just give it a think.

Birdie pushes himself to his feet, sheds his blanket.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Fact is, Marmon and his combustion engine grease monkeys just might have their eyes on bigger prizes than us, that's all.

Birdie reaches into his jacket pocket, pulls out something small and silver, flicks it toward Major.

The missing Silver Dollar.

Major catches it, turns it over in his hand.

Oh, there you are...

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Luck ain't all that. But still...

As Birdie shuffles away into the night, Major stares at the coin in his hand, parsing.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Get some sleep. And remember, we
 gotta stop by the American Express
 to wire back your winnings.

He opens a steel door, steps inside, pauses.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry, Major.

Major looks up.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 The bleach. Worst mistake of my
 life. And I've made plenty.

Birdie swings the door closed behind himself.

DAISY (PRE-LAP)
 What do you mean, gone?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

An elegant but cramped hotel suite.

SUPER: PARIS, FRANCE | TWO YEARS LATER

Major, utterly drained, collapses into an overstuffed chair as Daisy stands clutching a sheaf of papers in one hand.

He looks older, ragged. Gaunt.

Spent from years battling the greatest champions of the European sport across the entire continent.

MAJOR
 Not gone, invested.

DAISY
 In what? Where?

MAJOR
 In the market. The stock market.
 And a side venture. To make wheels.
 For automobiles.

DAISY
 If this is Birdie's idea, I swear
 I'll have his head.

Major slowly removes the stiff white collar of his dress shirt, tosses it to the dresser beside him.

MAJOR
 Just, for once, trust me on this.

DAISY
 Trust you? From what I can see,
 you're getting beaten more than
 you're winning. And what you're
 winning, prize-wise...

She shakes the papers at him.

DAISY (CONT'D)
 ...well it just ain't here!

MAJOR
 They're friends of Birdie's. It's
 safe. The money's safe. We're safe.

DAISY
 It's time, Major. Time to cut him--

MAJOR
 Please, I need to think. Rest.

DAISY
 What you need to do is to get a
 hold on your affairs.

MAJOR
 Woman, don't tell me my business.

A moment of stunned silence from Daisy.

DAISY
 Woman?! Wife!

Major stands, hobbles toward her.

MAJOR
 I can do this. I can mop the track
 with Jacquelin. I swear. I don't
 care how much it costs, how much I
 lose physically or financially. I
 will do this, baby. For us.

He tries to wrap his arms around her. She resists at first.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 Everything's gonna be fine. I'll
 find the feeling again. Get my head
 right. You gotta *believe* in me.

She finally drops the papers, leans into him.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 (unsure)
 I can do this. I will beat
 Jacquelin.

BIRDIE (PRE-LAP)
 See! Did I not tell you?

INT. RITZ PARIS, TEA ROOM - DAY

Birdie sits opposite Major and Daisy at a resplendent table
 inside the elegant Salon Proust.

He loudly SNAPS a broadsheet open, folds it, READS aloud:

BIRDIE
*The half-mile, the three-quarter
 mile, the two-mile, and his one-
 mile world record of one minute,
 forty one seconds could very well
 stand for decades! All that's left
 is Jacquelin and the quarter-mile.*

Daisy takes a sip of her tea as Birdie lowers the paper.
 Won't make eye-contact with him.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Monsieur Black Cyclone.

He reaches a hand out, taps a French sports magazine sitting
 on the table amid a stack of other periodicals with Major
 featured prominently on their covers.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Monsieur Ebony Flyer.
 (beat)
 They love you over here because
 you're not theirs.

Daisy lets her eyes drift to the same cover of "La Vie Au
 Grand Air", SKIMS the photo credit:

DAISY
Surnomme Le 'Prodige Noir'?

She sets her teacup down.

DAISY (CONT'D)
So much for colorblind.

Birdie folds the paper closed again, tosses it onto the heaping stack.

BIRDIE
Well, Worcester Whirlwind did have
a nice ring to it.

Saying nothing, Major lifts a hefty glass of milk, downs it.
His mind, like Daisy's, is elsewhere.

MAJOR
My color is my fortune.
(beat)
If I'd been born white, I might not
have amounted to a row of shucks in
this entire endeavor.

Both Birdie and Daisy stare at him blankly.

DAISY
What *on Earth* could you possibly
mean by that?

MAJOR
I wouldn't be the rider I am if I
hadn't had to battle their lot.
Coach or no coach.
(beat)
It's time, Birdie.

Birdie looks stung. And and a little confused.

Major, though, seems only barely convinced that what he just said is actually true.

Instead, the memory of being a perennial outsider, a full-stop soloist in all things, clouds his countenance.

Erodes his confidence.

DAISY
Know what your problem is?

MAJOR
I imagine so, yes.

Birdie lifts a napkin to his lips, dabs at them.

Doesn't like where this is headed.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

When I'm out there on the track,
out there racing, sometimes I see
the most devilish things. Terrible
things.

Daisy reaches for her teacup again, lifts it to her lips,
blows steam as if to dispel the thought.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Things I can't explain. Can't stop
seeing. Can't blot out.

Major pushes himself back from the table.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

(off her look)

But go on. Enlighten us.

Daisy locks him in her steely gaze.

DAISY

You're too enamored of their
plaudits and praise. Their little
fool's gold trinkets blind you to
the fact that they'll kick you to
the dirt the instant you stop
minting 'em money.

Major stares at her, wounded.

BIRDIE

They?

DAISY

Pass you over at the drop of a hat
for next year's crop of doe-eyed
thoroughbreds eager to please.
Leave you scrounging. Trying to
find out where they buried your
damn bankroll.

Birdie draws a breath to argue, backs down.

DAISY (CONT'D)

No amount of easygoing grace or aw
shucks piety will keep you in easy-
breezy comfort forever in this
white man's world.

(eyes on Birdie)

The minute you flag, this one'll
drop you just like *all* the rest.

Major looks away, feels alien again inside this sumptuous parlor full of pale Europeans.

MAJOR

Nobody drops me. Well, almost.

DAISY

You're running yourself to death. When all you need is family, not fame. Plus, where is all the money going, Marshall? Where?! Because--

Major lifts a hand from the table, cuts her off.

MAJOR

My race. My fate.

He loudly SCREECHES his chair out, stands.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Jacquelin, Birdie. Now.

He turns to walk away. But, instead of his footsteps across the parquet, all we hear is --

PRE-LAP: Heated SHOUTING IN FRENCH.

EXT. PARC DES PRINCES - DAY

Inside a fogbound velodrome packed with some thirty thousand FRENCH FANS, Major glides up to the start line wearing three heavy wool jerseys.

SUPER: **PARIS, FRANCE | MAY, 1901**

Three riders away, there he is. At last.

French Champion EDMOND JACQUELIN (20s).

Narrow eyes, jet black hair, aquiline nose. The greatest French sprinter of the 20th century.

And he knows it. All too well.

Both men size each other up through the freezing mist.

JACQUELIN

(heavy French accent)

Finally we meet.

MAJOR

Yep.

JACQUELIN
Disappointing.

MAJOR
Oh, yeah? How so?

JACQUELIN
You need so badly to win.
(wicked grin)
Whereas I only want to.

This time: no coin kiss. No wishful thinking. No luck.

JACQUELIN (CONT'D)
C'est la différence.

BRACE MEN race up behind them, prop each man as the CROWD falls eerily silent.

No band. No cheering. Just breathless anticipation before:

BANG!

The start gun fires and Jacquelin beats Major at his own game, takes an instant, wide lead.

MAJOR
Son of a--

Shivering again and blanketed in bone-chilling dew, Major bares down, gives it all he's got.

But it's not enough. He's not catching his rival.

With the gap between them widening and widening (even though Major himself has left the rest of the pack far behind) both men speed through the final turn at a breakneck pace.

SNAP.

Up goes the ribbon.

THWAP.

Through it rides Jacquelin.

A TRIUMPHANT CHEER from the barely visible thousands gathered to see their man best all comers.

PRE-LAP: The BRASSY PEAL of church bells.

EXT. FRENCH VILLAGE - DAY

Daisy and Major walk together down a cobblestone street lined with wheat-pasted French race posters emblazoned with his heroic visage.

SUPER: ROUEN, FRANCE | TWO WEEKS EARLIER

A smarmy RACE PROMOTER (40s) leads them down the street toward an ancient stone church.

RACE PROMOTER
(heavy French accent)
No one will know. This is the way
it must be. On the Continent.

Major looks to Daisy.

DAISY
(quiet)
Maybe he's right? Maybe it *is* for
the better. I mean, for now?

PRE-LAP: The DEAFENING APPLAUSE of rabid French fans.

EXT. PARC DES PRINCES - DAY

Major looks rocked to his core as Jacquelin, the rival he's lived to beat, circles the track ahead of him.

Victorious.

Every shred of Major's meticulously assembled and fought for confidence instantly erodes.

Collapses.

Jacquelin looks back, thumbs his nose at him.

A wave of ADORING FRENCH FANS surge out onto the track and toward the infield. And Jacquelin continues silently mocking Major. Taunting him ruthlessly.

Daring him to need it even more.

BIRDIE (PRE-LAP)
Wait. What?

EXT. PARC DES PRINCES, DRESSING ROOM - DAY

As Major wrings the moisture out of his outer jersey, Birdie stares at him, mouth agape.

BIRDIE

You're firing me?! Cutting me loose
just like... that?

The same smarmy race promoter from before stands in the far corner of the room with his arms crossed.

His tightly cropped hair glistens, as does his well-tended, wide mustache.

COQUELLE

(heavy French accent)

One champion. One manager. *Fini*.

Meet: ROBERT COQUELLE (40s) Major's new European Manager.

COQUELLE (CONT'D)

And I can guarantee the change.
From Saturdays to Sundays. Next
season. No man of God should have
to race on the Sabbath, *oui*?

Birdie looks to Major. Major looks sheepishly away.

COQUELLE (CONT'D)

(to Birdie)

You are welcome to stay for the
remainder of the season. And, of
course, maintain your role in the
States if you prefer. But here, if
he wants to win, he needs to work
with me exclusively, yes?

BIRDIE

(toward Major)

And you're okay with this?

MAJOR

Racing's my business. Business is
yours. Both of you. However you
work it out's fine with me.

Major pulls off his second jersey. It's soaked too.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

I just need to find my way back to
the feeling. I don't care about the
money. Never have, you know that.
But if I don't beat that arrogant
snake, there won't be ANY winnings
for any of us to split up whichever
way you both...

Major turns, finally looks to Birdie.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 ...and I prefer both, believe me.

BIRDIE
 Major. This isn't the way.

MAJOR
 I'm loosing, Birdie. He beat me
 right off the damn blocks. I'll be
 a laughing stock. A flash in the
 pan. Proof.
 (bitterly)
 To Marmon.

Major looks away again, full of self-doubt.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
 I gotta take back the reins. Get my
 affairs in order.

BIRDIE
 Your affairs?

No answer from Major as he wrings his jersey like a wet rag.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Marshall, I *made* you.

MAJOR
 (forcefully)
 I made me.

BIRDIE
 I *believed* in you. Got you here.
 Lifted you up when no one else--

MAJOR
 You bleached my skin. Burnt my
 hair. Tried to turn me white.

BIRDIE
 You told me--

MAJOR
 Stole my money out from under me.
 Sent it GOD knows where!

Still in the corner, Coquelle TUT-TUTS dismissively.

BIRDIE
 I was trying to *protect* you.

MAJOR

Well, that's my job now. And
Coquelle's. At least while we're
here. Back home--

Birdie, decimated, thunders across the room, throws the door
open loudly, wheels back around.

BIRDIE

Well, cock-elle. Your mama sure did
name you just perfectly.

BANG.

He slams the door. Disappears.

MAJOR

(feigning stoicism)
Alright. What's next?

Coquelle finally uncrosses his arms, snaps to attention.

COQUELLE

Two man sprint. Your final chance.

EXT. PARC DES PRINCES - DAY

Back out on the oval again, the mist is gone and the sky is
clear. And it's no longer frigid.

Major, in his trademark white jersey with a dark black band
across the chest, hovers over the bars.

A YOUNG MAN in a white suit braces him as, next to him,
Jacquelin bends to tighten the straps of his cages.

Another SQUALL OF APPLAUSE rains down from the packed
grandstands. This is the main event.

As his spotter strains to keep his bike steady, Jacquelin
reaches across himself, toward Major.

JACQUELIN

May the best man win.

Haughty, arrogant, cock-sure smile.

Major, undaunted, grabs his hand, shakes it firmly.

MAJOR

That's the general idea, yeah.

Both men re-grip their bars. Both spotters lean back.

BANG!

And off they roll.

This time though, no instant blast of speed off the blocks from Jacquelin.

Instead, both men enter the first turn at an exceedingly (almost shockingly) gentle pace.

JACQUELIN
You don't belong here.

Major, only inches to Jacquelin's right, exhales slowly.

MAJOR
You got that right. I don't belong
anywhere, apparently.

HUSHED MUTTERING is all we hear as they pedal past the teeming grandstands side-by-side.

EXT. PARC DES PRINCES, GRANDSTANDS - SAME TIME

Standing together in the crowd, Birdie and Daisy watch in anxious silence.

BIRDIE
This sure as hell better not have
been your doing.

DAISY
It's only while we're over here.
When he's back to racing in--

BIRDIE
(down toward Major)
C'mon now, dammit. Jump him!

DAISY
When we get back home, he'll get
back to his old self. Everything
will settle back down to normal.

Birdie reluctantly tears his eyes from the track.

BIRDIE
If you hadn't noticed, we left
normal behind a *long* time ago.

DAISY
I need to know where the money is.
Who's handling it? Where's it
invested? And how?

Birdie looks back to the track, to his protégé. His friend who just unexpectedly fired him.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 (bitterly)
 A very long time ago indeed.

EXT. PARC DES PRINCES - SAME TIME

Back down on the track, Jacquelin flinches, feigns making a break for it.

Major, unfazed, barely reacts.

JACQUELIN
 You'll never be the best if you
 can't even keep up with my shadow.

Major doesn't dignify this with a response.

Instead, he lowers his gaze, lets his eyes fall to Jacquelin's pumping pedals, does his best to match his cadence exactly.

MAJOR
 We'll see about that.

As their tires SQUEAK across the track, another sound slowly begins to creep in --

PRE-LAP: ACCORDION and FOOTSTEPS over cobblestones.

MAJOR (PRE-LAP)
 When no one's watching, I think I
 sort of... disappear.

EXT. CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES - NIGHT

No cheers. No crowds. No Jacquelin. No track.

Just Daisy and Major strolling arm-in-arm down the cobbles together in the moonlight.

Horse-drawn buggies speed along the grand boulevard.

DAISY
 You made the right decision. You
 don't need anyone but you. And me.
 (faint grin)
 Mostly me.

Major nods his head slowly, tightens his grip on her.

MAJOR
How do you do that?

DAISY
Do what?

Major smiles, doesn't have to say it. Instead, he lifts her hand to his lips, kisses it gently.

JACQUELIN (PRE-LAP)
(subtitled French)
Come on, you bastard!

EXT. PARC DES PRINCES - DAY

Back out in the brilliant sunshine of the most famous velodrome in the world, Jacquelin is still egging Major on.

Still taunting him, trying trick him into bolting.

But Major still won't take the bait.

Instead, the pace is stalling.

Slowing. Slowing. Slowing.

Entering the flats, still elbow-to-elbow, both riders eventually come to a full stop.

The crowd goes berserk. HOOTING. HOLLERING. WHISTLING.

Stone-still, Jacquelin balances with his front wheel turned slightly toward Major's bike.

Major does the same.

Jacquelin stares at him. Major smiles.

And then he slowly cranks a half revolution backward, eases his bike directly behind Jacquelin's.

The grandstands are in a frenzy.

Major looks up, sees Birdie there in the crowd as always.

Birdie, still stung but ever Major's not-so-minor defender, just nods. *That's right, nice and easy...*

Perhaps sensing he's being mocked, Jacquelin LAUGHS out loud as he shimmies his machine back-and-forth to stay upright.

And then he finally bolts.

But Major, barely bothered, starts right off after him.

Finally at a decent pace again (but not full-on sprinting), they RIP down the track.

Jacquelin bobs and weaves, trying to lure Major to make a break for it.

But, instead, Major stays in his slipstream. Precisely where he wants to be.

Jacquelin looks to the stands, then back to Major. And then, at precisely the same spot where he previously took off for the resounding win, he kicks again.

But this time, Major's ready.

And he's up on Jacquelin in half a heartbeat.

Going all-out, their machines swaying violently with every heavy pedal stroke, it looks as though we're in for a tie.

That is, until Major again digs deeper.

More than doubling Jacquelin's cadence, he hits the flats in the blink of an eye.

And takes the race by at least four lengths.

Victory hits Major like a slap in the face. Like he can't quite process it. Can't quite believe it.

EXT. PARC DES PRINCES, GRANDSTANDS - SAME TIME

Overcome with emotion, Birdie looks to Daisy, wipes a tear from his eye, turns to go.

BIRDIE
He'll regret this.

Daisy, unexpectedly full of doubt, simply nods as Birdie descends through the dumbstruck crowd.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
You both will.

EXT. PARC DES PRINCES - SAME TIME

Amid a still stunned silence, Major pedals through the straightaway with Jacquelin right behind him, slamming his fists against his own handlebars.

Instead of savoring his triumphal win, Major seems, like Daisy, suddenly full of doubt.

Crestfallen. Disheartened. Alarmingly empty.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 I'd beaten the fastest man alive.
 But I was still just a ghost.

He looks up to the silent stands, closes his eyes, searches his soul for a different outcome.

MAJOR (V.O.)
 And now, without the one man who
 got me here... The man who made it
 all real. Well, I just--

PRE-LAP: Adoring APPLAUSE and the SCREECHING of sea birds.

EXT. SYDNEY HARBOR - DAY

A weary and ragged Major stands on the deck of another luxury liner waving half-hardheartedly to a large crowd of AUSSIE FANS gathered along a concrete promenade.

SUPER: **SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA | THREE YEARS LATER**

Daisy stands next to him, also waving.

As she waves, we notice: she's very pregnant.

EXT. HARBOR STEPS - DAY

Standing at the edge of a bunting-lined stage, Sydney Lord Mayor ALDERMAN HUGHES (40s) addresses the crowd:

HUGHES
 It is my *highest* honor to welcome
 to Australia the man who, as the
 Champion Cyclist of the World, has
 met and defeated the foremost men
 in Europe *and* America.

Behind him, Daisy smiles to the dotting throngs.

HUGHES (CONT'D)
 And who now comes to our fine
 country to gain, if possible, some
 fresh victories.

Another CHEER goes up.

But, rather than looking like the confident conquering hero, Major seems spent. Drained. Exhausted.

HUGHES (CONT'D)

And while I wish Major Taylor every success, we sincerely hope that the Australians would hold their own against him.

More APPLAUSE. A strained grin from Major.

HUGHES (CONT'D)

Although I realize that they have a very difficult task before them.

This time, Birdie is nowhere in sight.

EXT. DOWNTOWN SYDNEY - NIGHT

Dressed to the nines and showing, Daisy walks down a bustling sidewalk with her arm woven around Major's as electric light fills the air with promise.

Passing STRANGERS tip their caps, make way, smile admiringly. They're not fans. Just good people.

The air is warm. And the sky above is a blue/black velvet.

DAISY

Sydney.

MAJOR

Mm-hmm.

DAISY

No, I mean...

She lifts her free hand to her bulging belly.

Major nods. She smiles.

MAJOR

Oh, I like it.

DAISY

Rita Sydney Taylor.

She seems 100% at ease for the first time in a very long time. He still seems on-edge. Off kilter. Not himself.

After a second of silence:

MAJOR

How it is again that a family of two...

DAISY

Of three.

MAJOR

...can't seem to manage on thirty-five thousand Dollars a year?

DAISY

Ask Birdie's so-called ace down on Wall Street. Won't so much as dignify my requests with a reply.

MAJOR

Heck, President Roosevelt barely makes more than that, I think.

DAISY

I need you to get things straight, Major. Now more than ever.

Major nods slowly, looks away.

MAJOR

I'm trying, Daisy. Lord knows I am. I just don't know if I have it in me anymore. Racing...

That's not what she wanted to hear. At all. For a change.

EXT. MOORE PARK VELODROME, CONCOURSE - NIGHT

Still not having shaken his ill temper, Major walks his machine out onto the flats of a massive, strangely shaped track in the dead of night.

The stands are packed with fanatical AUSSIE ENTHUSIASTS. But we can only hear them. We can't see them.

Only the track is lit from above by electric light. And, unlike your average track, it's fully circular.

The steep, banking concrete turns are pitched at more than twenty-five degrees. And they somehow seem more perilous, more foreboding than any we've seen so far.

In the infield: a full cricket pitch packed with COACHES, TRAINING STAFF, and COMPETITORS warming down.

A fast-moving pack of WHITE RIDERS blasts loudly by:

WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH.

Major slows, squints.

From out of the darkness behind him steps a tall man in a tan suit and a wide-brimmed felt Stetson.

This is his new trainer, SID MELVILLE (30s).

SID
Night races. Give me the willies.

He places a hand on Major's shoulder, squeezes.

SID (CONT'D)
Birdie too. Listen...

Sid leans in close to Major's ear.

SID (CONT'D)
There's a rumor going around
MacFarland's aiming to throw you.

Major doesn't react to this in the slightest.

SID (CONT'D)
Told Lawson he knows he can't beat
you. And he's already got money
down on himself, damn fool. Paid
for by you know who.
(beat)
Fuckin' Marmon.

MAJOR
(quoting)
*Dishonest wealth shall dwindle. But
what's earned through honest--*

SID
Uh-huh.

Sid turns to go.

SID (CONT'D)
Just watch out out there, huh?

Major nods, reaches back for the coin, hesitates, decides against it. And then pedals out onto the track.

EXT. MOORE PARK VELODROME - MOMENTS LATER

As Major slowly builds up a head of steam, a lanky American rider comes quickly into view.

This is said FLOYD MACFARLAND (20s). Long legs, skinny torso, and manicured mustache. A much less elegant rider.

Major eases up next to him, looks him up and down.

MAJOR

Tell me again why Marmon paid you
and Lawson to follow me down here?

MacFarland speeds up, doesn't even bother responding.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

I mean, if I wanted to beat you at
home, I woulda done it by now I
imagine. But you know...
(forced smile)
...busy schedule.

MACFARLAND

Do you mind?

MAJOR

What?

MACFARLAND

Not runnin' your mouth.

MAJOR

Least I know where to put my money.

MACFARLAND

That so?

Major seems to be struggling slightly just to keep pace.

MACFARLAND (CONT'D)

I hear you're losing it hand-over-
fist. What the hell do you know
about Vulcanized rubber anyway?

MAJOR

I know it tends to speed me to
victory, Lord willing.

And, with that, he promptly leaves his rival in the lurch.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

(over his shoulder)
Love of money is the root of all--

Over unseen loudspeakers: an ANNOUNCER'S BOOMING VOICE:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

*Riders to the start. Riders to the
start of the final heat of The
Sydney Thousand.*

PRE-LAP: CHOP. CHOP. CHOP.

The sound of a steel butcher's knife slicing carrots.

INT. SMALL KITCHEN - NIGHT [FLASHBACK]

Simple. Quiet. Alive.

Daisy and Major stand back-to-back in a modest but well-appointed kitchen cooking together.

He's by the sink, the one slicing carrots. She's by the stove, kneading dough in a silver bowl.

They're both wearing matching frilly aprons.

DAISY

What happens when you stop racing?

Major slides the carrots from the butcher block to a colander in the basin, grins.

MAJOR

Then I'll finally be home.

Daisy's fingers slow. She turns.

DAISY

Whenever you're here, I'm home.

Major nods to himself, grabs another carrot from the bunch.

MAJOR

Although, I think maybe I'll have Birdie's boys at the factory whip me up a better apron.

(broad smile)

Someday.

PRE-LAP: The heavy ROAR of a completely invisible crowd.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. MOORE PARK VELODROME - NIGHT

Poised now for a standing start, a handful of riders including Major and MacFarland hunch over their machines.

Two riders up from MacFarland is another (Swedish) American rider named IVER LAWSON (20s).

His bars dip low like Major's. And his hair is thick with pomade and parted in a strange zigzag.

He and MacFarland swap a furtive glance.

Major clocks it, looks dead ahead down the eerily illuminated track as clouds of cicadas flutter and flash around each and every lamp.

Their airborne VIBRATIONS sound like a chorus of a thousand distant rattlesnakes.

The CHURNING DIN only serves to amplify the oddity and eerie otherness of the place.

An OFFICIAL lifts his pistol.

OFFICIAL
(Australian accent)
Racers ready?

Long line of nods.

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
Set.

Everyone grips their bars.

BANG!

Major, aiming for safety, is the first off the blocks and into the lead.

MacFarland and Lawson struggle briefly to keep up. But then, with Lawson pacing, they're just a couple lengths back as Major speeds into the first steeply-pitched turn.

Instead of taking the low line, Major swings wide, lets Lawson and MacFarland close the gap and pass him.

To nothing but the GRINDING cicadas and the over-loud sound of Major's metronome-like breathing, the three men steadily build a bigger and bigger lead.

Through one corner then the other, they jockey for position with Major doing his best to keep clear and not get boxed.

DING! DING! DING!

The final lap commences.

Major darts ahead. MacFarland struggles to catch him. Lawson holds the inside line, nudges past Major.

Thinking fast, Major swings further right, to the center of the track to give Lawson a wide berth.

Everything slows down. Even the WAIL of the cicadas.

Major looks to the darkened stands, thinks he sees Birdie's ghostly silhouette here, there, and everywhere.

But each translucent iteration, each seeming spirt, turns away. Vanishes as if exorcized by the SOUND.

Amid the terrifying TORRENT OF DISTORTION, Lawson looks back to MacFarland, knows it's time, swerves directly into Major.

Major tries to react. But it's too late.

Everything speeds back up.

Major's wheels slip out from under him with the impact.

And he falls to the concrete with heavy THUD.

His bike goes flying. His limbs twist and bend as his body tumbles end-over-end directly into MacFarland's line.

MacFarland tries to hop him. But he's not strong enough.

His front wheel hits Major in the face.

Blood and teeth go flying as Major SKIDS across the deck, shredding his togs down to his bare, bloody skin.

EXT. MOORE PARK VELODROME, GRANDSTANDS - SAME TIME

Daisy, frantic, tumbles down the darkened grandstand stairs, fights her way through the crowd to save him.

DAISY
Marshall!! NO!!

The rest of the pack bobs and weaves around Major's body.

PRE-LAP: A grizzly, distorted HUMAN WAIL.

The gut-wrenching SCREAM of a man in paroxysms of pain.

INT. WINDSOR HOTEL, BATHROOM - NIGHT [FLASHBACK]

A younger Major stands before a crazed, gilt-edged Victorian mirror with his face blanketed in thickly applied layers of the gelatinous bleaching cream.

HOWLING inconsolably.

The skin of his forehead, cheeks, chin, nose, and neck have already begun to blister. And the roots of his hair have burnt to a surreal, vibrant orange.

But nobody comes. He's entirely alone now. Forsaken.

Staring at his ghoulish reflection in the mirror, slathered with heavily corrosive whitening lotion, he just SCREAMS and SCREAMS and SCREAMS.

It's the sound of centuries of mutilation and oppression.

SMASH!

In a violent spasm, Major SHATTERS the mirror with two open palms. Glass goes flying.

And, with it, shards of his own tortured reflection.

PRE-LAP: The loud, rhythmic BUZZ OF CICADAS once again.

And Daisy's FRANTIC FOOTFALL over concrete back in Sydney.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. MOORE PARK VELODROME - NIGHT

Pregnant and desperate, Daisy struggles to pull a dazed and bleeding Major up from the tarmac.

But he can't even see her. Won't even acknowledge her.

It's as if he's just gone. Consumed by the pain.

Overwhelmed by failure.

As she drags him across the track, we can barely make out the tiny glints of light from a silver coin still spinning, spinning, spinning on the track.

The Silver Dollar. The Comet. Abandoned.

Left behind.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER: FOUR YEARS LATER

Over black, the CHIRPING CICADAS gives way to the sound of a young girl HUMMING "RING AROUND THE ROSIE".

INT. TAYLOR RESIDENCE, BEDROOM - DAY

The young girl, RITA SYDNEY TAYLOR (4) rides a tiny three-wheeled bicycle around a modest but lovingly decorated bedroom inside Major's stately home.

A weakened and heavier Major lies in a tangle of sheets surrounded by heaping piles of his race clippings.

News from a different era. Another decade. Another life.

From off, a FAMILIAR VOICE:

BIRDIE (O.S.)
A book? About your exploits? Worst
idea I've ever heard.

Birdie, now graying slightly at the temples, steps past
young Sydney, smiles broadly.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Got a title?

Major looks up, COUGHS faintly.

MAJOR
(weakly)
"The Fastest... Bicycle Rider...
in the World."

BIRDIE
Fastest *bedridden* bicycle rider.
How far you got?

Major tries to sit up, grabs a sheet of paper, flips it
around toward Birdie, clearly in pain.

On the blank sheet there's a single hand-written word:

FORWARD

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Well, guess that *does* pretty much
sum up your entire career.

Major lowers the sheet, looking defeated.

MAJOR
I thought it'd *mean* something.

BIRDIE
Meaning's what you make it.

MAJOR
Birdie, I never should've fired
you. Never should've--

Birdie cuts him off with a hand to his thigh. Gently.

BIRDIE
Nope. None of that.
(beat)
How you holdin' up?

MAJOR
How's it look?

BIRDIE
Sorry about what happened down--

MAJOR
It was my fault. Australia.

BIRDIE
Dirty play, if you ask me. Worst
way to go out.

MAJOR
Is there a good way?

Birdie nods as Sydney still circles, still HUMMING.

BIRDIE
You know there is.

MAJOR
No, Birdie. I'm done. Finished.

BIRDIE
So, that's how your book ends? With
a whimper, not a bang?

Major's face shifts. Angry and crushed. Lost.

MAJOR
(through tears)
I was wrong about *everything*.
Competing. The feeling. Every damn
bit of it was vanity. A waste of my
time, my life! Trying to prove to
anyone that I was anybody's--

BIRDIE
Far as I'm concerned not even
Jacquelin was your equal.

Major stifles another cough, wipes away tears.

MAJOR
My pride deceived me, Birdie. And
the Lord, he took me down.

BIRDIE
Nonsense. Marmon took you down.
Turned races into assassination
attempts, one after the other.

MAJOR

I wanted to be the fastest rider
that ever lived. Not just the
fastest Black rider.

BIRDIE

I know.

MAJOR

Wanted to win so badly.

BIRDIE

Well, only one way to be the
official fastest...

MAJOR

No, you don't understand.

Birdie looks back to the open doorway to see Daisy silently
watching on.

BIRDIE

Listen to me now. This isn't about
you winning. Never has been. It's
about us winning. All of us.

Birdie and Daisy lock eyes.

A silent detente passes between them.

Birdie looks back to Major there on the bed.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

How much you weighin' now?

Major does an exhausted slow double-take, realizes what both
Birdie and Daisy might have in mind. Another tear falls.

MAJOR

No, Birdie. I can't--

BIRDIE

You can and you know it. Wanna
crack the quarter mile? You're
gonna have to drop *all* that weight.
Get back to true form.

(beat)

Save the damn book 'til you have a
proper walk-off, yeah?

Major looks to the sea of clippings, his research, gathered
all across the bed. Some now spattered with tears.

DAISY
 (to Major, gently)
 I can work at it. While you're
 gone. Sydney too.

Major's face softens, his watery eyes brighten.

DAISY (CONT'D)
 Build up our legacy, together.

Major bites his quivering lip, looks back to Birdie.

MAJOR
 Tell me this isn't just some damn
 ploy to sell more bicycles.

BIRDIE
 Bah. Two wheels are pretty much
 done for, my friend. It's four plus
 combustion that's gonna rule the
 day. If Marmon has his way.

Birdie taps the bed, turns to go.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Don't let me down, Major.

From beneath his palm emerges a matching 1890 Morgan Silver
 Dollar. Same markings. Same comet.

Hopefully the same talisman of good luck.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
 Tickets are on the dining room
 table. I'll meet you over there.
 Get you back before the little one
 even notices you're gone.

PRE-LAP: HEAVY BREATHING and BIRDSONG.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Major, sweating profusely and uncharacteristically winded,
 grinds his way up a steep, narrow, mountain road.

The grade is precipitous but the air is crisp and clean.

Birds crisscross the blue sky as Major wills his haggard,
 out-of-shape body further and further uphill.

MAJOR
 (straining)
 C'mon now. C'MON!

Picking up speed, he rounds a hairpin turn, emerges from the trees to face an epically grand vista.

Verdant foliage and rolling hills as far as the eye can see.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
That's right. That's...

Major kicks his right foot free, glides to a stop at the end of the road. The end of the line.

Spent, he bends forward with his head to his top bar.

WHEEZING.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
...it.

The feeling he's lived for. The one he thought he'd lost.

Not performance. Not perfection. Transcendence.

Even amidst the pain.

INSERT MONTAGE:

Still to the tune of his AGONIZED GASPING, we watch weeks and months of training grind quickly by:

-- Major, looking at the verge of collapse, wills his bloated body back up the George Street Hill --

-- Major, sweating profusely, jumps rope in a pool of light inside the eerily empty Worchester YMCA --

-- Major, pushing himself to his limit, takes a high corner all alone inside the Shrewsbury Street Velodrome --

-- Major, having shed weight but still desperate for air, summits the same mountain once again --

Unlike last time, the trees now are leafy and green as he dismounts and bends at the waist, sucking down air.

END MONTAGE.

PRE-LAP: A gale of SHORTWAVE STATIC.

Then FAINT APPLAUSE echoing over the airwaves.

EXT. VÉLODROME BUFFALO TRACK - DUSK

Under the riveted steel roof over the stands of this now familiar velodrome, thousands of FRENCH SPECTATORS eagerly await Major's return to the sport.

SUPER: VÉLODROME BUFFALO, FRANCE | AUGUST, 1908

Amid the ELECTRIC ROAR of the eager crowd, Birdie stands over Major's front wheel, steadying him.

BIRDIE

These are the moments where
history's made, my friend.

Behind Birdie, a massive, newer motorcycle with a strange, bullet-shaped tank belches out smoke.

Major reaches behind himself, pulls the Silver Dollar Birdie brought him from his jersey pocket, lifts it, kisses it.

Looks, for a moment, deeply out of his element.

MAJOR

History's just another lap they'll
probably make me ride twice.

Another rider with jet black hair, arched eyebrows and an almost impossibly chiseled physique rolls up next to Major.

This is reigning World Champion VICTOR DUPRÉ (20s). Calm, cocksure, profoundly aware of his innate abilities.

And wearing the Champion's striped jersey to match.

DUPRÉ

Bonjour.

A young BRACE BOY (teens) rushes up behind Dupré, keeps him steady as Major reaches out to shake his hand.

DUPRÉ (CONT'D)

(accented English)

Are you certain this is for you?

Major slips the Silver Dollar back into his pocket, takes Dupré's hand, holds it firm.

MAJOR

Nope. But he is.

Major looks back to Birdie, lets go of Dupré's hand.

Birdie ignores Dupré entirely.

BIRDIE

What do you want, kid?

Major locks eyes with him, remembers.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

What would you sacrifice everything
just to get a grip on?

Silence from Major. He knows he doesn't have to answer.
Birdie already knows, will always know.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

(hushed)

Just stay close to the rollers.
Ignore him and everything else.
When it's time to jump, jump.

MAJOR

Uh-huh. And watch out for horses.

Birdie rolls his eyes, lets go, steps back.

BIRDIE

Remember why you started all this
in the first place. Riding. Not for
all this. Not for them. For you.
For the purest of pleasures.

(beat)

Freedom.

Major looks down, inhales slowly.

Next to him, Dupré does the same. Ready to pounce.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)

And it backed into me.

MAJOR

Sorry. Watch out for horses'
assess. Got it.

To Major's left, a PORTLY RACE OFFICIAL (60s) raises the
start gun, grips the trigger.

PRE-LAP: VROOM! VROOM! VROOM!

EXT. INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY - DAY [FLASH FORWARD]

A white silk flag whips back and forth across the frame to
reveal the grandstands of the old Capitol City Velodrome.

SUPER: INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA | THREE YEARS LATER

The whole place, the site of Major's first victory, has been razed and replaced by much more massive structure.

And every seat is full, cheek-to-jowl.

The raceway has tripled in width and is packed with dirt. The turns still arc gracefully. But are more gradual.

More forgiving.

On the track, a loose bunch of primitive race cars - basically pill-shaped open-top single person buggies with steel wheels and Vulcanized tires - speed by.

They're moving fast, at straightaway speeds approaching seventy-five miles per hour.

But, from our vantage point, it's nowhere near as viscerally, wildfire fast as a tight bunch of cyclists pressing their luck for the tape.

A HEFTY REFEREE (50s) in a light blue suit, leans out of an elevated, track-side cage, lifts a checkered flag.

And, from the bunch, a single canary yellow car, number 32, takes the lead, streaks dead-out for the finish.

As it crosses the blurred white chalk line in a cloud of dirt and exhaust, the referee waves the flag.

And the crowd goes berserk as a TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE bellows from speakers slung from the roof of the stands:

TRACK ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*And there you have it folks! Ray
 Harroun takes the Marmon Wasp,
 number thirty-two, to the finish of
 the inaugural Indianapolis 500!*

A blistering blend of CHEERING and APPLAUSE.

EXT. INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY, GRANDSTANDS - SAME TIME

Seated in the grandstands, an even thicker, older looking Major turns toward a fully gray-haired but still pretty spry Birdie in an elegant pinstriped suit.

He's sporting the same pair of binoculars he wore when he first spotted Major way back at the beginning of it all.

MAJOR
Marmon Wasp?

Birdie lowers the binoculars, looks to Major, SIGHS.

Much as he was back when Birdie found him, Major seems bedraggled. His suit is wrinkled and worn, fraying in spots. Well-used and poorly tended.

BIRDIE
More like Flightless Dung Beetle.

Birdie thrusts the binoculars toward Major.
He doesn't want them.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
We were just too early. Invest a little differently. Hold on a little longer--

MAJOR
How much is gone?

BIRDIE
All of it.

Birdie stands, struggles to shore himself up under the weight of his shame.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
Turns out the future costs a lot more than we could've imagined.

Major looks around, a man far outside his element.

MAJOR
I thought you said--

BIRDIE
I was wrong. Thought I was building something bigger than us both. In the end, I couldn't even protect what you already had.

Major finally pushes himself to his feet. It takes effort.

EXT. INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY, INFIELD - LATER

As Birdie and Major walk through the grassy infield dotted with automobiles, VARIOUS BUSINESS TYPES greet Birdie with handshakes and back slaps.

And they eye Major blankly. His global fame, such as it was, has faded fast. Been erased.

Replaced by new men, new machines.

MAJOR

Guess no man can outrun the world.

Major reaches inside his jacket, pulls a silver tin of tiny white pills, shakes a couple into his mouth, swallows them.

BIRDIE

Sure did make 'em chase you,
though. Didn't we?

MAJOR

Yeah. I did. And for what?

Off in the distance, we finally spy Major's very first race rival: Walter Marmon again holding court next to his driver, RAY HARROUN (early 30s).

Dashing and dark, Harroun's face is covered in dirt and flecks of rubber. His glass goggles hang around his neck.

The rakish star of the hour. And, of course, white.

BIRDIE

(still to Major)

Listen, easy now...

Major ignores this, makes a beeline for Marmon.

Marmon turns, sees Major approaching, politely excuses himself from a pair of WASP-Y TYCOON TYPES.

MARMON

Well, I'll be goddamned.

Major slows, stiffens. Forms fists.

MAJOR

That sounds about right.

To Major's shock, Marmon thrusts a hand out toward him.

MARMON

Told ya I'd have ya beat one day.

Major hesitates, relaxes a fist, grabs Marmon by the hand.

MAJOR

You did your best.

A wicked smile washes across Marmon's prematurely lined face. He leans even closer.

MARMON (CONT'D)

By hook or by crook on two wheels.

He looks Major deep in the eyes.

MARMON (CONT'D)
Seems all I needed was four.

Marmon drops his hand, turns to go.

MARMON (CONT'D)
Good luck, Major.
(beat)
You're gonna need it.

And, with that, Marmon victoriously threads his way back toward the man of the hour. His car driver, Harroun.

Major just watches him go.

PRE-LAP: ROOOOAAAAARRRRRR!

END FLASH FORWARD.

EXT. VÉLODROME BUFFALO - DUSK

Back down on the track outside Paris, the evaluation lap of the motor-paced mile velo sprint is well underway.

Riders jockey for position, try to force each other to take the lead as the belt-driven motorcycle with the long, sleek tank RIPS down the slanted wooden track.

Major, already GULPING down air, struggles to keep Dupré in his sights. Can barely keep up, keep clear.

Dupré on the other hand, seems entirely at ease. Sensing that his elder Black rival is far from a match.

All around them, the crowd sails by in silent anticipation.

This is Major's last chance, and he's losing it. Fast.

DUPRÉ
(to Major)
Attention, grand-père.

Major tries to block him out. Fails. Already in pain.

DUPRÉ (CONT'D)
Don't let the pace break your heart
before the bell.

Up ahead, the MOTO DRIVER (20s) looks back.

Dupré nods. The driver veers wide. The pace EXPLODES.

And Major, digging as deep as he possibly can, is dropped instantly. Left in the lurch. Left behind.

The assembled crowd LEAPS to their feet, ROAR deafeningly for their World Champion.

But, over it all, we hear a YOUNG MAN'S VOICE:

MAJOR (PRE-LAP)
Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to
invite you, young and old, to
experience the freedom...

EXT. CYCLE SHOP - DAY [FLASHBACK]

Back out on the street in front of Hay's cycle shop, a much younger Major weaves through PASSING PEDESTRIANS with a surgical precision as he SHOUTS like a carnival barker:

MAJOR
...the thrill, the unparalleled
pleasure of *peregrination*...

This time, his eyes are open. And he pedals backward with his hands behind his back.

SUPER: INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA | SEVENTEEN YEARS EARLIER

YOUNG MAJOR
...under your own power...

Major glides through the crowd, comes to a full stop, grabs the bars, spins his front wheel.

YOUNG MAJOR (CONT'D)
...on the all-new Hay and Willits'
Outing Bicycle.

Lifting one leg over the handlebars, then the other, he pedals like a ship's figurehead.

Some passersby gawk in awe. Others rush by entirely unaware.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
Light, strong, and *exquisitely*
finished...

He's wearing the same woolen Confederate officer's coat, open at the chest.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
...with a special regard for the
features which even the most
discerning of riders...

Behind him, Hay steps out, reaches to flip the door sign.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
...particularly prefer.

Major whips his right leg back over the bars, leans all his weight onto his left pedal, presses the bike back and forth with one hand palming the front tire.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
As Susan B. Anthony once said,
*"bicycles have done more to
emancipate people than anything
else in this fine old world."*

Hay pauses, sizes Major up with a newly-kindled curiosity.

HAY
Fine, kid. You can have the job.
But I keep the jacket, yeah?

PRE-LAP: DING. DING.

EXT. VÉLODROME BUFFALO - DUSK

The bell lap commences.

And Major, far behind the pack, finally snaps to attention.

Tapping his signature violent ramp-up in cadence, Major jumps. Strains to rekindle his inner champion.

Picks up one rider, then another. Passes them by.

The crowd GASPS. Falls silent again.

And on Major thunders, sweat pouring down his face, until Dupré is finally there, alone, in his sights.

Instead of falling in behind him, Major swerves to the outside of the track, travels high through the curve.

Dupré looks over both shoulders, can't find him.

Until, at the end of the steep arc, Major yanks his bars left, descends in a blur toward Dupré.

Falls in right behind him. Right in his slipstream.

MAJOR (V.O.)
I guess, in end, it wasn't really
about the finish. It was about
whether I could keep riding.
(MORE)

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Even when there wasn't really
anything left to prove to anyone
but me.

No more striving. No more desperate maneuvering though
vicious competitors. No more greed.

Just a confident, steady ease from Major as he pulls side-
by-side with Dupré, looks over.

Flashes him a sweat-soaked, gap-toothed smile.

Dupré, stunned witless, tries to respond. Tries to keep up.
But to no avail. Major's kick is too strong.

Sunset paints the track a warm amber, as Major continues
down the straightaway at breathtaking speed.

Airborne. Soaring. Effortlessly free.

WHOOSH.

Major SURGES across the finish line more than four lengths
ahead of his nearest rival, the World Champion.

The hometown favorite.

And, as he does, in slithers a heavy wave of RADIO STATIC.

RADIO COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

(English accent)

He's done it, ladies and gentlemen!

He's actually done it!

But none of that matters now. Not to Major.

Instead, he BLASTS right past us and disappears into the
distance. No celebration. No victory. No elation.

Just the pure satisfaction of flying. And of ending it all
entirely on his own terms. His own way.

RADIO COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

*Major Taylor, in his last attempt,
has smashed both the track record
and the world record, absolutely
destroying the motor-paced mile in
just one minute, thirty-three, and
two fifths of a second!*

PRE-LAP: CRUNCH. CRUNCH. CRUNCH.

The sound of leather-soled shoes over gravel.

EXT. JARDIN DU LUXEMBOURG - EVENING

As the sun sets, Major and Daisy amble over crushed limestone dotted with pink Acacia blossoms.

Entirely unrecognized by the crowd of well-dressed PARISIANS out for their evening stroll.

DAISY
Feels nice, doesn't it?

Major nods slowly. Blossoms swirl at his feet.

DAISY (CONT'D)
Belonging.

MAJOR
Together.

He leans to kiss her, just like he wished he'd done way back in the gazebo in Worcester. Back home, years ago.

She pauses, kisses him back. Tenderly.

DAISY
You sure about this? Retiring.

MAJOR
Only been *more* sure once before.

He lifts a hand to her face, caresses it gently.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
About you.

PRE-LAP: Ecstatic CHEERING echoing off riveted steel.

EXT. VÉLODROME BUFFALO, INFIELD - DUSK

Back down in the infield, Birdie stands with his arms crossed and tears streaming down his face as Major continues along the track like nothing in the world could stop him.

BIRDIE
(through tears)
I'm so... Sorry I--

But he can't continue. Can't find the words as his chest is overcome by body-rocking sobs.

Tears of joy. Tears of sorrow. Tears of bitter remorse.

Birdie turns away from the track, hides his face from Major as he rips by one last time.

BIRDIE (CONT'D)
You didn't... You didn't need my
help. I... I needed yours.

Birdie sinks to the grassy pitch. Victorious but alone.

PRE-LAP: CLACK. CLACK. CLACK. DING.

The sound of typewriter keys pounding white paper.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A much older, balding Major sits alone at a long oak dining table lit by the glow of a brass chandelier.

On the table before him: a battered Royal typewriter and a massive, tidy stack of pages covered in black ink.

MAJOR (V.O.)
Turns out, they did finally see me
after all.

ZIP. ZIP. ZIP.

He quickly wheels out the last page from the rubber platen, lifts it to the light.

At the bottom of the page full of rapidly recalled exploits, a single typewritten word in all caps:

FINIS.

MAJOR (V.O.)
Shame they blinked.

SMASH TO BLACK.

ROLL END CREDITS --

To "A CHANGE IS GONNA COME" by Sam Cooke.

THE END