

Abstract

Atlantic City

by Jason Frazier

April, 2010

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Atlantic City is a screenplay inspired in part by events that took place in Catskill, NY in the early 1980's. The story follows Leon, a young fighter modeled after a teenage Mike Tyson, who is plucked from a juvenile prison and trained to be a champion boxer. However, despite Leon's considerable talent, he also has a dark side, which creates friction between his two trainers, Teddy and Gus.

One of the primary themes of this story is integrity, which is a virtue espoused by both Teddy and Gus. However, this principal is challenged by Leon whose potential offers redemption, particularly for Gus, and a second chance at the glory that was taken away from him in the opening scene. As Gus becomes seduced by Leon's talent, he ignores the growing signs of trouble, and his relationship with Teddy begins to deteriorate. Teddy is well aware of the path Leon is heading down and knows that without discipline, he will become a danger to himself and others. He is also concerned with Gus' willingness to sell out his own ideals due to the prospect of fame. Ultimately this conflict escalates to a level which threatens to alter the lives of all three men.

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Atlantic City

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By

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April, 2010

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FADE IN

EXT. AERIAL SHOT OF ATLANTIC CITY - DUSK

The camera moves in from over the water and down the boardwalk.

TEDDY, an Italian heavyweight journeyman in his late twenties, leans against the rail and stares out over the empty beach, watching the seagulls hover over the late afternoon waves. Though his brow is peppered with scar tissue, Teddy is handsome in a salt of the earth sort of way; his weathered mug hints at humble, working class origins.

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Inside the casino, life is bustling: old ladies in pink jump suits vigorously work the slots; high rollers test their luck at the craps tables; attractive young singles take down shooters at the bar.

INT. BOXING ARENA

A thick hue of smoke hangs over the crowd as it cheers the two fighters trading shots in the center of the ring.

Sitting ringside is SOL, a chubby, late middle aged promoter, head of wild, gravity defying silver curls that contrast his meticulously bronzed skin. Sol exudes an air of iniquity as he chews on a fat, unlit cigar and converses with the man sitting next to him—a WALL STREET type with a thick, awkward helmet of blond hair. Each man has a disinterested, waif-thin MODEL sitting on his periphery.

SOL

It's all taken care of. You can take the money to the bank. God I love this country.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Backstage, GUS, a squat, gruff trainer watches as an ASSISTANT tapes Teddy's wrists. Gus has the appearance of a longshoreman: broad shoulders, hard, wrinkled skin, and a heavily furrowed brow that perfectly complements his perpetually sour mug.

Teddy warms up, punching into the air as Gus calls out numbers.

GUS

Gimme four!

Teddy responds with a three punch combination.

GUS

Gimme two!

Teddy throws a different combination.

There is a knock on the door and Gus goes outside.

INT. HALLWAY

In the hallway, Sol is waiting. Next to him stands a no-neck bodyguard wearing a three-quarter-length leather jacket with a large bulge under one side.

SOL

How is that fine Italian boy of ours looking, Gus?

GUS

Strong.

SOL

That's good. Strong is good. But not too strong, right?

GUS

Not too strong.

SOL

See, that's why I love this guy. All business all the time. I'm glad you finally decided to play ball. You're going to be real glad you did.

GUS

We'll see.

SOL

You know as well as I do that boy you got in there at his best is second rate. He gushes blood like a stuck pig every time he gets tagged. He's got no future. But you're with me now, Gusy, so your future is roses. Ya know what I mean?

GUS

I know what you mean.

SOL

You don't now, but you will. I'm going to set you up with a real prospect--someone you can finish your career with. You can get out of the clubs. Stop trolling the projects for hitters fresh out of Riker's.

(Continued)

I got a black kid in my stable from Trinidad, took home bronze at the games last summer in the light heavies. Kid's going to be a monster. He's yours once we get this over with. Three years with you, and he's fighting for a title.

Gus turns to leave, but Sol grabs his arm.

SOL

This P.R. I got is a cash cow. A Puerto Rican heavyweight in New York, you understand. People can't get enough of him. Now are you sure you and your boy are on board?

GUS

Like I told you, it's all taken care of.

SOL

Good. Now listen, Fernandez has got a little habit, so tell your boy to go easy on his body. And don't take him too deep.

GUS

Not too deep.

Gus walks back into the dressing room. Sol turns to his bodyguard.

SOL

I don't buy it. Tell them to go to ahead with the gloves.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Gus leans against the door while Teddy and the assistant trainers look at him.

GUS

He's on the hook.

TEDDY

Okay.

GUS

We're going to have to knock him out. Go after the kidneys.

CU The camera stares deep into Teddy's eyes, showing his determination.

INT. RING

Deep into the fight, both fighters are battered and bloodied. Teddy lunges into his opponent's kidney. MANNY FERNANDEZ, a Puerto Rican southpaw, plants a steady stream of right jabs into Teddy's eye, which looks rough.

Sitting ringside, the ANNOUNCERS catch everyone up on the action.

ANNOUNCER #1

No one would have expected journeyman Teddy Gallo to make this fight so competitive. Six rounds in and it's anyone's fight. At stake is a shot at the World Heavyweight Championship. I'll tell you one thing, Gallo has demonstrated tremendous heart. He is clearly out matched by the athletic Fernandez, but by his sheer will, he has managed to remain competitive.

ANNOUNCER 2

No question about it, Dick. Teddy Gallo has fought the fight of his life. However, he has taken a ton of abuse from his Puerto Rican opponent, and that eye is looking none too good. You have to wonder how much longer he can fight at this level.

CUT TO:

Black Screen

ANNOUNCER 1 (V.O.)

What in the world? I don't believe it.

ANNOUNCER 2

Dick, I don't know what to make of this turn of events. Referee Yuri Papadacos has just eliminated Teddy Gallo due to a cut with just 30 seconds remaining and Gallo on the verge of knockout victory. I have never seen anything like this.

ANNOUNCER 1

Wait a minute, what's this? Teddy Gallo's trainer, Gus Moreno has entered the ring with an object.

ANNOUNCER 2

Dick, he's carrying the stool and heading straight for Papadacos. This is utter pandemonium!

INT. RING

The action explodes as Gus swings a stool wildly at the referee.

A number of SECURITY OFFICIALS swarm into the ring and attempt to restrain Gus, but he is having none of it and begins to fight everything within reach. A crowd of JOURNALISTS and FANS descend upon the ring and chaos ensues.

Meanwhile, Fernandez stumbles back to his corner and falls. He is caught by his trainer.

Amid the chaos, Teddy stands in the corner, watching Gus shove the security guards. He turns to an assistant trainer who checks his eye.

TEDDY

I can't see.

Teddy looks ringside at Sol who is laughing at Teddy while holding a hand over his left eye.

INT. TEDDY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

SUPER "10 years later"

An alarm clock goes off and Teddy rolls out of bed. Now in his late 30's, his hair is peppered with bits of grey, and his face shows lines of age. However, Teddy has kept himself lean and in shape.

He walks into the bathroom and brushes his teeth.

He looks at himself up close in the mirror. There is a large scar over his left eye. Teddy rubs TIGER BALM on it and blinks a few times.

INT. KITCHEN

A half empty liquor bottle sits on the counter next to a full glass of whiskey. Teddy stands over it.

Sitting on the couch is BRUISER, a plump, precocious looking dog. A BOXER. He watches Teddy intently, and Teddy stares back.

Teddy pours the glass down the sink, puts the bottle away, and spreads his hands defensively.

TEDDY

Relax, I was just testing my mettle.

Bruiser swats his paw at Teddy, and then rolls onto his back.

Teddy takes a box of Cheerios from on top of the refrigerator and pours two large bowls. He puts one on the floor, and Bruiser jumps off the couch and attacks it. Cereal flies wildly from his large, flapping jowls.

Later, Teddy sits at the nook, drinking coffee and reading the Wall Street Journal. Bruiser sits at his feet next to the empty bowl.

Teddy's apartment is small, but neat. A second hand couch sits in the living room, facing a modest, unplugged television.

Two large bookcases frame the room. They are full of erudite authors: Plato, Voltaire, Paine, Shakespeare, Hemingway.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF APARTMENT - DAY

Teddy walks outside and makes his way down the stairway to the ground floor where he opens a large sliding door.

INT. GYM

Teddy walks inside and turns on the lights.

The GYM is a large rectangular room filled with numerous heavy bags, speed bags and other boxing equipment. The walls are lined with black and white posters advertising fights from years past. A large canvas ring dominates the center of the room. In the far corner, a series of mats are spread in front of several pieces of weight-lifting equipment.

Teddy walks into the adjoining office and checks the answering machine. No messages.

He walks back into the main room, turns on a stereo and begins his workout.

Teddy runs on a treadmill, sweating profusely.

He powers through a set of pushups.

Then, bicep curls.

Next, Teddy wraps his hands and begins to work on a heavy bag. He throws a series of combinations, each one faster than the last. He still looks sharp.

Later in the day, he is at his desk in the office, doing paperwork. He checks his watch, and then leaves.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Teddy gets into an old, beat up van and drives off. We see that the town is small with lots of mom and pop stores.

The van parks in front of a middle school.

Teddy checks his watch.

Insert: watch reads 3:00

A bell rings and kids begin to exit the building. A group of rowdy boys makes its way to the van. The kids include: KENNY, 15, DANNY, 14, JOE, 13 and BILLY, 12. They all get in. Kenny sits up front.

TEDDY

What do you say, fellas?

DANNY

School sucks.

JOE

A fat one.

TEDDY

Watch it, smart ass. School's important.

JOE

Oh yeah, why?

TEDDY

So you don't get stuck driving around a bunch of bums like you for a living.

INT. GYM

They get back to the gym and everybody rushes into the dressing room.

Later, the kids are all in gear and working on the bags. Teddy stands near Kenny, directing him as he practices combinations.

TEDDY

Let me see the double jab.

Kenny does.

TEDDY

All right, now slip in, slip out.

Kenny pivots to his left, smoothly slides inside and let's go with a couple of body punches.

TEDDY

Good, that's it. Smooth as silk.

Kenny repeats the move.

TEDDY

Everything works off the jab. Just make sure you keep your head down. You try a move like that with your chin out somebody will disconnect your head from your neck.

Kenny laughs.

TEDDY

You think it's funny now; you won't be laughing when you need your girlfriend to chew your food for you!

Several feet away from Kenny and Teddy, Danny is getting beaten mercilessly by TERRI, a tall, lanky girl of about 14.

Teddy and Kenny stop to watch. Danny struggles to defend as Terri unloads on him, letting out angry grunts with each punch.

TEDDY

Come on, Danny, you're getting embarrassed.
Move!

Danny pivots to his side; however, he leaves his chin exposed and is caught with a left hook that sends him to the floor.

Danny lies there for a moment dazed, but not really hurt. His head gear has been knocked around to the side of his head, so he can't see.

Terri stands over him, nearly stepping on him. She spits her mouth piece out and taunts him.

TERRI

What's the matter, tough guy?

TEDDY

Whoa, whoa. What's with the hostility?

Teddy drags Terry into his office.

INT. OFFICE

TERRI

He thinks girls can't box.

Teddy looks at Danny, still sitting on the floor, and then back at Terri, suspiciously.

TEDDY

He said that?

TERRI

Not exactly.

TEDDY

What are you really mad at?

TERRI

Why are you men so stupid?

TEDDY

You mean all of us? How much time you got?

TERRI

You know, Mom's been dating a new guy.

TEDDY

Oh, yeah. Who?

Teddy fidgets and reaches into a mini fridge. He hands Terri a Gatorade.

TERRI

Mr. Pettigrew.

TEDDY

Pettigrew? Sounds like a douche bag. What is he, a math teacher?

TERRI

He's the vice principal. And he is a douche bag.

TEDDY

Watch it.

TERRI

You said it!

TEDDY

Nobody expects me to show any class.

TERRI

You sell yourself short.

TEDDY

I don't know about that.

TERRI

Look, I don't need my mother dating some vice principal with a bad hair piece and coffee breath. I'll never hear the end of it. I can get rid of this guy, but if you don't make a move soon, some other dickhead is going to snatch her up.

TEDDY

I'll keep that in mind. Now what's the deal with you and Danny? You really let him have it.

TERRI

He's a weasel. And that's nothing compared to what I'm going to do when I get back out there.

TEDDY

All right, you're done.

TERRI

But!

TEDDY

I don't want to hear it. You're in the cooler for the rest of the day. If you can't control your anger, you're not sparing. Watch some TV.

Teddy turns on the television. OPRAH is on, talking with DR. PHIL about how men never know how to communicate with women.

Terri sits down, transfixed.

TEDDY

Oh, for Christ's sake.

He leaves the office.

INT. GYM

Teddy walks back over to Danny.

TEDDY

You okay?

DANNY

Yeah.

TEDDY

Wanna tell me what that was about?

DANNY

She's into me.

Teddy bursts out laughing. He looks at Terri, sitting in the office. She is staring at Teddy and Danny, scowling.

TEDDY

You think so?

DANNY

She asked me to this dance at school, and I said I'd think about it.

TEDDY

So what's there to think about?

DANNY

I was just trying to play it cool, you know, keep her on the hook. And she sort of scares me.

From the office, they see that she is still steaming.

TEDDY

I wouldn't keep her waiting much longer.

Danny shrugs.

TEDDY

You did the right thing, though.

DANNY

What do you mean?

TEDDY

You didn't lose your temper. You didn't hit back. That's important. You can learn a lot about a man from how he handles himself under pressure. And remember; only a punk hits a woman, even if she's asking for it.

DANNY

I guess I'll learn how to duck.

Teddy helps him up.

TEDDY

You're a good kid. Just don't leave her on the hook much longer.

Later in the evening, everyone is leaving. PARENTS are picking up their kids.

EMMA, a pretty brunette in her mid 30's, enters. Looking flustered, she walks over to Terri, and they prepare to leave.

TEDDY

Look at this, if it isn't Mother Teresa herself.

EMMA

It's always the Madonna or the whore with you catholic boys. That's why you're always disappointed. There's nothing in between.

TEDDY

Bad day?

Emma shrugs.

EMMA

New case today. This boy whose mother woke him up with a pot of scalding water.

TEDDY

Jesus Christ.

Emma shakes her head and lights a cigarette.

EMMA

Nowhere to be found. In fact, his mother was some kind of religious fanatic. Apparently he didn't say his prayer before dinner. She told the police she was preparing him for the fires of hell, or some such nonsense. Eight years old.

TEDDY

I'm sorry.

EMMA

You're sorry, I'm sorry. Everybody's sorry. That's all anybody can think to say.

TEDDY

What else is there?

EMMA

Nothing. The kid's got third degree burns on his face. His mother's in psychiatric isolation. And he thinks it's because God hates him. There's nothing anyone can say.

TEDDY

I don't know how you come back from that.

EMMA

Most don't. Not when it's the family that initiates the abuse. That destroys any semblance of trust or security they might have developed. Once you lose that, you don't get it back. Most kids either lash out or go numb. I'm sure you guys see enough of that.

Teddy nods.

EMMA

Where's the old man, anyway?

TEDDY

He's not here. He hasn't been coming around much lately.

EMMA

Good. I don't have the patience to deal with that cantankerous bastard or his old world chauvinism.

Teddy laughs.

TEDDY

Well then I'm glad he's not here.

EMMA

I can barely stand the sight of him on good days. How the hell does that wife of his put up with him?

Teddy snickers.

TEDDY

They've got a system. It's complicated... In an old world kind of way.

EMMA

That's because in his world, the suffrage movement never happened. In fact, I bet a lot of things never happened.

TEDDY

You have no idea. I don't know; he's got some rough edges but also good points. He's as loyal as anyone you'll ever meet. He stuck by me when not a lot of other people did. It's easier for men, though. To him, women are a nuisance. Like I said, it's complicated.

EMMA

Sometimes I wonder why I let Terri come here. But then you're here.

TEDDY

Yeah, well compared to Terri, most of the boys here are sissies. That's some slugger you've got there.

EMMA

She likes boys now. I don't know what I'm going to do.

They watch Terri. She eyes Danny while he walks past her.

TEDDY

You'll be fine. Besides, you know she can take care of herself.

EMMA

She's been like that since her father left. Boxing seems like a good outlet for her. I feel like I could use it sometimes.

TEDDY

I teach a kickboxing class on Thursdays for adults. You should come by and work out some aggression.

Emma shrugs.

EMMA

Maybe I will.

She starts to go.

Teddy looks across the room at Terri who gives him a look.

TEDDY

Hang on a second. Have dinner with me.

EMMA

Excuse me?

TEDDY

You heard me. Have dinner with me. We can discuss politics.

EMMA

Politics?

TEDDY

You'll love it, I'm very...

EMMA

Catholic?

TEDDY

Liberal.

EMMA

What's your stance on a woman's choice?

TEDDY

I'm all for it. I think women should choose whatever they want.

Emma looks at Teddy skeptically.

EMMA

You support abortion?

TEDDY

Well I can't see myself ever getting one, but it certainly isn't a decision the state should make for anyone.

EMMA

Really?

TEDDY

And don't get me started on the constitutional issues.

EMMA

I wish more catholic men were as progressive as you.

TEDDY

The Vatican has always been antiquated with its policies on birth control. Among other things.

EMMA

I'm impressed; you're so up to date. Especially considering, well...

TEDDY

I'm a fighter?

EMMA

I didn't mean--

TEDDY

It's okay. It's been like 10 years since I've been hit in the head with any sort of regularity, so I'm feeling pretty sharp these days.

Emma laughs.

TEDDY

So have dinner with me.

EMMA

I don't know how Terri will--

TEDDY

Bring Terri. I'll bring her friend over there. We'll double date. Okay?

EMMA

Okay.

TEDDY

It's a date?

EMMA

It's a date. I have to go now. Bye.

Emma leaves with Terri. Terri smiles at Teddy and mouths the words "I told you so."

Teddy looks over at Kenny, who was watching the conversation.

KENNY

Abortion?

TEDDY

It worked, didn't it?

INT. GUS' BASEMENT - NIGHT

Gus sits on a tattered old couch in a dimly lit, shabby basement. He is watching an old black and white film reel. On the screen is footage of a boxing ring riot: Gus sees himself throwing security guards to the ground.

Gus turns the projector off and sits still for a moment. He is noticeably older. His face is wrinkled, hair thinned and white, and twenty pounds heavier.

He gets up slowly and with a slight stoop walks over to the staircase, passing a wall of pictures--framed photos of him standing with Teddy and other young fighters along with headlines cut from newspapers and boxing magazines.

INSERT HEADLINE: “MANAGER TAKES ON NJ ATHLETIC
COMMISSION. CLAIMS MAFIA CORRUPTION.”

INSERT HEADLINE: “MANAGER FILES SUIT: CLAIMS OPPONENT REMOVED
PADDING FROM GLOVE. INVESTIGATION
UNDERWAY.”

INSERT HEADLINE: “FIGHTER TO UNDERGO MASSIVE CORNEAL
SURGERY. CAREER LIKELY OVER.”

Gus stops to straighten a picture of him and Teddy smiling after winning the golden gloves, and then heads up the stairs.

Later, Gus sits at the dining room table, surrounded by Kenny, Joe, Danny, and Billy. The boys sit around the table, giggling and making conversation. Gus reads a newspaper as his wife CLARA, late 60's with a heavy eastern European accent, brings in plates of food: pasta, sausages, peppers, salad, bread, and wine.

Gus ignores her and focuses on a headline that reads:

INSERT HEADLINE: “HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION INJURED IN HOME
ACCIDENT. PULLS OUT OF FIGHT.”

Gus shakes his head and shows everyone the headline.

GUS

You see this? Guy drops a bowling ball on his foot and pulls out of a title fight. Used to be defending your title was something a champion took pride in. Now all anybody wants to do is hold onto it. They're scared of defending it--like a bunch of little girls.

Gus looks exceedingly upset, and the kids laugh. He throws the paper on the table.

GUS

Goddamned bums, the whole lot of 'em. Did I ever tell you guys about Willie Pep? Now that was a little guy with a big heart. Once won a round without throwing a single punch. Back in the day we called a guy like that a tactician. You kids wouldn't know nothing about that.

JOEY

A what?

GUS

Guy was in a plane crash once, broke his neck in eight places. Came back six months later and kept on winning. Willie Pep. Greatest defensive fighter ever lived. Once won a round...

Everybody at the table joins in...

EVERYBODY

Without throwing a punch!

GUS

Ha, ha, you guys are really something. Bunch of wise asses.

Gus turns to Kenny, the oldest at the table.

GUS

How'd it go at the gym today?

KENNY

Danny got beat up by a girl.

Everybody laughs.

GUS

What girl?

KENNY

Terri.

GUS

She's that DSS broad's girl? I don't know why Teddy lets her in the gym. I gotta talk to him about that. Girls got no place in the gym. What the hell happened, anyway?

DANNY

I was practicing defense, and I didn't want to hit her back.

GUS

Horseshit. If a girl acts like a man, you gotta treat her like one.

Gus loads his plate with pasta and passes it on.

GUS

Where's he at, anyways? He's late. You've seen him?

Everyone shakes his head as Clara walks back in.

GUS

You heard from Teddy yet?

CLARA

He called and said to start without him.

GUS

Damned right we start without him. He knows the rules. Dinner waits for no man. And I hope he doesn't think we're saving anything for him.

Gus takes the top off of a dish and looks in, scrutinizing the food. He picks up a sausage, breaks it in half and sniffs it.

GUS

What the hell is this? What are you trying to feed me?

CLARA

It's turkey sausage. Dr. Walowitz says it's better for you with your hypertension and all.

Gus slams the lid down, rocking the table. The kids smile, uncomfortably.

GUS

I don't have hypertension! I told you not to listen to what that pollock quack says. If you think I'm eating this California, hippie chow you gotta be out of your skull. I'll be six feet under before I eat this.

CLARA

Now Gussy.

GUS

Don't Gussy me. Take it out of here. Feed it to the dogs.

She gets up.

CLARA

I think I have some frozen Italian sausage in the ice box.

GUS

Here, take this too.

Gus hands her his plate.

GUS

Put it in the oven. We can't eat until the meat is done.

Clara collects the dishes.

GUS

And be quick about it. You got hungry men here.

INT. KITCHEN

Clara stands over the trash can, dumping out the sausages.

Teddy walks in, and Clara lights up as she sees him. He kisses her on the cheek and hands her a bouquet of flowers.

TEDDY

I thought these would look good on your table.

CLARA

You're a sweet boy.

TEDDY

How's the old man?

Clara sighs deeply.

CLARA

Same as it ever was. He's getting restless. I think he's been cooped up too long.

Teddy opens the refrigerator and takes out a can of beer. He cracks it open and takes a long sip.

CLARA

You get around to asking that girlie out?

TEDDY

Maybe I did.

CLARA

You better not take too long or else some dimwit will snatch her up.

TEDDY

Uh huh.

CLARA

It's unnatural, you know.

TEDDY

It is?

CLARA

A man your age should settle down. You don't want people to think you're queer.

TEDDY

I'm going to check on the old man.

CLARA

You're a fine catch, Teddy. But you better act before your balls droop and you look like that one in there.

TEDDY

I can always count on you Clara.

INT. DINING ROOM NIGHT

Teddy walks into the dinning room and sits down next to Gus.

GUS

Oh, great, you made it. I guess we can quit holding our breath now. Where you been, anyway?

TEDDY

The gym.

GUS

How are things going there?

TEDDY

Going good. I could use a couple more prospects, but other than that it's smooth. You should come by, it's been a while. Get out of the house for a change.

GUS

Yeah, well.

Clara comes back in with the sausages and the pasta.

GUS

All right, now we can eat.

Everybody puts his head down, and Gus begins to say a Hail Mary.

GUS

Hail Mary, full of grace...

INT. KITCHEN

After dinner, Gus walks into the kitchen as Teddy and Kenny help Clara with the dishes. The other kids are doing various chores: sweeping, dusting, etc.

GUS

Let me talk at you, Teddy.

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

They walk outside. Gus pauses to light a cigarette.

GUS

Let's take a walk, huh?

They walk slowly through the yard. It's quiet outside.

TEDDY

What's on your mind?

GUS

How's life treating you?

TEDDY

I can't complain.

GUS

You found yourself a woman yet?

TEDDY

Jesus, you too? Clara's already got on my case.

GUS

It's important to find a good woman before you get old. Keeps people from thinking you're a queer.

TEDDY

I heard.

GUS

How's your health?

Teddy shrugs.

TEDDY

I can still go twelve rounds. As long as nobody's hitting back.

GUS

Your eye holding up?

TEDDY

Yeah, that last surgery fixed it. I can see as good as before.

GUS

You got all that alcohol behind you?

TEDDY

Yeah. You wanna tell me what's on your mind or you gonna keep on jerking me around? You got the big C or something?

GUS

Naw, nothing like that. I'm still ticking.

TEDDY

Glad to hear it. So what then?

GUS

You've been running the gym full time for over a year now.

TEDDY

Yeah.

GUS

How's it treating you?

TEDDY

Oh, it's real good, Gus. I like training. I feel like I found my niche.

GUS

Yeah?

TEDDY

Yeah.

GUS

Good. I want you to take it over, permanently. I'm going to take a step back. Call it a semi retirement.

TEDDY

You're serious?

GUS

I'll still drop in, time to time, take a look at the prospects. But the gym's yours. Run it as you see fit. I got full confidence in you

TEDDY

Jesus, Gus. What gives?

GUS

I don't got the fire for it anymore.

TEDDY

You? I never thought I'd hear you say that.

GUS

I woke up one day and got old. I'm not going to be around that much longer. I can feel it in my bones. Something or somebody is gonna punch my ticket.

TEDDY

You're just paranoid. There's nobody coming after you. That's all ancient history.

GUS

Forget about that. I've gone about as far as I can.

TEDDY

There's that belt.

GUS

I missed the train on that a long time ago.

TEDDY

You never know.

GUS

The point is it's your time. You're a good kid, Teddy. Old school. Loyal and honest. You got integrity. That's important. You don't find that anymore, especially in this business. It's all about the money. That's why I like the amateurs.

Teddy nods in agreement, but Gus shakes it off.

GUS

I wish we could of got there, kid. It's the only regret I got, that title. I feel like I got this hole in me that I can't fill. Sometimes I lie in bed all night thinking about that night.

TEDDY

Atlantic City could have changed our lives.

GUS

It did, kid. Just not the way we thought. Or wanted.

TEDDY

It feels like a different life. But sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and for a minute I forget when it is. Sometimes I feel like I got another shot in me.

GUS

Maybe in your next life, kid. Who knows though? Maybe you get there as a trainer. Find a kid; bring him up through the gloves, the Olympic trials. He's out there somewhere, you know.

TEDDY

Who?

GUS

The next heavyweight champion. He doesn't even know it yet. No one around him knows. He's just some punk kid, face full of pimples, waiting for someone to pluck him up and polish him off. You just gotta get lucky. You gotta find him before the sharks do.

Gus walks back inside, leaving Teddy alone, brooding in the quiet night.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY

LEON, a muscular, broad-shouldered 14-year-old, sits in a crowded prison cafeteria, eating jell-o with his fingers.

As he looks at his surroundings, the other inmates at his table try to avoid his stare.

He eyes a LARGE INMATE standing in line, holding a plastic tray.

Leon gets up and walks over to the inmate.

LEON

Gimme your jell-o.

Leon's voice is awkward and high pitched. The other inmate laughs.

Still staring at the inmate, Leon takes the jell-o off of his tray and eats some. The inmate swings at Leon, but he slips it and unloads on him, beating him into the ground.

Eventually, the guards try to intervene. It takes three grown men to restrain him and drag him out of the room.

He is thrown into isolation--a small dark cell with only a steel sink, toilet and bed.

The guard slams the door, and Leon is left alone in the dark. He starts doing pushups.

EXT. OVERHEAD SHOT BRONX NY – DAY

SUPER “THREE YEARS EARLIER”

The camera pans over the depleted streets, which are lined with abandoned buildings and shabby tenement houses.

Groups of homeless people and drug addicts stand huddled around fires set in steel trashcans. Some of the people have old newspaper stuffed inside their jackets for added warmth.

INT. APARTMENT

Inside a shabby apartment, LEON, a stocky boy of 11, sits on an old couch. He watches the Flintstones on a black and white TV.

A cockroach crawls out of the cushions and onto his leg.

He swipes it away and walks into the kitchen.

WILLA, early 40’s and large, stands over a pan of frying fish. A long cigarette hangs out of her mouth as she talks on the phone. At the small kitchen table sits KEISHA, 15. She eyes Leon with contempt.

WILLA

That’s right, and I told him not to come round here till he got a job!

Leon walks in and opens the refrigerator. It is mostly empty. Willa takes notice.

WILLA

Hold on.

She puts the phone down and smacks Leon hard on the back of the head.

WILLA

Boy, I know you ain’t trying to get your dirty hands on my food. There ain’t nothing in there for you.

LEON

But I’m hungry.

Leon’s voice is extremely high pitched.

WILLA

Boy, get out of my kitchen before I romp your ass. You need to be a man and find your own food. I can't afford to be feeding your fat ass. Just like your worthless father, always expecting someone else to take care of you. It's bad enough I got to take you in 'cause your momma don't want your nappy-headed ass.

Willa goes back to her phone call.

WILLA

No girl, just my sister's no-good boy trying to get me to wait on him hand over fist. That's right, she back on the hey-ron... Probably doing lord knows what...Uh huh, that's him. Act like he kind of retarded, go around talkin' like a little girl.

Leon leaves the room with his head down. Keisha follows him.

Once they get into the living room she grabs Leon and drives him into the wall. Then she stands over him, towering.

KEISHA

I know you been going through my stuff.

LEON

No, I didn't.

KEISHA

Don't lie, you been stealing my makeup.

LEON

What I want with your makeup?

KEISHA

You want to be a girl 'cause you talk like one.

LEON

Stop saying that, no I don't!

Leon tries to leave, but Keisha won't let him. She takes out some lipstick and puts it on his face. He squirms, and starts to cry.

KEISHA

Yes you do. You know you want to be a girl.

LEON

No, stop. I don't want you to.

Keisha holds the lipstick in her hand and starts to punch him with it. Leon manages to squirm away and runs out the front door, his face covered in red lipstick.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Leon walks out of the building and down the street.

INT. MARKET

Leon walks slowly down an aisle, watching the cashier in the security mirror. The cashier watches him closely.

A customer walks up to the counter and diverts the clerk's attention.

Leon quickly snatches a can of tuna from the shelf and slips it into his pocket. He leaves.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Leon walks purposefully down the street, looking over his shoulder, paranoid. He sneaks into an abandoned building.

INT. BUILDING

Leon climbs up an empty staircase.

EXT. ROOF TOP - DAY

The roof is empty, and Leon walks to a large pigeon coup.

He opens the door, picks up a bag of food and begins to feed the birds.

He picks up one pigeon and holds it.

Leon sits down against the cage and takes out the can of tuna. He opens it with an old P3 can opener and eats with his fingers.

As it begins to get dark, Leon sits alone on the roof, stroking the pigeon.

He falls asleep.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Leon hurries down the street, holding the bird in his jacket.

He turns a corner and a group of teenagers notices Leon. Immediately, they accost him. The group is led by a BULLY who is bigger and several years older than Leon.

BULLY

Dirty Leon! Where you going?

Leon ignores him and keeps walking. The bully pushes, but Leon keeps walking. Dissatisfied, the bully follows.

BULLY

Come on, you know you're not going anywhere.
Not till we hear you cry like a little girl.

The bully picks up an empty whiskey bottle and throws it at Leon, hitting him in the back of the head. Leon falls to the ground and drops the pigeon. The bully sees this and picks it up.

BULLY

What's this? A bird?

He shows it to his buddies as they crowd around.

BULLY

What is you doing with a bird, you freak?

LEON

Leave him alone, he didn't do anything to you.

BULLY

Look, it's the only friend he's got.

He throws the bird into the side of the building. Everybody laughs.

Leon's pupils dilate, and his eyes fill with rage.

The bully steps towards Leon.

Leon lunges forward and hits the bully in the chin, dropping him. Leon jumps on top of him--his knees on the bully's biceps--and goes into a rage, savagely beating him. He picks up the empty bottle and smashes it into the bully's face.

The rest of the kids watch in silence.

After a moment, the bully is a bloody mess. Leon gets up and the rest of the kids step back.

His hands are stained red, and his shirt is bloody. In his right hand, he clutches the broken bottle. The kids stare at him in bewilderment.

Leon steps towards them; they all run away.

As he watches them run away, a red tint washes over his line of sight.

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

A bigger, older Leon sits alone on the subway, watching an OLD WOMAN hold a bag of groceries.

Leon's childish innocence is a now a distant memory as he studies his quarry.

At the next stop, the woman gets off, and Leon follows her, staying ten yards back.

The old woman shuffles down the train platform. Leon watches her walk down the street.

She steps into an apartment building.

INT. HALLWAY

The old woman waits for the elevator, wearily holding her groceries.

Behind her, Leon walks into the hallway and stops next to her.

LEON

Can I hold that for you, ma'am?

OLD WOMAN

Yes, you may, young man.

She hands Leon the bag, and he smiles, sweetly.

OLD WOMAN

I cannot tell you how much I appreciate this. That bag was sure getting heavy.

Leon smiles. The elevator door opens, and they both step inside.

OLD WOMAN

I'm going to eleven. What floor are you on?

Leon grins as the doors close, his eyes wide with malice.

The doors open on floor two and Leon steps out, holding the woman's purse and a bag of cookies.

He runs to the stairwell and leaves.

Inside the elevator, the old woman lies on the floor, unconscious.

EXT. ROOF TOP - DAY

Leon sits on the roof top next to his pigeon cage, counting money and eating.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY

Teddy and Emma sit at a table in a bowling alley, drinking PABST BLUE RIBBON. They look like they are having a good time as they watch Terri and Danny play air hockey. Terri is overly aggressive and is beating Danny pretty thoroughly. Danny doesn't seem to mind too much--he's used to it. Terri slams a shot hard off the side and scores.

EMMA

She gets it from her father, I think. He was the uber competitor.

TEDDY

I don't know, you don't strike me as the type of woman who is okay with losing.

EMMA

And how exactly did you come to that conclusion?

TEDDY

You're a social worker. The people you deal with, the things you see, most people can't handle that. You didn't get into that line of work because you like to give up when things get hard.

EMMA

You are perceptive.

TEDDY

Well, I have my moments.

EMMA

I meant for a boxer.

TEDDY

Ouch. So why, then?

Emma shrugs. Terri walks over and leans over the table, smiling. Danny waits by the air hockey table.

EMMA

Don't look at me, daughter.

Terri bats her eyes at Teddy.

TEDDY

Let me guess, you're out of quarters?

TERRI

I love you, Teddy.

TEDDY

Yeah, yeah, here, take it easy on the boy. You're going to give him a complex.

Terri picks up the quarters, smiles and walks back to the table.

Teddy yells over to Danny.

TEDDY

Are you going to let her beat you all night?

Danny shrugs. It looks like he will.

Terri walks over to Danny and punches his on the shoulder. She pauses for a moment, and then kisses him.

Emma smiles and shakes her head as she watches this.

EMMA

Jesus, do you remember when you were that age?

TEDDY

Me? Naw.

EMMA

Come on, I bet you get sentimental. When you're all alone. In fact, I bet you remember your first love.

TEDDY

I'll never admit it. You have to get me a lot more drunk.

EMMA

I remember mine. Rory Piscola.

TEDDY

Piscola? How'd he earn that name??

EMMA

Oh, stop. He was my boyfriend all sophomore and junior year. He's actually the reason I got into social work.

TEDDY

Sweet.

EMMA

Don't joke. You'll regret it when I'm finished.

TEDDY

Sorry. How did he influence your chosen career?

EMMA

He grew up in the system, in group homes and foster care. His mother was...let's say... unstable. She was never in his life, and nobody knew who his father was. So he used to come to school with these thick shirts on, and he never took them off—not even when we all went down to the river to swim.

TEDDY

He swam with his shirt on?

EMMA

No. He would just sit there and watch me. Always with this little smile on his face...

EXT. FLASHBACK RIVER - DAY

Rory, a thin 16 year old with wavy blonde hair sits on a rock overlooking the river, watching a young Emma and friends swim.

INT. FLASHBACK CAR - DAY

Emma and Rory sit in the back of an old car making out.

Emma takes his shirt off and sees dozens of little red and black circles all up and down Rory's back.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY

TEDDY

Bruises?

EMMA

Cigarette burns.

TEDDY

That's enough to make you sick.

INT. CAR FLASHBACK - DAY

Emma jumps out of the car and starts screaming and waving her hands while Rory pleads with her to calm down.

EMMA (V.O.)

So, naturally, I freak out. I'm this smart ass little 15 year old fem chick, and I start pacing around the front yard, screaming about justice.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY

TEDDY

But he didn't want justice.

EMMA

His concept of justice and mine were very different.

TEDDY

What do you mean?

EMMA

He lacked faith.

TEDDY

Faith in what?

EMMA

That anyone would take care of him. And you know what, he was right. He had nowhere else to go. He'd had enough of living in group homes. I don't know what the hell happened to him, but there was no way he was going back to live with the state. That's when I first realized there was a difference between kids who grew up in the system and everybody else. For some kids, waking up to a burning cigarette is just the way it is. And it is better than waking up in a group home.

TEDDY

I guess it depends on the home.

EMMA

It certainly does. That's one thing I can say about the old man: chauvinistic bastard or not, he is good with those boys. And so are you.

TEDDY

So what did you do?

EMMA

Nothing. I did nothing. Then one day during our junior year, he didn't come to school.

EXT. RIVER FLASHBACK - DAY

EMMA (V.O.)

After I got out, I went to our little hang out down by the river, the place we used to go to make out.

Emma walks down to the river and finds Rory sitting in the tall weeds, smoking and looking distant.

EMMA (V.O.)

There was something different about him. He had this thousand-yard stare, like he was removed from himself, watching life go by with him in it.

Emma and Rory start to kiss. Things get intense.

EMMA (V.O.)

We laid in the grass all afternoon, and I let him take my virginity. I can't explain why I chose that day; there was just something I felt that made it seem urgent.

Emma and Rory get up and walk home. They hold hands and stroll through a quiet residential neighborhood as darkness falls.

After a moment, they get to Rory's house and stop out front. The yard is full off POLICE OFFICERS and flashing sirens. Once the police see Rory, they rush him.

Rory is pulled away from Emma, taken to the ground and handcuffed. As he lies there, shackled, he stares at Emma with distant, indifferent eyes.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY

TEDDY

He got tired of the cigarettes?

EMMA

He took a baseball bat and smashed in his foster father's head while the bastard was eating his Cheerios. He's serving a life sentence.

TEDDY

It's terrible it came to that.

EMMA

The system failed him. It's become a cliché to say that, but it's what happens sometimes. Anyway, he stuck with me, so I got my masters in social work and decided to become a child advocate. I figured I'd try to help kids before they go somewhere they can't come back from.

TEDDY

You said that before. What do you mean?

EMMA

Once a kid is taken past a certain point, repeatedly let down by the people who are supposed to protect him--his parents, the state--he loses the capacity to trust people. Most kids spend the rest of their lives disconnected from everyone else. It's hard to function that way.

Teddy and Emma are silent for a moment.

TEDDY

Well, I don't know what to say now.

EMMA

Shit. I did it again.

TEDDY

What did you do?

EMMA

I have this awful tendency to become a downer when I talk about work. It's becoming a sort of a complex, I think.

TEDDY

It's okay. It's good we have something in common.

EMMA

Okay, your turn. Tell me something about you. Why did you stop boxing?

TEDDY

We've had enough sad stories for one date. Why don't we lighten the mood a bit? How about some skee ball?

Emma finishes her beer with a big gulp and waves two fingers at the waitress. She looks a little tipsy.

EMMA

I am not going to be the only one baring her soul here tonight, Teddy. If you have any machinations of ever seeing me in something more seductive than a bowling shirt, I advise you to spill your guts. Why did you quit fighting?

Teddy finishes his beer.

TEDDY

Atlantic City.

EMMA

What, you quit boxing to deal blackjack to geriatrics?

TEDDY

No, my last fight was in Atlantic City.

EMMA

What happened?

Teddy shrugs.

TEDDY

Gus and I took our shot. It was an elimination bout for the heavyweight title. We fell short. I picked up an injury, a detached retina, and had to go through some surgeries to get my sight back to normal. Plus nobody was ever going to give us another shot.

EMMA

Why not?

TEDDY

Let's just say things didn't go as planned. It all got pretty messy.

EMMA

So you moved up here?

TEDDY

That was a couple of years later.

EMMA

What did you do in the mean time?

TEDDY

I had a tough run for a while. Boxing had been such a large part of my identity that I didn't know what to do with myself. I went on a two year bender. I was in a pretty dark place.

EMMA

I can image. It must have been incredibly difficult having your career taken away like that.

TEDDY

I didn't make it any easier on myself. I was immature, and I wore my feelings on my sleeve. One night, I was really tying one on in this whole-in-the-wall pub down in the Lower East Side.

INT. HOLE IN THE WALL BAR FLASHBACK

Teddy sits at the dingy bar, drinking beer and whiskey. A familiar face walks in. THE FIGHT DOCTOR, old, sickly, looking like a degenerate gambler.

He sits down and orders an-

DOCTOR

Ulcer special!

The bartender stares blankly at his customer.

DOCTOR

Jim and Pepto.

Teddy hears this and looks to see what manner of man would order such a drink. It takes him a second, but he recognizes the doctor and stares, his nostrils flaring.

The doctor feels Teddy's drunken stare and tries to look away... But he can't.

He turns to Teddy and instantly recognizes him. He shudders, downs the rest of his drink and throws a bill on the bar. He tries to leave, but Teddy looms between him and the doorway.

The doctor walks to the back of the bar, past an old pool table and slips into the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM

The bathroom is the type of place that would make a sewer rat blush. Wall to wall filth. Projectile vomit everywhere. A urinal trough lines the far wall. It looks like it hasn't been cleaned since the Kennedy Administration.

The doctor runs to a back wall and tries to open a window. It won't budge.

He scrambles around the room, looking for an out.

The bathroom door slowly opens.

Seeing this, the doctor slips into a stall and locks the door. He looks at the toilet. It is disgusting.

Apprehensively, the doctor puts a foot on the rim of the toilet and tries to stand; however, his foot slips and goes into the toilet, splashing water on his new shoes. The doctor dry heaves.

Outside the stall, the sound of footsteps approaching, getting closer and closer.

The doctor stands on the toilet, steadying himself against the side walls.

The footsteps stop outside the stall.

The doctor holds his breath.

The footsteps continue on, and the doctor breathes, relieved. He takes a pack of Roloids out of his jacket and chews one.

Suddenly, the door bursts open. Teddy stands there, looking serious.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY

Emma stares at Teddy, looking uncomfortable.

EMMA

You didn't feel bad beating up a defenseless man?

TEDDY

Not at that moment, I didn't. In fact, it was the best I'd felt in two years. But I paid for it. It seems the doc was signed up to work a big fight for Sol that weekend, and he couldn't make it. Sol had let a bunch of cops in on it to sort of spread some good will with the boys in blue. Well, they weren't too happy with me, and they sent me to Riker's on an aggravated assault beef.

EMMA

You were in prison?

TEDDY

Just about a fifteen month stretch. I don't ever tell anybody about it, especially the kids. I'm ashamed.

EMMA

I can imagine.

TEDDY

It was the best thing that could have happened to me, though. I got into a program and sobered up. For the first time, I started reading something other than the sports page. And I learned to get a hold on my emotions. I stopped being such a hot head. When I got released and took the ferry back to the world, Gus was waiting for me.

EMMA

Gus was there?

TEDDY

He told me that it was time to stop feeling sorry for myself and offered me a job helping him run the gym up in Catskill. So, I moved up here, became his assistant, and he started grooming me as his protégé. Now I run the gym.

EMMA

I can tell you love it.

TEDDY

I do. It's a simple existence. I get up everyday, tend to the gym, pick up the kids from school. I teach them a few things about life. And when I lay down at night I feel content. There's something very satisfying about that.

EMMA

I really like that about you. A lot of people talk about making a difference in people's lives. You actually do it, everyday.

TEDDY

Oh, I don't know how much of a difference I make.

EMMA

You're being modest, Teddy. Those kids at the gym adore you. Look at Terri. She's been singing your praises for months.

TEDDY

Has she? I guess I should have asked you out sooner.

EMMA

I was wondering what was taking you so long.

Over at the air hockey table, Terri is still beating Danny unmercifully.

TEDDY

Why don't we go over there and give that poor boy a break.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY

ROGER, an imposing prison administrator with the look of an ex-fighter, walks down the corridor of the administrative segregation unit. The cell block is long and narrow, lined with cramped, single person cells. Everything is made from stainless steel.

Roger is accompanied by a guard wielding a large baton.

A TEEN puts his face up to the small opening in the door and yells from inside his cell.

TEEN

Hey! Y'all here for me, right?

The guard slams his baton into the door, making a loud clack. The teen backs off.

ROGER

Knock that shit off.

The guard raises an eye brow.

ROGER

You don't think they've got it rough enough here?

The guard puts his head down and holsters his baton.

Roger stops at a cell. The observation window is closed.

ROGER

Did you close this?

GUARD

Yes sir. He likes it closed.

Roger eyes the guard suspiciously, and then opens the window. He sees that inside Leon is shadow boxing. Leon doesn't look up.

ROGER

How's he been acting?

GUARD

Fine. As long as he's not with the others, he's real good. Quiet.

ROGER

He's quiet?

GUARD

He says thank you when I bring him his food.

ROGER

Open it up.

The guard opens the door.

INT. CELL

Leon stops punching when he sees Roger standing in the doorway and shyly slinks back in the corner.

ROGER

You been asking about me?

Leon looks down at the floor.

LEON

I heard about you.

ROGER

Yeah? What have you heard?

LEON

You used to box.

ROGER

So what?

LEON

I want to.

ROGER

So you want to? What's that got to do with me?

LEON

I figure you could teach me.

ROGER

You figure right--if I wanted to. You think 'cause you can fight, that means you can box?

LEON

No, sir.

ROGER

You think I'm just going to help 'cause you ask?

LEON

No, sir.

ROGER

That's right. You have to fly straight first. You've got to earn it. So what the hell is the matter with you?

LEON

What do ya mean?

ROGER

You got some kind of infatuation with cages?

LEON

No.

ROGER

Then why are you wasting your life away in one?

LEON

I don't know.

ROGER

I'll tell you something. Boxing can be a lifeline for some people. But you only get out what you put into it.

LEON

Yes, sir.

ROGER

If I let you back into the population, you have to fly straight. You can't start anymore fights. And you have to try in school. You do that, and I'll teach you some things.

LEON

Okay.

Roger takes a minute and studies Leon. The boy is a mammoth for his age, all muscles and veins. However, he fidgets in front of Roger.

ROGER

Okay. Your behavior improves over the next few months, and I'll see if I can help you.

Roger leaves, and the guard slams the door behind him.

Leon watches them go. When he's alone again, Leon smiles and resumes his shadowboxing.

EXT. CELL BLOCK

ROGER

Keep an eye on him.

INT. GYM - DAY

SUPER "THREE MONTHS LATER"

Teddy stands in the gym, supervising the afternoon sparing session. It is just another day.

The PHONE rings and Teddy goes into the office.

INT. OFFICE

Teddy sits down at the desk and answers the phone.

TEDDY

Hello?

EMMA

You had better not be late for dinner.

TEDDY

Who is this?

EMMA

Very funny, wise guy. I'll let that one go on account of your history of massive head trauma.

TEDDY

I appreciate it. I'll take any consideration I can get. How's your day going?

EMMA

Oh, fine. Looking forward to seeing you. We both are.

TEDDY

Me, too. What are we having?

EMMA

It's Thursday.

TEDDY

Mmmm. Lasagna.

EMMA

When can we expect you?

TEDDY

Not too long. Gus is bringing somebody by for me to take a look at.

Through the window, Teddy sees Gus, Roger and Leon walk into the gym.

TEDDY

In fact, they're here now. I have to go.

Teddy hangs up the phone and walks into the gym.

INT. GYM

TEDDY

All right, guys, that's enough for today. Go get changed and get started on your homework.

The kids begrudgingly walk off of the mat. Teddy ushers them out and walks over to Gus and Roger.

GUS

Teddy, this is the guy I've been telling you about. Roger Feller. One of my compatriots from back in the bad old days.

TEDDY

Good to meet you. I saw you fight Ron Lyle at MSG back in '79 or '80.

They shake hands.

ROGER

Talk about the bad old days. Lyle is the reason I got out of the game. That son of a bitch hit like a mule.

GUS

Ali and Foreman can vouch for that.

ROGER

After Lyle, I figured working in a prison would be a nice change of pace.

GUS

Teddy here is my top man. My guru in training. This is his gym.

TEDDY

So this is the kid?

They all look at Leon. He stands next to the door, fidgeting nervously and looking at the ground.

ROGER

Come on over here, Leon.

Leon walks over with his head down.

ROGER

Leon, this is the man I was telling you about. This is Gus. He used to be a trainer. Teddy here runs the gym for him.

GUS

Good to meet ya, kid. So we hear you want to be a fighter.

LEON

Yes, sir.

GUS

Who's your favorite fighter?

LEON

Joe Louis.

GUS

The Brown Bomber? He's old school. Most kids say Ali. Why do you like Louis so much?

LEON

Cause he had the belt the longest.

GUS

He did, huh? Do you know how long he had it?

LEON

From 37 to 49.

GUS

But who'd he take it from?

LEON

Braddock.

GUS

Well look at that. The kid knows his history. I'm impressed, Leon. Why don't you go strap your gloves on and show us what you can do to that bag?

CUT TO:

Leon is impressively wailing away on a HEAVY BAG as the three men watch him. The bag is chained to a RAIL on the ceiling and slides slightly when Leon punches it.

GUS

So you've been working with him for how long?

ROGER

For three months now. And you would not believe the change in this kid. No write ups, no fights. He even says please and thank you. The first week we get him back in school, Leon's reading level improves a year.

TEDDY

A year?

ROGER

For the first time in his life, he is applying himself. He's motivated, which is unusual for most of the kids like him.

GUS

So you think he's worth our time?

ROGER

My opinion is the kid's 50/50. He could go either way. With the right structure and discipline, I think he could get it together. But if you let up and let him drift, he could go bad. And I mean real bad. Don't give him an inch.

GUS

So there's potential if the discipline is there?

ROGER

I tell you one thing: The kid's a monster. He's got natural skills like I've never seen. And he's like a sponge, just soaks up everything you teach him. I can't even mess with him anymore. Last time we sparred, he cracked three of my ribs.

Leon drives a hard right hand into the bag with such force that it slams into the wall ten feet away.

Teddy and Gus eye each other.

GUS

Well, let's get him in the ring. You want to put him with Kenny?

TEDDY

No, not till we know what we're dealing with. I'll bang with him.

Gus and Roger eye Teddy.

TEDDY

I'll go easy. Just jabs.

They continue to stare at Teddy. Finally, Roger laughs and walks over to Leon.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE RING

Teddy and Leon stand on opposite sides, wearing full gear.

TEDDY

All right, Leon. We're just going to take it nice and easy. We just want to see what you know.

Gus bangs a metal bell with a ball-peen hammer, and Teddy and Leon move towards each other. Teddy is considerably taller and keeps Leon away with his jab. Leon is raw as he tries to get at Teddy, lunging. After a moment, he corners Teddy on the ropes. Teddy puts his hands up and Leon unloads on his midsection. Teddy winces in pain and moves out of the corner. Leon follows, stalking. He unloads on Teddy again and Teddy must fight back to protect himself. Pretty soon, they are going full out and things get intense.

Gus gives Roger a surprised look, and then rings the bell.

GUS

All right, enough of that that.

Teddy and Leon both stop. Teddy is breathing pretty hard.

GUS

Good work, Leon. Go on and get dressed.

LEON

But I can keep going if—

GUS

I said ya done, son! Get outta there!

LEON

Yes sir.

Leon starts to walk to the ropes, but Teddy stops him.

TEDDY

Good work in there, kid.

Leon nods, and they touch gloves.

Teddy climbs out of the ring and walks over to Gus and Roger. As he walks, he takes off his gloves.

TEDDY

You weren't kidding.

Teddy rubs his ribs.

TEDDY

I don't think I've ever been hit like that. If we teach him some control, he can really be something. How old did you say he is?

ROGER

He just turned 16. What do you think, Gus?

GUS

I think he comes to stay with us. I think if we do this right, he can be heavyweight champion in five years. How soon can you get him here?

EXT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER DAY

Teddy stands outside the gate, waiting.

After a moment, Roger and Leon walk outside. Leon is dressed in jeans and a sweat shirt and carries a duffle bag. Under his arm is a book about the history of the heavyweight boxing champions.

Teddy shakes Roger's hands, and then he and Leon walk to the van.

Leon looks at it skeptically.

LEON

This is your ride?

TEDDY

You never ridden in a van before?

Leon shrugs and gets in.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The van moves down the highway.

INT. VAN - DAY

TEDDY

So how bad is the food in there?

Leon looks skeptically at Teddy.

TEDDY

Well, if it's anything like the chow at Riker's, you probably never want to see a bowl of oatmeal again.

LEON

You was at Riker's?

TEDDY

Just for about a year and a half.

LEON

What was you in for?

TEDDY

Something I shouldn't have done.

LEON

You bullshitting me or what?

TEDDY

Or what.

Leon sits silent for a moment.

LEON

I liked the jell-o.

TEDDY

Yeah?

LEON

And on Saturdays they had fried chicken.

TEDDY

Saturdays at Riker's they had spaghetti. The
paiono special: Ramon noodles and runny ketchup.

Teddy looks at Leon and rolls his eyes.

LEON

What, you Italian or something.

Teddy nods his head.

TEDDY

When was the last time you had a bacon
cheeseburger?

LEON

I don't know.

CUT TO:

Still in the van, Leon devours a burger and fries.

It is evening when the van enters CATSKILL. It is nice and clean. Full of houses with
manicured lawns and respectable businesses.

Leon is taken aback by what he sees.

LEON

Yo man, this is where yous live?

TEDDY

Nice isn't it?

Leon shrugs.

The van nears Gus' house--a large, run down Victorian style residence.

LEON

I'm going to live here? Is that a mansion?

TEDDY

Eighteen rooms. It's pretty old, but spacious.

LEON

Wow. What am I gonna have to do to stay here.

TEDDY

Work hard in school. Stay out of trouble. Do chores.

LEON

What do you mean chores?

TEDDY

You know, clean your room, do the dishes, and maybe mow the lawn. Whatever Gus wants. The place needs a lot of maintenance, and Gus doesn't want to pay for it.

LEON

I could do that.

INT. GUS' HOUSE - EVENING

Teddy and Leon walk into the KITCHEN. Clara is standing over the stove.

TEDDY

Hi Clara. How's the old man tonight.

CLARA

Oh, grouchy as ever. Who's your new pal?

TEDDY

This is the new guy. This is Leon.

CLARA

Pleasure to make your acquaintance, Leon. My name's Clara.

Leon steps forward sheepishly and shakes Clara's hand.

TEDDY

Word is Leon is interested in the science.

CLARA

Another aspiring pugilist, eh?

LEON

Yes, ma'am.

CLARA

You'll fit in fine here then. Just remember one thing, boy-o. School work takes top priority in this house. It's school work, then your chores, then boxing. Understand?

LEON

Yes ma'am.

CLARA

Well then, welcome. You look like you have a robust appetite. Why don't you go in the dining room and have a seat at the table. Gus is in there. He's the old slouch with the sour mug.

Leon looks at Teddy who nods. Leon walks into the living room.

CLARA

Seems like a sweet kid.

TEDDY

I hope so.

Clara sighs and shakes her head.

Teddy shrugs and takes a beer out of the fridge.

TEDDY

I think this could be good for him. He never really had much of a home life. He lost his mother to drugs two years ago.

CLARA

Mary and Joseph. So what about Emma, then? When is she coming back over for supper?

TEDDY

Maybe Sunday. She hasn't warmed up to the old man's charms yet.

CLARA

You're a good catch, Teddy, but you better not let that one go. Those two girls are good for you. Little by little they're going to make you civilized.

INT. DINING ROOM

Teddy walks in and sees Gus talking to Leon. Also sitting around the table are Kenny, Joe, Danny, and Billy. They are silent, watching Gus and Leon. Teddy sits down.

GUS

You got the build of a heavyweight. Squat and solid. Built for power. Those skinny guys are not gonna know what to do with you. I'm gonna teach you to how to swarm, like Jack Dempsey. You ever heard of Jack Dempsey?

LEON

He beat Jess Willard for the belt in 1919.

GUS

That's right. You know Dempsey was part Indian.

LEON

He was Indian?

GUS

Before he made it to the big time, he used to fight bare knuckle all over Colorado. Used to walk into bars and say "I'll lick any man in the room." And then he'd do it. And he wasn't a big guy, neither. He was six foot, like you. He was one tough son of a bitch. You gotta have that if you're going to be champion. I think you have that.

Leon stares wide eyed at Gus.

GUS

You ever seen him fight?

LEON

No, it was before TV.

GUS

Forget about that. I got film of all the greats: Dempsey, Johnson, Louis, Pep and Saddler, Armstrong, Robinson. We're going to study all of them together. I'm going to show you what made them great, and then we're going to mold you into the best one ever.

Leon smiles.

GUS

Here, I got a surprise for you. Hold out your hand and close your eyes.

Leon does so, reluctantly.

Everyone in the room watches intently.

GUS

Okay, here you go.

Gus takes his false teeth out of his mouth and puts them in Leon's hand.

Leon opens his eyes and shrieks, dropping the teeth on the table.

The room erupts in laughter.

Gus grins widely, showing off his pink gums.

Leon stares at the old man, shell shocked.

Teddy walks up to Leon and puts his hand on his shoulder.

TEDDY

It's okay, kid. That means he likes you. First time I met him, he did the same thing to me. He didn't have any teeth back then, either.

Clara walks in with the food, and everyone settles down.

GUS

All right, come on, everybody bow your heads.

Everybody bows their heads. Leon looks awkward as Gus begins to say a Hail Mary.

GUS
Hail Mary, full of grace...

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY

After dinner, Gus gives Leon a tour of the house.

GUS
This is the bathroom. You boys gotta take turns,
so make sure you keep it clean.

They keep walking.

GUS
Linen closet.

They come to a bedroom and Gus opens the door. Inside there is a bunk bed.

GUS
This is your room. You're on your own in here, so
take whatever bunk you want. Clara will set you up
with the bedding.

Leon nods.

GUS
Okay, we wake up at 7 AM sharp. First thing you
do is make your bed. Breakfast is at 7:30. You're
late, you don't eat. Okay?

Leon nods.

GUS
You don't talk much, do you?

Leon shakes his head.

Gus shrugs.

GUS
Eh, I've heard of worse things. You got any
questions?

LEON
What's up there?

He points to a door at the top of a narrow staircase.

GUS

That's the third floor. That's my space. No one goes up there. Not even Clara. Capice?

Leon nods.

GUS

Okay, get yourself situated. Lights out at 10 o'clock.

Leon goes in the room and closes the door.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Leon sits on the bed and looks at the room. He lies down on the bed and closes his eyes.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Leon lies on the bed, sleeping. He opens his eyes.

The first thing Leon sees is Gus, staring down at him.

GUS

Road work.

EXT. ROAD - MORNING

Leon, Kenny, Billy, Danny, and Joe run on the side of the road. Kenny leads the pack, and Leon brings up the rear.

The boys continue to run, and Leon begins to slow, falling further behind

The boys slow down and backtrack to Leon.

Exhausted, Leon stops, leaning forward with his hands on his knees.

Kenny walks over to Leon.

KENNY

You okay?

LEON

Go on without me, I can't run no more.

KENNY

We don't leave anybody behind.

Leon looks up at Kenny, surprised.

KENNY

Come on man, we only have one mile left. We'll take it slow.

Leon stands up straight and takes several deep breaths.

KENNY

You have to get your breathing into a rhythm. Breathe in your nose, one, two. And then out of your mouth, three four. Okay?

Leon tries it and nods.

KENNY

Okay, let's go.

The boys continue running down the street.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

The boys all sit around the table eating breakfast.

The table is full of food: eggs, sausages, bacon, toast, juice.

Leon piles food on his plate like he has just hit the jack pot.

Gus sits at the head of the table, reading the paper. He looks over the top of the paper and watches Leon.

The bus pulls up outside and the boys all pick up their backpacks and head out.

Leon is the last one out of the door. He is wearing a nice collared shirt and kaki pants. Gus walks up behind him.

GUS

I'll see you at the gym this afternoon. You have a good day.

Leon nods his head and walks outside.

EXT. SCHOOL - MORNING

The bus stops in front of the high school. The boys all get out.

Leon takes in his surroundings. He is one of the only black kids there.

INT. LUNCHROOM

Leon walks out of the lunch line, holding a tray of food. A bit uncomfortable, he surveys the room.

He spots Kenny and the rest of the boys sitting at a table. Kenny waves at him, and Leon sits down.

Leon stares at his tray of food. It looks similar to the chow he ate in prison. Sitting across from Leon is a LARGE BOY. Leon stares at him for a moment, and then eyes his jell-o. The two lock eyes for a moment. The boy feels uncomfortable and leaves. Leon watches him leave, and then begins to eat his food. He starts with the jell-o.

Leon's teammates have been watching this scene unfold and laugh.

KENNY

You have to relax, man. No one is going to mess with you here.

INT. GYM - AFTERNOON

The gym is full of sparring teenagers. Teddy and Leon stand in front of a bag.

TEDDY

So, a guy like you, with your build, needs to stay low and get inside. What you want to do is attack the vital organs and then come hard back upstairs. Do you know where the liver and kidneys are?

LEON

No.

Teddy shows him on the bag.

TEDDY

The kidneys are on the sides. The liver is a little higher on the right side. With the way you swat, you hit a guy there, he'll be paralyzed for a good thirty seconds. Go ahead, try it. Left hook.

Leon tries it. His punches are thunderous.

As Teddy watches him, Gus walks into the gym and sits down.

TEDDY

All right, that's good. I'm going to show you a combination that attacks each one of these points.

Teddy takes a black marker out of his pocket and writes numbers on the bag: 1 at the left kidney, 2 at the liver, 3 at the side of the bag, about chin level.

TEDDY

So it's one, two, one, three. We'll call this combo one.

Teddy demonstrates slowly.

TEDDY

Got it?

Leon practices a few times, first slowly, and then faster.

LEON

Easy, man.

TEDDY

Good. Now do it one thousand times.

LEON

You serious?

TEDDY

What about me doesn't look serious? One thousand. Nobody said it was going to be easy.

Leon stares at Teddy for a second, and then looks at Gus.

GUS

What the hell are you looking at me for? You heard the man. Give 'em a thousand!

Leon starts punching.

Teddy makes eye contact with Gus who nods in approval.

Teddy walks over to Kenny and begins helping him.

Gus watches Leon.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's after dinner, and Leon is in the kitchen, helping Kenny and Danny with the dishes. Gus' voice bellows from downstairs.

GUS

Leon! Come down here!

Leon goes downstairs.

INT. BASEMENT

Gus is sitting on a couch, watching old boxing footage on the projector.

GUS

Take a seat. This is Dempsey at his best. When he fought Jess Willard.

Leon sits down and watches intently as the much smaller Dempsey destroys his opponent.

GUS

Look how he swarms him. He never lets up. Willard don't know what to do. He can't move. He can't punch. He can't do nothing but get hit.

LEON

Wow. He doesn't even let him get up.

GUS

Back then you didn't have to go to a neutral corner when you scored a knockdown.

LEON

He's got that big guy scared shitless.

GUS

He had him like that before he even stepped in the ring. He got inside his head. Once you do that, the fight is already won. You understand?

LEON

Just like on the streets.

GUS

After we unleash you on them, that's gonna be your best weapon. Intimidation. You wait and see.

CUT TO:

Leon in the ring with Teddy, pounding at the body pads Teddy is wearing.

TEDDY

Give me one!

Leon throws a combination.

TEDDY

Give me two!

Leon responds.

TEDDY

That's it, that's it. Make me piss blood. Remember, stay low. Your jab gets you inside.

Leon double jabs, and then ducks inside before unleashing another crushing combination.

TEDDY

Beautiful.

Gus sits in the corner of the gym, watching Leon, smiling.

INT. DINNING ROOM

Leon sits at the dinning room table with the rest of the boys, laughing at Gus.

INT. BASEMENT

Leon watches boxing footage.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Leon sits in the classroom, writing in a notebook.

INT. HALLWAY

Leon walks down the hallway, looking at the mostly white faces watch him curiously.

INT. GYM

Leon is in the ring, sparing with Teddy.

INT. BASEMENT

Gus and Leon watch film. Gus is standing up trying to mimic Joe Louis.

GUS

You see how he is always in position.

The footage shows Louis unloading into his opponent.

GUS

Boom! Look at that power! That comes from foot work. Look at his feet. He's always in position.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alone, Leon does pushups on the floor. He gets in bed and reads a book about boxing history.

Later, Leon lies in the dark sleeping. He opens his eyes and Gus is sitting next to the bed talking to him.

GUS

You don't know it yet, but you've got it kid. You're going to be great. One day people are going to be cheering for you. They're going to love you; they're going to tell you you're the best. You're going to be like a Greek god and people are going to worship you. And you are going to be my redemption. We're going to do it together. We're going to take those bastards by storm.

Leon lies there, silently. He closes his eyes and dreams.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The van drives down the highway.

INT. VAN

Inside, Teddy drives. Leon sits next to him, silent. In the back, the other boys, Kenny, Billy, Danny, and Joe joke with each other.

TEDDY

It's normal that you are nervous. I remember my first tournament. I threw up right before I had to go out. Got it all over my shoes.

Leon keeps looking out the window, nervous.

TEDDY

But once you get in there, you'll settle down. After you get hit with that first punch, the nerves go away, and then the training sets in. It's not much different than the sparring. Just faster. You'll be fine. Leon.

Leon looks over at Teddy.

TEDDY

You'll be fine.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

The room is full of teenage fighters getting ready for their bouts.

Teddy is busy wrapping Kenny's hands.

Leon sits in the corner, hands wrapped, looking at the other fighters.

A tall PUERTO RICAN fighter slams his hands into a locker, psyching himself up. Each time he punches, he yells in Spanish.

Teddy watches Leon for a moment, and then goes back to Kenny.

INT. GYMNASIUM

Spectators gather around the ring, watching two teens trade shots. Teddy stands in the doorway by the dressing room, watching. His other fighters sit nearby.

The bell rings and the fighters embrace.

Teddy looks down at his clipboard.

TEDDY

Leon, you're up next!

Teddy looks around for Leon, but he is gone.

TEDDY

You guys see where he's at?

The kids shake their heads.

Teddy walks into the-

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Leon is nowhere to be found. Teddy checks the stalls in the bathroom. Nothing.

EXT. OUTSIDE GYM - DAY

Teddy searches the parking lot.

He checks the van.

He walks around the corner, looking.

Leon is sitting on a bench at a bus stop. His hands are still wrapped.

Teddy walks over and sits down next to him.

Leon's eyes are red and dewy.

TEDDY

Breathe, Leon. Everything is going to be okay. I promise.

Leon puts his head in his hands and begins to choke up.

TEDDY

I know how you're feeling, Leon, I really do. Right now, you want to be anywhere but here. Hell, you'd probably go back to prison right now if it meant you didn't have to face this thing in front of you.

Leon picks his head up and looks at Teddy.

TEDDY

I know. I've been where you're sitting. It seems like running away is the easy thing to do. But Leon, I'm telling you, it's not. If you don't face your fear now, it's going to follow you around. It's going to haunt you, make you sick. It's going to eat away at you, and you will regret it. In the long run, going into this fight is going to be the much easier path.

Leon starts to catch his breath.

TEDDY

I've got faith in you, Leon.

LEON

Nobody's ever told me that before.

A bus pulls up and its doors open.

TEDDY

It's up to you.

INT. GYMNASIUM

Leon stands in the ring, facing his opponent--the tall Puerto Rican kid. Teddy stands behind him, whispering into his ear.

TEDDY

Remember what we worked on. Use your jab to get close, duck down to the body, and then come hard to the head with the left hook. Visualize it. You can do it.

The bell rings and Leon and his opponent start to circle each other.

Leon ducks down, punches to the body, and then explodes with a left hook, which catches his opponent on the chin, lifts him off of his feet, and plants him on the canvas.

The gym becomes hushed for a moment as all of the spectators gawk at Leon.

Teddy jumps through the ropes and runs over to give Leon a hug as the audience explodes in delight.

INT. HALLWAY

Teddy dials numbers into a pay phone.

TEDDY
Gus. First round KO. Eight seconds.

INT. GUS' KITCHEN

GUS
Eight seconds! What was it?

TEDDY
The left hook. Looks like we got ourselves a hitter.

Gus hangs up the phone and slaps his knee.

GUS
Alright.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Teddy walks back into the dressing room with a smile on his face, looking for Leon. He can't find him. He checks the bathroom.

TEDDY
Leon? You in here, pal?

Teddy starts to leave but stops after hearing something. He walks to the last stall and pushes the door open.

Leon is sitting, crying.

TEDDY
Are you hurt?

Leon gets up and pushes past Teddy, trying to choke back his sobs. Teddy stops him.

TEDDY
It's okay. You did good in there. You can feel good about yourself. You worked hard, and it paid off.

Leon struggles to get his breathing under control. He is having a panic attack. Teddy tries to put his arm around Leon, but he brushes him away and walks off.

Teddy watches Leon leave, concerned.

INT. HALLWAY

Leon walks out of the bathroom and is met by all of the boys from the gym. They all cheer when they see him and give Leon high fives.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY

Teddy and Gus sit at a table, watching the kids bowl. It is Leon's turn. He holds the bowling ball awkwardly and throws it into the gutter. Everybody laughs, and Leon looks around sheepishly. After a moment, he starts to laugh.

DANNY

What was that, Leon? You suck! What, don't they have bowling in the ghetto?

Terri punches Danny on the arm. Danny grabs her and starts to tickle her.

Leon watches this.

Terri gets up and grabs a ball.

TERRI

Don't listen to him, Leon, you're just putting too much muscle into it. Here, watch me.

She takes her time and throws a strike.

LEON

Wow, how did you do that?

TERRI

It's easy, pick up your ball.

Leon does, and Terri walks close behind, guiding him.

TERRI

Just take it nice and easy and let the ball glide out of your hands. Aim for the third arrow.

Leon does this and throws a strike. Terri jumps in the air and hugs him, making Leon blush.

TERRI

You did it!

Terri walks back to Danny, and he starts tickling her again.

Leon sits next to Kenny; they watch the two maul each other.

KENNY

Forget it, man. She likes the pretty boys. It's a good thing, too, 'cause Danny can't do shit with his fists.

At the table, Teddy and Gus are talking over a couple of beers.

GUS

I talked to Jimmy J, up in Albany. He's got a 18-year-old Mick kid he thinks can give Leon some trouble. I told him we'd take Leon up there next week.

Teddy nods his head. He watches Danny and Terri fool around. He also notices Leon watching them. Danny gets up and walks to the bathroom.

GUS

I been meaning to talk to you about that little tart over there.

TEDDY

What?

GUS

That little piece of tail over there. The one whose mother you're schtupping.

TEDDY

Hey, take it easy. What's wrong with Terri? She is a sweet girl.

Teddy watches Leon get up and sit next to Terri. He whispers something to her. Terri smiles and gets up and walks to the snack bar. Leon walks to the bathroom.

GUS

I don't like it. She's only going to cause trouble. A girl ain't got no place in a gym.

TEDDY

I've always wondered--what is it you have against women?

GUS

The way I see it, only two things can stop a young fighter: drugs and women. And a man can quit drugs.

TEDDY

It's a new century, Gus.

GUS

Not in my world.

INT. BATHROOM

Danny stands at the urinal. Once he finishes and turns around, he sees that Leon is waiting for him.

Leon slams Danny into the wall hard.

LEON

Don't be making fun of me in front of your girlfriend.

Danny stares at Leon, rattled.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY

GUS

We're going to get him all of the fights we can. Every week to get the experience he needs for the nationals.

TEDDY

That's only six months away.

GUS

Which is why we got to get serious about this. Everything else goes on the back burner. Everybody.

TEDDY

What about Kenny? We've been bringing him along for two years now. He's on schedule.

GUS

Forget about Kenny. He's not going to take us anywhere we haven't already been. Leon is the path, understand?

TEDDY

What about the commitment you made to the other boys?

GUS

No, we need to keep them around the gym. Leon needs as much sparring as he can get. We can rotate the boys every day to get him the rounds he'll need.

TEDDY

We can't put Leon in with the boys. He'll ruin them. Even Kenny.

GUS

Then it's got to be you. The way I figure it, he needs five hundred rounds if he's going to be ready by the time he goes to the gloves. That's five rounds a day, twenty five a week. Along with his bouts on Saturday, that'll get him there.

TEDDY

That would be a heavy load for a professional. I don't think it's for the best. Even if he can handle it physically, the kid is mentally fragile. He needs to be brought along slowly, develop some emotional security. He still doesn't know how to deal with people.

GUS

Hogwash. The kid is getting along fine. He needs to stay busy, keep his mind off trouble. If we push him, he can go all the way.

TEDDY

If you push him too hard, he's going to break down. He can't handle it. You heard what Roger said. Leon needs discipline, security. He doesn't need to be the chosen one.

GUS

Get your head out of your ass. What do you think we've been waiting for all this time? The kid is strong. He can handle it. Hell, it's the best thing for him. A kid like that from the projects, this is the only shot he'll ever get at greatness, at money. And it's our last shot. He's going to take us to the mountaintop, Teddy. He's our ticket back in the game.

TEDDY

Our ticket? What are you talking about?

GUS

Jesus Christ, Teddy, it should be obvious. This kid is going to be such a force that nobody will be able to keep him out of the game. And if we're behind him, nobody can lock us out. Not even Sol Shapiro. Leon is the answer I've been waiting ten years for.

TEDDY

The answer to what?

GUS

It came to me in a dream. He is the instrument that will facilitate my redemption.

Teddy sits back and considers Gus for a moment.

TEDDY

You are out of your fucking mind.

Gus dismisses Teddy with a swat in the air.

GUS

I'm serious as stomach cancer.

TEDDY

Everybody says it about you, like it's an inside joke. I always thought it was a front you put up to fool everybody. But it's not a façade. You live in your own reality, don't you? You really are a fucking lunatic.

GUS

Watch yourself, Teddy. Don't say something you can't take back.

TEDDY

This isn't about you, Gus. And it ain't about me. It's about the kid--what's best for Leon. He's just starting to get settled in. Now I'm telling you, pushing him like you want is going to cause problems. He is not strong enough to be your savior. And it's not fair to him. He needs to be treated like everyone else. You make him your golden child. He'll have a breakdown. Maybe more than a breakdown.

GUS

So you're telling me, huh? Who the hell do you think you are to be telling me anything? If it wasn't for me, you'd still be drowning yourself in some shithole back in Hell's Kitchen or playing grab ass up at Riker's.

Gus gets up.

GUS

The kid's going to get there with or without you. I'm not going to let you ruin this for me. Now if you want to be on board, you need to remember whose gym it is.

Gus walks out.

Teddy sits still for a moment. He sees Danny walk out of the bathroom, looking a bit shaken. Danny walks over, whispers something to Terri, and he leaves.

A moment later, Leon walks out of the bathroom and starts to bowl again.

INT. EMMA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Teddy sits at the table, sharing a bottle of wine with Emma while Terri curls up on the couch with the dog, watching television.

EMMA

He sounds like a lunatic.

TEDDY

Maybe I'm being hard on him.

EMMA

You said it yourself, Teddy. He is using that boy to fulfill some missing piece from his past. And you know that is wrong. The whole point of sending him to foster care was that he'd have the structure and boundaries that have always been missing. That is all null and void if Leon gets special privileges because he is the star pupil.

TEDDY

It's funny, ever since I've known Gus, he's always preached the importance of loyalty and integrity between men. I mean, he definitely has his issues with women, and God knows why that is, but he really believes in the importance of doing the right thing--even if it is the harder way to go--because it's the right thing to do. Kind of like a code of honor between brothers. Something that supersedes money and fame.

EMMA

Not many people have the discipline to live that way.

TEDDY

That's why we became so close--because we were both on the other side of that, dealing with all the promoters and crooks. It's like we were in it together; we had our integrity and that made us morally superior. It's what made leaving it all behind bearable. We always tried to teach that to the kids. And I thought that was the most important thing. At least it was to me.

EMMA

You keep on using the past tense. You're saying "it was" and "we were".

TEDDY

When I look into his eyes now, I don't see it anymore.

EMMA

What do you see?

TEDDY

Avarice.

EMMA

Avarice?

TEDDY

It's like he knows the ride is almost over, and he doesn't want to get off until he reaches the top. And if it means selling his soul to get there, I think he'll do it. I don't want to be a part of that.

Emma gets up and sits on Teddy's lap. She kisses him.

EMMA

Maybe it's time you went your own way.

TEDDY

Gus has already given the gym over to me. He's quasi retired as it is. If it wasn't for Leon, the old man probably wouldn't leave his basement. Hell, he probably won't be alive in five years. I think I just have to ride this out.

EMMA

Teddy, you don't need Gus to do what you do. We could move somewhere else and you could open up a gym.

TEDDY

I don't feel right about leaving him now.

EMMA

I don't understand this bond that the two of you share.

TEDDY

It goes back to our days in the ring.

EMMA

What about them? You haven't told me much about your boxing career.

TEDDY

I just don't like to talk about it.

EMMA

Well Teddy, at some point you are going to have to or this is never going to go anywhere.

TEDDY

Look, some things are better left in the past. Just let it die.

EMMA

But it's not in the past, Teddy. It's all over your face. You're one of the strongest people I've ever known, but this old man has a death grip on you. You've said it yourself; you don't approve of what he's doing with Leon. Why can't you just let him dig his own hole and crawl into it? What the hell is it about your past that makes you think you owe him?

TEDDY

We're kind of like old war buddies. We've been through the fire together, you know?

EMMA

No, I don't, Teddy, because you won't tell me about it.

Teddy sighs.

TEDDY

I was never a great fighter, but I was always pretty tough inside the ropes. I mean I could stand in there with just about anybody. Gus used to joke that I had everything but talent.

EMMA

Your trainer said that?

TEDDY

He meant it as a compliment. I was a journeyman. It was clear that I wasn't a top ten guy. I couldn't move like the top fighters, and I didn't have their dexterity. Put it this way: You'd never see me throw a blinding combo like Sugar Ray Leonard.

EMMA

Who?

INT. RING

Clip of Sugar Ray Leonard knocking out Donny LaLonde with a vicious three punch combination.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT

TEDDY

But I always had a granite chin and a heavy paw. That meant I was great for seasoning up and comers. If you got by me, you knew you're ready for the prime time. And on my best night, I could get you out of there. I was one of those guys that you had to beat to be taken seriously.

EMMA

That's kind of sad, isn't it?

TEDDY

You are who you are; there's no use deluding yourself. I made a living. People in the business respected me. And I knew that if I ever caught a break I'd have a puncher's chance. Not a good chance, but, I don't know...

EMMA

A puncher's chance?

TEDDY

That's right, a puncher's chance. Plus I had Gus in my corner. No one else had a Gus.

EMMA

What do you mean? What's so special about him?

TEDDY

He doesn't look it, but the old man is a guru. Ask anybody in the business. Anybody who's old school. He's like a savant when it comes to the psychology of boxing.

EMMA

I thought it was all physical. Lots of brawn and bulk.

TEDDY

No. The fight game is 90% mental.

EMMA

How do you mean mental?

TEDDY

Most of it has to do with dealing with fear. Mental preparation. Self actualization. It's a scary prospect, climbing into the ring.

EMMA

But don't you get over that at some point? It seems like most fighters would have learned to deal with fear. I mean, isn't that the point of all the machismo? Because they're so confident?

TEDDY

I'll tell you a secret. The guys who make the most noise, talk the most trash, act the most macho--9 times out of 10--they are the ones who are the most scared.

EMMA

They are hiding their emotions?

TEDDY

It's all a mask. Inside we're all just a bunch of scared little boys.

EMMA

Now that I could have told you. But if Gus was so good, why was he training you? I mean if you were just a journeyman?

TEDDY

He was in exile.

EMMA

He was in exile? Did he organize a coup d'état in the ring?

TEDDY

That's funny, but it's actually not that far from the truth.

EMMA

How so?

TEDDY

You have never seen an industry as political and as corrupt as boxing. It's all run by crooked promoters, most with mafia ties, who play God with the fighters.

EMMA

How do they do that?

TEDDY

Promoters are only interested in developing prospects into champions, so they can set up big money paydays. Sometimes they develop guys who have great potential, like an Olympian or a Golden Gloves champion. Sometimes it's guys they think they can sell like an Irishman in Boston, a Mexican in LA or Texas, or a Puerto Rican in New York. You know, someone who is going to draw a crowd, stir up a bunch of nationalistic pride. When a promoter has this kind of fighter, a guy whose not elite but can make him a lot of money, sometimes he needs a little help getting him to the top level.

EMMA

What kind of help?

TEDDY

They do all sorts of things: poison your food the day before the fight, tamper with the gloves, or try to bribe the ref or a judge. If a promoter is really desperate, maybe he asks you to take a dive.

EMMA

Why would a fighter do that?

TEDDY

A lot of guys won't. But if you're desperate, maybe the promoter tells you that if you take the dive, he'll set you up with a title shot in your next fight. That's how a lot of it goes--tit for tat, quid pro quo. You scratch my back--

EMMA

I got it.

TEDDY

Gus would never play ball.

EMMA

So he was exiled?

TEDDY

After a while, promoters realized they couldn't trust him, so they wouldn't work with him, and they made sure he didn't get any of the top prospects. That's how he got stuck with me.

EMMA

But then how did you get the fight?

TEDDY

Well, it was pretty clear we were going nowhere, and I was getting sick of fighting in the clubs, so Gus made a deal with a promoter named Sol Shapiro. Gus told him we'd play ball, so Sol gave us a title elimination bout with Manny Fernandez, his gold star Puerto Rican gem.

EMMA

You threw the fight with him?

TEDDY

No, we never even intended on it. We just told Sol that we would to get us in the ring. We figured, if I can take him out, it'd create such a buzz that Sol or someone else would have no choice but to let me fight for the title. And then...

EMMA

You would at least have a puncher's chance.

TEDDY

That's right. Plus Fernandez was weak. He had been a good fighter coming up, but he'd developed a coke habit and hadn't been in training like he should have been. It was the perfect opportunity for us.

EMMA

So what happened in Atlantic City?

TEDDY

Sol knew better than to trust Gus. He hedged his bets.

EMMA

How did he do that?

TEDDY

He had the ref in his pocket. And the doctor.

EMMA

Both of them?

TEDDY

They were both degenerate gamblers, so it was easy for him to put pressure on them. Plus, I swear that bastard removed some of the padding from Manny's right glove. Jesus, that was a brutal fight.

INT. FLASHBACK RING

Teddy has a large gash over the left eye; meanwhile, blood runs freely from his Fernandez's nose. His right glove is noticeably caved in as if padding has been removed. The bell rings and each fighter returns to his corner. Gus jumps in the ring and runs to the referee.

GUS

There's something wrong with his glove. Why is it dented like that? Check his gloves.

The referee pushes Gus out of the way.

REFEREE

Get back in your corner or I will disqualify your fighter.

Gus grabs the referee with both hands.

GUS

He's got you taking? Goddamnit!

He is pulled away by his assistant trainer. Meanwhile in the corner, the cut man is doing his best with Teddy's eye, which is bad. Gus returns.

CUT MAN

Eye's bad, Gus.

GUS

Horseshit. It'll hold up one more round. What do ya say, kid? This is the closest we're ever going to come. You got six minutes in you?

TEDDY

Yeah. I'm still standing.

GUS

Alright then, Teddy, it's time to get urgent. You got to keep pressure on him. Don't leave it in the judge's hands. Double jab then over the top with the right. Paw him to sleep then drop the anvil. Once you get inside, step on his lead foot, so he can't go nowhere. Hard to the body, then back upstairs with the hook. I want him pissing blood tomorrow. And gimme some goddamned head movement! You look like a tree out there.

Across the ring, Fernandez sits on his stool, exhausted as his trainer tries pours water over his head, trying to coax two more rounds out of him.

Sol sits in his seat looking discontented. He gets up and walks over to the ring doctor and whispers into his ear.

The buzzer sounds and both fighters rise. Gus steps out of the ring, and his cut man whispers into his ear.

CUT MAN

That eye can't take much more. Not the way he's getting it. It's like he's got bricks in his hands.

GUS
He'll be okay. He's tough enough.

CUT MAN
Somebody's got to protect him.

GUS
We're too close. I can't stop it now.

The bell rings and the fight resumes. Teddy and Manny square off. In slow motion, Teddy is hit repeatedly by Manny's jab.

Teddy peppers his opponent with jabs. He punches lightly, just making contact.

Fernandez isn't worried about the jabs, so he stops trying to slip them and just comes forward.

From the corner, Gus yells--

GUS
Now, Teddy!

Teddy springs off his back foot, drives a hard jab into Manny's eye, and then follows with a right hand that shatters Manny's jaw. His body goes limp and crumbles.

Manny sits on the canvas, dizzily trying to regain his bearings. Slowly he gets up on his knees. Seeing this, the ref drags out the count.

At six, he stops and points to Teddy, directing him to another corner, clearly wasting time before resuming the count.

Gus yells in protest. The CROWD agrees.

Fernandez gets up on nine, wobbly.

GUS
He can't stand up, ref. Stop the fight!

Members of the crowd yell, agreeing with Gus.

Sol nods to the doctor.

The referee waves to Teddy and the fight resumes. Teddy moves in to finish his Fernandez off.

Suddenly, the doctor steps up onto the side of the ring and motions for the referee to come over. The ref stops the action.

DOCTOR

His eye's bad, I wanna get a look at it.

The ref pulls Teddy over, and the doctor examines him.

GUS

What are you doing? You're checking him now?
You kidding me? We got less than a minute left.

Gus looks over at Sol who makes eye contact and smiles broadly as his over-sized cigar sticks out of his fat mouth.

The doctor shakes his head, and the referee waves his hands. Fight over.

Teddy puts his hands in the air and looks around incredulously.

Gus storms the ring and starts a riot.

Teddy is attended to in the corner by an assistant trainer.

He is having obvious trouble with his vision.

TEDDY (V.O.)

At about this time it hits me: I can't see out of my
left eye.

INT. EMMA'S HOUSE

EMMA

They cheated you out of your title shot.

TEDDY

We tried to cheat each other. They won. After we double-crossed Sol, we were done in the sport. Nobody was giving us a shot. That's when I went through my thing, you know my depression. You have to understand, I was 30 seconds away. 30 seconds away from a different life, and it was snatched away. It was a long time before I could make peace with that. And the eye thing didn't help either. I think Gus feels responsible for that, too. Like he should have protected me.

EMMA

And on top of it, you went away to prison. That must have been awful.

TEDDY

Well, going to prison was my doing. I can't blame anybody for that. I'll tell you one thing though: when you're in prison, it's like you're a ghost. The world just goes on without you. Everybody forgets. You barely exist.

EMMA

That must have been so lonely.

TEDDY

It teaches you who really cares about you. Most people just write you off.

EMMA

But Gus didn't?

TEDDY

I remember the day I got out. I hadn't talked to anybody in two years. I don't know where I'm going. I got fifty bucks in my pocket. I don't know what I'm going to do. I get off the ferry and there he is, waiting for me with a job and a place to stay. I thought I was going to break down and cry.

EMMA

Wow.

TEDDY

I have to tell you; there's no better feeling than stepping out of that gate and having someone waiting for you. It's like being born again. That's why I can't leave him.

INT. RING

Leon stands in the ring, staring down his opponent, his nostrils flaring.

From the floor, Teddy watches Leon sway back and forth.

The bell rings and Teddy watches Leon swarm his opponent, knocking him senseless in a matter of seconds.

Against another fighter, a large, muscle bound kid, Leon swings big and knocks him out.

Gus looks on from the stands, smiling. Teddy and Gus lock eyes, and Gus gives him a knowing nod.

Against a DIFFERENT OPPONENT, Teddy watches Leon duck under a jab and deliver a crushing liver shot that makes him crumbling to the canvas and whither in pain.

INT. GYM

Teddy watches Leon and Gus work on a bag in the gym.

In the ring, Leon and Teddy spar voraciously as Gus, Kenny, Danny and others watch. Leon tries to bull rush Teddy into the ropes, but Teddy uses his jab to defend.

After they are done, Teddy grabs the ropes, exhausted.

Leon hops out of the ring and walks toward the dressing room. On the way, he passes Danny and pushes him hard in the back.

Teddy watches this.

INT. TEDDY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Obviously sore, Teddy ices his shoulder with a large bag.

He wraps his ribs with an ace bandage.

Emma rubs Teddy's back.

INT. BASEMENT

Leon watches footage of GEORGE FOREMAN knocking out JOE FRAZIER.

INT. LEON'S ROOM

Leon puts a poster of George Foreman on his wall.

INT. DINING ROOM

Leon sits at the table, working on homework. Clara comes by and gives him a glass of milk. She sits down next to him.

CLARA
How is everything going?

LEON

I'm okay.

CLARA

Are you?

LEON

What do you mean?

CLARA

Well, every time I see you, you are alone. You don't like the other boys, do you?

LEON

They okay, I guess.

CLARA

Have they been hard on you because you are new?

LEON

No, not really.

CLARA

Well, what about at school? Have you made any friends there?

LEON

I've never really been good at making friends. Sometimes other people make me nervous. I just like to be alone. Is that okay?

CLARA

You want to know something, Leon? I don't like being around people much either. If you ask me, there is nothing better than peace and solitude.

Leon smiles.

CLARA

How about the ladies? Have you found any you fancy?

LEON

I don't know.

CLARA

You have!

LEON

She doesn't like me, though.

CLARA

How do you know? Have you talked to her?

LEON

No.

CLARA

You mustn't be scared, Leon. Girls don't like that. They like strong boys who exude confidence. And the most important thing is not to take no for an answer.

INT. RING

Leon chases a thin kid around the ring. The kid jabs and moves, frustrating Leon.

The bell rings and both fighters walk to their corners.

INT. CORNER

Teddy drenches Leon's head with a large sponge.

TEDDY

What the hell are you doing out there?

Leon is out of breath.

LEON

He's fast. I can't catch him.

Teddy gives him some water.

TEDDY

Control your breathing. Long and slow.

Leon opens his mouth for more water.

TEDDY

You've had enough. Now you have to cut the ring off. If you keep on swinging for the fences, you're going to fall over. That ain't boxing. Control yourself. Work him into the corner with the jab, trap him against the ropes and then step on his lead foot. You following me?

LEON

Corner him and step on his foot.

TEDDY

Don't just step on it, slam the piss out of it! And then punch his guts out. Got it?

LEON

Got it.

TEDDY

Then get to it.

The bell rings, and Leon goes after his opponent. He lunges with his punches and misses while his rival continues his assault.

Gus gets up from his seat and stands next to Teddy.

GUS

He's sloppy. What's his problem? Did you tell him to jab?

TEDDY

Of course I did. He's not listening to me. He thinks he can just knock everyone out.

GUS

He can't?

TEDDY

Not like this. He's got to get it under control. This might be a lesson.

Leon's opponent lands a quick combination and gets a little cocky, bouncing off the ropes with his head down. Leon catches him with a right uppercut that turns out his lights. Teddy and Gus look at each other.

GUS

Maybe you just ain't saying nothing worth listening to.

Gus climbs into the ring and hugs Leon. Leon happily reciprocates. Teddy watches the two celebrate for a moment, and then walks out of the room.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Teddy walks in as Leon finishes getting dressed.

TEDDY

You want to tell me what you were doing out there?

LEON

Knocking fools out.

TEDDY

You weren't following my directions.

LEON

They didn't seem worth following. And I was right. You saw what I did in there.

TEDDY

So you think it is always going to be that easy?

LEON

Why not? You're a grown man and you barely stand with me.

TEDDY

Is that what you think? Listen, Leon, that brawling you do isn't going to work when you fight somebody with talent. You got the national golden gloves next month. If you fight like that in there, you'll get embarrassed.

Leon gets up to leave.

TEDDY

That's not the point, though. The point is, I'm your trainer and you listen to what I say. That's how it works. I'm the one with the knowledge.

LEON

And if I don't you're going to send me back to prison, right?

TEDDY

I wouldn't do that to you.

LEON

Hell no, you wouldn't. Everybody knows you ain't the one calling the shots.

Leon leaves.

Teddy waits for a moment and then walks out.

INT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Teddy walks outside and sees Gus showing Leon off to a small crowd.

GUS

What you guys saw in there today was nothing. Once I unleash him on the national golden gloves, you're all gonna know who he is.

Teddy walks by them and shakes his head.

CROWD MEMBER

What about that Morales kid? He's the defending champion.

GUS

Forget about him. With Leon's combination of speed and power, nobody in the amateurs can handle him. I should know; I trained him myself. Taught him everything I know.

CROWD MEMBER

What do you think about it, Leon?

LEON

I think I got a good shot. I just do whatever Gus wants because I know he's looking out for him. He's the only the one I can trust.

GUS

What'd I tell you. The kid's modest too. He's got character and integrity. Like I tell everybody, that's the most important thing.

Teddy watches this charade from afar. Next to him is Danny.

TEDDY

Son of bitch is taking all of the credit.

DANNY

Gus has changed. I don't like it.

TEDDY

Everybody changes.

DANNY

You haven't.

TEDDY

Don't be so sure.

DANNY

I wish Leon had never come here.

INT. ARENA

SUPER "NATIONAL GOLDEN GLOVES TOURNAMENT"

The arena is packed with thousands of people, gathered around a dozen different rings. Each ring has a large sign announcing the weight class. Inside, fighters battle each other.

In the stands, sit a collection of parents, fans, agents and promoters.

Sol smokes a fat cigar and mingles with other DISREPUTABLE LOOKING MEN.

Twenty yards away, Gus scowls at Sol. Gus is surrounded by a group of REPORTERS.

REPORTER 1

So what's this we hear about this monster kid you've been training?

REPORTER 2

I heard you plucked him out of the reformatory.

REPORTER 3

This tournament has got the best prospects from all over the country. Do you think he really has a shot?

GUS

Well I'll tell you this. Once you see him, you won't forget about him. And one more thing: make sure you don't come late. This boy likes his first round KO's.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Dozens of fighters of all shapes and sizes crowd the dressing room, putting on gear, stretching, shadow boxing.

Leon and Teddy sit on a bench; Teddy is wrapping Leon's hands.

TEDDY

Remember what I've been telling you. If you want to win this thing, you are going to have to use your brain. These aren't the bums you've been fighting upstate every week. This is another level. You have to stick to our strategy?

LEON

Yeah, yeah.

TEDDY

I'm serious. You have to focus. What is our strategy?

LEON

Put them to sleep.

TEDDY

And how are you going to do that?

LEON

I'm gonna move my head, jab to get in close, stay low, and look for an opening.

TEDDY

That's right. Now a lot of these boys are going to try to win on points with their jab, so you have got to slip it and corner them.

LEON

All right, man.

Gus walks in.

GUS

How's he lookin'?

LEON

I'm good, Gus.

GUS

You feeling mean?

LEON

Yeah.

GUS

Good. You about done, Teddy?

LEON

Yeah, he's wrapped.

GUS

Okay, let me have a word with Leon a minute.

TEDDY

Yeah, all right. Think about what you're going to do, Leon. Visualize it.

Teddy leaves.

GUS

So, how are you feeling?

LEON

Nervous. I'm a little scared.

Gus lightly smacks Leon on the side of the head.

GUS

I don't want to hear that kind of talk. Don't let these guys here see any weakness. If they think you're weak, they're going to eat you alive.

LEON

Okay.

GUS

Now the first thing I want you to do when I leave is to start cursing as loud as you can and punch everyone of these lockers--whether there's a man in it or not. You get yourself in a frenzy and let them see it. You do that and they'll be shitting their pants.

LEON

Okay.

GUS

One more thing. That crowd out there is crawling with promoters and agents. You got a hell of a chance to make an impression. This is going to be our coming out party, okay? So swing for the fences.

INT. HALLWAY

Gus walks out of the locker room and meets Teddy.

GUS

How do you think it's gonna go?

Teddy eyes MORALES, a mean-looking Mexican fighter warming up nearby.

TEDDY

That Morales kid worries me a little, but I think it's Leon's to win it if he keeps his head.

From inside the dressing room there is a loud bang and a lot of screaming.

Teddy starts to go in to check it out, but Gus stops him.

GUS

Let it be.

As they continue to talk there is a series of loud noises and screams.

GUS

Look, I know things ain't been real great between us for a while.

TEDDY

Yeah.

GUS

And I know you blame me for that and maybe you're right. But Leon couldn't have gotten here without you. You've done some great work getting him ready.

TEDDY

Thanks, Gus.

GUS

This is a big night for us. We win this, and we're it. Everybody's gonna know we're players. We turn the kid pro and we'll control the New York scene.

TEDDY

Everything will flow through us, huh? You have it figured out.

GUS

In two years, we'll have him fighting for the belt. He'll be the youngest heavyweight champion ever. That'll be good for everyone. Leon will be set for life. You can buy that girl of yours a house and marry her like a respectable man. Everybody will be set.

TEDDY

And what will you get, Gus?

GUS

I'll get my belt. And I'll walk up to Sol and shove it in his face and tell him I ain't giving him the fight. I'll tell him I'm cutting him out. And then I can die happy.

TEDDY

Jesus, Gus. What the hell happened to you?

GUS

What do you mean?

TEDDY

You're playing out the past through Leon. That ain't right. He's not some tool for you to screw Sol Shapiro with. What happened to you? You used to be all about the kids.

Gus looks away for a moment.

GUS

Maybe I've been zealous this past year. I just thought the ride was over, ya know, Teddy. I was waiting to die. Then Leon comes, and we're back in the game. I got something to live for again.

TEDDY

It shouldn't come at the expense of your principles.

GUS

Maybe you got a point. We'll take the foot off the gas when we get home. Lighten things up.

TEDDY

I think that'll be good for everyone.

GUS

Okay, then. Right now we got a tournament to win.

Several fighters walk out of the locker room, shaking their heads.

FIGHTER

That guy's crazy, I ain't fighting him.

Teddy shoots Gus a look.

GUS

Hey, every little bit helps.

INT. RING

Leon squares off against his opponent, a smaller, scared-looking teenager.

The bell rings, and Leon rushes. He lands a jab, which knocks his rival on his back.

INT. AUDIENCE

Sol winces at the strength of Leon's jab. He turns to his companion.

SOL

What do you know about this kid? Who's he with?

COMPANION

Gus Moreno.

SOL

Gus?

Sol laughs.

SOL

Perfect.

INT. RING

Against a different fighter, Leon violently lands a right uppercut that ejects his mouthpiece and ends the fight.

INT. AUDIENCE

The crowd screams in surprise.

Sol nods in approval.

SOL

Wow. He's got it. I wanna have a talk with him.

INT. LOCKER ROOM

Leon sits on a bench, drinking a Gatorade.

Teddy stands in the corner, talking on a cell phone.

TEDDY

He's in the finals. All first round knockouts. It looks good.

Sol walks in accompanied by a PENCIL-NECK ACCOUNTANT in a suit and a BODYGUARD.

Teddy raises an eyebrow, but doesn't say anything.

Sol approaches Leon.

SOL

So you're the kid who is turning the rest of the field into Swiss cheese?

LEON

I guess so. Who are you?

SOL

I'm the guy who is going to change your life. When do you turn 18?

LEON

A few months. Why, you into young boys are something?

Sol turns to his companions and laughs.

SOL

I love it. He's all attitude. That's going to serve you well in your career, that street mentality. You know I came up on the streets.

LEON

Where? White Plains?

SOL

Nope. Hell's Kitchen. Here, look at this.

Sol flashes his Rolex.

SOL

Worth more than the car you came here in.

Leon looks at it, impressed.

SOL

You're with Gus, huh?

LEON

How'd you know that?

SOL

I know all things, kid. Gus and me go way back. He used to be all the rage back in the day. It's a damn shame what happened to him.

LEON

What do you mean?

Sol postures to his entourage.

SOL

He doesn't know. Beautiful. Where you been, kid? That manager of yours is a joke; he got himself run out of the industry for being a head case. Nobody wants to work with him. Why do you think he's working with the amateurs?

LEON

He's helped me. He believes in me.

SOL

He believes in you? Give me a break, kid. What are you looking for--a father figure or a manager?

LEON

He says he can get me to the top.

SOL

Don't be naïve; a blind man can see you've got the stuff.

LEON

You really think so?

SOL

Are you kidding me? With the right backing, you can be a star. Now you've heard of me before, right? You know who I am?

LEON

I've seen you on TV. You're always ring side for all the big fights.

SOL

And do you know why that is? No, of course you don't. I'll tell you why; it's because all those fighters in those big money fights are in my stable. Now I have three world champions right now. Every fighter I sign, I do with a guarantee that if he wins, he'll be in the top ten inside three years. Now do you think your buddy Gus can promise you that?

LEON

I don't know.

SOL

Well, you've got some thinking to do, then. This is a business, kid. The sooner you learn that, the quicker you'll make your money.

LEON

I owe Gus. He pulled me from the penitentiary.

SOL

You owe him nothing! Why do you think he did that? Because he loves helping underprivileged black kids from the ghetto? Come on now, my brother, be smarter than that. He's just another in a long line of white men who want to pillage the treasures of the black community. When he looks at you he sees the pot of gold at the end of his Irish rainbow. Open your eyes. Gus has no love for you. He is only enamored with what you can do for him. Do you think Gus knows what it's like to be a black man?

LEON

You're not black.

SOL

I'm not black? Let me tell you something, I'm of Hebrew descent. Do you know what that means?

LEON

You're Jewish?

SOL

It means, my people were being oppressed by the Italians back when your African ancestors were still chasing lions and building mud huts.

LEON

They still do that over there.

SOL

The point is, we've been dealing with oppression longer than anybody. You've read your bible. We were the original black people.

LEON

Are you fucking with me?

SOL

Forget about that. Is Gus who you really want behind you? Look at what happened to that trainer of yours. He stayed loyal to Gus. How'd that work out for him? Is that where you want to be in ten years?

Leon thinks about this for a moment.

SOL

It's time to think about your future. Now I've already offered a contract to the boy you're fighting in the final, Morales, but I'll tell you what. You go out and win this tournament, and I'll give you his spot in the stable. Here.

Sol hands Leon a large wad of hundred dollar bills.

SOL

Now this is just a taste of what you'll get when you sign with me. All my guys train out in Vegas. We put them up in a condo right on the strip. You ever seen the women they got out in Vegas? Of course you haven't, you've been shacking up with father time.

Leon flips through the money, his eyes widening with each bill.

SOL

You're going to love it, Leon. I'll make you a star, get you on TV right away. At some point, we all got to grow up and do what's best for ourselves. The day you turn 18, you come see me, okay?

Sol and his companions walk out. As they pass Teddy, Sol says:

SOL

What did I tell you? Eating out of the palm of my hand.

Leon flips through his stack of money as Teddy watches him from afar. Teddy follows Sol into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY

TEDDY

It looks like you're up to your same tricks.

Sol turns around and faces Teddy. It takes him a minute to recognize him.

SOL

Well if it isn't Teddy Gallo, the only man in the history of boxing who chose devotion over dollars. You are an inspiration, Teddy. Looks like that eye is working again.

TEDDY

It saw you coming a mile away.

GUS

You have done a hell of a job with that kid. Gus is going around telling everybody it was him, but I know the truth. You know he's going to be mine, right?

TEDDY

I know.

SOL

I'll make a deal with you. You convince him to come to me, and I'll keep you on as a trainer. I'll even give you a six figure advance. What do you think? Could you see yourself in Vegas?

TEDDY

Not a chance.

SOL

No, of course not. You know, if memory serves, we had a similar conversation about ten years ago. You didn't take me up on my offer then, either. How'd that work out for you?

TEDDY

I'm doing just fine.

SOL

Of course you are. Still the loyal foot soldier. Goddamn, Teddy, it's your tragic flaw. Everyone can see it but you. I'll tell you what, don't answer now. Mull it over. When you're done being a cautionary tale, you call me.

Sol hands Teddy a business card.

SOL

Just don't wait too long.

Sol starts to leave, and then turns back around.

SOL

I'm glad you got your eye back. No hard feelings, huh?

He leaves with his entourage.

TEDDY

None at all.

Teddy tears the card up and drops it on the floor.

INT. ARENA

Teddy walks out of the dressing room and sees Gus standing nearby, holding court with a group of boxing insiders.

GUS

I've been saying it since the first time I laid eyes on him. This kid is going to be the next big star. I've taught him everything I know. He's mean, I'm telling you, like a cross between Liston and Foreman. You're going to see a lot of this kid. I'll make sure of that.

Gus sees Teddy and walks over.

TEDDY

You're really enjoying yourself.

GUS

Seeing these vultures again is like Christmas morning. I feel like I'm middle aged again.

TEDDY

Jesus, Gus, if I didn't know better, I'd say you're glowing.

GUS

Listen, I was thinking, this being the finals, I wanna be in the corner. For old time's sake.

TEDDY

Whatever you want, Gus. You're the boss. You made that clear to me. Might as well make it clear to everyone else.

Gus lightly squeezes Teddy's cheek.

GUS

This is our night, my boy.

INT. RING

Leon stands in the middle of the ring, squaring off at Morales as they prepare for the fight to start. Gus and Teddy stand behind him.

TEDDY

So it looks like you've got a lot at stake.

Leon shoots Teddy a quizzical look.

TEDDY

He's going to try to push you around. Don't let him.

At the bell, Leon rushes Morales, throwing wide hooks that catch only air. Leon's opponent sides steps the charge and counters with a series of jabs and short crosses. Leon manages to get inside, and tangles up Morales. Morales lands a sneaky elbow that the referee misses. Leon is stunned and Morales jumps on him.

INT. CORNER

Gus throws his hands up.

GUS

What is he doing?

TEDDY

It's getting dirty.

INT. RING

Morales throws a shoulder into Leon, which backs him up on the ropes. Incensed, Leon throws an off-balanced punch and is caught with a counter that drops him to the canvas.

INT. CORNER

GUS

Get up! Get up!

INT. RING

Leon gets up, out of breath. Sloppily, he charges again and eats more punches. As the bell rings, Leon is trapped against the ropes, close to being stopped.

INT. CORNER

Gus puts the stool down and Leon collapses on it. Gus grabs Teddy and shakes him.

GUS

Get in there. What are you doing?

TEDDY

I thought this was your show.

GUS

You're his trainer. Get in there.

Teddy gets in the ring and starts working on Leon.

TEDDY

What are you doing in there?

LEON

He's too strong. I can't beat him.

TEDDY

Bullshit. One little beating and you're ready to give up? I thought you were a tough guy. Don't you want this?

LEON

I do.

TEDDY

Do you really?

LEON

Yes.

TEDDY

Then walk out there and hit him in the balls.

LEON

Do what?

TEDDY

He's pushing you around. Go punch him in the balls and make him respect you.

LEON

I don't know if I can.

TEDDY

You go low or don't come back here.

Teddy snatches Leon up, pulls the stool out from under him and climbs out of the ring. Leon is stunned, then the bell rings.

INT. RING

Leon comes out tentative, and is bullied around the ring by Morales. After taking a hard right hand, Leon decides he's had enough and takes Teddy's advice. He throws a low hook that lands well below the belt line. Morales immediately tightens up and retreats. Leon seizes on this and presses his opponent. Sensing blood in the water, Leon becomes frenzied and knocks Morales out with extreme malice.

Gus jumps through the ropes and celebrates, picking Leon up and carrying him around the ring.

Teddy stays back and watches Gus.

INT. STANDS

Sol nods his head.

SOL

That's our boy.

INT. GUS' HOUSE – DAY

Gus, Teddy, and Leon walk in the front door and are met by Clara and all the boys- Kenny, Billy, Joe, and Danny as well as Emma and Terri. Everyone cheers the conquering heroes.

Leon is ushered into the living room.

KENNY

Check it out, man, you're on YouTube.

Kenny sits down at a computer and plays a video of Leon knocking fools out at the National Golden Gloves Tournament. The action is set to rap music.

With each knockout, all the boys at the table yell and whoop.

KENNY

You're famous now, Leon.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Leon walks down the hallway and is the center of all attention. Guys give him high fives while pretty girls eye him. Leon drinks it all in, loving his newfound fame. SARA, a cute blonde, stands in front of her locker, eyeing Leon. Leon smiles but keeps walking.

INT. CAFATERIA - DAY

At lunch, Leon sits with the guys from the gym.

RICHIE, a skinny, preppy teen, approaches Leon and puts his arm around him like they are old friends. ERIC, JOHN, and WILLIAM hover behind him. They look like clones of him.

RICHIE

What's up, homey?

LEON

What's up?

RICHIE

Dude, your shit on YouTube was the bomb! You got to show us some of your moves up close.

LEON

You want me to knock you out?

RICHIE

Hell yeah, man. Well, maybe Eric. He thinks you're a bitch.

Leon shows his teeth to Eric who laughs uncomfortably.

RICHIE

I'm just messin', dude. Listen we're having this party after school today. You in?

LEON

I have training.

RICHIE

That's too bad, man; it's going to be off the chain.

Richie points to a nearby table. Sara and several other girls wave.

RICHIE

You sure you can't skip it?

LEON

All right.

RICHIE

Word. Meet me in the back lot after 4th period.

Richie leaves with his entourage.

Leon turns back to his food. Kenny shoots him a concerned look but says nothing.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Leon walks through the parking lot. He spots Richie's RANGE ROVER and approaches. Richie and John are sitting in his truck, waiting. Leon bumps Richie's fist through the window and peers into the back seat.

Three girls--Sara, KATIE, and JESSICA--sit, wearing skimpy outfits. They giggle when they see Leon.

RICHIE

You ready to do this?

LEON

Uh huh.

RICHIE

Get in.

Leon gets in the back seat, squeezing between the girls.

The truck takes off, tearing through the parking lot and off school grounds. They are followed by another SUV full of teenagers.

Richie and John both pull out blunts, light them, and pass them around. Sara takes one and smokes. She blows the smoke in Leon's mouth, and then passes it to him. He puffs.

INT. GYM - AFTERNOON

Teddy watches the usual kids work the bags. He walks over to Kenny.

TEDDY

Have you seen Leon, today?

KENNY

Not since lunch.

TEDDY

You don't know where he is?

KENNY

I can't say.

INT. RICHIE'S HOUSE – DAY

Everybody hangs out in the backyard, getting high, drinking and listening to 50 CENT.

Leon makes out with Sara on a lounge chair.

Richie walks up with Eric, who is dressed in full head gear and boxing gloves.

RICHIE

So are you ready to give us a show?

He hands Leon a pair of gloves.

SARA

Come on, Leon. I want to see you fight.

EXT. RICHIE'S BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

William records the action with a camcorder as the teenagers crowd around and chant- -

CROWD

Beat his ass! Beat his ass!

Leon, wearing only a pair of gloves, eyes Eric quizzically. Eric is fully decked out in protective gear--gloves, headgear, mouthpiece. He's even wearing a cup over his shorts.

RICHIE

Come on, dude, he doesn't think you can knock him out.

SARA

Come on, Leon. Knock his bitch ass out!

Leon shrugs and approaches Eric. He fakes a right to the head, and Eric covers up his face.

Big mistake. Leon immediately drops his weight and fires a left hook to the liver, followed by a right upper cut that sends Eric airborne. He lands with a thud on the grass.

The crowd stands quiet for a moment. Leon looks at his audience, and then awkwardly raises his hands. They go wild.

RICHIE

Did I tell you or what! That was awesome, dude!
People are going to freak when they see this. Have
another beer, man.

Leon takes one and drinks as the crowd disperses. Sara approaches.

SARA

I've never seen somebody so strong. Can you show
me your moves?

She leads him into the house and to an empty bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Leon closes the door and eyes Sara as she lies down on the bed.

SARA

Are you going to get rough with me?

Leon lies down next to her, and they start kissing. Sara moans with pleasure.

Leon starts to get more aggressive, handling Sara roughly. She begins to feel uncomfortable.

SARA

Leon, stop-

Leon puts his hand over her mouth.

Sara starts to kick frantically. She gets some space from Leon and runs out of the room, crying. Leon sits still for a moment, trying to catch his breath.

INT. GYM - EVENING

Teddy sits at his desk and calls--

CLARA

Hello?

TEDDY

You seen Leon today? He didn't show up.

CLARA

He didn't. No, he hasn't been here. Let me ask Gusy.

She opens the door to the basement and yells-

CLARA

Gus!

GUS

What? I'm watching film.

CLARA

Teddy's on the phone. He wants to know have you seen Leon. He didn't go to the gym today.

GUS
What am I, his shadow?

Clara returns to the phone.

CLARA
Teddy, he hasn't seen him either.

TEDDY
Okay.

INT. GUS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Leon opens the door quietly and sneaks through the living room. He is obviously intoxicated.

Gus sits in the shadows waiting. Leon sees him and stops.

GUS
Come over here.

Leon approaches, expecting a reprimand. Instead, Gus says-

GUS
Sit down.

Leon sits down, waiting for it...

GUS
You been drinking?

LEON
I don't know.

GUS
You got to watch that. It'll kill a career in a heartbeat.

LEON
If you say so.

GUS
Another couple of months and you're 18. That means we can go pro. Have you been thinking about that?

LEON

I don't know, not really.

GUS

Come on, if I was you, it'd be all I could think about.

LEON

Yeah, I'm pretty excited.

GUS

Your life is going to change, kid. Fame, fortune, broads.

LEON

Broads?

Gus nods his head.

GUS

You got to watch out for the broads. They can get you into trouble faster than anything else.

LEON

I'll keep an eye out.

GUS

I'm serious, Leon. You've got a destiny, and I'll do everything I can to protect it, but you have to be careful. Don't give anybody a reason to take it away from you.

LEON

But Gus, I haven't done nuthin--

GUS

Forget about that. I ain't accusing you of nothing. Just watch your step, capice?

LEON

I will.

GUS

It's late. You better get to bed.

Leon gets up and makes for the steps, but he is stopped by Gus' voice.

GUS

You haven't talked to anyone else about going pro have you?

LEON

Like who?

GUS

Like a promoter or an agent. Somebody like Sol Shapiro.

LEON

I don't--

GUS

He's a scumbag; they all are. They'll use you up and throw you away. If you hear from him or anybody else, you tell 'em to take a hike. All we got in this business is our loyalty.

Leon walks upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT

Leon sits down on his bed and takes his wallet out of his pocket.

He holds a business card which reads:

SOL SHAPIRO

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Leon leans against a locker, watching Terri and Danny talk. Leon starts to walk over, and Danny leaves.

Leon

Hi, Terri.

TERRI

Are you enjoying your newfound fame?

LEON

I guess so. I'm not used to all the attention.

TERRI

You deserve it.

LEON

I guess. Hey, we're going to break out early. Do you want come with us?

TERRI

I can't. I have a test sixth period.

Terri closes her locker.

LEON

You sure? You don't come around the gym anymore. I don't ever get to see you.

TERRI

I guess I grew out of boxing.

LEON

Well you grew into a nice body.

Terri laughs.

TERRI

That was really cheesy.

LEON

Do you want to go to a movie with me or something?

Terri closes her locker.

TERRI

Leon, you're a nice guy, but I'm with Danny. I'll see you around.

Leon watches Terri leave.

INT. GYM - AFTERNOON

Leon walks in and starts to unload his gear. Teddy sees him and walks over.

TEDDY

Where have you been all week?

LEON

Taking a break. Call it a vacation.

TEDDY

You've been on vacation?

LEON

That's right. Can't I get a break? You guys have been riding me for so long, I felt like taking a break.

TEDDY

I get it, you need some time off?

LEON

I'm just tired of being your slave.

TEDDY

Whoa, your slave? Where's that coming from?

LEON

Look man, all I'm saying is I'm out of here in a few months; I've done my time and I'm about to go pro, so I think I should be able to train when I want to.

TEDDY

Is that right?

LEON

You need to step off.

TEDDY

I do?

LEON

Things have changed, man. I ain't ya whipping boy no more.

TEDDY

So you're calling the shots now?

LEON

That's right. And if you want to be around when I'm bringing in the green, you had better get on board.

TEDDY

Well, Leon, I don't know about any of that. But I do know this is my gym, and nobody works here unless I say so.

LEON

Come on, man, everybody knows you don't run this bitch.

TEDDY

Take a walk. You're not welcome here today. You can come back when you get your head on straight.

LEON

Please man, don't even--

Teddy snatches the gloves out of Leon's hands. Leon jumps up and gets in Teddy's face.

LEON

Is you crazy?

TEDDY

Take a walk! Now!

Leon postures for a moment, staring at Teddy, their faces less than an inch apart.

TEDDY

Do you really want to find out? Then let it happen.

Leon walks out of the gym. For the first time since Leon walked in, Teddy notices his surroundings. Everyone else in the gym is staring at him.

INT. TEDDY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Teddy sits on his couch, sipping whiskey, watching sports news. A report comes on, featuring the rising stars in boxing. Leon appears, knocking people out.

TELEVISION

Perhaps the biggest star is Leon Jackson, the Bronx prodigy who was plucked from juvenile hall by infamous trainer Gus Moreno and brought to his training facility in the small, upstate town of Catskill.

Shots of Catskill.

A series of pictures of a younger Gus.

TELEVISION

Ten years ago, Moreno was at the center of a scandal when he initiated a post fight riot following the defeat of his fighter in a heavyweight elimination bout.

More footage of Leon punching.

TELEVISION

Jackson first gained national attention when he burned through the National Golden Gloves tournament, scoring four knockouts in route to an impressive victory.

Leon smiles, holding up a trophy. Gus is visible.

TELEVISION

Recently, Jackson has made a splash by going viral.

Footage of Leon participating in backyard boxing while people cheer.

TELEVISION

Leon's YouTube videos have become a sensation with fight fans all over the country. Jackson is expected to announce his decision to turn pro later this month, which will likely create a bidding war. It appears the sky is the limit for young Leon Jackson.

Teddy turns the television off. His phone rings.

TEDDY

Hello?

GUS

What's this I hear about you kicking Leon out of the gym?

TEDDY

I kicked Leon out of the gym.

GUS

Why are you being a wise ass?

TEDDY

He didn't show up all week, and then he came in with an attitude. He needed to be taught a lesson. Did you know he was skipping training?

GUS

Don't worry about that. He's just being a teenager.

TEDDY

I know that. But teenagers need discipline.

GUS

Go easy, okay, Teddy. I don't need you ruffling any feathers. Give the kid some space.

TEDDY

I think he needs some punishment right now. His head's getting big.

GUS

You let me worry about that.

Gus hangs up.

TEDDY

Here we go.

He drinks the rest of his liquor.

INT BEDROOM – NIGHT

Teddy lies in bed, sleeping next to Emma. He is awakened by the phone.

TEDDY

Hello? Is he okay? I'll be right there.

He hangs up the phone.

EMMA

What is it?

TEDDY

Leon.

INT. POLICE STATION – NIGHT

Teddy walks into the police station, which has a small town rural feel. Leon sits on a bench with his head down. He avoids Teddy's stare.

Teddy spots Gus behind the counter, talking to an officer.

Gus nods to Teddy. He shakes the officer's hand and walks over.

TEDDY

What's the story?

GUS

He's getting let go with a warning.

TEDDY

He's lucky.

GUS

The sheriff is a friend.

TEDDY

Why'd he get picked up?

GUS

Some little tart from his school claimed he got too rough with her.

Gus turns to Leon.

GUS

Didn't I tell ya to be careful with these broads? They're all looking to get over on you. You're lucky the sheriff knows how important you are.

TEDDY

Hold on, what do you mean too rough? What did you do?

LEON

I didn't do nothing. It's like Gus says--she's just trifling--

GUS

Leon! Go wait in the car!

Leon walks out with a little more swagger than Teddy would like.

GUS

Relax, Teddy.

TEDDY

What are you hiding? What the fuck did he do?

GUS

They were skipping school at some rich kid's house. Drinking. Smoking the dope. Apparently, the kid got a little frisky, nothing big. He didn't rape nobody. He just scared her a little.

TEDDY

What about the girl's parents? They must be flipping out.

GUS

The sheriff talked to the father. He got him calmed down. We're gonna cut him a piece out of future earnings.

TEDDY

You what?

GUS

We couldn't take the chance; the kid's still on parole.

TEDDY

If this is what he's doing, maybe he needs to go back inside.

Gus stares at Teddy for a long moment.

GUS

If you want to stay on here, I don't want to hear anymore of that talk. You're either with us or you're not.

TEDDY

He's suspended from the gym.

GUS

Are you crazy? His pro debut is in less than two months.

TEDDY

The kid's out of control. If you don't put the brakes on him now, it'll never happen. Now we've talked about this. Boxing's the only thing he's got that means anything.

Gus turns and leaves.

GUS

I'll talk to him.

INT. GYM – DAY

Teddy sits at his desk, filling out paper work. Through the window, he sees Leon enter the gym.

He shakes his head and starts to get up when Gus comes in behind him.

Leon starts to put his gear on as Gus takes a seat.

Teddy walks over.

TEDDY

Take those gloves off.

Leon looks at Gus.

TEDDY

I thought we were clear about this?

GUS

Take it easy, Teddy. The kid's sorry he let us down. Tell 'em, Leon.

Leon is putting on his shoes and doesn't bother to look up.

LEON

Sorry, Teddy.

GUS

He needs to stay busy; and he's got work to do. We got to get you ready for the big time, right, Leon?

LEON

Right, Gus.

TEDDY

I don't want him here. He's suspended.

GUS

Don't make this hard on yourself, Teddy.
Everybody knows whose name is on the lease.

Teddy starts to leave.

LEON

Hey, Teddy.

Teddy stops and turns around.

LEON

I told you.

Teddy pushes the door open and walks out.

EXT. PARKING LOT – DAY

Teddy is full of rage and kicks the ground as he walks. Unsatisfied, he punches the window of the van, shattering it.

Teddy is suddenly calm. He looks at his fist, which is bloody.

He marches across the street to a convenience store.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE – SAME

Teddy walks in and picks a pack of bandages off the counter. Then, he walks to the back and grabs a bottle of JIM BEAM. The CASHIER, a very old Vietnamese man, eyes him curiously.

Teddy puts the bottle on the counter.

CASHIER

You have rough day?

Teddy smiles faintly and walks back out.

The cashier watches him walk back across the street and up the stairs on the side of the building.

INT. TEDDY'S APARTMENT

Teddy walks inside, drops his key on the floor and slams the door.

He runs his hand under some cold water.

Teddy examines his hand. No stitches needed. He wraps it in gauze and walks into the bedroom with the bottle. The dog follows him.

INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT

Teddy wakes up hours later to an incessant knocking.

He sits up and wipes the sleep from his eye. The bottle sits on the night stand, half empty. Next to it, the alarm clock reads:
SUPER "10:30"

Teddy takes a deep breath and walks to the door.

INT. DOORWAY – NIGHT

Teddy opens it and is bombarded by Emma who rushes in, hysterical.

EMMA

What's wrong with your phone? I've been calling you for two hours!

TEDDY

What's wrong?

EMMA

I can't find her anywhere. I've been driving around for three hours; I can't find her.

TEDDY

Where did you look?

EMMA

Everywhere. The library, the coffee shop, the bowling alley--

TEDDY

When was the last time you checked home?

Emma stares at Teddy. His eyes are very bloodshot.

TEDDY

Come on, I'll drive.

INT. VAN – NIGHT

Teddy and Emma ride in the van.

EMMA

Do you want to tell me about the window?

TEDDY

Must have been some kids.

Emma spots his bandaged hand.

EMMA

You've been drinking alone.

TEDDY

Here we go.

Teddy pulls the van into the driveway, and they both get out.

EMMA

The lights were off when I left.

INT. HOUSE

Emma bursts through the front door with Teddy close behind.

EMMA

Terri? Terri?

Emma runs upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM

She opens the door and finds Terri sitting on her bed. Her eyes are red and nose runny. She also has bruises on her arms and a torn shirt.

EMMA

Are you okay?

Terri cries.

EMMA

Teddy, go wait downstairs.

Teddy walks out of the room and goes downstairs to the--

INT. LIVING ROOM

Teddy sits at the table. After a while, Emma walks in.

TEDDY

Does she need to go to the hospital?

EMMA

No.

TEDDY

What happened?

Emma walks into the kitchen and sits down at the table.

EMMA

She went to the book store for a coffee. She saw him there. He offered to walk her home. They got to the park, and they stopped at the swing. That's when he told Terri he wanted to sleep with her. He told her he was going to be a star, and she would regret not doing it later. When she refused, he tried to force her. He grabbed her and dragged her toward the woods.

TEDDY

He didn't-

EMMA

He didn't rape her. She had a can of mace in her pocket and sprayed him in the eye. She got away.

TEDDY

I should have known.

EMMA

You couldn't have known.

TEDDY

He tried to do something like this last week with a girl from school. The police let him go, though. Gus knows the Sheriff. He convinced him to sweep it under the rug.

EMMA

Excuse me?

TEDDY

I should have told you.

EMMA

You knew this boy was going around forcing himself on young girls and you didn't say anything?

TEDDY

I should have told you, but--

Emma slaps him.

EMMA

But he's the golden boy, right? You've got big plans for him. And big plans for the pay checks.

TEDDY

No, I didn't want to--

EMMA

Don't tell me you didn't want to let Gus down.

TEDDY

That's not what--

EMMA

You know what Teddy, you say you're different than Gus, and you pretend to take the highroad, but in reality, you are just as complicit. You make me sick. You proclaim yourself to be a man of integrity, but in the end, you want to cash in like everybody else. At least Gus is honest about who he is.

TEDDY

Emma- -

EMMA

I want you out of my house and away from my daughter. You all deserve each other. I hope it's all worth it.

INT. VAN – NIGHT

Teddy drives, angry.

As he drives, the song “Atlantic City” by Bruce Springsteen plays.

Teddy's eyes are dark and cold and distant. He is in another place.

EXT. FRONT YARD GUS' HOUSE – NIGHT

Teddy screeches to a halt and hops out of the van, making a beeline for the front door.

INT. HOUSE

Teddy bursts in the door, startling Clara.

TEDDY

Where is he?

CLARA

Gus?

TEDDY

Leon. Where the hell is he?

Gus enters, bewildered.

GUS

Teddy? What the hell is going on?

TEDDY

I'm looking for Leon.

GUS

He ain't here. You been drinking?

Teddy walks out, leaving the door open. Gus shoots Clara a worried look and follows him.

EXT. DRIVE WAY – NIGHT

Teddy drives off in the van.

Gus comes out behind him, gets in his car and follows.

INT. VAN

Teddy drives slowly down the street, looking into the shops.

Teddy sees some teenagers standing in the doorway of the POOL HALL. He stops the van in the middle of the street and gets out.

INT. POOL HALL

Teddy walks into the pool hall; it is a smoky haze. Loud rock music reverberates throughout the room. A number of lowlifes hover around the tables. In the back, Teddy spots a large group. Leon is in the center. Teddy advances.

Leon's back is turned as Teddy approaches. Teddy grabs him from behind and throws him through the back door and into the alley.

EXT. ALLEY – NIGHT

Leon lands with a thud. Teddy follows him out the door, accompanied by a large contingent of drunks. Leon gets up, shocked. Then he sees Teddy and understands. A slight grin appears on his mug.

LEON

I was wondering when you'd come around.

Teddy takes a step closer.

LEON

I didn't think you'd have the balls. Not for that bitch.

Teddy lunges at Leon and punches him in the face. The two men begin to fight. Leon starts to bob and weave. Teddy stands still, right hand cocked.

Gus walks outside and yells.

GUS

Teddy--

Teddy unleashes a wicked combination, which overwhelms Leon, knocking him back.

GUS

No, Teddy!

His grin gone, Leon suddenly looks unsure of himself. He glances at the crowd around him.

TEDDY

You can't hide behind them.

Leon lunges forward with a wild hook. Teddy slaps it down with his left hand and drives his elbow into Leon's nose, breaking it. Leon falls and Teddy is on him, punching incessantly.

Leon stops fighting, bloodied. He curls up into a ball and starts to scream.

The crowd looks on, shocked, inert.

Teddy keeps beating him unmercifully. Each punch makes Leon's head bounce off of the concrete. Gus tries to intervene but is knocked away. Teddy knows he should stop, but can't. Leon loses consciousness. And then--

Teddy stops, gets up and looks at Leon, helpless. He looks at the blood on his hands.

The sound of police sirens closes in on the parking lot. As it gets closer, the dark lot is filled with flashing blue lights.

Teddy looks at all of the faces staring at him, each one tinted blue.

He locks eyes with Gus who shakes his head, saddened.

EXT. OVERHEAD SHOT OF STATE PRISON – DAY

INT. CELL BLOCK

Camera passes down row of cells, providing a small window into each. An inmate does push ups; another sits on the toilet; a third cries. Teddy sits on his cot, reading a newspaper.

INSERT HEADLINE

“STAR PROSPECT SIGNS WITH HEAVYWEIGHT PROMOTER, SHAPIRO.
PROFESSIONAL DEBUT SET FOR NEXT MONTH”

Teddy rips the article out, takes gum out of his mouth, and sticks the newspaper to the wall.

INT. CAFETERIA

Teddy sits at a crowded table. Behind him, a fight breaks out.

Teddy ignores the ruckus. Instead, he runs his fork through the watery, ketchup based tomato sauce that sits in front of him, holding it up and letting the sauce drizzle back to onto the tray. He looks blankly at it and drops the fork.

INT. CELL

Teddy sits in the dark, staring at a picture of Emma.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

Teddy runs along the walls, ankle deep in snow.

INT. PRISON REC ROOM

Teddy sits among a number of other inmates, watching a boxing match. It is Leon's pro debut.

Leon wins with a first-round KO, and the prisoners go wild.

Teddy is detached.

INT. GUS' BASEMENT

On the television, Gus watches Leon in the ring after his victory. Sol Shapiro stands next him, the large cigar sticking out of his mouth. He has his arm around Leon.

Gus gets up and walks to the stairs. He takes two steps and collapses, clutching his chest.

INT. PRISON YARD – DAY

Teddy sits on a concrete bench, staring through the fence out over the water.

Teddy focuses on the calm waves of the bay.

SUPER “ONE YEAR LATER”

INT. CELL

Teddy stands in his cell, taking newspaper clippings off of the wall.

INSERT HEDADLINE

“PHENOM WINS 9TH STRAIGHT BY KO”

“JACKSON ON PACE TO BECOME YOUNGEST HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION”

EXT. PRISON FRONT GATE – DAY

Teddy stands in front of a large steel gate, waiting for it to slowly open.

Once it does, Teddy walks out. A large BUS sits in front of the gate. Other than that, the parking lot is empty.

Teddy sighs and starts to walk.

The bus pulls out. Behind it, Emma and Terri are sitting on the hood of their Jeep, waiting.

Teddy walks over. Terri runs and jumps into his arms, wrapping her legs around him. He walks toward Emma, still lugging Terri. Once he reaches Emma, all three embrace.

EMMA

Everybody’s missed you.

EXR. GUS’ HOUSE – DAY

Teddy knocks on the front door. Clara lets him in.

INT. HOUSE – DAY

Clara hugs Teddy.

CLARA

In the study.

INT. STUDY

Teddy finds Gus sitting on a couch, watching a horse race. The old man is in bad shape. He is frail and thin, and hooked up to oxygen. However, he lights up when Teddy enters, and tries to stand.

GUS

Teddy--

Teddy ushers Gus back down.

TEDDY

Don't get up.

GUS

You came back.

TEDDY

Of course I did.

Gus smiles, clutching Teddy with both arms.

EXT. FRONT PORCH – DAY

Teddy helps Gus down the steps, and the two walk out into the yard. Gus pulls his oxygen tank with one hand and lights a cigarette with the other.

GUS

Doctor tells me I gotta keep it away from the tank.

TEDDY

That's what he tells you? Is he a fire man or a physician?

GUS

He's a pollack; he don't know his asshole from his elbow.

TEDDY

I guess not.

GUS

Those women of yours pick you up?

TEDDY

Yeah.

GUS

You're a lucky man, Teddy. You gotta hold on to them.

Teddy considers this for a moment.

TEDDY

Sorry to hear about Leon.

GUS

Forget about that. To hell with him.

TEDDY

You got any new prospects?

GUS

I got this new boy I think can do something at lightweight. From Dominica--those boys down there are quick. Used to working in the sugar cane.

TEDDY

Where'd you find him?

GUS

Mom works at the hospital. Good kid. Clean cut, well mannered. You're going to like him.

TEDDY

How's the gym?

GUS

Gone to shit since you've been gone. I tried it with Kenny in charge. Boy can't keep the books to save his life. I guess running that gym ain't as easy as it looks.

TEDDY

Imagine that.

GUS

It's good to have you back, Teddy.

FADE OUT

