

FADE IN:

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - NIGHT

Fans pack a high school stadium as a game unfolds on the field below.

A marching band standing in their designated area BELTS OUT a school fight song.

Cheerleaders SHOUT out their cadences from the sidelines.

On the field, the team on offense is about to break their huddle.

QUARTERBACK

Thirty-two sweep left on three. On
three. Ready?

ENTIRE OFFENSE

BREAK!!

The offensive players spread out to take their positions.

Tailback TONY BRIGHT, wearing number 32, takes his place a few yards behind the quarterback. Tony is a senior. A physically gifted star athlete, and one of the most sought after college football recruits in America.

Once Tony has taken his stance, he stares straight ahead and waits for the snap.

Across the line of scrimmage, the middle linebacker sizes Tony up, and calls out a threat.

LINEBACKER

Hey Bright! Thirty-two! Yeah, I'm talkin'
to you, bitch! You bring that shit in my
neighborhood again, and I'm gonna fuck
you up! You hear me?

Tony only stares ahead, fully focused on the next play.

The ball is snapped, and pitched back to Tony as he sprints to the left side of the line of scrimmage.

Most of his teammates hit their blocks, but the loud-mouthed linebacker comes clean with a free shot at him.

LINEBACKER

Come on!!

Tony, nearing the line of scrimmage, makes a sudden move to his right. The linebacker, anticipating this move, zeroes in to make the tackle.

Just as he is about to be hit for a loss, Tony uses a spin move and breaks into the clear. The linebacker has nothing left to tackle but air.

The crowd EXPLODES as tony runs an additional forty yards for a touchdown. The band BURSTS into song after he crosses the goal line.

On the sideline, Tony's coaches smile at one another.

In the stands, MANNY BRIGHT shares high fives with fans seated near him. Manny is Tony's uncle. He's a sturdy, clean-cut man in his late thirties.

MANNY

That's right! That's how we do it,
Anthony! That's how we do it, baby!

Seated next to Manny is GLORIA or "GLORY" HAWKINS. Glory is in her late fifties, round and jolly. There is an ocean of wisdom behind her pleasant brown eyes. Glory is Tony's grandmother and legal guardian.

Glory smiles and claps as she looks down at her grandson who has just scored the touchdown. Pride beams from her face.

Tony shares high fives with his teammates in the end zone, then respectfully jogs off the field as applause continues to rain down on him.

INT. BEDROOM - DAWN

Tony lies asleep in his bed.

Suddenly, the door opens and light pours into his bedroom.

Manny sticks his head through the doorway.

MANNY

Yo, Anthony! Rise and shine, my man!
It's time!

Tony wearily lifts his eyelids. He lets out a big SIGH, and then begins to roll out of bed.

INT. TOW TRUCK - DAY

Manny is driving Tony to the gym in his work vehicle.

MANNY

You were good last night. That's your best game this season. You showed just about everything you got, and a lot of the right people saw it.

Tony nods silently.

MANNY

There's going to be even more of those scouts at your next game. So you've got a lot of work to do, young man. We ain't even scratched the surface of you yet.

Tony smiles as he looks ahead.

INT. WEIGHT ROOM - DAY

Tony is furiously lifting stacks of weights. Trainers SHOUT encouragement, urging him to lift more and more. Sweat pours off Tony's body as he works out.

EXT. RUNNING TRACK - DAY

Tony is running wind sprints around the track. He has fastened a parachute to his back to add wind resistance.

Again, trainers and his uncle Manny SHOUT encouragement.

Tony crosses a finish line as a trainer clicks a stopwatch.

TRAINER

Not bad. Not bad at all, kid!

Tony doubles over and nearly collapses after this sprint. He is terribly winded.

INT. SHOWERS - DAY

Tony, still exhausted from his workout, leans up against a shower wall as the water cascades over him.

Manny appears at the entrance of the shower room.

MANNY

Hey! You sleeping? You been in there long enough. Let's go!

Tony nods, and then shuts off the water above him. Manny tosses him a towel.

INT. AUTO REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Tony is stacking heavy tires for a window display at Manny's shop.

Manny, dressed in uniform, walks over to him. He is carrying a push-broom.

MANNY

Good job. After you sweep up, we can head on outta here and see what granny's got to eat.

Tony, looking worn-down, grabs the broom and heads toward the shop floor. Manny places a hand on his shoulder.

MANNY

Hey. Good job today. Good job with everything.

TONY

Thanks.

Tony walks away to finish his work.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Tony is eating a meal with Manny and Glory, who beams at her grandson who is obviously enjoying her cooking.

GLORY

You'd better believe there's more
where that came from.

TONY

It's delicious, grandma.

Tony cleans his plate and gets up to retrieve a second helping
from the adjoining kitchen.

MANNY

That's enough of those red beans,
young man. They ain't going to make
you any faster.

GLORY

Emanuel!

MANNY

You just leave the seconds to me,
granny. This young man is in
training right now.

GLORY

He is still growing.

MANNY

You keep feeding him red beans, and
his belly's the only thing that's
gonna be growing!

Manny pats his own midsection to emphasize his point.

TONY

It's okay, granny. I'm good.

GLORY

You sure?

Tony nods. Glory shakes her head and begins to clear the table.

MANNY

That was one hell of a show you
put on last night, young man. Made
me proud. Proud for everyone in
those stands to know you're my
nephew.

TONY

Thanks. It was a pretty good game.

MANNY

Pretty good, my ass. You can be great. You can be a winner. And not just on the football field, either.

Tony smiles.

MANNY

(cont'd)

But there's lots of things that can trip a young man up around here. If these streets don't swallow you up, something else will... if you let your guard down.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

We hear Manny's voice continue his speech as we see Tony walk the halls at his school.

MANNY (VO)

(cont'd)

There's all kinds of distractions

A group of pretty girls walk past Tony and openly flirt with him. Tony looks down and smiles sheepishly.

MANNY (VO)

(cont'd)

There's the young ladies. Now they'll do what they can to sink their claws into you.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

A patrol car follows Tony, the officers inside watching him closely.

MANNY (VO)

(cont'd)

There's the police. They don't care who you are. Some of them would love to put a young black man with the world at his fingertips behind bars.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Tony and some friends are hanging out in a parking lot. A fancy car pulls up, and a slick-looking young man motions at Tony. One of his friends in a letterman's jacket shakes his head and whispers something into his ear.

MANNY (VO)

(cont'd)

There's all kinds of people who want something from you. And they ain't waiting for you to finish college.

One of Tony's friends motions for the would-be agent to drive away and leave them alone.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

MANNY

That stuff, combined with the usual bullshit in this neighborhood... it would be a miracle if you made it. Even with your talent.

TONY

Look, I know. I know all that.

(beat)

But you don't have to worry. I'm not letting you down. I'm going to make you both proud of me.

MANNY

I hope so. I hope so.

(beat)

So, you ready to make the decision?

TONY

Soon. It's just down to a couple.

MANNY

And who might they be?

TONY

You have to wait until my press conference. Just like everybody else. After we win state.

The two share a laugh.

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - NIGHT

The championship game of California's biggest district is unfolding on the field below.

Cameras flash from all points in the crowd.

The sidelines are packed with media members, cheerleaders, officials, and most importantly.. college scouts.

Tony is in the game as a defensive safety. He tunes out the madness and spectacle around him and stares intently at the opposing quarterback who hikes the ball.

Tony takes half a moment to recognize the play, and then he adjusts his coverage.

A wide receiver from the opposing team begins to cut towards the middle of the field.

The quarterback throws a tight spiral in this receiver's direction.

The receiver extends his arms, hoping to make the catch.

Just before the football arrives, Tony appears like a flash and intercepts the ball.

With Tony's blazing speed, he easily outruns the offensive players and takes the ball the other way for a touchdown.

The fans behind Tony's bench ERUPT INTO RAUCOUS CHEERS.

In the stands, Manny throws his arms around Glory and gives her a big kiss.

Along the sidelines, several scouts smile, nod, and shout amongst themselves.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - NIGHT

Its later in the game. Tony is lined up at running back. His team has the ball near mid-field.

The quarterback hikes the ball. Tony springs into action. He takes the handoff and charges through a hole between the enormous linemen.

A linebacker appears to be in a good position to make the tackle.

Tony puts a move on, and the linebacker is left grasping at air.

A safety moves up to make a hit, but Tony spins off him and keeps his balance by using an arm as a third leg and pushing off from the grass beneath him.

Once he is upright again, he begins to accelerate towards the end zone.

A cornerback appears to have the angle to stop Tony short of the goal line, but a sudden burst of speed takes him into the promised land.

The crowd ERRUPTS once more.

Tony takes a look at the scoreboard as he begins to catch his breath. The game is a rout. 45-7.

Tony's teammates swarm him. They lift him up and carry him off the field.

Tony wears a huge smile. He points up into the crowd at Manny who points back and SHOUTS at the top of his lungs.

MANNY

That's right! You know it, baby!
What a run! What a fucking run!!

MANNY

(cont'd)

(to those around him)

That's my nephew out there! That's Anthony Bright! You're looking at the best player in America! The best!

Several people near Manny give him high fives and pat him on the back.

Tony takes a moment to soak in the spectacle. His school's fight song BLARES, as fans CHEER and his teammates begin to celebrate along their sideline.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

Tony and his teammates are celebrating their championship at a fancy banquet hall. Boosters, family members, and students sit with the players at circular tables. Coaches and administrators sit at the head table. A podium rests at its center.

Head coach EUGENE CHAMBERS, a balding man in his early 50s, is addressing the hall.

COACH CHAMBERS

... all I've asked of these players, they have given me, and more. All we have asked from you, our fans, you have given us, and more.

The crowd erupts into enthusiastic applause.

COACH CHAMBERS

(as the applause begins to die)

This championship is the result of teamwork, through and through. Everyone in this room has contributed to what you see in front of me.

Coach Chambers gestures to an enormous trophy resting in front of the head table.

COACH CHAMBERS

(cont'd)

And it's been my greatest pleasure coaching each of these young men. I've been a coach for almost thirty

(cont'd)
 years, and I've seen some very talented young men walk through my door. But one in particular has been at joy to watch these past four years... and I frankly don't know how we're ever going to replace him.

At a nearby table, Manny puts an arm around Tony who looks down and tries to stifle a nervous smile.

COACH CHAMBERS

(cont'd)
 (chuckling)

Its not every season we have someone named a unanimous first team all state on offense, and also merit honorable mention on defense.

The crowd CHUCKLES with the coach.

COACH CHAMBERS

(cont'd)

Of course we all know who I'm speaking of. He's our captain, an A student... he's our hero. And I'd like to invite him up to this podium to say a few words.

(beat)

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Anthony Bright!

The banquet hall ERRUPTS into applause. Tony cannot hide a big smile, but he seems reluctant to step up to the podium.

MANNY

What the hell you waiting for?
 Get on up there!

Tony stands and the APPLAUSE intensifies. Manny gets to his feet and urges the room to join him. A standing OVATION ensues.

Tony takes his place behind the podium. The applause takes some time to simmer down. Finally, he composes himself and says some words he has obviously put some thought into.

TONY

Thank you. Thank you all very much. I can't begin to tell you how much each of you have meant to me and all my teammates these past four years. And although we've had a lot of fun since we won that beautiful trophy you see right there, at the end of the day, its not just for us. Its for all of you. Everyone who has supported us and helped us get here... this championship is for you.

The hall breaks into applause once more.

TONY

(as the applause subsides)

Thank you. Thank you.

(beat)

And the time we've all shared together... I'm never going to forget it. Ever.

Suddenly, Manny blurts out the question on everyone's mind.

MANNY

So, where's it gonna be, Anthony?

Tony looks down sheepishly. The audience CHUCKLES.

A hulking teammate is the next to inquire.

TEAMMATE

Yeah! Tell us!

COACH CHAMBERS

Out with it!

Several audience members randomly SHOUT out the same request.

Tony shakes his head, and then seems to compose himself. Perhaps he is ready to make the announcement.

TONY

In case any of you were wondering where I'm playing ball next fall...

The banquet hall goes suddenly quiet, save for the reverb from Tony's microphone. Some noticeably lean forward in their chairs.

TONY

(cont'd)

I'll let you know on February
twelfth when I make my decision
public.

Several BOOS trickle out from the crowd, along with plenty of good-natured ribbing.

Tony gives the room his biggest smile.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Coach Chambers is speaking with Tony after the banquet is over.

COACH CHAMBERS

You definitely know how to play a
crowd. That's for damn sure. Even
when you aren't wearing pads.

TONY

I got to have something to fall
back on after all this is over.

COACH CHAMBERS

I don't think you'll have any
trouble. That's for sure.

(beat)

Well, I'm not going to press you.
Because I don't think you'd tell
me anyway.

TONY

No. Not even you, coach. Not sure
you could keep it to yourself.

COACH CHAMBERS

Me, either. But I'm sure you at
least have it narrowed down some,
don't you?

TONY

I have. I'm really close.

COACH CHAMBERS

Well, good luck to you, Anthony.
You really are the best player I
ever coached. And I'm sure you'll
do great at UCLA.

TONY

(laughing)

I will. If I go there.

The two share a warm embrace.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Tony, Manny, and Glory are driving home from the banquet on a busy freeway. Manny is driving Glory's sedan with Glory in the passenger seat and Tony in back.

GLORY

That was wonderful. A perfect
way to end a great season.

(turns to Tony)

I'm so proud of you.

TONY

Thanks. I love you, grandma.

GLORY

And we love you too, Anthony.

Manny, despite navigating through the heavy traffic at high speed, turns to look Tony in the eye.

MANNY

Hey. This thing tonight... that
was all about you. That was
your coronation, young man.

GLORY

(gestures to the road ahead)
Emanuel!

MANNY

(looking forward)

I'm serious. All that work you've
done. All that time we've spent
making you into a man is starting

(cont'd)
to pay off.

TONY
Those are my boys back there. I
wouldn't be where I am if it
wasn't for them.

MANNY
(chuckling)
Cut the shit, Anthony. You ain't
speaking to the public.

GLORY
Emanuel!

MANNY
This ain't some pep rally, or an
interview with the school paper.
You don't have to be this humble
kid with god-given talents twenty-
four seven. That championship
you got... its all about you. Own it.

Tony smiles and looks out the window.

GLORY
You sound like you're auditioning
to be his agent.

MANNY
That wouldn't be a bad gig.

GLORY
I'm sure Anthony could do a lot
better.

TONY
Damn straight.

Tony continues to stare out the window as the sedan moves along.

MANNY
So, its S.C., ain't it?

Tony just keeps staring out the window.

MANNY

Come on. I ain't gonna spill the beans.

(beat)

You are going to USC, aren't you?

TONY

We'll see. You'll find out like the rest of them. When its time.

MANNY

(frustrated)

I ain't one of them! I'm your own flesh and blood, Anthony! I need to know what you're thinking, so you don't make a mistake. This is serious shit, here!

GLORY

Emanuel! That's quite enough of your mouth! It's his decision, and I'm sure he will make the right one.

MANNY

(sighs)

(to Tony)

It's your call. You know where I stand. We've been all over it. Your granny and I think it would be best.

GLORY

His grandmother thinks it would be best if he made the decision on his own!

TONY

Thank you!

(beat)

Look. Truth is I haven't made up my mind yet.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

The sedan exits the freeway and enters Tony's less-than-pristine neighborhood in south central Los Angeles.

The sedan passes through streets lined with liquor stores, fast food joints, and shabby apartment complexes.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Tony stares out at the world he has called home his entire life.

The sedan passes close by a tricked-out car filled with surly-looking characters.

One of the makes eye contact with Tony, starring pure venom back at him.

MANNY

You are at least close, aren't you?

TONY

Real close.

From Tony's POV, we see the gang member turn to his crew and mouth the phrase, "pussy assed nigga".

Tony looks ahead, deep in thought.

INT. RADIO STUDIO - DAY

Inside a studio crammed with sports memorabilia, University of Nebraska head football coach DAN SHEPPERD is being interviewed on air by sports talk host ALAN CHIZEK.

CHIZEK

And were back on 1420 KLYN. This is Sports Daily with Alan Chizek talking to the man himself, coach Dan Shepperd. Let's give them a shout out, coach.

Coach Shepperd raises a curious eyebrow at the enthusiastic, middle-aged radio host.

CHIZEK

Go big red!

Coach Shepperd, a physically imposing and stern-faced man of about 40, dutifully obliges the host and echoes the popular phrase into his microphone.

SHEPPERD

Go big red!

CHIZEK

So, we've got plenty of callers on hold already and before we get to them, I'd just like to get an overall picture of just where you think the program is right now. If you could.

SHEPPERD

Well, first off I'd like to say... after two full seasons here, we've started to right the ship. We've come so far since that first day I stepped on campus that cold December morning...

CHIZEK

(interrupting)

Oh, you got that right! It was freezing. I'll never forget that day.

SHEPPERD

Me either... anyway it seems like a decade has passed with all we've done since then.

CHIZEK

Tell me about it. I'll always recall the way you stepped up to that podium and took the reins of what was at the time, a runaway horse. But here we are. Two winning seasons, and two bowl wins later... things are looking up. Way up.

SHEPPERD

Thanks. Thank you. We still have a long, long way to go. But I can tell you without a doubt, we're moving in the right direction.

CHIZEK

Is Nebraska football truly back, in your opinion?

SHEPPERD

Back. And here to stay.

CHIZEK

Those are some refreshing words.

(beat)

So, now the long and painful offseason is setting in for us fans. But I don't suppose there's ever an end to the offseason for you guys.

SHEPPERD

(chuckling)

Oh, no. Just ask my wife about that. My job does get me out of a lot of housework, though. So I can't complain there.

CHIZEK

Winter conditioning moving along nicely?

SHEPPERD

You bet. For a lot of those guys it can be tougher than two-a-days even. But it is going very well so far from what I understand.

CHIZEK

Great. So, you and the rest of the coaching staff are out beating the brush right now, I take it? What with signing day just around the corner... the next big day for us fans, if you will... what kind of a class can we expect?

SHEPPERD

Recruiting never stops, Alan. Signing day is just a formality in the greater scope of things. We pretty much have to hit the road the very next day and start again.

CHIZEK

We've all heard some pretty impressive names expected to sign next Tuesday. Any last minute surprises, you think?

SHEPPERD

You never know. I guess that's why they call them surprises.

Chizek chuckles nervously.

SHEPPERD

(cont'd)

Of course I can't mention any of these young men by name just yet.

CHIZEK

Right.

SHEPPERD

But let's just say I think you'll all be pretty happy once this new class is signed. We've done some fine work. We have some genuine talent coming in here this fall. Not just great athletes... that goes without saying, but also I think some young men with fine character.

CHIZEK

Most recruiting services seem to agree. I know we can't always put our faith in them...

SHEPPERD

(interrupting)

That's an understatement.

CHIZEK

Well, it looks like a solid class on paper, anyway. And I'm sure we can expect some more names to be added by the time next Tuesday rolls around.

SHEPPERD

Possibly. Nothing is set in stone.

(cont'd)

And you really never know who might end up falling into your lap at the last moment.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tony is laying in bed asleep. The television is on, and it provides the only light in the room.

The bedroom's lone window is open, though it is covered with bars. A breeze causes the curtains to dance.

From outside, there are various sounds of the inner city. Automobiles can be heard on the nearby freeway. Sirens WAIL in the distance.

After a moment, the THUMPING bass of a car stereo is heard. It gets louder as the vehicle approaches Tony's back yard.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

An enormous silver Cadillac with tinted windows and gigantic tires stretched around shiny golden rims rolls to a stop behind Tony's house.

The THUMPING music is deafening.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tony lifts an eyelid, awakened by the noise from outside.

Tony lets out a deep SIGH.

He rolls out of bed and walks over to the window, preparing to shut it.

Before shutting it, he listens for a moment to the commotion outside.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

The THUMPING beat from inside the vehicle ceases.

All four doors open, and various people step outside into the alley.

The driver is MAC-10. A squat, muscular young African-American in his early twenties.

Exiting from the front passenger seat is BEAT DOWN. He is a tall African-American draped with lean muscle. He appears to be in his late teens.

From the back seat steps C-NOTE, a burly gang banger with an enormous afro-style haircut. Also late teens.

Following C-NOTE out the door are two young black teen-aged girls NESHAUN and JASMINE. Both are dressed scantily, yet look barely a day out of middle school.

Finally, the ringleader of this crew steps out. DAWG NUTZ, as he is known on the street, stands well over six feet tall. Muscular. Full of tattoos which are difficult to decipher against his black skin. Dawg appears to be in his early twenties. He sports medium length hair braided into several tight pigtailed. Most of his teeth appear golden.

NESHAUN

So, where this party at? What the fuck is this place?

BEAT DOWN

Bitch, you at the party already.

NESHAUN

What you sayin' cuz?

BEAT DOWN

Who you callin' cuz, shorty? You actin' like you already part of this crew.

JASMINE

This shit is lame. We came here to party with y'all. Where the fuck is it?

MAC-10

Shut up, bitch.

NESHAUN

Nigga please!

C-NOTE

You got a big mouth for a shorty.
Know how to use it?

JASMINE

Whatever
(to Neshاون)
Let's roll. These niggas ain't
where its at.

Neshاون and Jasmine begin to walk away from the gang bangers.

Finally, Dawg begins to wield his street authority.

DAWG

Ay! Where y'all getting' to?

The two young ladies stop and turn to face the gang leader.

DAWG

You want to roll with this crew
or what?

DESHAUN

Y'all said we were going to a party.

DAWG

It's a party anywhere this crew is
at. Get over here. Both y'all.

Both young ladies hesitate for half a moment, and then slowly walk back toward the gang leader who is leaning up against the car.

The girls appear suspicious of this dangerous hoodlum, yet mesmerized by him at the same time.

Once the girls are within reach, Dawg puts an arm around both and pulls them closer.

DAWG

What's up with y'all? Actin' like
you don't want to come over here.

Jasmine, the more attractive of the two girls, gets most of Dawg's attention.

Dawg begins to kiss her. First on the lips and then on the neck.

C-Note comes up behind Neshاون and begins to massage her shoulders.

NESHAUN
Man, you trippin'.

C-NOTE
Shut your mouth and relax, bitch.

Dawg continues kissing Jasmine who now appears to be having second thoughts about these young men.

Dawg pulls the straps of her tank top down off her shoulders. Jasmine protests as her breasts are now exposed. She attempts to back away.

JASMINE
Hold up! This ain't cool, Dawg!

NESHAUN
(to C-Note)
Y'all back the fuck off! Not up
in this alley!
(to Jasmine)
Let's go, girl.

Neshاون and Jasmine attempt to walk away. Dawg and his crew have no intention of allowing their departure, however.

DAWG
Hold up!

BEAT DOWN
Hey! Where the fuck you bitches
goin'?

NESHAUN
We're leavin' your lame asses here.
We're gonna find us some *real* men.

Jasmine GIGGLES at her friend's remark. Her giggle is abruptly turned into a GASP as Dawg grabs her from behind.

Dawg picks Jasmine up and throws her down into a pile of debris at the base of a fence.

Jasmine looks terrified as she realizes Dawg's intentions.

DAWG
I don't recall givin' y'all
permission to leave!
(to Mac-10 and Beat Down)
Hold this bitch down!

The two thugs quickly move to pin the young lady to the ground.
Neshaun, not intimidated, moves in to confront the gang leader.

NESHAUN
Back off, Dawg! She only 14!

Dawg backhands Neshaun across the face.

DAWG
(to C-Note)
Get this skank outta my face!

C-Note drags the dazed Neshaun away from Dawg.

DAWG
(to Jasmine)
Now, where were we, doll?

The terrified young woman struggles to break free of the gang members and get to her feet.

Dawg begins to unbutton his jeans...

Suddenly, a CRASH is heard as a large rock is tossed into the gang leader's windshield.

The gang members tense up, ready for additional trouble. A couple reach for weapons stashed inside their baggy clothing. Jasmine is released as they prepare for battle.

MAC-10
(looking all around)
Yo! Who the fuck done this to my
ride?

BEAT DOWN
Come on out, motherfucker!

C-NOTE

Show your punk ass!

The four gang members focus their attention to the rickety wooden fences that span the length of the alley.

Finally, Dawg looks down at the ground where Jasmine had been cowering. The young lady has vanished.

A fairly large gap in the fence behind Tony's house seems the likely escape point.

DAWG

Aw, fuck!

Neshaun takes off running down the alley.

DAWG

Get that bitch!

(to Mac-10)

The other one went in there.

MAC-10

But what about my ride, Dawg?

DAWG

I'll buy your ass a new one!

Now get in there!

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

Crying and terrified, Jasmine runs through Tony's back yard toward his house.

From behind a large bush, two powerful arms reach out and grab the young lady.

Jasmine lets out a SHRIEK until she sees that Tony has grabbed her, rather than a gang banger.

Tony puts a finger to his lips, urging her to remain quiet. Its too late.

Tony looks up to see an automatic pistol pointed at his head. Dawg has him in his crosshairs.

DAWG

Nigga, you fucked up tonight.

Dawg is promptly joined by Mac-10, also brandishing a pistol.

DAWG

And I *know* you ain't the one
who fucked up my homie's ride!

MAC-10

And this nigga got your girl,
Dawg! I say this nigga got to
die!

MANNY (OS)

What's going on out there?

The back porch light turns on. This sudden distraction gives Tony an opportunity...

Tony swings a baseball bat he had concealed right at Dawg's wrist. The impact shatters Dawg's radius bone and causes him to drop his gun.

Mac-10 is too slow to respond, and Tony quickly uses his bat to disarm this thug as well.

MANNY

(stepping into the yard)
Anthony, what the Christ is
going on out here?

Tony stands above the pair of wounded hoodlums, holding the bat in a threatening manner.

TONY

Call the police!

Manny looks incredulous at the scene in front of him.

TONY

Now!

Tony kicks one of the pistols into the bushes before Dawg can grab it.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Beat Down and C-Note are chasing after Neshاون.

Sirens can be heard BLARING as police cars approach the area.

Beat Down catches Neshاون and grabs a hold of her.

BEAT DOWN

Bitch, where you goin?

NESHAUN

Fuck you!

The young lady whirls around and scratches the gangster across the face. As he recoils in pain, she adds insult to further injury by kicking him in the groin.

Neshاون takes off running once again as Beat Down gasps for breath.

BEAT DOWN

(gasping)

Fucking cunt!

Staggered, beat down attempts to pursue her. The approaching sirens have C-Note worried.

C-NOTE

Man, forget that bitch and let's split!

BEAT DOWN

You split, motherfucker! She's mine!

Regaining his composure, Beat Down runs toward Neshاون.

The pursuit comes to a CRASHING halt where the alley intersects with a street.

A police cruiser SLAMS into the gang member, knocking him off his feet.

There is not a sign of life in the young man as he lays in the street.

C-Note runs over to check on his homie as the police step out to assess the damage.

C-NOTE

Beat! Yo, Beat! Get up, nigga!
Get the fuck up!

The police pull him back.

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

The police are taking Dawg and Mac-10 into custody.

POLICEMAN

Let's go. Come on.

The officer tugs at Dawg, whose hands are cuffed behind his back. Dawg does not budge. He stares icily at Tony who does not look away.

POLICEMAN

(to Dawg)
Move it, tough guy!

Dawg and Mac-10 are lead away towards the alley from whence they came. Dawg does not take his eyes off Tony until he is out of the yard.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The police are just about to leave Tony's house after wrapping up their initial investigation.

Manny is shaking hands with a detective.

MANNY

Thank you. I've got your card.
We'll be in touch.

DETECTIVE

Thank you.
(to Tony)
And thank you, young man. We'll clear all this up. Good luck to you.

TONY
Thank you, sir.

The detective exits the home, and Manny closes the door behind him.

MANNY
(exhales deeply)
How's that for your Sunday night?

GLORY
I just cannot believe what is happening to this neighborhood. What are these young people thinking?

MANNY
It just occurred to you where we live? This ain't the projects, but it is South Central.
(to Tony)
And you mind telling us what the hell you were thinking? What are you doing getting us into that shit?

Tony squirms in his chair, wanting to respond but not sure how.

MANNY
I don't need to tell you what those kind of guys can do to you! To all of us!

GLORY
Hush, Emanuel. Anthony did the right thing. I would hope you would have, too.

Tony looks over at his grandmother and smiles.

MANNY
Maybe I would have. I'm not afraid of those little punks. But Anthony... you got a lot more to lose. You have so much these guys can take away from you!

Tony can take no more. He has to defend his actions.

TONY

So, what are we supposed to do?
Just sit here and pretend we
don't hear some of the stuff
that goes on outside these walls?
I mean, its like sometimes you
freak out on me if I so much as
look out the window! I know what
kind of world we live in the
middle of. I can't ignore it
any more. I got no friends. Only
guys on the team or guys from
the gym. Its like I got no life!
I just wish...

Glory goes over to the couch and sits down next to her grandson.
She puts an arm around him.

GLORY

What is it? What do you wish
for?

TONY

I just want this to be over. I
just want to go off to school
some place nice. Just to get the
hell out of here for a while.

MANNY

I know what you're saying,
Anthony. 18 years of this shit
is enough, huh?

TONY

Maybe. I just... I mean I'm never
going to forget this place. This
is my home. And one day if I can,
I'm going to make it a better
place. I'll never forget where
I'm from. But right now... I have
to go somewhere else. Somewhere
far away from all this.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

In front of many of his schoolmates, Tony is about to announce his college choice.

Seated behind a long table at the center of the floor are Tony, Coach Chambers, and Reverend Thaddeus Thompson. Thompson is a hulking former gang member in his mid-40s. He and Coach Chambers are smiling and looking intently at Tony who looks ahead stoically.

At the center of the table are three baseball caps, each with the logo of a well-known university. A maroon cap with gold lettering for USC, a powder-blue cap with gold lettering for UCLA, and a scarlet cap with a white letter "N" for Nebraska.

Several photographers and television crews are gathered around for Tony's announcement.

The air is electric with anticipation.

Off to one side of the auditorium are Manny and Glory. They look on with pride as Tony is about to claim a huge reward for all of his hard work and natural gifts.

Coach Chambers is the first to address the crowd.

COACH CHAMBERS

First of all, on behalf of Anthony Bright and his family, I'd like to start by thanking all of you for coming out today to witness this fine young man take the next step of what has become an amazing journey.

(beat)

There have been many, many suitors for this fine young gentleman. And I'm sure he will make the right choice.

(to Tony)

So, without any further ado, it's time for you to make one of these universities' day!

Tony flashes a huge grin. Nervous and muffled laughter RUMBLES through the auditorium.

Tony leans forward and speaks into the microphone...

TONY

As Coach Chambers said, I just want to thank all of you for your support these past four years. And for coming out today to see me make this choice. I promise each of you that no matter what happens to me, or wherever I end up, I won't forget you or this community.

The crowd ERRUPTS into applause. Manny claps loudly and Glory smiles with great pride.

TONY

Throughout this process, I have met some truly wonderful people, and I've visited with many fine schools. In the end, its kind of unfortunate that it had to come down to one...

MANNY

(interrupting)

Come on, Anthony! Just tell us already!

Glory slaps her son on the arm. Laughter trickles throughout the auditorium. Tony shakes his head and smiles.

TONY

Okay. Enough suspense.

The crowd HUSHES itself, and pained anticipation seems to build to a head on the faces of everyone in the room.

Finally, Tony reaches down and selects the scarlet cap. Tony is going to the University of Nebraska.

There are some GASPS as this was not the expected, or in many cases the favored choice.

Once Tony places the cap atop his head, however, strong APPLAUSE begins to build. Tony has made his decision, and the crowd respects him for it.

Off to the side, Glory is clapping enthusiastically. Manny, on the other hand, looks a bit stunned. Finally, he begins to clap as well.

Tony has a huge smile as cameras flash and CLICK all around him.

INT. COACH CHAMBERS'S OFFICE - DAY

Coach Chambers, Reverend Thompson, Manny, and Tony mull over the big decision.

Manny paces around the room, while the others sit.

Tony still wears the NU cap.

MANNY

Nebraska? Nebraska? Really,
Anthony?

TONY

You heard right. That's where I'm
headed.

MANNY

(chuckles)

Shit. I know we talked about you
maybe going someplace different.
But I figured Pasadena was
different enough. What the hell is
wrong with USC?

COACH CHAMBERS

Nebraska's a fine school. You made
a good choice, Tony. Now you show
them how its done. Make us proud.

TONY

Thanks, coach. I won't let you
down.

Tony gets up and goes over to his coach. He leans down and puts
an arm around him.

MANNY

If I recall, didn't you tell me
your visit to Lincoln was boring?

TONY

I don't think that's a word I used.

MANNY

You were there in October. You have any idea how cold it gets there in the winter?

TONY

The average high temperature in January is thirty-four degrees. I'll buy some long underwear.

Manny glares back at him.

REV. THOMPSON

(to Manny)

This is a big day in this young man's life. And I'm sure he has given this decision the deepest consideration.

(to TONY)

How 'bout it, son? Is this truly what you want?

TONY

Absolutely. Nebraska is the total package. It's where I'm headed.

REV. THOMPSON

Well, then so be it.

(to Manny)

I'm with you, Manny. I was hoping for USC, too!

Everyone shares a laugh.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Reverend Thompson shares further thoughts with Tony outside Coach Chambers' office. He puts an arm on Tony's shoulder.

REV. THOMPSON

I'm proud of you. We all are. And with all that's happened lately... I understand where you

(cont'd)
might want to experience a new
environment.

TONY
It's not that. I'm not running
from anything. This has been my
home all my life. And some day,
I'm going to be able to come back
here and help make some real
changes. But for now, NU is the
place to start. The coaches, the
classes, the exposure...

REV. THOMPSON
You just go knock 'em dead, kid.
Show them what you can do and
let them know where you came from.
Don't worry about Manny and Glory.
They're like my family, too. I'll
be looking out for them. God be
with you.

Tony and Reverend Thompson share an embrace.

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

A passenger jet touches down with a SCREECH on the runway of the
airport at Lincoln, NE.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Inside the modest airport terminal, Tony collects his bags.

He takes a look around, noting all the University of Nebraska
memorabilia posted all over the walls.

With bags in hand, Tony begins to head for the exit. There are
few others inside the terminal, and nobody seems to recognize
him.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Tony steps outside into the brilliant sunlight of mid-August. He
squints as the glare overwhelms him.

Finally, somebody recognizes him.

VOICE (OS)

These freshmen are getting smaller
every year!

Tony turns to find two young men dressed in University of Nebraska athletic clothing. The one who spoke to him is senior quarterback BRADY GOODWIN, a handsome and stocky kid with an intensity projecting from his eyes. Standing next to him is BARON MITCHELL, a lanky wide receiver with a cocky smile.

Goodwin extends a meaty forearm and an open palm as he approaches Tony.

Tony and Goodwin shake hands. Goodwin's intentionally strong grip sends a tremor through Tony's body.

Mitchell extends his fist. Tony does likewise and the two share a fist-bump.

MITCHELL

Welcome back, cuz. I guess you
had more fun with us than we
thought.

Tony smiles sheepishly.

TONY

I did. Sorry if I wasn't like
all...

MITCHELL

Shit, we did everything we could
to get you to some.

(to Goodwin)

Our boy here's either a fag or
he's found God.

Goodwin glares at his teammate. Tony looks away nervously.

GOODWIN

(sternly)

Come on. We'd better get you
signed in. We've got a lot to
take care of in the next couple
of days. Once practice starts,
you're not going to have time
to blink.

INT. CAR - DAY

The three young men are driving back to campus. Tony sits in the back seat of the sedan, while Mitchell rides shotgun.

Goodwin looks at Tony through the rear view mirror as he talks to him.

Tony mostly looks out the window as the vehicle weaves through the streets of Lincoln.

GOODWIN

We were close last year. I don't have to tell you that, Tony. But maybe you don't realize just *how* close.

(beat)

A little more firepower behind me in the backfield, and who knows what could have happened.

MITCHELL

Or a couple more passes in my direction... it might have been all we needed.

Mitchell turns to Tony and winks. Tony smiles back.

GOODWIN

(wistful)

I don't call the plays. I wish I did. One day, maybe.

(beat)

But for now I just do what they tell me. And if I'm elected captain again...

(looks at Mitchell)

I'll do what the coaches can't. I'll take us that one last yard. The one you can't account for in the playbook.

Tony only stares ahead, trying to figure out what his new teammate is talking about.

GOODWIN

(cont'd)

I guess what I'm trying to say, Tony is that if we're prepared to go that extra yard... we can win not only the conference title, but the whole bowl of wax.

(beat)

What do you think?

TONY

I think...

MITCHELL

He thinks you don't have a future writing motivational speeches for Tim Tebow.

Tony bursts out laughing. Goodwin glares back at him.

GOODWIN

Go ahead and get it out of your systems. Especially you, rookie. You have exactly two days before life as you know it is over, and you can only wish you were back where you came from.

TONY

Don't count on it.

INT. DORMATORY - DAY

Tony, carrying his bags, walks through the dormitory into his living quarters in Harper Hall. Tony's room is a large corner room that can comfortably house three students.

Tony drops his bags, and then takes a moment to breathe it all in. A look around reveals two other sets of belongings have already been dropped off. Next to one of the suitcases is a large pair of cowboy boots.

Suddenly, a huge hand clamps down on Tony's shoulder. It belongs to CALEB GRUNWALD, an enormous offensive line recruit from Western Nebraska.

GRUNWALD

Hey! You lost, or something?
Looking to steal my shit?

Tony is momentarily startled, but quickly regains his composure.

TONY

You don't have anything I want.

Grunwald looks Tony over and concurs.

GRUNWALD

(to Tony)

Maybe not.

(shouting down the hallway)

Yo, Deion! I just caught this
kid trying to steal your stuff,
man!

TONY

Stop trippin', cowboy.

Deion SIMS, a tall, lean young man appears in the doorway. He is suave, cocky, and also a highly-touted recruit.

SIMS

(to Grunwald)

This him?

GRUNWALD

Caught him up to his elbows in
your suitcase.

TONY

Whatever.

SIMS

(looking Tony over)

This little nigga? That what
they teach you in South Central?

Sims's expression becomes warm. He extends a huge, boney hand.

SIMS

Tony Bright?

Tony nods.

SIMS

Deion Sims. Heard a lot about
you, man.

GRUNWALD

Anthony Bright? Him?

TONY

The one and only.

GRUNWALD

So, the letterman jacket really
is yours? You didn't steal it?

SIMS

Man, quit fuckin' with him.

Grunwald begins to giggle, and then wraps his arms around Tony.
He picks the young tailback up off the ground.

GRUNWALD

I knew it was you. Just fuckin'
around. I'm Caleb. I'm gonna be
blocking for you guys.

Tony finally lets loose a smile. He looks over the enormous
lineman.

TONY

That's good to hear.

GRUNWALD

You guys hungry? I'm starving.

(Tony)

Put your stuff down and let's
go get something to eat.

SIMS

I heard that.

TONY

COOL. Let's do it.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Tony, Sims, and Grunwald walk through a mostly deserted campus in the late afternoon sunshine. Few other students have arrived yet, giving the freshmen a chance to look things over for themselves.

All three are carrying sodas from a local fast food restaurant. They're trying to act casual on their next-to-last day of freedom before two-a-day practices begin.

TONY
(to Grunwald)
So, where are you from, cowboy?

GRUNWALD
Seward. And I ain't a cowboy.
We farm. There's a difference.

SIMS
You got cows, don't you?

GRUNWALD
(sighs)
Yeah. We got cows.

SIMS
There you go.

TONY
(to Sims)
How about you?

SIMS
Big D, baby. Carter High school.
We're the *real* cowboys.

TONY
I've heard of that school.
Bunch of NFL guys come from
there?

SIMS
You know it. I'm just next
in line.

Sims laughs at his own bravado as the three enter the quadrangle east of Memorial Stadium.

The three walk up to the statues of players in front of the stadium.

TONY

Don't y'all want to hear where I'm from?

SIMS

What's the point?

GRUNWALD

Yeah, dude. We've all heard your story. A guy like you with five stars next to his name on Rivals.

SIMS

Everyone knows. And we're glad you made it out of there.

GRUNWALD

All those years of dodging bullets must have been what made you so fast.

TONY

That's my home you guys are talking about. It ain't *that* bad.

Sims and Grunwald seem not to hear Tony defend his neighborhood. By this point, the enormity of the stadium and statue out front seem to have their full attention.

SIMS

(under his breath)

Damn.

GRUNWALD

I guess this is where we make it all happen.

As Sims and Grunwald stare at the stadium, Tony drifts over towards the practice fields.

TONY

We have to make it happen

(cont'd)
out there, first.

Sims and Grunwald join Tony at the fence overlooking the outdoor practice fields.

TONY
I don't even want to think about what they're going to put us through.

SIMS
Shit, dog. Don't remind me.

GRUNWALD
First guy who pukes buys dinner for the other two?

Tony and Sims both nod their heads.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Tony, Sims, and Grunwald are sitting on the floor of their dorm room. Only one small desk light burns as the three have a quiet conversation.

GRUNWALD
So, what are you guys thinking?

Neither Tony nor Sims answer. All three are clearly anxious.

GRUNWALD
I mean, I'm nervous. Nervous as hell. If you guys are, its okay to say so.

SIMS
Nervous? Why you trippin', cowboy?

GRUNWALD
And you ain't? Come on, man.

SIMS
Look, nobody said its gonna be easy. But none of us got here on accident. I know *I* belong here, anyway.

TONY

Let's be honest. We're all nervous.
And wondering if we're going to
make it. But I just want you all to
know... whatever happens here... I got
you guys' back. For real.

SIMS

I heard that.

Sims extends a fist. Tony extends his, and they bump them
together. Grunwald quickly follows suit.

GRUNWALD

Go big red!

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

With a searing sun blazing overhead, Grunwald bends over a trash
can and vomits.

The freshmen have just finished a wind sprint. Sims, still
doubled over, finds the strength to taunt his large roommate.

SIMS

(winded)

I guess dinner's on you, then!

Most of the players are too winded to laugh. Grunwald, vomit
still dripping from his lips, turns and glares at Sims.

Tony, sweating heavily but not overly winded, looks on
stoically. He projects an air of being all business on the
practice field.

Student assistants pass around bottles of water which the
players anxiously drink.

Tony drinks half a bottle, and then pours the rest over his
head.

Defensive assistant coach TYRONE NELSON approaches the group of
players. He is a bald, and extremely muscular man with a booming
voice.

COACH NELSON

Break time's over, sweethearts! We
haven't even begun out here, today!
Let's hit those ropes! Move it!

The players summon whatever strength they have left and run over to a rope station.

We see a montage of players running through the ropes, and around other various obstacles.

Coach Nelson, and other assistants SHOUT out encouragement and constructive criticism.

All the while the sun beats down on the sweaty players.

Tony completes each drill or sprint with a steely determination. He appears to be a man among boys.

In the bleachers overlooking the practice fields, Head Coach Dan Shepperd watches the drills.

After watching Tony finish first in yet another drill, Coach Shepperd nods to himself. He likes what he sees.

INT. COACH SHEPPERD'S OFFICE - DAY

Tony enters Coach Shepperd's enormous office adorned with all manner of trophies and red letter "N"s.

Coach Shepperd is seated behind his massive desk. He smiles warmly as Tony enters the room.

TONY

Hi, coach.

COACH SHEPPERD

Tony! Why don't you have a seat.

Tony, clad in only workout attire, looks a little under-dressed for the opulent office.

He gingerly sits in one of the fine leather chairs on the other side of the desk.

COACH SHEPPERD

So, nice to finally meet in

(cont'd)
person, isn't it?

Tony nods politely.

COACH SHEPPERD
You can only learn so much about
someone over the phone.

(beat)
It's great to finally have you
here with us.

TONY
Its great to be here. Thank you
so much for this chance, sir.

COACH SHEPPERD
Thank you for taking it.

There is an awkward pause. Coach Shepperd attempts to keep
things going with standard chit-chat.

COACH SHEPPERD
How'd it go out there today?

TONY
I made it.

COACH SHEPPERD
Still standing, I see.
(chuckles)
But of course you are. I watched
it all. You don't disappoint, Mr.
Bright.
(beat)
Not everybody shows up to camp in
shape. Do I have that uncle of
yours to thank?

TONY
Mostly. I've been living with him
for ten years and I don't think
he's ever let me sleep past eight.

COACH SHEPPERD
He sounds like quite a guy. I've
probably spent more time talking

(cont'd)
to him than you.

TONY
That's Manny for you.

COACH SHEPPERD
So, how you feeling? Been in town
for a couple days now... what do
you think?

TONY
It's nice. Quiet.
(beat)
I like it.

COACH SHEPPERD
Good. Well, the upperclassmen will
be here on Thursday. Sorry to say
it won't stay so quiet.

TONY
I guess not.

COACH SHEPPERD
All I can say is don't let them
get to you. Believe me, they'll
try. They know who you are.

Tony nods.

COACH SHEPPERD
But, considering you past... I doubt
they'll cause you too much grief.
Especially once you run past them.

TONY
Not a chance, coach.

COACH SHEPPERD
(getting to his feet)
Well, its back to the film room
for me.

Tony also rises to his feet. Coach Shepperd extends his hand.

COACH SHEPPERD

I just wanted to say welcome in person. Great to have you!

They shake.

TONY

Thanks, coach. I won't let you down.

COACH SHEPPERD

I don't imagine you will.

(beat)

And look... I know it can be tough. You're a long way from home. You're going nuts trying to learn the plays. Classes haven't even started yet.

(beat)

If you ever need anything, or just want to talk... maybe I can find another five minutes between now and the day you graduate.

The two share a laugh.

INT. FILM ROOM - DAY

Coach Shepperd enters the film room where assistant coaches Nelson and MIKE FORREST, the offensive coordinator, are waiting for him

COACH NELSON

So, you read him the riot act yet? Tell him he's out of here if he fucks up? Give him the usual spiel?

COACH SHEPPERD

Nah. It may not be necessary for this one.

COACH FORREST

Sooner or later, its always necessary with these kids.

COACH SHEPPERD

I don't know. I've got a good feeling about him. He seems respectful. His grades were good.

(to Nelson)

You saw where he came from. You think he wants to go back?

COACH NELSON

I've been in his neighborhood. I just hope he didn't bring any of that here with him.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Tony, and the other freshmen are doing stretches and getting ready for another long, hot practice. Most look weary from the day before.

GRUNWALD

(under his breath)

Oh, my god! I am so fucking sore. There is no way I'm going to make it through two more of these today.

COACH NELSON

Did I just hear a little girl say he wanted to go home to his mama?

Tony smiles at his ailing roommate.

COACH NELSON

You ladies thought yesterday was tough...

Suddenly, the practice field is invaded by dozens of upper-classmen all dressed and ready to work out.

From the moment they step onto the field, the veterans eye the freshmen with blatant skepticism.

VETERAN #1

Look at these pre-schoolers they brought in!

VETERAN #2

A gynecologist doesn't see this

(cont'd)
many pussies in one week!

Some of the freshmen look away, afraid to look the veterans in the eye. Tony returns a cold stare.

COACH NELSON
What are we waiting for? Each of you owe me five laps! Let's move it!

CUT TO:

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Most of the players are nearing the end of their opening run. Some are noticeable winded already. Tony is just hitting his stride.

COACH NELSON
Okay! I need groups of ten! Time for sprints!

Tony eagerly takes his place in a line of ten.

An assistant blows a whistle, producing a loud TWEET. Tony and the others take off on a dash from one end of the field to the other.

Tony easily outruns the others. Rather than take a rest, Tony jogs back to the starting line so he can run another sprint.

A huge veteran calls him out.

VETERAN
Who you trying to impress, little man?

Another TWEET from the coach's whistle, and the players are off and running again.

Tony easily leaves the field behind him once more.

VETERAN
(winded)
Wait 'til we get some pads on, hot shit! It ain't so easy when people

(cont'd)
are hitting your ass!

TONY
They have to catch me first!

From an observation scaffold, Coach Shepperd looks down at his team and smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Several players have just finished their second practice of the day. Most are either doubled-over or sprawled out in the grass.

COACH SHEPPERD
Not bad today. Not too bad. In fact you guys did so well, I think we're ready for full pads tomorrow.

Several players voice muted opposition to this plan. Quarterback Brady Goodwin, always looking to suck up, voices encouragement.

GOODWIN
You heard the coach. We're ready for pads by day two. We can do this, gentlemen!

Cocky receiver Baron Mitchell pipes up.

MITCHELL
How about you wear mine.

Several players laugh.

GOODWIN
You couldn't carry my jock, let alone the rest of my pads. See you all tomorrow!

Tony, Grunwald, and Sims walk toward the locker room together.

SIMS
(to Tony)
You tired out yet? Even a little?

TONY

I think I'm good for today.

SIMS

Man, you're making the rest of us look like shit out there.

TONY

You guys are doing that all on your own.

GRUNWALD

Real funny, dude. I think some of those big boys are looking to light you up tomorrow. Maybe you ought to bring a couple bodyguards.

TONY

Why do you think I keep you two around?

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The players are strapping on their pads the following morning.

Tony, after putting on his practice jersey, cannot resist looking at himself in a full-length mirror.

MITCHELL

That's a nice Halloween costume you got there, son. But can you really play some football?

TONY

We'll see.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Pads CRUNCH and POP as players slam into on another. Linemen barrel into each other. Coaches SHOUT out encouragement and colorful criticism.

Tony takes his place in the offensive backfield.

The veterans on defense take immediate note of this, pointing him out.

VETERAN #1
You're all mine, kid!!

VETERAN #2
Send that bitch back to his homies!

Brady Goodwin hikes the ball and hands it off to Tony.

From Tony's POV, we can see he has no room to run.

Tony bounces the play outside and is clobbered by a linebacker for a two-yard loss.

VETERAN
This ain't high school, junior!

COACH FORREST
Follow your blockers next time,
Bright!

TONY
(under his breath)
What blockers?

COACH FORREST
Run it again!

Tony lines up once more in the backfield. The defenders eagerly take their stances. They clearly smell blood in the water.

VETERAN #1
(pointing)
The end zone is *that* way, kid!

VETERAN #2
Need a map? Someone to hold
your hand?

Tony has a steely and determined look in his eyes.

The ball is snapped. Goodwin turns and glares at Tony as he hands him the ball.

From Tony's POV, we see him follow the fullback through a decent-sized hole.

Tony, with a quick burst, is through the hole and sprinting down the field.

From his POV, we see nothing ahead but end zone.

Tony seems destined to score, until he is blind-sided by a defensive back. Tony lands two feet out of bounds.

Several players WHOOP and a couple give high-fives to the defensive back who hit him.

Tony regains his bearings and gets to his feet. He begins to jog toward the sideline.

COACH FORREST

Nice run, Tony. We'll get you in that end zone next time.

Tony, surprised at the compliment, turns and nods back at him.

COACH FORREST

Okay! Next group!

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Tony exits a convenience store and walks out into the harsh late-day sunshine. In one hand he holds a bottle of sports drink. In the other, a bag of potato chips.

Tony walks over to the cooler where the store's bagged ice is stored. He sets his items on top of the cooler and grabs a 5 pound bag from inside.

Across the parking lot, a group of coeds are gathered around a parked car. The girls are discussing where they plan to meet later for a party.

One of them, a leggy blonde named CASSIDY STOLTZ, notices Tony picking out his bag of ice.

CASSIDY

(to her friend)

So you just want us to meet you over at tenth and Charleston

(cont'd)
about nine?

One of her friends, AMANDA BELL, confirms this plan.

AMANDA
Yeah, we'll be there by then. It
should be rocking by dark.

CASSIDY
Cool! Who's all bringing the booze?

Another young lady, CHEYENNE ARNOLD, apparently has this all figured out.

CHEYENNE
I think Jessica's boyfriend is
bringing enough for us if the
keg goes dry. But maybe we'd
better... hey!

Cassidy has stopped looking at her friend. She is now focused on Tony.

Cheyenne waves a hand in front of Cassidy's face.

CHEYENNE
Hello! Is that cool? If we bring
some, too?

CASSIDY
Uh, yeah. Sure. I think we'd
better just in case.
(beat)
Just a minute, okay?

Cassidy promptly makes her way across the parking lot to where Tony is struggling to carry his items back to his dorm.

Cassidy's friends exchange knowing glances.

AMANDA
Doesn't take her long, does it?

CHEYENNE
(sighs)
Never does. I was hoping she'd at

(cont'd)
least wait until classes start.

By the time Cassidy reaches Tony, the bag of ice has slipped out of his hand once again.

Cassidy reaches down and grabs it for him.

CASSIDY
I got it.

TONY
(surprised)
Uh... thanks. Thank you.

CASSIDY
I don't think you're going to make it back to Harper by yourself with all this stuff.

TONY
I'll manage. Thank you, though.

Cassidy continues to carry Tony's bag of ice down the sidewalk.

TONY
How do you know where I live?
I mean, who are you?

CASSIDY
I'm Cassidy. I go to school here, too.

Tony takes a moment to look the young lady over. She stands at least 5'10, with a dark tan making a nice compliment to her dirty-blonde hair. She is wearing a short denim skirt, and a tee shirt designed to leave very little to the imagination as far as her breast size, which is considerable. Her hazel-green eyes radiate warmth and friendliness.

TONY
Well, I'm...

CASSIDY
(interrupting)
You're Anthony Bright. But you go by Tony. You led the state of

(cont'd)

California in rushing the last two years, and your team won the state championship last year.

Tony looks away, surprised and embarrassed at the same time.

CASSIDY

(cont'd)

...and last season you averaged umm... 7.3 yards per carry and scored 35 touchdowns.

TONY

I think it was more like 7.4 per carry, actually.

Cassidy turns and begins to blush.

CASSIDY

Sorry. I talk too much, don't I?

TONY

Forget about it. Always nice to meet a fan, I guess.

The two continue down the sidewalk in silence for a moment.

TONY

Seriously, though. I got it.

Cassidy shrugs and hands the bag over to Tony.

CASSIDY

So, what do you have going on for later?

TONY

At this point, I think I just need to rest. It was a tough one out there today.

CASSIDY

Cool. But, hey. Later there's going to be this killer party over at tenth and Charleston.

(cont'd)

One of my friends is getting a keg.

TONY

That sounds fun... but eight o'clock comes pretty early for us, you know.

Cassidy looks down, disappointed.

CASSIDY

Well, I understand. But if you change your mind...

Cassidy begins to scribble on a tiny piece of paper she takes from her pocket.

CASSIDY

(cont'd)

Just call me, okay?

Tony, his hands full, has no means of taking her note. Cassidy precedes to stuff the note into his workout shorts. Her hand goes in a bit deeper than is necessary.

Cassidy walks back toward the convenience store. Tony is unable to avert his eyes from her swaying posterior.

Tony finally turns and smiles as he begins to head back to his dorm.

INT. DORM ROOM - DUSK

Tony is sitting in his dorm room talking on the phone to Manny.

MANNY (OS)

So, how they treating you?

Tony takes a moment to answer.

MANNY (OS)

Ah, ha! Told you the stuff I put you through was nothing compared to them. How you holding up?

TONY

Good. Real good so far. Haven't even puked yet.

MANNY (OS)

That's my nephew. That's my Anthony.

(beat)

Can't wait to see you on TV this fall. That's going to make us proud, young man. Real proud.

TONY

So, how's everything there?

MANNY (OS)

Same old same old, I guess. You know how it is.

TONY

All too well.

MANNY (OS)

Let me put granny on. Just a sec.

GLORY (OS)

Anthony?

TONY

Hi grandma.

GLORY (OS)

Anthony, how are you?

TONY

I'm good. Doing fine so far.

GLORY (OS)

How are they feeding you?

TONY

I'm not starving. You should see the spread they serve for us.

GLORY (OS)

It's not as good as my cooking though, is it?

TONY
How could it be?

Both share a laugh.

GLORY (OS)
And how about your classes?

TONY
They don't start until Monday.
I'm pretty much just practicing
and sleeping.

GLORY (OS)
You meeting any new friends?

Tony looks down at Cassidy's number sitting on his desktop.

TONY
A few. I haven't had a lot of
time yet.

GLORY (OS)
Well, I'd tell you to stay out
of trouble, but I'm sure you
don't need to hear that from me.

Tony laughs.

GLORY (OS)
I'd better let you rest.
(beat)
I love you, Anthony. I'm so
proud of you. I'm sure your
mother is, too. She's watching
you, you know. Staring down at
you from heaven.

TONY
I know. And I love you, too.
Tell Manny goodbye for me.

GLORY (OS)
I will. You take care, now.

TONY
You, too. Goodbye.

GLORY (OS)
Good bye, Anthony.

Tony hangs up his dorm phone.

The sun has set now, and Tony is left alone in his room with his thoughts.

He picks up Cassidy's number and appears to be contemplating whether or not to call her.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Tony and his teammates are practicing again on another hot, steamy day. We see a brief montage of the action.

Pads CRUNCH, players are knocked to the turf. Whistles TWEET and coaches SHOUT at players.

We see Tony carry the ball a series of times in scrimmages. He is beginning to stand out, even against seasoned veterans.

Defenders bounce off him, and it often takes more than one to get him down.

On other plays, we see Tony simply outrun the defenders.

Coach Shepperd and his assistants smile at one another after he breaks another long run.

EXT. FOOTBALL COMPLEX - DAY

Tony and his roommates Deion Sims and Caleb Grunwald have showered and are exiting the massive football complex at the north end of Memorial Stadium.

The three are chuckling about something we cannot hear.

Standing near the exit are Cassidy Stoltz, Amanda Bell, and Cheyenne Arnold.

Tony and his teammates walk past the girls. He and Cassidy share eye contact the entire time.

TONY
(to his teammates)
I'll catch up to you guys later.

Sims and Grunwald appear stunned at this flirtatious behavior by their normally shy roommate. They both look the girls over as Tony walks over to them

SIMS

I hope that's all he catches.

GRUNWALD

(laughs)

Let's go.

INT. CASSIDY'S HOUSE - DAY

Cassidy and Tony walk through the front door. Cassidy's house is a cluttered, aging house just north of campus.

Cassidy throws her keys and purse down onto a sagging recliner.

CASSIDY

Sit down. Anywhere.

Tony gingerly sits down on a couch partially covered in unfolded laundry.

CASSIDY

(OS from kitchen)

Want something to drink?

TONY

I'm okay.

Tony takes a moment to look around the room, obviously not sure he should be there. Amid the clutter is an incredible amount of Nebraska Cornhusker memorabilia.

Cassidy returns from the kitchen with an open beer in her hand.

She plops down on the couch next to Tony.

CASSIDY

Sure you don't want anything?

She offers Tony the bottle. He shakes his head.

CASSIDY

Nobody's going to know. I can

(cont'd)
keep a secret.

TONY
Somehow I don't think anything
we do is going to be a secret.

CASSIDY
Does it need to be?

Cassidy slides closer to him.

TONY
Can't we just... I mean I'd like
to get to know you a little.

CASSIDY
(flattered)
What would you like to know?
I'm an open book.

TONY
Well, where are you from?

CASSIDY
I don't suppose you've ever
heard of Hastings, Nebraska,
have you? I'd be disappointed
if you have.

Tony shakes his head.

CASSIDY
(cont'd)
I'm a junior. I'm a psych major.
I live here with three other
people. Well, usually three, but
you never know who's coming over.

Cassidy leans in closer.

CASSIDY
(cont'd)
But this time of day, we're about
as safe as it gets.

Tony is obviously nervous, but she is looking too good for him to pass up.

Tony and Cassidy find themselves in a deep kiss. After a moment, she begins to grind her body on his.

With her own hand, she moves his between her legs. Again clad in a miniskirt, there is nothing preventing him from exploring further...

As quickly as this make-out session begins, Tony pulls back and ends it.

TONY

I'm sorry. Really, I am. I never should have come over here like this.

Tony gets to his feet.

CASSIDY

It's okay. I understand.

TONY

I mean, you're really nice and I'd like to see you again...

CASSIDY

You would? Well, that's good because I'd like to see you, too. Maybe I came on a bit strong.

(beat)

Or maybe you have a girlfriend?

TONY

No. It's nothing like that. Look, I gotta run.

Tony heads for the door.

TONY

I'm sorry. I need to get back to my room.

CASSIDY

You need a ride?

TONY

No. That's okay. I can make it.

CASSIDY

You sure?

TONY

Yeah. I gotta run. But I'll see you later, okay?

Tony is half-way out the door.

CASSIDY

Call me. You'd better call me.

Tony leaves, and shuts the door behind him. Cassidy sits back on the couch and smiles to herself.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Tony sits and takes notes as a professor drones on about the upcoming course on Western Civilization.

PROFESSOR

...at which time you'll be quizzed on your reading assignments for each week. In addition to the readings, what we cover in the lectures will also be included on tests. The tests will include true and false, multiple choice, as well as essay questions...

Tony looks to his left and sees Deion Sims with his head down on his desk. Deion lifts an eyelid.

SIMS

Remind me to bring a pillow next time.

Tony looks to his right and sees Caleb Grunwald also with his head down.

GRUNWALD

You getting all this? Counting on you, man.

Grunwald closes his eyes. Tony rolls his own.

INT. RADIO STUDIO - NIGHT

Sports Talk Nightly host Alan Chizek is talking about tomorrow's opening game. He could hardly contain his excitement if he wanted to. Sitting across from him is former player KEVIN KNOX, a hulking former linebacker with a weathered face and a crew-cut.

CHIZEK

So, here we are. After all these months of waiting, all these nights where we had to wing it when there was nothing else to talk about all summer. The time is upon us.

Tomorrow starts another season of Nebraska Football.

(beat)

Amen!

KNOX

Amen!

The two share a nervous chuckle.

CHIZEK

And joining us here this evening... truly one of the all-time greats... still the school record holder for career tackles, Mr. Kevin Knox.

KNOX

Thank you, Alan. Thank you very much for having me.

CHIZEK

You bet! Now, with tomorrow's opener looming, and such high expectations from fans, coaches, us in the media... maybe you could share with us some insight into what these players are going through right about now.

KNOX

Well, the evening before a game,

(cont'd)
particularly a home game, is very
special for the players. It really
is a time for bonding...

* THIS SCENE TO BE INTERCUT WITH A MONTAGE OF THE TEAM'S
ACTIVITIES *

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

Tony and his teammates are well-dressed and sitting at circular
banquet tables.

The players talk and laugh as they polish off generous portions
of prime rib. We cannot hear what they are saying.

KNOX (VO)
First off, there's always a nice
team meal. Some of the best food
I've ever eaten.

CHIZEK (VO)
We could use something like that
here in the studio for a change.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Tony and his teammates file into the seats of a movie theater
reserved for them, only.

KNOX (VO)
Then, you usually do something
fun or relaxing as a group. For
us it was usually a trip to the
movies...

CUT TO:

Tony and his teammates laugh hysterically at whatever they are
watching on the big screen.

Someone tosses a handful of popcorn in Caleb Grunwald's face. He
catches as much of it as he can in his mouth.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

The players file onto a couple of luxury busses once the movie is over. Policemen have to hold back the numerous fans seeking autographs.

KNOX (VO)

Once the fun and games are over, usually around nine, it's back to the hotel and time for one last thought, prayer, or whatever else anyone has to say. Then, its time for bed, and each player is left to sort it all out for himself.

INT. EAST CAMPUS HOTEL - NIGHT

The lights go out in each room as coaches walk down the hallways carrying flashlights.

INT. RADIO STUDIO - NIGHT

CHIZEK

And how did you sleep in that hotel bed. Could you?

KNOX

Me? I slept just fine. Unless we were playing Oklahoma.

Both men laugh heartily.

KNOX

The thing to keep in mind is that it wasn't what we did the night before a game that defined us, and it's the same for these kids today.

INT. EAST CAMPUS HOTEL - NIGHT

Tony lies awake in his bed, staring up at the ceiling.

In the next bed, Deion Sims sleeps soundly.

INT. RADIO STATION - NIGHT

CHIZEK

Well, there has been so much said about how special this team could

(cont'd)

be. Bottom line... what do you think?

KNOX

All I know is I can't wait.

EXT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY

It is game day outside Memorial Stadium. Absolute pandemonium. Thousands of red-clad fans mill about on the stadium's east side.

Vine Street forms a horseshoe as it ends at the stadium's steps. At the center of this horseshoe, wealthy boosters party and mingle.

At the curb, the fans part along a sidewalk that the players will follow to get to their locker room.

Cheerleaders and the school pep band whip the crowd into a frenzy with their songs and cadences.

The frenzy reaches its zenith as a caravan of touring busses and police vehicles turns into the horseshoe from 14th Street.

INT. BUS - DAY

Inside a large, comfortable tour bus, Tony and his teammates look out with an anticipation matching that of the fans outside.

As the bus nears the stadium, the scale of the situation begins to sink in to the freshmen.

GRUNWALD

Holy shit! Would you look at all those people!

SIMS

This is what it's all about, baby!
This is what I signed on for!

Tony is speechless, right up to the moment the bus comes to a stop.

From Tony's POV, we see him step off the bus into a roaring crowd.

EXT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY

The players, clad in jogging suits and workout gear, file out of the busses. The crowd CHEERS loudly.

They walk slowly and confidently up the sidewalk taking them to the football complex next to the stadium.

A few of the fans recognize Tony and call out his name.

Tony has made it halfway through the crowd when he spots a familiar face. Situated between Amanda Bell and Cheyenne Arnold is Cassidy Stoltz waving her hands wildly and shouting.

As Tony walks past her, the two make extended eye contact. Cassidy winks and licks her lips seductively.

Tony sheepishly turns away and smiles.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Tony and his teammates are squeezing into their pads and scarlet uniforms with cream numbering and lettering.

Once their uniforms are complete, Tony and the other freshmen take a moment to admire themselves in a mirror. Their expressions beam with pride.

CUT TO:

Once the players have all dressed, coach Shepperd brings them together for one last pep talk. We only hear the tail end of this.

COACH SHEPPERD

You all know what to do... now go
out there and do it!

The players rise to their feet and SHOUT in agreement. They are ready to play football.

INT. TUNNEL - DAY

After touching the horseshoe above them for luck as they pass beneath it, the players cram themselves into a tunnel leading out onto the field.

INT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY

Fans eagerly watch the players make their way through the tunnel on the big screen monitors.

A song by the Alan Parsons Project BLARES from the P.A. system.

Brady Goodwin, and three other senior captains shake hands at midfield with the opposing team's captains.

The referee flips a coin, and then indicates that Nebraska has won the toss.

This incites the crowd even further.

INT. TUNNEL - DAY

Finally, the dual doors holding back the players are pulled open by members of the Nebraska National Guard. The entire team spills out into the corner of the North end zone.

INT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY

The crowd CHEERS even louder as the players run out onto the field.

From Tony's POV, we see him run out into the raucous stadium. The world seems bathed in red.

Tony, dazed by the spectacle, returns a few high-fives.

He and his teammates take their place on the sideline.

Coach Shepperd and his assistants pace nervously as the players on the field line up for the kickoff..

Finally, the Nebraska kicker sends the ball high into the air and through the opposite end zone.

Tony, Deion Sims, and Caleb Grunwald hang together on the sideline. They are the only three true freshmen to dress for the game. They watch the first defensive series intently.

The opposing offense is quickly forced to punt. The Huskers return the punt to near midfield.

Tony glances over at the coaches, but they do not look his way.

Brady Goodwin leads the offense onto the field. Tony does not join them.

SIMS
(in Tony's ear)
We'll be in there soon enough,
baby!

TONY
Hope so.

CUT TO:

INT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY

A shot of the scoreboard reveals the game to be early in the fourth quarter. Nebraska has a sizeable lead over their opponent.

Nebraska players have just recovered a fumble near midfield.

Tony looks anxiously over at Coach Shepperd. The coach's stern expression slowly turns into a smile.

Coach Shepperd nods his head in the direction of the field.

Tony quickly straps on his helmet and runs onto the field.

Many of the fans take note of Tony's number 32 entering the action. CHEERS begin to build.

Tony reaches the huddle and is met by a glaring Brady Goodwin. Goodwin looks a little annoyed to still be in the game when other starters have been pulled.

GOODWIN
Thirty-two trap. That's thirty-
-two trap. On two. Break!

Goodwin stares at Tony the whole time he is calling the play as if the frosh would forget what it was.

Tony takes his place behind the line of scrimmage. He tunes out all sound.

Goodwin takes the snap and turns to hand Tony the ball.

Before Tony can take the handoff, the referee blows the play dead with a loud TWEET from his whistle.

The preliminary signal made by the referee is a "false start" against the offense.

Tony winces.

GOODMAN
(looking around)
Who moved!?

The referee makes the announcement.

REFEREE
False start. Number thirty-two
offense. Five yard penalty. Still
first down.

Tony rolls his eyes as his suspicions are confirmed. He moved too early.

The ball is placed five yards back as the team re-huddles.

GOODMAN
We'll try it again! Same play.
On three.
(to Tony)
This time wait 'til the ball is
snapped! Break!

Tony, wearing a scowl on his face, takes his place in the backfield once more.

GOODMAN
Red... eighteen! Red... eighteen!
Red... hike!

Goodwin turns and hands the ball off to Tony.

From Tony's POV, we see him take the handoff and run through a gaping hole in the line of scrimmage.

Once he is through the line, Tony puts the moves on a linebacker and jukes past him.

Tony bursts into the open field. The crowd rises to its feet and CHEERS loudly.

Tony kicks it into high gear and outruns the defensive backs on his way to the end zone. He has scored on the first official carry of his collegiate career.

The crowd ERRUPTS as Tony's teammates rush over to congratulate him.

After a series of high-fives, Tony jogs off the field pumping his fists.

Coach Shepperd comes over and gives him a hug as the crowd continues to CHEER.

COACH SHEPPERD

I finally got to see you do this
in a game! Tony, you're going to
be one hell of a player here. One
hell of a player!

TONY

Thanks, coach!

EXT. NORTH BOTTOMS - NIGHT

Later that evening, several young people are celebrating at a series of house parties. The area just north of campus is lined with sagging older houses filled with college kids drinking and carrying on.

College kids walk down the street openly drinking cans and cups of beer. Some can barely stand up from the day's festivities.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Tony, Deion Sims, and Caleb Grunwald find themselves at one of the many house parties in the neighborhood.

The three are hanging out in the kitchen of an old house filled with partying kids.

Tony drinks water from a bottle. Sims and Grunwald are drinking unknown beverages from colored plastic cups.

SIMS

(to Tony)

Yo! When this girl of yours gonna get here?

TONY

She's here. I saw her walk in just a bit ago.

SIMS

Well go get her, dog! Before one of these other cats move in.

TONY

They won't. She's with me.

GRUNWALD

Which one is she?

Grunwald peers into the living room filled with partying college kids.

TONY

That blonde. Over there in the red.

The room is full of young women matching that description.

GRUNWALD

You ain't that big of a pimp!

Cassidy, who has been talking to her friends, comes into the kitchen. She immediately runs over to Tony and throws her arms around him.

CASSIDY

Tony! I'm so glad you showed up!
Told you it would be a blast!

Cassidy seems like she's been out partying for a while. She looks good, but her speech is a little slurred.

CASSIDY

(cont'd)

This is my friends' place. We party here all the time. Nobody got you a beer yet? Let me.

TONY
That's okay...

Before Tony can decline, Cassidy makes her way over to the keg.

SIMS
Damn! She's one fine-assed little
honey!

GRUNWALD
Yeah, dude. When have you had
time to meet her? She got a
sister? Or some slutty friends?

TONY
Y'all chill, okay? We're just
friends, anyway. At least so far.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

While the party rages on, five rough-looking non-students casually enter the party. They are shabbily-dressed in baggy clothing, trying desperately to look like legitimate gang members.

All five spread out and appear to be casing the house.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cassidy returns to Tony with a cup of beer. Tony takes the cup, but does not drink from it.

CASSIDY
You were *amazing* out there
today! You were the best!

TONY
Thanks.

CASSIDY
And thank you so much for
coming! I seriously didn't
know if you'd be here. But I
am SO glad you are!

Cassidy moves in closer to him.

A young woman enters the kitchen from the living room. Her name is DESTINY. She is one of the young people that live at this house.

DESTINY
Seriously, who invited those
little wannabes out there?

CASSIDY
Who are you talking about?

DESTINY
(pointing into the living room)
Them! They aren't students! One
of them tried to pick a fight
with my boyfriend. I want them
out!

Tony and Cassidy look into the living room. The five punks, dressed in their baggy clothing stand out easily from the college partygoers. Four of them are obviously "wiggers", the common term for white kids trying to act and dress like black gang members or hip hop singers. The fifth, an actual black kid, seems to be hanging back while his white cohorts make fools of themselves posing and getting in people's faces.

One of the punks, a tall and stocky kid named DICKEY, is getting in the face of Destiny's boyfriend once again.

GRUNWALD
(stepping toward them)
I'll handle this.

TONY
You just chill, man.

Tony's warning comes too late.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Grunwald steps between Dickey and Destiny's boyfriend, a preppy kid named Zach.

GRUNWALD
(to Dickey)
Do we have a problem, homey?

DICKEY

Why don't you fuck off, cowboy?

GRUNWALD

I think I was invited. Were you?

Suddenly, one of Dickey's pals named MORT smashes a beer bottle over Grunwald's head.

Unfazed, Grunwald responds by laying Mort out with one punch.

The rest of Dickey's crew join in, and a brawl breaks out.

Chairs, bottles, and people fly as Dickey and his crew fight their way to the front door.

In the chaos, one of Dickey's pals, the black one named MUCKLE, grabs a video game component and attempts to flee with it. The thief is tackled by Tony before he can get outside.

TONY

Give it up, shorty!

MUCKLE

Fuck you, cuz!

Muckle takes a swing and lands a weak punch on Tony's jaw.

Tony raises a fist to retaliate just as police break through the front door with guns drawn.

POLICEMAN

Nobody move! Let's see some hands!

A policeman points his weapon right at Tony who still has a clenched fist.

TONY

(under his breath)

Shit.

INT. COACH SHEPPERD

Tony sits, solemn-looking, across the desk from Coach Shepperd. The coach is laying down punishment for the incident at the house party.

COACH SHEPPERD

I've already spoken with your friends, and they basically get the same thing you're getting.

TONY

Which is?

COACH SHEPPERD

One week. And next game. You're banned from all team functions and facilities. You'll be as much a regular student as I can make you for the next seven days.

Tony looks at the floor.

COACH SHEPPERD

(cont'd)

I guess it goes without saying that I've very disappointed in you, Tony.

(beat)

I really thought... and I still do think you're different. A cut above the majority of kids that come through our door.

(beat)

Well, I'm not going to waste any more of our time. I'll see you at practice next Monday.

Tony hauls himself to his feet.

TONY

I'm really sorry, coach. I can assure you this won't happen again.

COACH SHEPPERD

I sure hope it doesn't.

Tony walks over to the door. He reaches for the handle.

COACH SHEPPERD

And, Tony...

TONY

Yes, coach?

COACH SHEPPERD

(begins to smile)

Thanks for having your teammates'
back.

Tony looks down and smiles.

COACH SHEPPERD

See ya.

TONY

See you, coach.

EXT. L.A. COUNTY JAIL - DAY

The exterior doors to the high security facility open up, and out into the world steps Dawg Nutz.

One of the guards posted at the exit, a heavysset Hispanic man, takes a parting shot at the newly-paroled gang member.

GUARD

You be sure and hurry back, now.
The fellas in there miss you
already.

The guard blows a kiss to add to the insult.

DAWG

Then why don't you keep them
company, beaner?

The doors shut behind him, and Dawg is alone on the sidewalk.

He nervously looks up and down the street. After a moment, he recognizes a vehicle.

A large silver Cadillac pulls to a stop at the curb next to Dawg.

A tinted rear window lowers a few inches. A large black hand forming the shape of a pistol emerges from inside.

C-NOTE
(from inside)
Bang! You dead, nigga!

Dawg tenses up, perhaps not sure if he can trust his old cohorts.

The passenger side door swings open, revealing the seat to be vacant and waiting for Dawg.

MAC-10
Get in, nigga! What you waitin'
for?

INT. CADILLAC - DAY

Dawg slides into the front passenger seat.

He exchanges various fist bumps and gang specific handshakes.

C-NOTE
(from the back seat)
How was it in there?

DAWG
How is it always?

MAC-10
Now that you out, we got to get
it on tonight.

C-NOTE offers Dawg a blunt that has already been lit.

DAWG
Naw, save it, man. We got business
first.

EXT. SERVICE STATION - DUSK

In the last few moments of twilight, Manny Bright is closing down the auto service station where he works.

Manny steps outside and locks the front door behind him.

As he locks the door, a large sedan riding low to the ground coasts slowly past the station.

Manny turns quickly, as if suspecting someone coming up behind him.

Through his POV, we see the tail end of the sedan as it moves behind a building next door, and then out of view.

Manny walks over to the tow truck he uses as his primary transportation.

He opens the driver's side door, and tosses his lunch box inside the cab.

He looks down to find the left front tire as flat as a pancake.

MANNY

Aw, shit.

Manny moves to the rear of the vehicle, looking for tools to make a quick fix.

While his back is turned to the street, the sedan re-appears. It rolls into the lot, and over toward Manny.

As the sedan creeps to a stop, Manny turns and notices it. There is a look of dread on his face.

One of the tinted windows of the sedan slides down.

VOICE

(from inside)

Yo, Bright! How much for an oil
change, nigga?

Manny turns and begins to run toward an alley next to the service station.

A double-barrel shotgun protrudes from inside the sedan.

Before Manny can put any distance between himself and the sedan, both barrels BOOM, and Manny is knocked to the ground.

The sedan quickly drives off as Manny is left to writhe in agony. He has taken a good portion of the blast in the back.

From Manny's POV, we see him begin to black out as he stares up into the darkening sky.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

From Manny's POV, we see him slowly regain consciousness. Tony, standing over his hospital bed, is the first thing Manny sees.

TONY

How you doing, old man?

MANNY

(weakly)

Tony? What are you doing here, son?

TONY

I came as soon as I heard. You been in here for two whole days. Thought we lost you.

MANNY

Where's granny? She okay?

TONY

She's out in the hall. She's fine. I'll go get her...

MANNY

Wait. Wait a minute.

TONY

The police are wanting to talk to you, too.

MANNY

(wincing)

Wait! I got to talk to you first.

Tony pulls up a chair and leans in close to his uncle.

TONY

Who did this?

MANNY

I don't know. Does it even matter?

TONY

Damn right it matters! I want to know who did this to you!

MANNY

You were stupid coming back here, Anthony. It could have just as well been you. Isn't that why you left this place?

TONY

It don't matter why I left. I'm here now. Here for you and granny.

MANNY

Anthony listen to me... you need to get back to school. Right away. Before you really fuck up a good thing. This is your time! This is your chance! You may not get another one. You need to get out of L.A. as soon as possible. I'll get by. Granny and I were just sick when we heard you got suspended.

TONY

That don't even matter now. I'm not going back until I know you'll be okay.

MANNY

Anthony, don't make me the reason you couldn't make it at Nebraska. I wouldn't be able to handle that.

A nurse pokes her head into the room.

NURSE

Is everything okay in here?

TONY
Everything's fine.

The nurse notices Manny is awake and alert.

NURSE
I'll get the doctor. Young man,
you're going to have to step
outside for a moment.

TONY
(to Manny)
I got to go.

The two squeeze each other's hand.

MANNY
It's good seeing you. But you
walk right out that door and
don't stop 'til you're back at
school. You hear me?

TONY
I hear you, old man. Be seeing
you.

MANNY
Get on outta here.

Both attempt to wipe away tears.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Tony finds Glory and Reverend Thompson in the waiting room
having coffee. Glory looks tired and tense.

REV. THOMPSON
Tony! Good to see you, young
man!

Tony and the reverend share a bear hug.

REV. THOMPSON
Damn! Someone's put on some new
muscles! How they treating you?

TONY

As good as I deserve, I guess.

(beat)

Manny's awake. At least he was
a minute ago.

GLORY

(gets to her feet)

Praise the Lord!

TONY

Doctors are with him now.

Glory quickly heads down the hall toward Manny's room.

REV. THOMPSON

Thank God. Thank God.

TONY

Do we have any idea who did this
to him?

REV. THOMPSON

As of the moment... who knows? Did
he have any enemies?

TONY

No more than anyone else trying
to survive around here.

(beat)

Manny told me I should leave town.
He thinks I'm not safe here.

REV. THOMPSON

He might be right about that.

(beat)

Look, don't you worry about Manny
and your granny. The doctors are
doing all they can for him. And
I'll be keeping an eye on her. You
just get yourself back to school.
Show them they were right to bring
you there.

TONY

Thanks, reverend. Thanks for
everything.

The two share an embrace.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Tony steps outside the hospital and heads toward a waiting taxi.

Before getting into the vehicle, he notices a tricked-out Cadillac gliding slowly toward the cab.

A window of the Cadillac slides down, revealing Dawg Nutz sitting in the front passenger seat.

Dawg and Tony make cold eye contact.

Dawg molds his hand into the shape of a pistol and shakes it in Tony's direction.

Tony extends his middle finger.

INT. CADILLAC - DAY

In the back seat, C-NOTE clenches a double-barrel shotgun. He flicks a switch and begins to lower his window...

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Tony ducks into the cab.

INT. CADILLAC - DAY

MAC-10, from the driver seat, calls out a warning.

MAC-10
One time, one time!

The gang members take heed of a nearby police cruiser.

DAWG
Fuck! Get us outta here, nigga!

INT. TAXI - DAY

DRIVER
You look like you're in a hurry.
where to?

TONY

The airport. Make it quick!

INT. CASSIDY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cassidy is relaxing on her couch. Suddenly, there is a knock at the front door.

Cassidy moves to the door to answer it. She opens the door to find Tony, dressed in his high school letterman's jacket.

CASSIDY

Oh, my God! How are you? I'm so sorry about your uncle! Its like all anyone's been talking about around here.

TONY

Can I come in?

CASSIDY

Of course. Of course you can.

Tony steps inside.

CASSIDY

Did you see your uncle? How is...

Tony begins to embrace her, and she quickly returns the favor.

After a moment, the two begin to kiss passionately.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

As morning light begins to filter through the curtains in Cassidy's bedroom, Tony is putting on his clothes.

Cassidy, lying nude in bed, looks up at him and smiles.

CASSIDY

Call me after practice... if you want.

TONY

Think I just might.

Tony, smiling, heads for the door.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

In a colorful South-Central Los Angeles barber shop, VONNIE EDMUNDS is making a telephone call. Edmunds is a husky African American man in his late twenties. He works the head chair in the popular establishment. Jazz music softly plays in the background.

On the other end of the line, a weary voice answers the phone.

VOICE (OS)

Hello.

VONNIE

Put that pipe down and listen
up, little man.

INT. OLD HOUSE - DAY

On the other end of the line, in Lincoln, NE, wannabe gang member Muckle is lounging on a sagging couch.

The couch sits along the wall of a living room cluttered with beer cans, fast food containers, and video game equipment.

On a nearby loveseat, Dickey and a friend battle head to head with a video game playing out on a massive flat screen TV.

INTERCUT WITH L.A. BARBER SHOP:

MUCKLE

That you, Vonnie?

VONNIE

The one and only.

MUCKLE

Damn! What up, my nigga?

VONNIE

Just seein' what my little
cousin is up to. You still in
school out there?

MUCKLE

Well, I'm kinda... I'm just

(cont'd)
takin' some time off to figure
some shit out. Get me some
money together...

VONNIE
Who you tryin' to clown, junior?
Any green you got gets smoked up
every day! Heh, heh, heh.

MUCKLE
Whatever.

VONNIE
Anyway, listen up. I got someone
here would like a word with you.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

Vonnie passes his phone to Dawg Nutz, who is sitting in a barber
chair next to him.

DAWG
(into the phone)
Hey. This Muckle?
(beat)
What kind of name is that?

Dawg listens for a moment. We don't hear what Muckle tells him.

DAWG
(into the phone)
Well, that's all good. So,
listen. How'd you and maybe
some of your homies like to
help a brother out?

INT. DICKEY'S HOUSE - DAY

MUCKLE
(into the phone)
Yeah. We'd be down. That would
be no problem. You know how to
find us?
(beat)
Cool.
(beat)

(cont'd)
Be talkin' to you. Peace.

Muckle ends the call.

DICKEY
Who the fuck was that?

MUCKLE
Shit. Let's just say it's a
small world, homie.

DICKEY
Fuck you talkin' about?

MUCKLE
How'd you like to get back at
that nigga from the other
night?

Dickey, forgetting about his game, turns to Muckle and smiles.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Tony, carrying a gym bag, walks into the locker room after
having served his suspension.

Tony shares a few high fives and fist bumps with teammates.

QB Brady Goodwin even gives him a polite nod.

COACH FORREST
Glad to have you back, Tony.
And glad to hear your uncle is
going to pull through.

TONY
Thanks.

COACH FORREST
Now suit up. Let's see what you
remember.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

We see Tony running a few drills with his teammates. He runs
hard, and looks like he hasn't missed a beat.

INT. RADIO STUDIO - NIGHT

Host Alan Chizek is conducting his weekly interview with Coach Shepperd.

CHIZEK

...and as we look forward to this weekend's looming showdown with the Washington Huskies, we'll be able to welcome back Tony Bright who will be returning after a week-long suspension.

(beat)

Now, there were some who questioned if the young man would even be returning to the team after also enduring a family crisis back in L.A..

COACH SHEPPERD

Yes, we were all saddened to hear about his uncle being the target of possible gang violence. But thankfully it appears he will be okay.

CHIZEK

Coach, do you think most Husker fans can even appreciate just how difficult an environment some of these kids come from.

COACH SHEPPERD

Unless you've actually lived in one of the larger inner cities of this country, I don't think you really can, Alan.

CHIZEK

There are those who may have some reservations about our coaching staff even recruiting these areas in the first place. Perhaps there is a... fear that maybe trouble can follow some of these players here to Lincoln.

COACH SHEPPERD

Well, when its all said and done,
good players are where you find
them. It just so happens that
some of the finest young players
in this country come from low income
areas.

(beat)

Arrests, trouble with alcohol, these
things pop up every place where you
have a large concentration of young
people... many of them away from home
for the first time.

CHIZEK

True. Absolutely.

COACH SHEPPERD

But I don't think we have anything
to fear as far as inner-city crime
waves following these players here.
I think a lot of those types would
be bored stiff.

The two share a chuckle.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Outside the modest home of Dickey and Muckle, a familiar
tricked-out silver Cadillac pulls to a stop along the curb.

The California plates do as much as anything to make the car
look out of place.

Three of its doors open. Out steps Mac-10, C-Note, and Dawg
Nutz.

They take a moment to look over the sagging and somewhat shabby
homes that make up this North Lincoln neighborhood.

INT. DICKEY'S HOUSE - DAY

Dickey, Muckle, and another pal lounge around on couches in
their cluttered house.

Though the abundant sunlight suggests mid-day, it appears that nobody in this house has been outside yet.

The front door swings open, and in walks the three gang bangers.

Dickey and his crew immediately perk up when they set eyes on the hardcore L.A. crew.

DAWG
(to nobody in particular)
What up?

DICKEY
(getting to his feet)
Hey! Great to see you guys!
Welcome to my crib!

Dickey moves over to Dawg and attempts to hug him. Dawg winces as the big lug of a wannabe gets too close for his liking.

DAWG
No need for trippin', cuz.
(to Muckle)
Yo. Your cousin says "hi".

MUCKLE
Y'all have any trouble finding
the place?

MAC-10
We got a G.P.S..

DICKEY
Damn straight! We're honored to
to have you guys with us! What
you guys want to do? You need a
drink? We got a fridge full of
forties. My homie over there got
some herb...

DAWG
Shit. Just shut the fuck up and
tell us where that nigga at.

EXT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY

Another home game has brought a large, festive crowd to Memorial Stadium.

Once again, the fans have lined up en masse along the sidewalk leading to the football complex north of the stadium.

The pep band is stoking the crowd with a school fight song.

INT. TOUR BUS - DAY

Tony and his teammates look out at the crowd as the bus carrying them to the stadium turns onto Vine St.

SIMS

(to Tony)

You miss this last week? It wasn't the same without you, man.

GRUNWALD

(hugs Tony)

Glad to have you back! And that's not just roommate talk there. We missed you out there on the field, too. Let's kick some ass today!

TONY

I'm ready, baby. Nobody is gonna catch me out there today. Nobody.

There is a steely determination in Tony's eyes, as if he is playing not only for his school, but his family as well.

EXT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY

The bus pulls to a stop, and the crowd breaks into loud CHEERS. Many fans swarm toward the players as they begin to exit the busses.

From Tony's POV, we see him step off the bus and begin to make his way through the crowd.

In the midst of the loud gathering of people in red, Tony picks out Cassidy and her friends SCREAMING encouragement. Tony winks back at her and smiles.

Tony continues along with his teammates as they move through the crowd.

Suddenly, Tony spots something in the crowd that startles him and nearly makes his eyes pop out of his head. Standing in the crowd, flanked by his two homies, is Dawg Nutz!

Tony blinks, convinced he must be seeing things.

He opens his eyes again to find Dawg and his cohorts smiling at him.

Dawg extends his index finger and raises his thumb. He then makes a shooting gesture at Tony.

Tony, with a petrified look on his face, picks up his pace and continues to walk toward the locker room.

INT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY

As the game is being played on the field, Tony watches the early action from the sideline.

Tony's attention seems to be focused more on the crowd around them. Between plays, he keeps looking up into the stands.

From Tony's POV, we see gang members sprinkled throughout the sea of red-clad fans. They are likely a figment of his imagination, but Tony's agitated state of mind makes it hard for him (and us) to tell.

INT LOCKER ROOM - DAY

It is halftime, and the Huskers have a seven point lead. Coach Shepperd is addressing the team which is huddled around him.

COACH SHEPPERD

Gentlemen... the first thirty wasn't bad, but I've seen a lot better. And so have you. We've taken some of their best shots, and now its time for them to start taking *ours*.

(beat)

So far I like the effort, but we need to *focus*. I've seen too many mental errors already. We should

(cont'd)
be up by at least two scores! Stay
fucking focused!

Senior quarterback Brady Goodwin suddenly feels the need to chime in.

GOODWIN
Hear that?! We need some focus
out there!

Goodwin looks in Tony's direction.

GOODWIN
(cont'd)
We got too many guys looking up
into the stands for their
girlfriends when they need to
be focused on the man in front
of them! Now let's get out there
and get it done! Who's with me?!

The players give a collective WOOT, and come together to exchange fist bumps.

INT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY

The scoreboard indicates a tie game midway through the fourth quarter. Nebraska is on offense near mid-field.

A running play is called, and Tony watches from the sideline.

Quarterback Brady Goodwin hikes the ball, and then hands it to senior tailback ANDRE WILLIAMS.

Williams momentarily breaks into the clear, and then gets swallowed up by defenders.

After the play is blown dead, Williams is forced to limp off the field.

Coach Shepperd points at Tony, indicating he is to be the replacement.

Tony slides his helmet on, and jogs out to the huddle.

GOODWIN
(to huddle)
Pitch left sweep on three!
(to Tony)
On three! Break!

TEAMMATES
(in unison)
Break!!

Tony lines up a few yards behind the line of scrimmage.

Goodwin BARKS out the cadence before hiking the ball.

GOODWIN
Red, dragon! Red, dragon!
Red... Go!!

Goodwin receives the snap from center, and the offense springs into action.

Tony heads to his left as Goodwin turns in his direction, ready to pitch him the ball.

Through Tony's POV, we see him look toward the sideline, hoping to find some running room. His gaze abruptly wanders up into the stands, however, and by the time he looks back to receive the pitch, the ball is already bouncing off his pads and onto the turf!

TONY
Oh shit!

Frantically, Tony attempts to dive onto the loose ball. One of the offensive linemen, oblivious to the fumble, kicks the ball with the back of his foot as Tony is about to grab it.

The ball bounces around awkwardly until a defensive lineman pounces on it.

GROANS rain down on the field from the stands above.

On the Nebraska sideline, players and coaches throw up their hands in frustration.

Tony, hanging his head, begins to jog off the field.

Once he reaches the sideline, he has trouble looking anyone in the eye.

Brady Goodwin is the first to come over and get in his face. He grabs Tony by the helmet and forces eye contact.

GOODWIN

What the fuck was that? Huh?
What the fuck are you thinking?

TONY

I'm sorry... I'm...

GOODWIN

If you don't want to play here,
then don't bother to suit up
next time! Got it?

Goodman releases Tony and then storms off down the sideline.

Deion Sims approaches bearing a much lighter tone. He pats Tony a couple times on the helmet.

SIMS

It's okay, man. It's okay. We
still got this one. It's gonna
be fine.

Tony grabs a seat by himself on the bench, still keeping his head down.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The game is over, and players are starting to file out. Tony is dressed in sweats, and his gym bag is slung over his shoulder.

Tony looks fairly glum. Caleb Grunwald comes over to talk to him.

GRUNWALD

Hey. Bunch of us are headed to
Buffalo Wild Wings for some
grub. You in?

TONY

Naw. I think I'm just gonna
split.

GRUNWALD

You sure?

TONY

Yeah.

GRUNWALD

Look, don't sweat that stuff out there today. We all fuck up from time to time. But we won, didn't we?

TONY

(starts to smile)

Yeah. We sure did.

GRUNWALD

Should be top ten next week. Sure you don't feel like celebrating?

TONY

Naw. Probably just head home.

GRUNWALD

Or over to your girlfriend's house, huh?

Tony looks away, smiling wide now.

GRUNWALD

There has to be *some* place you're spending the night these days. Me and Deion miss you.

TONY

I bet. Listen, I may give you guys a call later, okay?

GRUNWALD

You know where to find us. We will probably just hit the party scene afterwards. Hope we see you.

TONY

Maybe.

(beat)

Hey, thanks.

GRUNWALD

For what?

TONY

Just... thanks. For everything.

I love you guys.

Grunwald locks Tony in a massive bear hug.

GRUNWALD

I know you've been through a lot lately. Just remember... we got your back. Whatever happens.

TONY

Thanks. I will.

EXT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - NIGHT

Tony exits the football complex and quickly walks past the stadium on his way back to the dorm.

While walking, he glances nervously at the numerous groups of red-clad fans still milling about. Nobody seems to recognize him in the darkness.

INT. TONY'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Tony enters his dorm room and plops his gym bag down on his bed.

A quick glance at the phone indicates there have been voice mails left on it.

Tony hits a button, starting the messages playing. The first is from a local journalist.

VOICE (OS)

Tony, hi! This is Steve Sipple of the Journal Star. Just wanting to set up an interview with you for this Tuesday's Big Red Roundup. You can reach me at 476-3131. Hope

(cont'd)
to hear from you.

The next message is from a familiar voice.

CASSIDY (OS)
Tony! What's up? It's Cass. Just wondering what you're doing tonight. If you're going out, you know where to find us! Talk to you later, okay!

The third message is from a sinister voice that Tony does not recognize, but does not really need to.

DAWG (OS)
Tony motherfucking Bright! You know who this is? Take a wild motherfucking guess, nigga.
(beat)
Midnight. Parking lot north of the stadium. Be there or granny gets it. See you there!

Tony, eyes widening, stands frozen for a moment.

He then picks up the phone and dials eleven digits. After a few rings, we hear Glory's voice on the other end.

GLORY (OS)
You have reached Manny, Glory, and Tony. Please leave us a message, and we'll be getting right back to you.

TONY
(voice shaking)
Granny, hi. If you're there, give me a call. It's Tony.

Not sure what else he should say at this juncture, Tony hangs up the phone.

A tear rolls down one of his cheeks.

EXT. MEMORIAL STADIUM - NIGHT

It's late now, and few people are out. Tony, hastily walking past the stadium, is pleading into the phone.

TONY

Come on, Granny. Pick up the phone!

(beat)

Fuck!

Tony puts the phone back in his pocket and keeps walking.

After a moment, he rounds the north end of the stadium and heads across 10th Street to a mostly deserted parking lot.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Tony walks onto the dimly-lit lot. Only the stadium lights provide any illumination.

Tony quickly spots the gang members' ride parked in one corner.

Cautiously, he approaches the sedan. When he gets twenty yards from the vehicle, all four doors open. Several people emerge from inside. Mac-10, C-Note, Dickey, Muckle, and of course Dawg Nutz.

Tony eyes the odd collection of thugs with a look of curiosity.

Tony stops about twenty feet from the gang members.

DAWG

Come over here. We ain't gonna bite you.

Dickey snickers at this remark. Mac-10 and C-Note glare at the wannabe.

Tony cautiously moves a little closer. Once he is approximately ten feet from Dawg, he addresses the gang leader eye to eye.

TONY

Well, here I am.

DAWG

So, here you is.

(beat)

Something tells me I was the

(cont'd)

last motherfucker your punk
ass thought you'd see when
you stepped off that bus today.

TONY

What do you want with me and my
family? Why you want to mess
with us?

DAWG

You gotta ask? Shit, nigga, you
lucky I don't pop you right
here this second.

Dawg raises his baggy shirt, displaying a handgun stuffed into
his waistline.

TONY

So, why don't you? I know you
and I ain't the best of friends,
but why you want to go after my
uncle and my granny?

DAWG

Shut the fuck up and listen to
me. Nigga, you owe me. I did
time 'cause of you. Hard time.
You got up in my business and
fucked things up for me. The
whole time I was inside, all
I could think about was puttin'
some lead in you. I drove all
this way just for that chance.

TONY

Do what you want to me. Just
please leave my family out of
this.

DICKEY

You ain't tellin' us how its
gonna be.

DAWG

All y'all shut up. I'm trying
to talk some business here.

(cont'd)

(to Tony)

That's right. Business. Bad as I thought I wanted to kill your ass, you might be worth a lot more to me alive.

Tony returns a curious glance.

DAWG

(cont'd)

A couple years from now... if you live past tonight, where will you be?

(beat)

NFL would be my guess. Big NFL dollars in them pockets of yours. And I think you owe me some of them.

TONY

Who says I ever make it there? I'm not making any promises.

C-NOTE

With a attitude like that, maybe you won't.

DAWG

I say he will make it. He'd best make it. His granny depends on it.

Dawg's pals smile as the gang leader lays down his terms.

Tony's resolve seems to be hardening more with each passing moment. He has no intention of becoming Dawg's servant.

TONY

Never. No way. No how. No mother-fucking chance. I'd rather you shoot me right here and now.

DAWG

(smiling)

Shit. If that's the way you're gonna be...

Dawg reaches under his shirt. His hand finds the pistol.

DAWG
(cont'd)
There's other ways for a nigga
to make a dollar.

Dickey and Muckle's eyes widen. Mac-10 and C-Note act as if they've seen this all before...

Before Dawg can draw his weapon, the spotlight from an approaching campus police cruiser shines brightly on the group of young men.

MAC-10
Yo. One time, Dawg!

DICKEY
Don't sweat it, yo. Campus
pig. Wannabe.

The police cruiser pulls to a stop a few feet from the sedan. The officer inside quickly gets out, hand on his holstered weapon.

OFFICER
What's going on tonight,
gentlemen?

DAWG
Nuthin'.

OFFICER
It doesn't look like nothing.
Let me see some hands. All of
you!

After the slightest hesitation, Dawg, C-Note, and Mac-10 put up their hands. Dickey and Muckle find themselves following suit.

OFFICER
(to Tony)
You, too.

Tony obliges, not exactly sure what if anything he should tell this officer. His granny's situation is still unknown to him.

OFFICER

Everyone up against the car.

Tony and the gang members gather around the tricked-out Cadillac. Tony is the first to be patted down.

OFFICER

Any guns, knives, anything
that's going to stick me?

TONY

No, sir.

Satisfied that Tony is clean, the officer moves on to Muckle.

OFFICER

How about you?

MUCKLE

No, sir.

The officer gives Muckle a quick pat-down. There is obvious concern on the young officer's face as no backup has yet arrived.

The officer finishes patting down the local thug, and is about to frisk Dawg.

Before he can lay a hand on the lead banger, Dickey suddenly pulls a small handgun and holds it to the officer's head!

DICKEY

Drop it, asshole!

The officer freezes.

DICKEY

I said drop it!

C-NOTE

(to Dickey)

Just be cool, kid!

MAC-10

Officer, we don't even know
this guy!

OFFICER

You need to put it down, son!
Now!

DICKEY

I'm giving orders here, not
you!

Suddenly, Tony lunges at Dickey and grabs the hand holding the gun. This gives the officer a chance to pull his own weapon.

Muckle takes off running.

Dawg, Mac-10, and C-Note duck around the other side of the sedan.

Dickey is finally able to shake Tony off of him. Tony falls to the ground. Dickey aims his pistol at Tony..

Before Dickey can get a shot off, the officer shoots Dickey though the throat.

Dickey gasps, and blood begins to gurgle from his mouth. Dickey collapses in a heap.

The officer's triumph is short-lived. Dawg pulls his pistol and shoots the officer in the back.

Tony, now truly in danger, takes off running at full speed toward the pedestrian bridge leading from campus to the North Bottoms.

Tony has just about reached the bridge when another shot rings out from Dawg's pistol.

Tony GASPS and reaches for his side. The bullet has grazed his mid-section. Blood begins to seep from the wound.

With fear and determination on his face, Tony sprints over the footbridge.

Mac-10 opens the car door and jumps in, fumbling for his keys.

DAWG

Fuck the car, man! Get after
him! We fucked, he gets away!

Dawg leads Mac-10 and C-Note up the bridge in pursuit of Tony.

EXT. NORTH BOTTOMS - NIGHT

Tony has a decent head start, and the fastest pair of legs, but he is wounded.

Once he reaches the end of the bridge, he looks back, checking to see if he is being followed.

TONY
(breathing heavily)
Oh, Jesus!

At the crest of the bridge, the three gang members are bearing down on him.

SIRENS can be heard in the distance, but no police seem to be close enough to help Tony.

Tony takes a quick look around him. The North Bottoms are filled with old buildings, older houses, and discarded industrial equipment.

Tony darts toward a sagging tool shed next to a darkened house.

INT. TOOL SHED - NIGHT

Tony collapses on the floor beneath a broken window. He checks his wound in the light of his cell phone. Blood continues to flow.

Tony dials a number into the phone. He attempts to catch his breath while waiting for an answer.

MALE VOICE (OS)
Hello?

Tony does not immediately recognize the voice.

TONY
Granny? Is granny there?

MALE VOICE (OS)
Is this Tony?

TONY
 (worried)
 Yes. Where's my granny?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. TONY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The male voice on the other end of the call is revealed to be that of Reverend Thaddeus Thompson.

REV. THOMPSON
 She's right here, Tony, and she's fine.

TONY
 Look... I got these guys after me. I'm in trouble. They tell me she's in danger...

REV. THOMPSON
 Don't you worry, Tony. I don't plan on letting anything happen to your granny.

A quick shot of Glory's couch reveals two bloodied gang members being held at gunpoint by one of Rev. Thompson's fellow clergymen.

REV. THOMPSON
 (cont'd)
 Here's your granny.

Rev. Thompson hands the phone to Glory.

GLORY
 Tony?

TONY
 Yes, granny.

GLORY
 Tony, I'm okay. What's going on? Are you in some trouble?

TONY
 Yes. But I'm just calling to

(cont'd)
make sure you're okay.

GLORY
I am. Now you need to get some
place safe. You hear me?

TONY
Yes. I will.
(beat)
Granny, I love you!

GLORY
I love you, too.

EXT. TOOL SHED - NIGHT

Outside the tool shed, C-Note looks in through the window.
Realizing Tony is inside, he smiles.

C-Note produces a pistol from his jeans pocket...

Suddenly, a police cruiser rolls past the shed. C-Note ducks
behind a bush.

The police car does not stop.

Confident he went undetected, C-Note moves inside the shed,
weapon drawn.

INT. TOOL SHED - NIGHT

To C-Note's dismay, he does not find Tony inside. There is only
a small bloodstain where he had been lying.

C-NOTE
Be fucked!

EXT. TOOL SHED - NIGHT

C-Note steps back outside to resume the hunt.

From out of the shadows lurches Tony, swinging a rusty old
plumber's wrench.

The wrench connects, knocking the gun from C-Note's hand. It
discharges with a BANG as it falls to the ground.

Tony and C-Note wrestle for a moment. Tony finally gets the upper hand and pins the gang member to the ground.

With a couple of big swings with the wrench, C-Note is out of commission.

Tony drops the bloody instrument in disgust after realizing what he has done.

A bullet WHIZZES past Tony and TEARS into the metal shed.

Tony looks up to see Dawg and Mac-10 only half a block away.

Tony takes off running once again.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Tony runs as fast as he can down a trash-strewn alley. Dawg and Mac-10 are in hot pursuit. Dawg fires off another round that just misses Tony.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

From inside a raging house party, a drunken male partygoer sticks his head out and looks around the back porch.

PARTYGOER #1

Dude, was that a gun I just heard?

PARTYGOER #2 (OS)

(from inside)

What?

PARTYGOER #1

Dude, I totally thought I heard a gun out here.

Suddenly, Tony bursts from the darkness of the back yard and runs up to the back porch, nearly knocking the two partygoers off their feet.

Dawg and Mac-10 are still in hot pursuit.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Tony bursts through the back door into the crowded house party.

He is so winded, that he has difficulty explaining what is happening amidst the din.

From across the party, Cassidy spots Tony and heads over to him.

CASSIDY
(shouting)
Tony! Where you been? We've
been waiting for you!

TONY
(grimacing)
Call the cops!

CASSIDY
What?

TONY
Call the fucking cops!

Cassidy looks down and sees Tony's wound. She SHRIEKS.

Dawg and Mac-10 burst through the back door, weapons drawn.

Partygoers SCREAM and dive to the floor.

From behind the gang members, Caleb Grunwald and Deion Sims tackle Dawg and Mac-10 to the ground.

Mac-10 squeezes off a round that embeds itself into a wall.

Grunwald smashes a bottle across Mac-10's face and is able to dislodge the gun from his hand.

Dawg and Sims battle for Dawg's gun. Tony, summoning his last energy, dives in to help his teammate.

Dawg proves to be a strong and menacing adversary, refusing to surrender the weapon.

Before Tony and Deion can wrestle it free, the gun discharges, hitting Cassidy from across the room.

Tony, seeing her hit, reacts violently. He punches Dawg repeatedly in the face. Finally, Dawg relinquishes the weapon.

Tony, seeing the gun on the floor, picks it up.

For a moment, he points it at Dawg, ready to end the gangster's life.

SIMS

Tony! Don't do it, brother!

GRUNWALD

He ain't worth it. Put it down!

Tony, obviously conflicted, finally throws the gun down.

Bleeding, exhausted, and emotionally spent, Tony falls to his knees sobbing.

EXT. NORTH BOTTOMS - NIGHT

Outside the house party, police cars converge on the scene as young people flee the area.

EXT. UNL CITY CAMPUS - DAY

From above, we see the landmarks of the University of Nebraska's main campus.

Oldfather Hall, Hamilton Hall, the Coliseum, among others.

Eventually we fix on Memorial Stadium. Its gray sides and pillars, its enormous windows, its inscriptions of heroic deeds of the past...

Finally, we come to rest on the bright letter "N" at the center of the field.

Radio host Alan Chizek provides a voice over...

CHIZEK (VO)

... and so after these first few weeks of what has already been a whirlwind of a football season, Husker fans find themselves asking some difficult questions. At what point do our off-the-field costs eclipse our need

(cont'd)

for on-field results?

(beat)

At what point do we cast aside years of tradition for a few big plays? At what point do we sacrifice what's left of our integrity for a final score?

(beat)

Have we reached that point where the behavior of our players is irrelevant in the face of what they're able to do on a crisp Saturday afternoon?

(beat)

In this reporter's humble opinion, it all boils down to character. After that, what else really is there?

FADE OUT

