

BAG

MAN

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INSERT - TV COMMERCIAL

An ATHLETIC MALE sits in a picture perfect classroom. It's like a stock photo came to life. So clean and pristine it's unsettling.

MALE ATHLETE (V.O.)

There are over 360,000 NCAA student-athletes, and just about all of us will be going pro in something other than sports.

QUICK FLASHES: A volleyball is spiked, a tennis ball served, a baseball caught. Again: clean. Stock.

MALE ATHLETE (V.O.)

Over the last 100 years, the NCAA has helped millions of student-athletes find their power off the field, the court, and the rink.

An ethnically diverse group of athletes, all dressed for different sports, stand together, arm-in-arm.

MALE ATHLETE (V.O.)

The NCAA puts the *student*...

The same ATHLETIC MALE from the first shot, still at his desk, dramatically... raises his hand. Looks directly at the camera. Smiles and gives a big thumbs up.

MALE ATHLETE (V.O.)

.... in "student-athlete".

SLAM IN ON:

A RUNNING BACK GETS ABSOLUTELY DEMOLISHED BY A LINEBACKER. FALLS LIFELESS AND BLOODY TO THE GROUND.

INT. THE SUGAR BOWL - NIGHT

BISSINGER

Get the fuck up!!!

TYLER CONNORS, the running back in question, lies flat on the turf near the sideline. Almost certainly unconscious. Definitely concussed. Upon closer inspection we see--

He's the MALE ATHLETE from the commercial.

COACH FRANK BISSINGER, 65, red in the face, headset dangling from his neck, CLAPS in Connors' face.

BISSINGER (CONT'D)
Get the fuck up and get off the
field!!

He gets the fuck up. Dizzy. Guided to the sideline. Blood gushing from the bridge of his nose.

We hover over the burly offensive line as they get back to the line of scrimmage. Bloody. Sweaty. Gasping for air like their lives depend on it.

This is a violent game. 18 year olds crushing each other. Broken bones. Shit talking. Bloody noses and lips. Hell on turf. A car accident every single down.

TITLE CARD READS: **THE SUGAR BOWL**. National Semifinal, 2017.

SCORE READS: **Oklahoma 34, Auburn 28**

A mass of tens of thousands. Drunk, restless, and otherwise.

STEVE MCGUIRE, the sophomore quarterback, sprints to the line of scrimmage. Auburn on the 5-yard line. One play from the championship.

Hurry up offense. Everything moving light speed.

Chaos on the sideline as the coaches try to get the play into the huddle. BISSINGER still screaming. The crowd only gets louder. Both school bands are blasting music. Deafening.

BISSINGER (CONT'D)
Colt 16 Indiana!! Colt 16 Indiana!!

It's almost impossible to call a football game at normal tempo. Hurry up is normal tempo x5.

GRAD ASSISTANTS hold up COLORED BOARDS to get the play in.

STEVE MCGUIRE
(to the other players)
Colt 16 Indiana!!

CLAPS his hands as he calls a receiver into motion. The center SNAPS the ball. The play happens in a blur of unadulterated violence.

McGuire reads the defense. Drops back. Throws --

The ball is TIPPED off the hand of a defender. And--

IT'S INTERCEPTED. It's over. Auburn loses.

The Oklahoma bench explodes. Players rushing to midfield. Confetti shoots from the sky.

Close on AUBURN PLAYERS. Kneeling on the ground in shock. BISSINGER. Hands on his knees. Bent over in pain. Exhaustion.

But we're not focused on that...

We snake through the celebration and confetti...

Through the chaos...

Through the end zone...

Through the drunken fanfare of the crowd...

A MAN gets up from his seat, shaking his head as he walks towards the exit. We can't make out his features save for his SILVER HAIR and a noticeable LIMP.

The screen becomes grainy as we move CLOSER AND CLOSER until it's nothing but a jumble of colors.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE CARD READS:

Rules you need to know about college football:

#1. For those involved in the game, it's not a game -- it's a religion. People across the country go to church every Sunday... in the South they go to church on Saturday too.

#2. Despite players logging over 80 hours a week on the field, they are not paid. The NCAA still considers college football an extracurricular activity.

#3. Rules are made to be broken.

NATIONAL SIGNING DAY, 2018

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)
I believe in Auburn Tigers
Football.

INT./EXT. ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

We're, quite literally, going 100 miles per hour. We're frantic. Everything speeding by--

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)
I have since I was a boy.

But it's controlled chaos. There is a plan and it is being followed. We're never in a panic, because we're in good hands. And those hands belong to --

ATTICUS ARCHER. 55. Silver hair. Oxford jacket. He methodically checks his watch, as he always does when a plan is unfolding. He has everything under control.

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)

The first college football game was played in 1869. Four years after Appomattox. Rutgers beat Princeton 6-4. Upon seeing the violence and chaos of the game, a Rutgers professor proclaimed to the crowd: "you will come to no Christian end".

EXT. PATTERSON HOME - NIGHT

Atticus' Mercedes glides to a stop in front of a SUBURBAN HOME. It's the smallest house in an affluent neighborhood. Trying to be something it's not.

Atticus gets out. He hesitates for a moment, typing on his phone. He's sending something, but we can't see the screen.

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)

College football is sewn into the soil of our country, especially here in the South. When you're on the field, you're independent of history, and money, and politics, and everyone and everything that came before you. You have one objective: *move forward.*

The limp. Close on Atticus' leg as he walks to the door.

INT. PATTERSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Atticus is talking directly at us.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I could go on forever. But I won't. We don't have time for that. Not in the slightest. You know who I am. I'm not a player. I'm *sure as hell* not a coach. You won't find my name anywhere on campus. And that's exactly why I'm here. Tonight. To talk to you.

REVEAL:

He's sitting across from --

RICKY PATTERSON. 18. Everything you would expect a star quarterback prospect to look like: the long hair, the square jaw. He's THE QB recruit, the great hope, the arm that's going to save a program --

BILL PATTERSON, 50's, Ricky's Dad. The classically overbearing sports father. We all know this guy, he's the Dad that gets ejected from little league games for arguing with the umps.

Bill has waited his entire life for this night: the night his boy gets a full ride to a powerhouse football program. There are pictures of Bill and Ricky EVERYWHERE on the walls. All with Ricky in uniform. Bill proudly standing by his side.

But Atticus is here to talk to --

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
Francis.

FRANCIS PATTERSON, 16, who looks exactly like Ricky, just...fatter. Ricky if he was staring into a funhouse mirror.

SAWYER PATTERSON, Ricky's mother, 40's, enters the room.

SAWYER PATTERSON
Tea?

ATTICUS ARCHER
You're too kind, Mrs. Patterson
(takes a sip)
Mmm, delicious.

He turns his attention to Ricky, who seems to be perpetually running his hands through his flowing hair.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
I trust senior year is coming along well. Would have loved to have you at Auburn, but we understand and respect the commitment you're making to Bama... especially considering what's going on there. It's an honorable choice. Shows a lot of character.

Ricky starts to open his mouth but Atticus keeps going. He's in control.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
We've had our eyes on both you and Francis for a very long time. Ricky, you're the best high school quarterback in the country, and I hope you're not offended by this, but we think Francis has a chance to be even better.

(Bill smiles)
Tomorrow is signing day.

The kitchen phone RINGS. No one moves. Entranced by Atticus.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
I should be out closing our top recruits for this year. Instead I'm here, working on *next* year. That's how much we believe in you, Francis.

The kitchen phone RINGS again. Bill's cellphone springs to life on the chair, BUZZING. He pushes it aside.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
This is my last year at Auburn, and I want to make sure I leave things better than where I found them. You're going to do great things, Francis. You're going to win championships. We're going to make you a star. You're not going to get that at Alabama, not with the sanctions.

Francis smiles. A fat grin.

RING. RING. RING. Ricky nervously twists a lock of his hair around his finger. *What the hell is going on?*

BILL PATTERSON
Now, where in the hell...

RING. RING. RING. No one can hear themselves think.

EVERY PHONE IN THE HOUSE IS RINGING.

Sawyer hurries into the kitchen.

BILL PATTERSON (CONT'D)
I appreciate your honesty, Mr. Archer.
(MORE)

BILL PATTERSON (CONT'D)
To tell you the truth, since the
Bama sanctions came down, we've had
reps from every school in the
nation sit on that very couch in
this very living room, and we've
told them all the same thing:
you're not getting Ricky Patterson.
No fucking way.

SAWYER PATTERSON
(calling from the other
room, concerned)
Bill??

BILL PATTERSON
WHAT?

(as he walks out of the
room, annoyed)
Excuse me a moment.

Ricky and Francis sit silently on the couch. Murmurs echo from the kitchen. Atticus nods, giving the boys a polite smile. The only calm one in the house.

BILL PATTERSON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
RICKY???

Ricky leaps up from his seat and into the kitchen. Francis tries to look away from Atticus, who holds his gaze as he patiently waits. Checks his watch.

We can hear an argument developing in the kitchen. Exasperated. Pure panic. RICKY AND BILL ARE YELLING AT EACH OTHER. Sawyer trying to break it up.

Francis is freaking out. Fidgeting and trying to look away. Atticus still calm as can be.

The rest of the family returns to the living room. Pale. Like they've seen a ghost.

BILL PATTERSON (CONT'D)
T-that was Alabama. Th-they're
dropping Ricky.

ATTICUS ARCHER
You're kidding.

Sawyer is seconds away from tears. Bill is absolutely bewildered. Doesn't know what to do with himself.

BILL PATTERSON
I can't believe it. I...

ATTICUS ARCHER
Bill. Breathe. Back up and tell me
 exactly what happened.

TITLE CARD READS: 45 MINUTES AGO

The ROAR of an engine. That 100mph engine.

INT./EXT. ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

ATTICUS ARCHER
We're getting Ricky Patterson.

Atticus speeds down the two lane highway, talking into a phone.

He has two phones, one in hand and one clipped to the dashboard. We'll make it easy and call them BURNER and CIVILIAN. It's essential to know the difference.

INT. AUBURN ATHLETIC FACILITIES - NIGHT

BENNY - The Guy on the Inside. 23, skinny, pale... Benny is the overworked Grad Assistant who has dreams of running the program.

He and the other GA's are working well into the night. Nothing new. The pale light of the cement hallways weakly masks the bags under their eyes.

BENNY
 (into his phone)
The Ricky Patterson?

ATTICUS ARCHER
 If we had to drop Bolden, could we
 make that happen?

Surprised, Benny turns away from the other GA's.

BENNY
 (nearly a whisper)
Drop Bolden?

ATTICUS ARCHER
 Hypothetically.

The other GA's are talking over him.

BENNY
 (to the group)
Yo, shut the fuck up.
 (MORE)

BENNY (CONT'D)
I'm talking to my Grandma.
(He continues down the
hallway to avoid them)
Usually we don't make a habit of
dropping five-stars. Hypothetical
or not.

ATTICUS ARCHER
One hour. Be prepared to drop
Bolden. Don't ask questions.

The line goes dead. Benny looks at his phone. We see Atticus
is saved as **GRANDMA NANCY**.

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

An overly enthusiastic ROOKIE COP readily points the speed
gun towards the highway. As Atticus *blows* by--

102MPH.

He reaches for the flashers. The VETERAN COP sitting shotgun
swats his hand away.

VETERAN COP
We don't pull that car over.

INT./EXT. ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

Atticus *going even faster*. Makes another call on BURNER. A
well-oiled machine.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I need you to stop everything
you're doing.

EXT. SOUTHERN ROAD - NIGHT

GEOFF - Second in Command. 51, round, mustached. In a word:
Southern.

He's standing at the foot of a winding driveway, all gravel
and dust on a deserted road. In the midst of slipping a BROWN
BAG into a mailbox as he answers his phone.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I'm sending you an address. Need
you to drop 20 there within the
hour.

GEOFF
20? I don't have 20.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Go to Kenny. He'll have it ready.

GEOFF
What's going on?

INT./EXT. ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

ATTICUS ARCHER
Don't have time to explain. Address coming.

He hangs up. Sends the address on BURNER. Picks up CIVILIAN. Texts DIANE ARCHER: "Home late. Love you."

Checks his watch before TWISTING the dial on the radio.

FRANKIE
(over the radio)
Rumors continue to flood in on where the Tigers will go with this recruiting class....
(turns up the volume)
We know Bama is out of the equation after their sanctions. Alleged payments, sexual assault, kickbacks... all leading to the FBI investigation. Four of Bama's so-called "bag men" arrested. You gotta wonder about five-star quarterback Ricky Patterson, the consensus crown jewel of this class. He continues to say that he's sticking with Alabama despite their two-year postseason ban. No disrespect to Steve McGuire, but I'd imagine the Tigers would love to bring in a quarterback of Patterson's caliber considering the way last season ended.

TANK
There's no reason to be polite about it. We don't have shit at quarterback. I--

Atticus shuts the radio off as he pulls up to --

EXT. PATTERSON HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

The Pattersons' house. Right where we started.

Atticus picks up BURNER as he gets out of the car. THIS TIME WE CAN SEE THE SCREEN.

A SCREEN SHOT OF AN EMAIL CHAIN. We recognize one of the addresses as Bill Patterson's. Atticus selects "Send photo".

Scrolls through his contacts. He selects: ESPN, FOX, TUSCALOOSA NEWS, FRANKIE AND THE TANK, RACHEL UPCHURCH.

He hits SEND just as he exits the car and *limps* to the door.

And we're back to --

INT. PATTERSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

NOW.

Pure chaos. Every phone still ringing. Bill and Sawyer look at Atticus. Desperate. Scared. Remember how this was supposed to be the best night of Bill's life? *Oops.*

ATTICUS ARCHER
An email with an agent? Really?
Bill this is...

BILL PATTERSON
We didn't take anything. He
contacted us. We discussed numbers.
That's it. Nothing happened.

Atticus covers his face with his hand. Shaking his head.
Really playing this up.

ATTICUS ARCHER
You really thought it was OK to
discuss numbers over email? To
leave a paper trail...?

BILL PATTERSON
(really losing it)
We didn't take anything! It's...
those are private emails... I can
sue!

RICKY PATTERSON
(twisting his hair in his
closed fist)
Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!

SAWYER PATTERSON
Ricky! Please!

ATTICUS ARCHER
Time is of the essence. Press is gonna be outside that door any second. Shut off your cell phones right now. Unplug the house phone. No press. Period.

Ricky has his head buried in his hands. He can't look at Bill.

RICKY PATTERSON
Dad... I... I can't believe this.
How could you?

BILL PATTERSON
Ricky, it wasn't... I'm doing what's best for you. That's all I ever do.

Panic. *We can feel it.* Everyone is losing it.

BILL PATTERSON (CONT'D)
Signing day's tomorrow. We don't have options. *Fuck.*
(looks at Atticus)
What do we do??

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Geoff trudges through a vast FIELD. Holding a DUFFEL BAG at his side.

GEOFF
The fuck is going on...

He continues through the tall grass. The bag bouncing at his side. Crickets and cicadas buzzing. The Southern stars gleaming brightly above.

INT. PATTERSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ATTICUS ARCHER
There are always options. Who were Ricky's other final choices?

BILL PATTERSON
Um... USC. Already has the #2 prospect coming in. Texas. Same thing. And... Auburn.
(MORE)

BILL PATTERSON (CONT'D)
(looks at Atticus in
desperation)
Wait. What about... Auburn?

ATTICUS ARCHER
Oh, we're full on scholarships. Had
everything wrapped up for months
now. I don't--

BILL PATTERSON
There has to be something you can
do. Please.

ATTICUS ARCHER
We have our quarterback. McGuire
has looked great so far.

BILL PATTERSON
McGuire?? No, no, no. We--

ATTICUS ARCHER
Bill. Don't be ridiculous. Every
player in our class is a five-star.
We can't just drop one of them the
night before signing day.

BILL PATTERSON
Ricky will do anything. We've
worked so hard to get to this
night.

ATTICUS ARCHER
(he looks Ricky directly
in the eye)
This has to be what you want. Not
what your Dad wants. Not what your
Mom wants. Not anyone but you. You
want a future as an Auburn Tiger?
Then look me in the eye and tell me
that.

Ricky is a boy who has never had to answer for himself. Mom
and Dad always by his side. Protecting him. Telling him what
needs to be said. And now?

SAWYER PATTERSON
(by Ricky's side)
Ricky... Say something...

It seems like he doesn't know what to do. His face blank for
a moment. He swallows. Finally stands up. Speaks--

RICKY PATTERSON

I'd do anything. Anything to play at Auburn. Please. I can't sit next year out. I don't want to go to a junior college. I've worked too hard. This is my life. I have nothing else.

Atticus takes a deep breath. Draws the moment out. Really thinking. All the Pattersons look on... waiting for a response... *Desperate*. He has them **hook**, line, and **sinker**.

With the faintest hint of a smile -- *he checks his watch*.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Then I'll do everything in my power to make it happen. Sit tight. Prepare your papers. I'm going to call you in exactly one hour.
(he turns to Francis)
Francis? Be a good little brother and turn your phone back on please.

Atticus glances out the window as CAMERA FLASHES start to pour in. Closes the blinds.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

Press is here. Francis? Phone please.

Francis places his cell phone in Atticus' open palm. Everyone but Atticus confused. He passes the phone to Bill.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

(to Bill)

Answer when I call.

EXT. PATTERSON HOME - FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Over "LET 'EM IN" by Wings.

A cacophony of REPORTERS has gathered in front of the house. Cameras flashing. No sign from the front door.

In the very corner of the screen--

Atticus walks right by them, head down. Removes BURNER and texts BENNIE: "Drop Bolden".

Smiles as he gets into his car.

As he drifts away we hit Paul McCartney's "Someone's knockin' at the door..."

INT./EXT. - ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

Atticus reaches into his glove compartment and removes an ORANGE PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE. He swallows a few pills. Rubs his leg. *In pain*. Gazes out the window...

Now that we have a chance to catch our breath, let's address where we are: The South.

Indian summers, glistening lakes, fried chicken so brown and crispy you want to reach out, napkin be damned. And... Football. Practice fields and Tiger signs everywhere.

Atticus pulls through town...

MAIN STREET.

If John Hughes was from the South, all his movies would have been set on this street. Striped awnings. Mom & Pop shops. It's a sloping hill, old shops perfectly aligned. A 45-degree angle of brick. Massive old-growth oak trees line the street.

You've never been here and it still feels like home. Atticus loves it like a child. Auburn... *the loveliest village on the plains*.

INT. TOOMER'S - NIGHT

One of those bars that's upscale dive-y. Perfect for game-day camaraderie or a \$50 meal. Auburn apparel and memorabilia lines the wall. Framed black and white photos. Pristine throwback jerseys. Heaven for a Tigers fan.

RONNIE - The Lieutenant. 42, sits at a table in the back corner. Your alcoholic uncle in another life. In this one, he's a rising bag man. He sips a glass of whiskey. He owns the place. Literally.

A MAP of the entire United States is spread out in front of him, along with a long list of players. X's and O's everywhere... a bag man's playbook.

ATTICUS walks in. Makes his way behind the bar and mixes himself a glass. Walks to the table. Places the glass beside Ronnie's. Except--

Atticus isn't drinking whiskey. He's drinking CHOCOLATE MILK.

ATTICUS ARCHER
We're dropping Bolden.

RONNIE

What the fuck are you talking
about? For who?

Atticus takes the list of players. CROSSES OUT Bolden. Draws a CIRCLE around the #1 player on the list: RICKY PATTERSON.

Ronnie's jaw on the floor in disbelief. Has to get up.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

I thought you were there for his
brother? How...

ATTICUS ARCHER

Francis can't play for shit.
Ricky is committing tomorrow. Bama
dropped him.

RONNIE

What?! What happened?

GEOFF barges though the door. Sweaty. Panting. Pissed off.

GEOFF

What the fuck is going on? That
field smelled like my first wife's--

RONNIE

We got Ricky Patterson.

GEOFF

You're shitting me.

Geoff takes a seat. In a daze. Looks at Atticus.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

You son of a bitch.

RONNIE

What is Bissinger going to say?
Patterson can't start with
McGuire...

ATTICUS ARCHER

He will. Wait until he sees him up
close.

GEOFF

(whispering even though no
one else is in the room)

How much is he gonna cost?

ATTICUS ARCHER
How much was in the bag you
dropped?

GEOFF
You said 20...

A stupid grin crosses Geoff's face as he realizes what he was doing all along. There's always a plan.

Atticus *checks his watch* as he picks up BURNER and dials.

ATTICUS ARCHER
(into burner)
Bill, it's Atticus.

Geoff and Ronnie watch. In anticipation. *In awe.*

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
Yeah. Listen, I have good news. It
wasn't easy, but we were able to
clear a spot. I'd like to be the
first to officially welcome you to
the Auburn family.

(listening)
Bill... this is a delicate subject,
but I'm sure you had some
arrangements with Alabama.

Ronnie is dancing as Atticus finishes the call.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
I'm going to send you an address.
You'll find something there. We'll
have some transportation set up for
Ricky as well.

(listening)
Of course. Of course. Yes.
Congratulations.
(as he hangs up)
Ricky Patterson is an Auburn Tiger.

RONNIE
This could be our best class ever.
(raising his glass)
Cheers to Atticus. Your last
signing day is going to be your
best. Bet you're not gonna miss
these long ass nights.

Atticus doesn't say anything. Geoff *clears his throat*. He's been waiting to say something...

GEOFF

I don't want to rain on the Ricky Patterson parade... but I have something that just might.

ATTICUS ARCHER

(intrigued)

Go on...

Geoff takes out his phone. Pulls up a video. It's grainy. He's showing it *specifically* to Ronnie. Atticus leans in anyway. Can't help himself.

It's High School tape. A MASSIVE D-LINEMAN. We only see a few plays, but he's plowing guys over.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ.

GEOFF

Meet Chance Fluker. Just transferred from New Orleans. Playing at Prattville.

ATTICUS ARCHER

How old?

GEOFF

17. Out next year. Let's set up a high school visit immediately.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I'll go next weekend.

RONNIE

You don't want one of us to go?

Atticus ignores him. Starts the tape over.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Wow.

Close on his gaze and the grainy footage. Once Atticus finds a prospect he wants, he will stop at nothing until he gets him. And this is no ordinary prospect...

He's found a new white whale.

EXT. ARCHER HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Atticus pulls up to his HOUSE. Two story, nothing flashy. The only house on the block that *doesn't* have an Auburn flag flying out front.

He walks to the door. His limp a little more exaggerated than before. He's in pain.

INT. ARCHER HOUSEHOLD - KITCHEN - NIGHT

He walks into the master bedroom holding a large ICE PACK.

DIANE ARCHER
Jade? Or malachite?

DIANE ARCHER, 52, no nonsense, maybe the only person on the planet who can see through Atticus' charm, think Connie Britton, walks in from the closet.

There are dozens of CARPET SAMPLE SQUARES scattered on the floor.

ATTICUS ARCHER
What are you doing up?

DIANE ARCHER
If you're gonna get home late, I'm
gonna stay up late.
(pause)
So what do we think?

Atticus holds both samples up. They look exactly the same.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I think.... what room is this for
again?

DIANE ARCHER
The living room.

ATTICUS ARCHER
It seems... loud.

DIANE ARCHER
Good news or bad news?

ATTICUS ARCHER
(matter of fact)
We got the #1 prospect in the
country.

DIANE ARCHER
How much?

ATTICUS ARCHER
20.

DIANE ARCHER

Not bad.

Atticus takes a few more pills.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)

Be careful with those.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Just a long day on my feet.

BURNER starts to ring. Atticus removes it from his jacket. *It never stops.* Looks at it and answers.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

(into the phone)

Yeah, we got him. I'll stop by later this week. We can discuss then.

(listens)

Yeah.

Nods and hangs up.

DIANE ARCHER

Remember when I thought you were cheating on me? You and the adulterers, the only ones who need two phones.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I think malachite.

DIANE ARCHER

I like jade.

ATTICUS ARCHER

These all have fancy names.

(pointing at a different sample)

What about that one? What's that one?

DIANE ARCHER

Green. Are you still good to visit next weekend?

ATTICUS ARCHER

(knows this isn't going to go well)

I can't anymore. I have a high school visit. Just popped up.

DIANE ARCHER

What do you mean? You're done. No more signing days.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I know. Just some due diligence. It'll just be next weekend.

DIANE ARCHER

Whatever this is, it can wait.

He says nothing. She knows that look in his eyes. *It can't.*

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)

Did you at least look at the pictures I sent you?

He takes out CIVILIAN and brings up the photos. They look beautiful. Modern. Right out of Architectural Digest.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)

We're old. It's time to get out of here. Time for our forever home.

ATTICUS ARCHER

We're not old.

She smiles. As he gets into bed, clothes still on...

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

I changed my mind. Jade.

DIANE ARCHER

I knew you'd come around.

She looks over. Atticus is already sleeping.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

Folding chairs set up in rows, all facing a table at the front of the gym. ATTICUS stands in the back. He's watching FLUKER TAPE on his phone. Obsessed.

You would think we were about to see a High School play if not for --

RICKY PATTERSON sitting behind the table, four hats in front of him. There's a HIGH SCHOOL MASCOT standing behind him. Looks like a cheap Halloween costume.

BENNY stands close to the front of the room with SAWYER AND FRANCIS. Bill is noticeably absent.

RICKY PATTERSON

I want to thank everyone for taking the time to come today. This has been a really long process and I...

As Atticus watches him talk, the lightbulbs begin to FLASH...

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FIELD - DAY

Hazy. A dream. Shards of memory.

A QB launches passes. He's good. *Really good.* We watch as he goes through practice. Chemistry with his receivers. He's the complete package. Almost could be Ricky Patterson.

As he walks off the field, he takes off his helmet --

It's ATTICUS. 17 years old.

A group of COLLEGE COACHES. Alabama, Texas, LSU. Lined up waiting. One of them is BISSINGER. It's hard to believe he was ever young, but here he is: face less weathered, softer.

FLASHES of different COACHES and BAG MEN sitting around the table with Atticus and his family. Shaking hands. Recruiting.

A focus on HANK ARCHER, 44, Atticus' father and his high school coach.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

Back in the gym as Ricky addresses the media--

RICKY PATTERSON

I won't be commenting further on Alabama. I'm not here to talk about the past...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

A mirrored set up to Ricky's gym, but KEVIN BOLDEN, 18, clad in his letterman jacket, is standing in the corner - waiting for his ceremony to begin. An AUBURN and an OLE MISS hat on the table.

RICKY PATTERSON (V.O.)

I'm here to talk about the biggest decision of my life. I'm excited to announce that I'm committing to...

Bolden's phone rings. He answers. We can't hear the other end of the call, but his face drops. He hangs up the phone.

Walks to the table and REMOVES the AUBURN hat. Crushed.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

The same AUBURN HAT. But now Ricky is reaching for it.

RICKY PATTERSON
Auburn University. Go Tigers.

The Mascot starts dancing. Ricky fixes his long hair. Atticus checks his watch.

RICKY PATTERSON (CONT'D)
I couldn't be more excited about
the opportunity ahead. Feel like
I'm going to get a great chance to
get starting reps right away.

INT. ATHLETIC OFFICE - DAY

The Auburn staff watches Ricky's announcement on TV.
BISSINGER spins in his chair, shocked at what he just heard.

BISSINGER
Starting reps? Can someone explain
to me again how the fuck we got
this kid?

INT. CONNORS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

The team is gathered. Watching Ricky's announcement. Locked in but causal. No one wants to act like they're worried.

TYLER CONNORS
Yo, McGuire! This kid says he's
going to start.

The players laugh. *Who the fuck does this guy think he is?*

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

BRIGHT FLASHBULBS as a crowd has gathered around Ricky. We're focused on one journalist as she ELBOWS her way to the front of the crowd --

RACHEL UPCHURCH
Excuse me. Excuse me!

RACHEL UPCHURCH, 36, bespectacled. She looks like she should be a political correspondent. Instead, she's stuck with sports. She treats it all the same. Everyone else asks bull shit. She's a pain in the ass.

RACHEL UPCHURCH (CONT'D)
Ricky, when you said starting
reps... did you mean this season?

RICKY PATTERSON
It'll be a good competition. I
respect McGuire a ton. But, I'm
here to compete.

RACHEL UPCHURCH
I notice your Dad isn't here. Can
you tell us more about that?

Atticus shakes his head. *Fucking Upchurch.*

RICKY PATTERSON
My Dad made a mistake. There's a
reason he's not here today. And
that hurts. To be honest, I don't
know if I'll ever be able to
forgive. But now I... I....

He's starting to lose his train of thought. *Slipping.* Atticus glares at Benny, jerks his neck. "Get him out".

BENNY
Alright, enough. Enough.

Benny gets him the hell out... pushing Ricky through the crowd and outside the gym.

Atticus goes to follow them, giving Upchurch a *glare* as he passes.

As he's walking out the door... something catches his eye.

Someone that is-- THOMAS KENDRICK, 38, African-American. Most former athletes put on fat when they retire. Kendrick put on muscle.

Atticus doesn't recognize him, which is a problem because Atticus recognizes everyone.

ATTICUS ARCHER
You press?

THOMAS KENDRICK
Yeah, what's up?

ATTICUS ARCHER
For who? Never seen you around.

THOMAS KENDRICK
I keep a low profile.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Then I would definitely know you.

THOMAS KENDRICK
(laughing)
And you are...?

ATTICUS ARCHER
Just a fan.

THOMAS KENDRICK
You must be pretty devoted. Take
off work and everything to come to
some high school gym.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I work from home.
(looking Kendrick over)
You play?

THOMAS KENDRICK
North Texas. Four years.

We hear it in Atticus' tone as soon as they start talking
ball: *he likes this guy.*

ATTICUS ARCHER
We played them, what, eighteen
years ago?

THOMAS KENDRICK
Sure did. I was on the field. One
of the best games of my life.

ATTICUS ARCHER
What was the final score of that
one? 49 to....
(He thinks about it for a
moment. *But he knows.*)
14?

THOMAS KENDRICK
Scored a touchdown in Jordan-Hare.
I'll take that to my grave.

ATTICUS ARCHER
No kidding. So who's your SEC team?

THOMAS KENDRICK

I root for the underdog. Grew up playing outside the spotlight. SEC is too much of a circus. Look at this gym. Christ. Everything that's wrong with the game. Guided by some delusion that a player needs more than a scholarship.

ATTICUS ARCHER

You don't think players should be paid?

THOMAS KENDRICK

Think you should play for the love of the game. Anything else and you're in it for the wrong reasons. If you're good enough to get paid, you'll get it when the time's right. Surprised you think differently, you struck me as a traditionalist.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I am. Think people should be compensated fairly for the work they do.

THOMAS KENDRICK

Last I checked a degree at Auburn runs about, what, 110K for four years. That not fair to you? What's more valuable than an education in this country?

ATTICUS ARCHER

I know this isn't the case at North Texas, but at Auburn everyone is playing for the NFL.

THOMAS KENDRICK

And how many players did Auburn send to the NFL last year?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Eight. But four undrafted free agents and one--

THOMAS KENDRICK

So eight. Of what? 20? Those don't sound like fair odds to me.

ATTICUS ARCHER

And if the others had been paid,
they'd already have a jump start on
life after school.

THOMAS KENDRICK

That's what's the degree is for.
Just like you said, compensated
fairly for the work they do.
(off Atticus' frustrated
glare)
So, where'd you play?

ATTICUS ARCHER

I -- played high school ball.

Kendrick nods. This is everything he hates about the SEC... diehard fans who didn't play. Who don't know what he knows.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

Who'd you say you write for again?

SFX: TAP. TAP. TAP.

TITLE CARD READS: YESTERDAY

INT. NCAA HEADQUARTERS - MEETING ROOM - DAY

TAP. TAP. TAP.

An NCAA meeting. Glass walls. Everything high-tech. Modern.

It's so corporate it hurts. The type of room where everything is done behind a fake smile. Case in point: the offices are in Indiana. And sitting in the middle of the room is--

THOMAS KENDRICK - He's not a journalist.

And he's bored. His PENCIL hits the table in rhythm. **TAP.**
TAP. TAP.

He looks around the glass table at his colleagues. A rainbow of diversity. When they catch his glance, they SMILE.

From down the hall we hear... CLICK CLACK CLICK CLACK.

High heels. For our sake, those heels might as well be the Jaws theme, because they announce the arrival of...

SARAH SWANNER, 48, NCAA President. Block glasses. Razor sharp black hair. She's a killer. A fucking killer.

She sits... folds her hands... looks around the table...

SARAH SWANNER
Shall we begin?

Smiles from her staff. *Because that's what you do here.*

MONTAGE OF THE MEETING:

Different NCAA MEMBERS stand at the front of the room, giving presentations.

NCAA MEMBER #2
Incidental Benefits-Reasonable Refreshments states an institution may provide student-athletes with reasonable refreshments (e.g., soft drinks, snacks) for student-athlete educational and business meetings and, on an occasional basis, for celebratory events (e.g., birthdays). Because the pasta constituted a full meal and not a snack, Oklahoma has self-reported the pasta violations.

TAP. TAP. TAP.

AFTER THE MEETING:

INT. SWANNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Kendrick knocks on Swanner's door. Her office is well decorated, but sparse.

THOMAS KENDRICK
You wanted to see me?

SARAH SWANNER
You didn't have much to say in the meeting. No feedback?

THOMAS KENDRICK
The presentations were very well done.

SARAH SWANNER
(smiling)
I thought so too.
(pause)
How's your summer been?

THOMAS KENDRICK
Warm.

She places a FILE on the desk.

SARAH SWANNER
(matter of fact)
We're sending you to Auburn.

Remember the look on Atticus' face when he saw the Fluker tape? *The same look is now on Kendrick's face. He can't believe it.*

SARAH SWANNER (CONT'D)
I didn't want to announce it in
front of the others. It's a big
assignment for obvious reasons.
You've put your time in, Thomas.
It's time to get you in the field.

THOMAS KENDRICK
Do we have intel?

SARAH SWANNER
The intel we have is the #1 recruit
in the country was dropped the
night of signing day under
mysterious circumstances... we have
to look, even if it's nothing.. Dot
the I's and cross the T's. Keep a
low profile. See what you can find.
It's probably nothing, but you
never know.

THOMAS KENDRICK
You want me in Auburn, then I'm
going to Auburn.

Ever the company man.

Swanner smiles like a shark. Close on Kendrick's determined eyes.

TITLE CARD READS: NOW

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

ATTICUS ARCHER
Who'd you say you write for again?

Those SAME EYES look directly at Atticus.

THOMAS KENDRICK
I'm a freelancer.
(reaching out his hand)
Tom. Nice to meet you.

As he does, BURNER begins to ring.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Atticus. Have to run but let me
know next time you're in town.
Maybe in the playoffs. North Texas'
season should be wrapped up by
then. I'll set you up with field
passes.

THOMAS KENDRICK
I'm sure you will.

Kendrick watches him walk out the door. He takes note of Atticus' limp.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FIELD - NIGHT

CHANCE FLUKER *steamrolls* an offensive lineman, flattening him before SACKING the Quarterback.

BAMA COACH
Jesus fucking Christ.

A litany of COACHES and RECRUITERS from other schools: blood red Alabama polos against the fence, bag men from LSU, Florida, and Texas stand close by --

All watching Chance. Everyone's jaw on the floor. This kid is an animal. A beast. An absolute, no doubt, home run, phenom.

Atticus sits in the bleachers. He isn't watching Fluker. His eyes are focused elsewhere--

JENNA FLUKER, Chance's mother. Only 39. *Tired.* A single mother, always a million things going on.

Atticus watches her closely. *His wheels turning.*

AFTER PRACTICE:

The other reps are MOBBING Chance's coach. Atticus avoids the crowd. Waits at the bottom of the bleachers for Ms. Fluker.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Ms. Fluker?

MS. FLUKER
No thank you.

ATTICUS ARCHER
My name's Atticus. I'm with
Aubur...

MS. FLUKER

No thank you. I have to go. We have to make the bus and we're already late --

ATTICUS ARCHER

If I could just have a moment...

MS. FLUKER

Talk to Chance's coach. He's arranging all of Chance's recruiting. We're only taking official visits.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I don't want to talk to his coach, I want to talk to you.

MS. FLUKER

We're not interested in your money.
(a deep, frustrated, breath)

I know you have a job to do. But I do too. I have three children to raise. On my own. I don't have time to listen to each and every rich white booster who tries to sell me.

ATTICUS ARCHER

So you're just going to let his coach do it?

MS. FLUKER

I'm going to let the experts handle it. He knows what he's doing. He knows--

ATTICUS ARCHER

He's going to pawn Chance off to the highest bidder.

MS. FLUKER

He wouldn't do that--

ATTICUS ARCHER

He would and he will. I promise you. Your son is a once-in-a-lifetime talent, and he's going to command once in a lifetime money. All I'm asking is you listen to me. I know you don't want *my* money --

MS. FLUKER

Chance is going to do this the right way. He's going to earn his degree, and when he plays well enough, he'll go to the NFL. He's not taking a penny before. My son is not going to get caught up in all your nonsense.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Why don't I join you for dinner? I'd love to talk to you and your sons about what we can offer at Auburn.

MS. FLUKER

Mr. Archer, if you want to buy out an entire Zaxby's and bring it over, you can join us. Otherwise, leave us be.

Atticus lets her go. Immediately recalibrating. This is going to be a bigger challenge than he thought.

Watches her and Chance from a distance as the BUS pulls up. The bus... *it gets him thinking.*

EXT. AUBURN CAMPUS - DAY

Establishing shot: The age-old red brick sign reads AUBURN UNIVERSITY - Founded 1856. Campus, all brick and clock towers and magnolia trees.

KENDRICK walks through the front gates. Makes his way through the quad. Looking around. Taking note of everything. Like anything could be a lead.

Students walk by him. Someone BUMPS him. He gets turned around. Like he's drifting.

It seems huge. Needle in a haystack. Everything's easy in theory. Now he's here.

Where to start?

INT. ARCHER HOUSEHOLD - CAROLINA COAST - DAY

Diane walks through the beginnings of their new home. Right off the coast. Ocean view. Modern. Beautiful.

She places the CARPET SAMPLES in the living room. Examines them.

DIANE ARCHER
Jade.

A breeze blows through the house. It's vast. Expansive.
Lonely.

INT. AUBURN ATHLETICS - OFFICE - DAY

ALEXANDRA NOONE - Compliance Officer, 31, no bullshit, sits at her computer typing 200 words per minute. The office is full of cubicles. Upscale but corporate as hell.

KENDRICK walks in.

THOMAS KENDRICK
Hi... I'm looking for...
(looks down at his paper)
Alexandra Noone?

ALEXANDRA NOONE
Yeah, what's up?

THOMAS KENDRICK
(extending his hand)
Thomas Kendrick. NCAA. This is your official notice that we're opening up an investigation at Auburn regarding potentially illegal recruitment of student-athletes.

ALEXANDRA NOONE
OK, great. Swanner let us know someone would be coming.

Totally straight-faced. Like she doesn't even give a shit. Kendrick is immediately awkward. Expected her to flip out.

ALEXANDRA NOONE (CONT'D)
Follow me.

She guides him down the hall... Opens a door in the very back...

It's clearly a repurposed closet.

THOMAS KENDRICK
OK, great. Thanks.

This really isn't going how he expected.

ALEXANDRA NOONE
Make yourself right at home, Mr. Kendrick.
(MORE)

ALEXANDRA NOONE (CONT'D)

My team's here at your disposal to pull any files you need. Let me know how you'd like to schedule your interviews and we'll get everything in order.

THOMAS KENDRICK

I want to start with Ricky Patterson.

Noone nods. Plays it cool. But for the first time, Kendrick has played a card that maybe she wasn't ready for.

INT. BIG KENNY'S AUTOMOTIVE DEALER - DAY

Atticus paces up to the towering glass walls. Auburn gear everywhere. All the ATTENDANTS give him nods of recognition.

BIG KENNY - The Mogul, 62, waves from inside.

He talks like the happiest guy in the world but you know if you short him even a cent he might kill you. The stature (and temper) of a rhino.

Big Kenny runs Auburn. Has sold half the cars in the town. Owns a quarter of the real estate. The cash? It's all him. There are pictures of Kenny and famous Auburn players, Bissinger, etc. everywhere.

KENNY

Been wondering when the gimp was going to show his face.

Kenny wraps his arm around Atticus' neck. Brings him in.

KENNY (CONT'D)

I'm gonna need all the details on how we landed Patterson. You rat bastard.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I didn't have anything to do with that.

They make their way into Kenny's office.

KENNY

What are we going to do without you next year?

ATTICUS ARCHER

(completely ignoring the question)

(MORE)

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
I'm going to need a vehicle. One
later this week. Potentially
another in a few. Both are special.
Let's make sure we get them
something nice.

Kenny smiles. Relishing the challenge.

KENNY
Patterson?

ATTICUS ARCHER
I didn't say anything.

KENNY
Tell me more about him. My cash go
to good use?

INTERCUT THE REST OF THE CONVERSATION WITH:

EXT. AUBURN PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)
He's special.

Ricky practicing. Something isn't right. He's uncertain in
his motion.

BILL sits in the stands. Watching. Ricky gazes up and notices
him. When Bill turns, Ricky looks away immediately.

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)
Haven't seen an arm like his in
years.

BISSINGER stands behind Ricky as he THROWS...

The ball misses an open receiver by ten yards. Bissinger
looks to the offensive coordinator, TIM PAYTON. Shakes his
head.

Benny watches. *Twists his hands together.*

KENNY (V.O.)
Starting?

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)
If Bissinger is smart he will.

Ricky stands alone. No camaraderie with his teammates. He
looks out of place. Plays with his hair.

INT. BIG KENNY'S AUTOMOTIVE DEALER - DAY

KENNY

Let's not forget who's paying for this. Don't want another bust like McGuire. Wasted a lot of cash on that one.

Atticus is straight faced as he checks his watch.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Geoff will be by later to pick up the package.

SEPTEMBER

Sweep over the bustling Auburn campus. Game day. Tailgates everywhere. A buzz on campus. Everyone drinking. Beer pong. Keg stands. The band MARCHING through the quad.

Opening Day. Two of the best words in sports.

Toomer's packed to the brim. Wall to wall with Auburn gear.

Thousands of Auburn fans line Donahue Drive to cheer on the team as they walk to Jordan-Hare Stadium.

The sun setting over Jordan-Hare as fans stream in.

INT. KENDRICK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

KENDRICK sits alone at his desk. Watching the game on TV.

ESPN ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

It's finally here, folks. Welcome to the kickoff of the 2018 season. Is Auburn for real with Steve McGuire at quarterback? ASU will try and test that tonight at Jordan-Hare.

#9 Auburn vs. #24 Arizona State

A buzz in the stadium. Everyone clad in their best game-day attire. An offseason's worth of anticipation all building to this moment...

Auburn comes RUNNING out of the tunnel. Rapturous cheers. Deafening chants of Auburn's age-old fight song:

CROWD

War Eagle, fly down the field!
Ever to conquer, never to yield.
(MORE)

CROWD (CONT'D)
War Eagle, fearless and true,
Fight on you orange and blue.
Go! Go! Go!

Atticus watches from his seats. Diane stands next to him, the other bag men in the same row. Atticus claps slowly. And then the game begins...

GAME HIGHLIGHTS:

Auburn scores early...

But McGuire throws an INTERCEPTION...

And another one...

HIT after HIT after HIT. Helmets colliding. Players woozy.

RICKY on the bench. Awful body language. Slouched over. No teammate even close to him. He's not touching the field.

Atticus watches him. Dismayed. He sees who Ricky is looking at... BILL in the stands. Atticus' wheels start turning.

Arizona State is driving, down 24 to 17.

They're on the five-yard line, on the verge of a touchdown when --

FUMBLE. Auburn recovers. Game over.

FINAL: Auburn 24, Arizona State 17

ESPN ANALYST

Auburn survives a late scare from a talented Sun Devils team. Not an impressive night for junior quarterback Steve McGuire, but he'll take the win.

Atticus shakes his head. Too close for comfort.

EXT. AUBURN PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Atticus waits outside of the gates as BILL exits. Already decked out in Auburn gear.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Bill.

BILL PATTERSON
Atticus... I didn't see you at practice.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I don't go to practice.

BILL PATTERSON
Listen, I've been meaning to talk
to you about--

ATTICUS ARCHER
We need Ricky starting.

BILL PATTERSON
(relieved)
Thank god. I was starting to think
that--

ATTICUS ARCHER
And that means we need you to take
a step back. Ricky is struggling
with your presence.

BILL PATTERSON
How can you possibly say that with
any--

ATTICUS ARCHER
When's the last time you spoke to
him? You have no idea what's going
through his head. I don't want to
see you on campus. No more
practices. No more games.

BILL PATTERSON
I've been to every single one of
Ricky's games since he was just a
kid. Every single game.

ATTICUS ARCHER
All the games are televised. Campus
security has already been alerted.
You'll be removed if you set foot
on campus.

BILL PATTERSON
Now, this isn't what we agreed to--

ATTICUS ARCHER
You're right. We didn't agree to
anything.

BILL PATTERSON
I'm going to report this. What you
did. What you gave us.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I didn't give you anything. You found a bag in a field. In fact, a good standing citizen would have called the police then and there to report it.

BILL PATTERSON

You son of a bitch. This isn't want we wanted.

ATTICUS ARCHER

No, it's what Ricky wanted. He stood in your living room and told us as much.

Bill has nowhere left to go. Hangs his head. Defeated.

INT. AUBURN ATHLETIC DIRECTOR OFFICE - EVENING

A beautiful office, overlooking the quad. Big oak desk. Mahogany. That sort of thing. Reis' ASSISTANT leads Atticus into the room. Waits by the door as he's seated.

BARRY REIS - ATHLETIC DIRECTOR sits behind the desk. Half moon glasses. A nice suit. Professional hand shaker and hobnobber. He has one job: raise money. He does it well.

NOONE sits on the other side of the desk. One chair unoccupied next to her. Like it was waiting for Atticus.

BARRY REIS

Mr. Archer. So good to see you. I want to start by thanking you for your generous donation to the program, we couldn't --

Reis' assistant shuts the door. He immediately stops with the bullshit.

BARRY REIS (CONT'D)
Is Patterson clean?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Define clean.

BARRY REIS

Did he take money?

ATTICUS ARCHER

(fucking with them)

From who?

BARRY REIS

God dammit, Atticus. The fucking agent his Dad talked to.

ATTICUS ARCHER

No. He's clean where he needs to be.

BARRY REIS

How the hell did the press get their hands on that email?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Someone found it.

BARRY REIS

Heard his Dad's been to every practice.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I handled it.

ALEXANDRA NOONE

Good. He's raising eyebrows. For obvious reasons. Ruffle feathers in Tuscaloosa, people are gonna come looking. NCAA has someone on campus. *"Collecting information."*

ATTICUS ARCHER

What'd you say?

ALEXANDRA NOONE

Nothing. Gave him the closet and left.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Good. Things are taken care of. They don't have shit.

BARRY REIS

How can you possibly know that?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Because if they had anything, we'd already be fucked. It's my job to make sure that they don't. Nothing either of you has said scares me. The NCAA has reps on campus? *So what?* They can come sleep in my guest room for all I care. You're forgetting the golden rule: it's not the crime we need to hide, it's the evidence.

(MORE)

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
You show me a shred of evidence,
then I'll worry. Until then, do
your jobs. I'll do mine.

Reis and Noone say nothing.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
Who'd they send? Do we know him?

ALEXANDRA NOONE
No. Some guy named Thomas Kendrick.
This is all we have...

Noone hands him a file. Atticus opens it. A black and white photocopy of Kendrick's ID Badge. Atticus sees Kendrick's picture. THE GUY FROM SIGNING DAY.

ATTICUS ARCHER
God dammit.

ALEXANDRA NOONE
What?

Atticus is never surprised. Maybe a split second of disbelief on his face. *If that.* Then: calm. Collected. Like always.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Never trust someone that tells you
losing 49-14 was the best day of
their life.

BARRY REIS
You know him?

ATTICUS ARCHER
I didn't think so.

BARRY REIS
They want to start with Patterson.

ATTICUS ARCHER
They're not starting with
Patterson.

BARRY REIS
What, we're just going to tell them
no?

ATTICUS ARCHER
That's exactly what we're going to
tell them. But you're going to doll
it up with your bullshit rhetoric.
(pauses)
I need some time to think.
(MORE)

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
Hold them off on Patterson. I'll
work with him when the time comes.

Atticus begins to get up. Has to stop. His leg hurting. Tries again. Gets it this time. Reis and Noone say nothing.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
I'll be in touch. Keep me apprised.

BARRY REIS
How's the house coming?

ATTICUS ARCHER
It's coming great, Barry. Thanks
for fucking asking.

Reis opens the door, has to fake nice and bullshit in front of the assistant again.

BARRY REIS
That sounds swell, Mr. Archer. You have a nice day now, and make sure you send Diane our regards.

INT./EXT. ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

Atticus speeds down the Southern highway. Dials on BURNER.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Get Geoff in.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Ronnie stands in a nearly empty parking lot. We can't tell where he is... yet.

RONNIE
Something wrong?

ATTICUS ARCHER
Just get Geoff in.

Not messing around. Ronnie dials.

EXT. SOUTHERN FIELD - NIGHT

A dark and barren field. GEOFF pulls up. Exits the car. And out of the backseat... RICKY.

GEOFF
Follow me.

They push through the grass... Waiting for them...

A BRAND NEW LEXUS.

GEOFF (CONT'D)
Here she is.

RICKY PATTERSON
Holy shit.

GEOFF
Anyone asks, it was a gift from
your uncle. Paid in all cash. No
receipts.

RICKY PATTERSON
Yes, sir.

They both pace around the car. Taking it in. Geoff notices
that the back plate still has the BIG KENNY frame around it.

GEOFF
Let's get this off.

Geoff kneels down and begins to unscrew the frame. Just as he
does-- HIS PHONE RINGS. He checks it. Ronnie.

GEOFF (CONT'D)
Fuck, I gotta take this.
(handing him the
screwdriver)
Make sure you take that off. You
good to get back?

RICKY PATTERSON
Yeah.

GEOFF
Call if there's a problem.

INT./EXT. ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

Geoff is in. Driving away from Ricky.

THREE SPLIT SCREENS. All three in different locations, all
three working towards the same cause.

GEOFF
Sorry, just dropped the package for
Patterson.

ATTICUS ARCHER
NCAA is on campus.

GEOFF

Fuck! Who?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Thomas Kendrick.

RONNIE

Who??

ATTICUS ARCHER

Don't know much. Used to play.
North Texas.

Ronnie and Geoff both laugh.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

I already have my guy looking into
it. Will have more for you soon.

GEOFF

This about Patterson?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Has to be. They don't have anything
though. Not yet.

RONNIE

You sure?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Ever been arrested?

RONNIE

Twice.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Did the cops call to tell you they
were gonna arrest you, or did they
just do it?

Ronnie and Geoff silently acknowledge. *Point taken.*

GEOFF

What's the plan?

(a long pause)

Atticus?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Ship still sails.

GEOFF

Don't think we should lay low for a
few weeks?

ATTICUS ARCHER
Can't.

GEOFF
You sure? Don't want to end up like
Bama.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Yes. We're still on for Fluker.
Ronnie, is everything in order?

RONNIE
Yup. Securing the location as we
speak.

We pull back to see that Ronnie is IN A ZAXBY'S.

INT. RICKY'S PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Ricky pulls into his parking spot. Gets out of the car. He admires his new ride. It's really fucking nice. He's 18... never had anything close to this.

He kneels down to the license plate. Reaches out to unscrew the BIG KENNY frame as--

TYLER CONNORS
Yo, Patterson. Nice ride.

CONNORS walks up from the shadows of the garage.

RICKY PATTERSON
Hey... Tyler. What's... what's up?

TYLER CONNORS
Thought we could kick it for a bit.
Get to know each other better.

Finally. Ricky's been waiting for this moment. He can't hide his smile.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

They walk down the halls of Ricky's building. Connors isn't saying anything. The whole place is dark. Starting to feel a little weird.

Ricky reaches for his keys as they get to his door. He FUMBLES them to the ground. Reaches down. Picks them back up. Looks to Connors, who nods. No big. Ricky unlocks the door...

They enter his apartment. It's pitch black. As he turns on the light--

HALF THE TEAM is crowded into the room. Ricky is taken aback.

RICKY PATTERSON
Guys... hey. What's up?

TYLER CONNORS
(overly friendly)
We just wanted to stop by. Feel
like you've been quiet at practice.
Get to know the best quarterback in
the country a little better. You
are the best quarterback in the
country...
(looks him in the eye)
You said you could start, didn't
you?

Ricky takes a step back, only to be pushed forward by a big LINEBACKER.

TYLER CONNORS (CONT'D)
Look me in the eye.

RICKY PATTERSON
Sorry, I... is everything ok?

TYLER CONNORS
OK? Everything is great, buddy.
Why, *is something wrong?*

Ricky looks to his teammates, hoping to find an answer. He doesn't. Starts to twist his hair around his finger.

TYLER CONNORS (CONT'D)
You like doing that, huh? Messing
with your hair?

RICKY PATTERSON
I...

TYLER CONNORS
See, the rest of us have shaved
heads. Keeps us close. Everyone's
on the same level, you know?

Murmurs from the other players.

TYLER CONNORS (CONT'D)
That's something you want, right?
To be a part of the team?

RICKY PATTERSON
Yeah... yeah, of course.

TYLER CONNORS
(smiling)
Great.

The linebacker grabs Ricky. PUTS HIM IN A HEADLOCK. Connors reaches behind his back to reveal...

A RAZOR. Everyone starts to CHEER. The player holding him TIGHTENS his grip. Ricky squirms.

The BUZZ of the razor gets everyone cheering even louder.

RICKY PATTERSON
Guys st--

THEY START SHAVING HIS HEAD. He struggles at first. Tries to fight it. But it's no use. He gives in. Long blonde locks fall from his scalp.

HAIR ALL OVER THE FLOOR. The linebacker tightens his grip. Ricky twists his head, trying to avoid the metal. No use...

RICKY PATTERSON (CONT'D)
Stop!!

He continues to resist. Tries to break free again. Connors goes back in with the razor.

RICKY PATTERSON (CONT'D)
Please!!

And then the razor stops. The room silent in anticipation...

TYLER CONNORS
Let's see.

Ricky tilts his head up. ALMOST COMPLETELY BALD. Patches of hair still remaining from the sloppy shave. Uneven. He looks awful. Like a different person. Like a little boy.

TYLER CONNORS (CONT'D)
Welcome to Auburn.

INT. RICKY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ricky stares into the mirror. He's shaved the rest of his head. Completely bald. Scalp scratched.

He removes his phone. Goes to call "DAD". His finger hovers over the name... ready to call... but...

He slaps a row of HAIR PRODUCTS off the shelf below.

RICKY PATTERSON
FUCK!

He SMASHES the mirror. Blood oozes down his clenched fist. Drips to the floor. Lands on the discarded bottles of gel. Close on the blood.

INT./EXT. FLUKER RESIDENCE - DAY

We're not in Old Town anymore. This is the real South. The grass overgrown, houses small... few and far between. It feels unwatched... dangerous...

Because, really, none of us are safe. At any second a man can come knocking at door and change everything.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

Ms. Fluker opens the door to find ATTICUS standing outside with RONNIE and GEOFF. They have a CAR FULL OF ZAXBY'S.

ATTICUS ARCHER
We were in the neighborhood. Mind if we join you?

She can't believe it. Shakes her head. *That mother fucker.*

INT. FLUKER RESIDENCE - DAY

Atticus walks in. It's a *tiny* house. Hard to believe they fit four in it.

Chance walks in. He looks bigger than the living room. He's trailed by his TWO YOUNGER BROTHERS.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Chance. It's an honor to finally meet you. My name's Atticus. And who's that behind you?

MS. FLUKER
Boys.

Chance's brothers step out and wave. *Shy.*

Ronnie and Geoff go back and forth between the car and the table, setting bag after bag of Zaxby's on the table. It's an absolute feast. Will feed the Flukers for at least a week.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Shall we eat?

Everyone sits. An expectant silence as they watch Atticus.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
Chance, let me start with this...
(an expectant pause)
I believe in Auburn Tigers
Football.

And so it begins.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Diane sits in the pew of a large SOUTHERN CHURCH. A congregation of hundreds. Everyone dressed up.

She looks around. Everyone else is there with their significant other. Or their family. Their children. Holding hands. Everyone but her.

EXT. AUBURN PRACTICE FIELD - PARKING LOT - EVENING

KENDRICK is outside the practice fields, in the parking lot, scanning the cars...

An entire row of upscale LEXUS'S....

He crouches down, looking at the plates. Continues down the row. One catches his eye in particular...

A frame reading BIG KENNY'S LEXUS.

RICKY NEVER TOOK THE FRAME OFF.

EXT. FLUKER RESIDENCE - PORCH - EVENING

Atticus stands with Ms. Fluker, watching Chance play touch football with his brothers. His joy is undeniable.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Chance is a good kid.

MS. FLUKER
He's a good boy. He is. There's no reason he should be. Not in this world.

ATTICUS ARCHER

At Auburn we believe that good things should happen to good people. That's all. It doesn't have to be about anything else.

MS. FLUKER

I appreciate that, Mr. Archer, but we're going to make this decision together. You can come over here everyday if you want. It's not going to change things.

Atticus bites his lip. There has to be a way.

ATTICUS ARCHER

You don't need to take the bus everyday. It doesn't have to be like that. That car that we brought the food in? We can leave it here. You can forget the bus. You can forget waiting on the corner in the rain.

MS. FLUKER

I'm willing to ride the bus every day if it means that Chance is going to make it.

ATTICUS ARCHER

It won't be traced back to you. We have it taken care of.

(off her hard gaze)

Your son should be getting paid.

MS. FLUKER

He's going to get paid. When he's in the NFL.

ATTICUS ARCHER

The NCAA is robbing you. All I'm trying to do is make it right.

Chance and the boys come running up to the porch.

CHANCE'S LITTLE BROTHER

Can we have more?

ATTICUS ARCHER

You can have as much as you'd like.

This is a sentence he's never heard. Ms. Fluker twists her mouth. A bit uncomfortable. *But it feels good.* To not worry. To not be hungry. To have what you want and need.

The boys smile as they race each other through the door and back to the table.

Chance hesitates for a moment. He's watching the car. Atticus takes note.

MS. FLUKER
We'll come for a game. One game.
That's it.

Atticus smiles. She's cracking. Slowly but surely. They always do.

The sun sets over the house. It's easy to believe that this might all work out.

INT. BIG KENNY'S AUTOMOTIVE DEALER - NIGHT

Atticus pulls the car he brought to the Flukers' into the dealership lot. KENNY waiting for him.

BIG KENNY
What happened?

ATTICUS ARCHER
She didn't go for it.

BIG KENNY
Shit. You losing your magic?

ATTICUS ARCHER
She'll get there. They're coming for Ole Miss.

BIG KENNY
Damn. Big game. Didn't want to schedule them for a cupcake matchup?

ATTICUS ARCHER
We're not going to lose to Ole Miss.

BIG KENNY
Fair enough.
(leans in, whispers)
I hear the NCAA is on campus?
Snooping around?

ATTICUS ARCHER
You get the #1 recruit in the country, that's going to happen.
(MORE)

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
I have my guy on it. Going to see
him now, actually.

BIG KENNY
I thought I was your guy.

Atticus cracks the slightest smile. Checks his watch.

ATTICUS ARCHER
(re: the car)
Keep this one close. I have a
feeling it won't be long until we
need it.

Kenny smiles. *Music to his ears.*

EXT. BIG KENNY'S AUTOMOTIVE DEALER - NIGHT

Atticus walks out of the dealership and back to his own car.
He checks his watch. We linger. To see --

KENDRICK is watching. He's staked out in the parking lot
across the street. Again: he sees the LIMP.

Takes in the sight. Measured. The towering glass walls of Big
Kenny's Lexus. You can't miss it. He smiles. He has
something.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

A diner on the edge of the universe. The outskirts of town.
Street lights flicker on and off over the parking lot.

Atticus pushes open the double door entrance. He looks
around. Finds his guy, which is an interesting way to
describe--

RACHEL UPCHURCH.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Ms. Upchurch.

RACHEL UPCHURCH
When is Patterson going to start?

ATTICUS ARCHER
(coy)
Ask Bissinger. I have nothing to do
with roster decisions.

RACHEL UPCHURCH

You'd tell me if you needed me to know. Such is the nature of our relationship.

ATTICUS ARCHER

What'd you get for me?

RACHEL UPCHURCH

Two egg scramblers and chocolate milk.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I don't have time for theatrics.

Upchurch smiles. Not many people can fuck with Atticus like this. She uses it to the fullest. Removes a FILE.

RACHEL UPCHURCH

Thomas Kendrick. Played four years at North Texas before joining the NCAA. He's been working in their office for almost twenty years. Administrative assistant, then special assistant to Sarah Swanner, and then coordinator. Until now.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Bullshit titles. They sent a paper pusher to investigate the #1 recruit in the country. Doesn't add up.

RACHEL UPCHURCH

There is *something*.

Atticus raises his eyebrow. *Intrigued*.

RACHEL UPCHURCH (CONT'D)

He was supposed to go to Alabama. Got caught taking money. Ended up at North Texas.

Atticus nods his head. *Now, it's adding up*.

ATTICUS ARCHER

You could have led with that by the way.

RACHEL UPCHURCH

Don't be an asshole.

The waitress places a GLASS OF CHOCOLATE MILK on the table. Atticus takes a long sip.

RACHEL UPCHURCH (CONT'D)
You're nervous aren't you? You're
scared of this guy.

ATTICUS ARCHER
No. I'm not.

RACHEL UPCHURCH
I've seen you pushed before, but
this is different. This is fear.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Just keep working on this guy. And
make sure the NCAA doesn't--

RACHEL UPCHURCH
What bothers you about the NCAA so
much?

ATTICUS ARCHER
Like I said, I don't have time
for...

RACHEL UPCHURCH
Come on.

ATTICUS ARCHER
It's an agency for self-
preservation, not for change.

RACHEL UPCHURCH
Someone has to protect the
"integrity" of the game.

ATTICUS ARCHER
When the NCAA was established, no
one knew college football was going
to be a billion-dollar sport. Now
it is. The only reason the NCAA
still fucking exists is to make
sure that money is channelled right
past the players and back into
their pocket. Protecting the
integrity of the game? Bull shit.
They're establishing committees to
tell players they can't eat an
extra serving of pasta.

RACHEL UPCHURCH
Player compensation is a
complicated argument.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Do you get paid for working?

RACHEL UPCHURCH

Of course. But I also worked plenty of unpaid gigs to get to where I...

ATTICUS ARCHER

How many hours? Players work 80. At least. Auburn athletics made \$147.5 million last year. The NCAA made almost a billion. You think that was from the baseball team? Who generates that revenue? The stadium? The AD?

RACHEL UPCHURCH

The players.

ATTICUS ARCHER

The players. Come on. Minimum wage in Alabama is \$7.25. That's 15k per year per player. No one is asking for a fortune.

RACHEL UPCHURCH

What about their scholarships?

ATTICUS ARCHER

When the school purposely puts them in bullshit classes? How much is a degree in Communications from Auburn worth?

RACHEL UPCHURCH

I majored in Communications.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Exactly.

RACHEL UPCHURCH

Fine. If it's as bad as you say then go on the record with me. Burn the whole thing down. The system. The NCAA. All of it.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Not going to happen.

RACHEL UPCHURCH

Why?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Because then the program goes down too.

RACHEL UPCHURCH
Is the program really worth it?

ATTICUS ARCHER
(checking his watch)
Of course it is. And as much as I
would love to sit here reviewing
freshman economics all night... I
have to go.

The WAITRESS approaches the table.

WAITRESS
Split bill?

RACHEL UPCHURCH
He's got it.

Atticus shakes his head as he reaches for his wallet.

INT. KENDRICK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Kendrick is sitting alone in his office. The radio on. His computer open.

FRANKIE
Auburn is lucky to be 3-0. If they play like that against Ole Miss this weekend? No chance. And, listen... you know what I'm going to say.

TANK
Patterson.

FRANKIE
Patterson. McGuire still doesn't look like a championship quarterback. This is the time to get Patterson reps.

He Googles ATTICUS ARCHER, AUBURN.

Diane and Atticus' wedding announcement. Kendrick takes note of Diane. Keeps clicking. Nothing else interesting. Until --

An old newspaper article. Headline: **Auburn drops star recruit after leg injury.** Kendrick continues reading. Intrigued.

INT. ARCHER HOUSEHOLD - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Star recruit headed for North Texas after scandal.

Atticus reads an old article on *his* computer. A blurry photo of Kendrick outside his house with his father. Head bowed.

Atticus pulls highlights from the Auburn vs. North Texas game.

ANNOUNCER
What a catch by Kendrick!

Atticus pauses. Rewinds. Kendrick SPRINTS across the middle of the field, *reels in a wild throw, evades two defenders. It's impressive tape.*

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
North Texas may not be ahead on the scoreboard, but this performance is one of the most memorable I've ever seen considering the talent gap between these teams.

Close on the paused screen. Kendrick's green uniform blurry.

EXT. AUBURN CAMPUS - QUAD - EVENING

#5 Auburn vs. #8 Ole Miss

We sweep over the Auburn Campus. It's pure madness. Game-day turned up to 11. Absolutely packed.

The ESPN College GameDay set. Crazy fans behind the stage. It appears that every human on campus is intoxicated. Everyone but--

ATTICUS, who is laser focused as he makes his way through the chaos of the tailgaters, DIANE next to him. He types on BURNER.

EXT. AUBURN ATHLETIC FACILITY - DAY

BENNY is with the FLUKERS, giving them the tour of campus. He looks down as his phone vibrates.

A text from GRANDMA NANCY: "Meet at players' entrance in 20".

EXT. JORDAN-HARE STADIUM - NIGHT

Atticus and Diane come pacing up to the front gates of Jordan-Hare. It's massive this close. Its walls towering over them.

Atticus looks around. Finally spots-- THE FLUKERS. Atticus smiles. Waves. Makes his way over.

ATTICUS ARCHER
How's everything look so far?

CHANCE FLUKER
Amazing.

Chance is showing genuine emotion. Atticus has him. But, it's not Chance he has to worry about...

Ms. Fluker *is stoic*. Not giving any sign of emotion or excitement. All business. She's still not cracking.

ATTICUS ARCHER
This is my wife, Diane.

DIANE ARCHER
It's a pleasure to meet you. I've heard so much about you, Chance.
(looking at Ms. Fluker)
What a beautiful family you have.

MS. FLUKER
Thank you.

Atticus bites his lip. *Come on.*

ATTICUS ARCHER
You're going to see something special tonight. You ever experience an atmosphere like this?

CHANCE FLUKER
No, sir.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I didn't think so.
(reaching into his coat)
Your field passes. Enjoy the view.

MS. FLUKER
Come on, Chance.

Atticus nods. Not what he was hoping for.

We pull back... Winding through the throng of fans lining up outside the gates...

KENDRICK is watching the conversation. Takes note of Atticus talking with... Benny. *Who the hell is that?*

INT./EXT. JORDAN-HARE STADIUM - NIGHT

Fans pile into the stadium. It's loud. A buzz from the alcohol and the magnitude of the game. A cocktail you can't order from any bar.

Chance and Ms. Fluker walk onto the field... an amazing view. There's no feeling like walking out of the tunnel.

ESPN ANALYST (V.O.)

What a treat we have for you tonight. Two of the best teams in the country squaring off for supremacy in the South.

The sky is cotton candy as the game kicks off, the stadium electric. SEC football at it's finest.

Highlights from the first half:

A defensive struggle. Hardly any positive plays. Running up the gut. Sacks. It's ugly.

KEVIN BOLDEN, the 5-star Auburn dropped for Ricky, is making plays for Ole Miss.

ESPN ANALYST (V.O.)

Neither team opens the game particularly strong. We expected a defensive struggle, and that's exactly what we have. At the half: Auburn 6, Ole Miss 7.

Diane and Atticus watch as the players make their way to the locker rooms for halftime.

DIANE ARCHER
Do you want anything?

ATTICUS ARCHER
No. I'm OK.

He stretches his leg as he stands. *It's hurting.* But he's focused on one thing--

FLUKER. He watches carefully as Chance and his mother pace the sidelines. He's nervous. They can't lose this game.

INT. AUBURN LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The Auburn players slump into the locker room. Completely gassed after a grueling half.

Coaches yelling. SLAMMING lockers. They can't lose this game. Payton approaches Bissinger. Guides him behind the lockers.

TIM PAYTON
Coach. Do you want to give
Patterson a run?

BISSINGER
We're sticking with McGuire.

TIM PAYTON
We have 80 total yards.

BISSINGER
You're the one calling the plays.
Figure it the fuck out. McGuire is
our quarterback.

TIM PAYTON
Got it. Anything else?

BISSINGER
Yeah, stop running the fucking ball
on 3rd and 8.

INT. JORDAN-HARE STADIUM - NIGHT

SECOND HALF HIGHLIGHTS

Auburn scores quickly, going up 13-7....

Ole Miss rallies back. A long pass. Touchdown. BOLDEN. He runs right in front of the Auburn student section and spreads his arms wide in celebration.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Fucking Bolden. God dammit.

Checks his watch.

17-13 Ole Miss. Two minutes left. Auburn is driving.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
One drive, Steve.

Bissinger on the sideline with McGuire. Screaming. Red in the face.

BISSINGER
Take care of the ball! We have
time!

McGuire nods, runs back to the huddle.

STEVE MCGUIRE

I got it.

Auburn drives up the field. McGuire makes a couple nice passes to get them in the red zone. And --

He's intercepted. A GASP from the stadium.

Ole Miss KNEELS. Game over. Their players are going crazy. A huge win. Bolden sprinting in celebration. The sweetest revenge. Atticus stands in shock. Diane rubs his shoulder.

DIANE ARCHER

I'm sorry, honey.

Atticus says nothing. Stares in anger. Geoff slumped in his seat, head in his hands.

RONNIE

That could be it.

FINAL: Ole Miss 17, Auburn 13

INT. ARCHER HOUSEHOLD - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Atticus is watching highlights from the game. Another look at McGuire's interception. Atticus rewinds the tape. Watches it again. And again.

Flips to SportsCenter... Bissinger's press conference:

BISSINGER

If Ricky Patterson was ready to start, he'd be starting. He's not, so he's not.

Bites his lip.

BISSINGER (CONT'D)

McGuire is our quarterback. That's all I have to say.

Close on Atticus, the blue light from the television bathing his emotionless face.

He picks up BURNER....

INT. QUIXOTE'S - NIGHT

A shitty college bar that's revered exactly for that reason. Neon lights. Neon drinks. *They give you the same headache.*

MCGUIRE stands at the bar with his GIRLFRIEND, 20. Let's just say he's not getting the star quarterback treatment.

STEVE MCGUIRE
Could we get a fucking drink
please?

A DRUNK GUY approaches him.

DRUNK GUY
Hey, McGuire! You suck, bro!

STEVE MCGUIRE
(shaking his head)
Thanks, man. Have a good night.

DRUNK GUY
(gets even closer)
Bartender! Kick this guy out! I'd
say throw him out, but he'd be
intercepted.

STEVE MCGUIRE
Yo, get out of here.

McGuire gives him a little shove, pushing him away.

DRUNK GUY
You serious??

McGuire gives him another shove, and the drunk guy pushes back. Hard. He winds his arm...

As his FIST CONNECTS WITH MCGUIRE'S JAW we--

SMASH TO BLACK

OCTOBER

FROM A TV:

FOX SPORTS ANALYST (V.O.)
Absolutely crushing news out of
Auburn last night, as quarterback
Steve McGuire's jaw was broken in
an altercation at a local bar. No
word yet as to --

OVER BLACK

DRUNK GUY
I didn't even hit him that hard.
Never seen a jaw break so easily.

EXT. AUBURN - BACK YARD - NIGHT

REVEAL: Geoff is talking to the DRUNK GUY from the bar. He passes him a handful of HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS.

GEOFF

That's the first half. The second comes after you keep your mouth shut.

The drunk guy counts the bills. Stuffs them in his pocket, satisfied.

FOX SPORTS ANALYST (V.O.)

This means that the mantle of quarterback now belongs to freshman phenom Ricky Patterson.

SFX: BUZZZZZZZZZZZZ

INT. RICKY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The TV is on, but the room is empty. The Fox Sports reporter talking to a vacant couch.

BUZZZZZZZZ

We slowly snake around the corner to see--

Ricky standing in front of his mirror. SHAVING HIS HEAD. Straight-faced. Close on the reflection of his eyes as the cold metal slides across his scalp.

EXT. BEN HILL GRIFFIN STADIUM - NIGHT

A sweeping overhead view of Florida's stadium. "The Swamp". You can feel the humidity from hundreds of miles away. 98 degrees at kick. Sun pouring down on the plastic seats.

The stadium is rocking, Gator blue and orange everywhere.

#14 Auburn vs. #8 Florida

Atticus walks the sideline as the team warms up. He focuses on Patterson, launching balls in warmups. Bissinger STARES at him from across the field.

EXT. BEN HILL GRIFFIN STADIUM - NIGHT

Atticus reaches his seats. Stands with Diane and the other bag men.

ESPN ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 And here we go. All eyes on the
 freshman quarterback as he steps
 into the Auburn huddle for the
 first time.

Patterson takes the first snap. Steps back. And --
TOUCHDOWN.

A 70-yard bomb. He runs up the field celebrating. The team's
 going crazy. Bissinger turns to Payton. Raises his eyebrows.
 "Holy shit".

HIGHLIGHTS

Patterson continues to light it up. Auburn dominates.

Bissinger watching Patterson run the huddle from the
 sidelines. He turns to the OC.

BISSINGER
 What the fuck is this? That's not
 what we called. He's calling his
 own plays.

Payton smiles as Patterson launches another pass. Shrugs his
 shoulders.

BISSINGER (CONT'D)
 That son of a bitch.

FINAL: AUBURN 35, FLORIDA 7

ESPN ANNOUNCER
 A shocker in Gainesville tonight.
 After Steve McGuire goes down with
 the broken jaw, Ricky Patterson
 sets a record for touchdowns by a
 true freshman quarterback in their
 first start. What else can you say
 but... wow.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The team WHOOPING and HOLLERING, basking in victory. Music
 blasting. As Patterson removes his pads, he's approached by
 CONNORS.

TYLER CONNORS
 Yo, Freshman. Why don't you come
 out with us tonight? Help us
 celebrate.

Ricky smiles.

INT. QUIXOTE'S - NIGHT

That EXACT SAME SMILE as everyone lifts Ricky up, passes him across the room and onto the bar.

BIG KENNY walks in, a string of GIRLS following him.

KENNY
Time to celebrate boys.

The bartender tosses Ricky a bottle of champagne.

RICKY PATTERSON
Let's fucking go!!!

TYLER CONNORS
(shouting over the chaos
of the bar)
YO! Think we got off on the wrong
foot. What we did... That was cold.

Ricky processes the apology. And just when we expect him to gloat...

RICKY PATTERSON
Never liked it anyway. Made me look
like a girl. Cheers, bro!

The grin that crosses his face tells us one thing: Little Ricky Patterson is gone. He pops the bottle and sprays it everywhere. Looks at his teammates.

RICKY PATTERSON (CONT'D)
We're fucking kings.

And we see it in his eyes. He believes it.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The pews packed. Sunday mass. The high walls of the church echoing THE PREACHER'S sermon. Atticus and Diane sit in one of the front rows.

PREACHER
No one can serve two masters, for
either he will hate one and love
the other, or he will be devoted to
the one and despise the other.

A VIBRATION. Atticus reaches for his pocket. It's BURNER. He slowly removes it. Has a text from UPCHURCH: "Wow." Atticus goes to respond...

Diane elbows him. "Don't." Atticus bites his lip. Puts burner back in his pocket. IT VIBRATES AGAIN. Another text. BENNY: "CALL ME."

HE GETS UP. Makes his way out of the row. Passing at least ten people as he does.

ATTICUS ARCHER
(under his breath)
Sorry. Sorry. Excuse me.

PREACHER
(continuing with his sermon)
A man cannot serve both God and money.

The congregation turns as Atticus walks down the center aisle to the front door of the church and out to --

EXT. CHURCH - FRONT GARDEN - DAY

He traipses outside. Opens a text from BENNY. A link. He clicks it and opens an ESPN VIDEO:

ESPN ANALYST (V.O.)
Remember Ricky Patterson lighting it up down in Florida on Saturday night? Exclusive footage to ESPN shows Patterson enjoying himself after the game.

Blurry cell phone footage from Quixote's. Patterson stands on top of the bar, dousing the crowd with champagne.

ESPN ANALYST
Remember, Patterson is a true freshman.

ESPN ANALYST #2
I'm sure that was just juice in there.

Both analysts laugh. Atticus stares in disbelief. The laughter continues. It's interrupted by an incoming call: ALEXANDRA NOONE.

ATTICUS ARCHER
(answering)
Yeah. I saw it.

ALEXANDRA NOONE
Saw what?

ATTICUS ARCHER
The footage of Ricky.

ALEXANDRA NOONE
Oh. We have a bigger problem than
that. NCAA wants to interview Ricky
this week. Can't hold them off any
longer.

ATTICUS ARCHER
(recalibrating)
OK. We knew this day was coming.
I'll work with him.

Hangs up. Checks his watch. Paces back into--

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The PREACHER is finishing his sermon as Atticus returns to his seat.

PREACHER
And, of course, let's pray for our
Tigers next week. God has placed
quite a few obstacles in their way
of late, but let's pray that Coach
Bissinger will rise above to face
the challenges ahead.

CHEERS from the congregation. Diane looks at Atticus.

INT. RICKY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Atticus KNOCKS on the door. It opens just a CRACK. Ricky
peeks out. Surprised to see Atticus.

RICKY PATTERSON
Mr. Archer...

ATTICUS ARCHER
Can I come in?

Ricky opens the door. Atticus surveys the apartment. The
place is a *mess*. Empty bottles everywhere. The remnants of an
after party.

A guy walks out of the bedroom holding a GIANT BONG.

BONG GUY
Yo, Ricky. You doing another hit?
(he notices Atticus)
Oh, what's up man?

ATTICUS ARCHER
Good evening.

Bong Guy awkwardly retreats back to his room.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
You need to get ahold of yourself.
First start went well. I get it.
We're all excited. Don't let that
jeopardize what's ahead.

RICKY PATTERSON
I know. I'm sorry... I... got
caught up in the moment.

Ricky's starting to get nervous. He instinctively reaches his finger up... goes to twist it in his hair. There's nothing there.

ATTICUS ARCHER
NCAA is starting their interviews
this week. You're at the top of
their list. Nothing to worry about,
but we need to get you ready.

Ricky's really getting nervous.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
These things all go according to a
script.
(as he sits down)
Luckily, I know the script.

INTERCUT INTERVIEW SCENES:

INT. RICKY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Atticus sits across from Ricky. Coaching him.

ATTICUS ARCHER
They're gonna sit you down in one
of the empty athletic offices. It
will be you and the agent. A tape
recorder on the table. Probably one
light on. They start with the same
question every time.

INT. ATHLETIC FACILITY - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

The room is EXACTLY how Atticus described it. Kendrick sits across from RICKY.

As nervous as Ricky is, Kendrick is showing some nerves as well. *This is what he's been waiting for.*

KENDRICK

Tell me about your recruitment to Auburn. You had an official in-home visit, but went with Bama anyway.

RICKY PATTERSON

The visit was great. Bissinger and Benny were really nice. But I was committed to Bama. That's where my Dad wanted me.

KENDRICK

Clearly.

RICKY PATTERSON

My Dad made a mistake. But we didn't do anything illegal. He never took anything.

(chip on his shoulder)

Went with the school that wanted me. Welcomed me with open arms. Auburn was always in my top 3.

(really big chip on his shoulder)

You can check.

The room has shifted. Ricky's confident.

INT. RICKY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

ATTICUS ARCHER

Second question can vary, it depends on the benefit in question. I'm guessing he'll be asking about Big Kenny.

INT. ATHLETIC FACILITY - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

KENDRICK

What can you tell me about Big Kenny's Lexus?

RICKY PATTERSON

That's where I got my car.

KENDRICK

Paid for all in cash. By your uncle.

RICKY PATTERSON

That's right.

Kendrick nods. *Interesting.*

KENDRICK

Last question: will you consent to letting the NCAA access you and your family's bank records?

INT. RICKY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

ATTICUS ARCHER

The bank records. Always the last question. Here's the secret: they don't need your permission. They'll get a warrant and do it anyway. So just say yes.

INT. ATHLETIC FACILITY - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Ricky nods. *He's ready.*

RICKY PATTERSON

Of course.

Kendrick bites his lip. Interview over. Ricky begins to get up--

KENDRICK

Actually, I have one more for you.

Off Ricky, who's immediately showing nerves again --

KENDRICK (CONT'D)

What's your relationship with Atticus Archer?

SHIT. Ricky's floored. Deer in the headlights. Stutters.

KENDRICK (CONT'D)

Do you need me to repeat the question?

RICKY PATTERSON

(voice shaky)

I... don't know who that is.

Kendrick stares at him. Fire in his eyes. *Are you sure?*

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Atticus paces down the hallways of upscale student apartments. He stops in front of a single door: 811. Looks around. No one else in sight.

He **KNOCKS**. Waits. The door slowly opens to reveal --

MCGUIRE. Jaw wired shut. He beckons Atticus in.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

ATTICUS ARCHER
How's the jaw?

STEVE MCGUIRE
Broken.

They sit in silence. Atticus taking a moment to collect his thoughts, choosing his words carefully.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I know... I know things didn't work out the way we hoped, but that doesn't mean you failed. Doesn't mean you aren't a talented player, and, more importantly, a quality person.

STEVE MCGUIRE
Really easy to say now that you have a starting quarterback.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Steve.

STEVE MCGUIRE
Don't fucking "Steve" me. I was Ricky Patterson before there was Ricky Patterson. Remember how badly you wanted me?

ATTICUS ARCHER
The way you performed isn't my fault.

STEVE MCGUIRE
I wasn't given a fair chance! What happened to that loyalty you preached??

(MORE)

STEVE MCGUIRE (CONT'D)
You sat in my living room... looked
me and my family in the eyes. Told
us all the great things we were
going to do together.

ATTICUS ARCHER
We gave you two years! Look what
Ricky's doing in one start.

STEVE MCGUIRE
Ricky's an asshole! How do you not
see that? I don't care how well
he's played. We have guys on this
team - guys who are going to make
millions-- who have raped girls.
Who steal shit. Who are high off
their ass every fucking night. You
cover all that up for them every
time without question. They get to
play. And I'm punished? I'm
punished because I threw one
interception? I--

He has to stop. Hurts to move his mouth this much. He rubs
his jaw to ease the pain.

ATTICUS
We're going to get you back out
there, I--

STEVE MCGUIRE
You play well, you're untouchable.
You throw one interception? Your
jaw is broken. Tell me if that
feels backwards to you.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I know you're upset. It's
understandable. I... I know what
you're going through.

STEVE MCGUIRE
You know??

ATTICUS ARCHER
Yes.

STEVE MCGUIRE
You don't know shit! You never
played a snap.

ATTICUS ARCHER
(a beat)
I came to give you this.

He hands Steve a BAG.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
A token of our appreciation.

STEVE MCGUIRE
I don't want your fucking token.
It's not going to work like that.
You can't just sweep me under the
rug.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Steve.

STEVE MCGUIRE
Get out.

Atticus stares him down. He leaves the bag on the table before walking out the door.

Steve grabs the bag and SLAMS it against the wall. HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS float through the air.

INT. KENDRICK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Kendrick is still awake. Pouring over the interviews. Looking for something. *Anything.*

KENDRICK
(recording)
What's your relationship with
Atticus Archer?

RICKY PATTERSON
(recording)
I... I don't know who that is.

Stops... Rewinds the tape and starts again..

RICKY PATTERSON (CONT'D)
(recording)
Bissinger and Benny were really
nice.

Pauses it... Rewinds... Once more:

RICKY PATTERSON (CONT'D)
(recording)
Bissinger and Benny were really
nice.

He raises his eyebrow... RUSHES to the shelf...

Removes the AUBURN MEDIA GUIDE. Hurriedly flips through the pages. Finds what he's looking for--

BENNY. Special Assistant - Recruiting. Kendrick recognizes him immediately. *The guy that was with Fluker and his family before the Ole Miss game.*

INT. BENNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A KNOCK on the door. Benny opens it to find KENDRICK. Immediately goes to shut it--

Kendrick FORCES the door further open. Walks in.

BENNY
You can't just--

KENDRICK
I'm here to help you. So shut the
fuck up and listen.
(really taking control)
We have the program dead to rights.
We found deposits in Patterson's
accounts.

BENNY
That's not true, I would have
heard...

KENDRICK
From who?

Benny goes to say something, but Kendrick talks right over him. In control.

KENDRICK (CONT'D)
You didn't hear from anyone because
you're the fall guy. The fall guy
is always the last to hear.

BENNY
No, I would know.

KENDRICK
Benny, you're a pawn. There's a bus
coming. Who do you think is getting
thrown under it? Bissinger? Reis?
Archer? It's going to be you my
friend. Little Benny. They don't
need you. This is a big machine and
you're the smallest cog.

Benny tries to stand tall. Bites his lip--

But it quivers. He hangs his head.

BENNY
I didn't want this.

KENDRICK
That's why I want to give you a way out. Full immunity. Your name will never be mentioned in this investigation.

(reaching into his jacket)
I just need you to wear this.

He reaches into his jacket-- holds up a WIRE. Close on Benny.
Scared.

INT./EXT. GEOFF'S CAR - CHICK-FIL-A - NIGHT

Geoff and Ronnie are finishing a phone call. WE DON'T HEAR THE OTHER END OF THE CALL.

They're at the front of the drive-thru line.

GEOFF
Yeah. Everything's taken care of.
(listening)
Copy.

RONNIE
Yeah, could I get a #5?

Geoff hangs up the phone. They continue waiting. Silent for a moment.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
Atticus seem different to you? He's supposed to be taking his foot off the gas, and instead he's stepping down harder.

GEOFF
Was never going to be easy for him to walk away.

RONNIE
Get that, but it was supposed to be our show this year. Just gonna be me and you soon enough... he's still shouldering all the load.

They stay quiet. Both mulling it over.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
Hear Fluker's official at Ole Miss
went real well. LSU putting
pressure on as well. Has the
hometown connection.

GEOFF
Gonna be tough. Mom's not cracking.

RONNIE
That's why I think it's time to
stop thinking so much about his
Mom.

GEOFF
Atticus knows how to handle these
things.

RONNIE
What Atticus doesn't know won't
kill him.

GEOFF
What're you saying?

RONNIE
Sayin' that we might need to take
matters into our own hands.

INT. BENNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Close on a phone vibrating...

REVEAL: GRANDMA NANCY is calling. It's Benny's phone.

Kendrick is standing over him. Benny lets it vibrate.

KENDRICK
Is that him?

Benny has a panicked look that says nothing but yes.

KENDRICK (CONT'D)
Answer it.

BENNY
(turns around to face
Kendrick)
He's a professional. He's not just
gonna walk into a trap like this.

KENDRICK
Answer it.

He does.

BENNY
Yeah.

INTERCUT WITH--

ATTICUS ARCHER
Got a weird call yesterday. Kid
from down South. Interested in an
official. Already took one with
Bama and LSU.

BENNY
OK...

ATTICUS ARCHER
You OK? You sound stressed.

Benny stutters. Kendrick grabs his shoulder. *SQUEEZES*.

BENNY
Yeah. Yeah. I'm good.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Said it would take 15 to confirm an
official. Geoff dropped a bag this
morning. You should be getting a
text from him tomorrow to confirm
the date of his official.

Benny silent again. Kendrick prods him. *ASK WHO IT IS.*

BENNY
Wh-who is it?

Benny closes his eyes. *Don't say it. Don't say it.* *Don't say it.*

ATTICUS ARCHER
Adoree Mair.

Fuck. Benny's face drops. Kendrick smiling.

BENNY
Ok. Got it. Yeah, I'll...

ATTICUS ARCHER
Benny... maybe I haven't been
saying this enough lately. You've
done a great job. If we can get
through this year, all of your hard
work will be worth it.

BENNY

I know... it... I want to be here.

He's having a hard time keeping it together.

ATTICUS ARCHER

How would you feel about being the
director of football operations
next season?

This kills Benny. *He knows he's never going to get the chance.* You can see his heart break.

BENNY

Amazing... it sounds amazing.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Good. Confirm with me when you get
the text tomorrow.

Hangs up. Kendrick immediately springs to the computer--

KENDRICK

Look up the address.

Benny does. A fire in Kendrick's eyes. *He has them.*

EXT. SOUTHERN ROAD - NIGHT

Kendrick pulls up. Nearly jumps out of his car.

Goes to the mailbox... Opens it to find...

A BAG.

Kendrick shaking as he reaches for it. *He fucking has them.*

Pulls it out and opens it *all the way* to find--

IT'S FULL OF MONOPOLY MONEY.

KENDRICK

No...

He rips into the bag-- Orange 500's spill out. A rainbow of technicolor bills: blue 50's, yellow 10's all flutter in the air around him.

TITLE CARD READS: 45 MINUTES AGO

The rev of an engine. By now, we know the sound by heart.
100MPH.

INT./EXT. ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

Atticus is finishing his call with Benny. HE KNEW THE WHOLE TIME.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Good. Confirm with me when you get the text tomorrow.

Hangs up and immediately dials RONNIE and GEOFF.

INT./EXT. GEOFF'S CAR - CHICK-FIL-A - NIGHT

They're at the back of the drive-thru line.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Benny's been compromised. Cut off all communications immediately.

GEOFF

God damn. Well, bag's already been planted.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Good. Kendrick should be headed there as we speak.

RONNIE

Dumb ass.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Same address I sent you?

GEOFF

Yeah. Everything's taken care of.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Great. See you at Toomer's tonight.

GEOFF

Copy.

RONNIE

Yeah, could I get a #5?

INT. BENNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

NOW.

Atticus storms in without a word--

REACHES UP BENNY'S SHIRT AND RIPS THE WIRE OFF. THROWS IT ON THE GROUND AND CRUSHES IT WITH HIS FOOT.

Finally can speak--

ATTICUS ARCHER
I really thought you were different.

BENNY
Atticus I-- What about Patterson's account? He said they fo--

ATTICUS ARCHER
You fucking idiot! How could you not call me?? They haven't even looked at his accounts yet.

Benny's face drops. Realizes Kendrick completely fooled him.

BENNY
Atticus, he barged in here... there was nothing--

ATTICUS ARCHER
How could you not call me??

BENNY
Because I thought we were fucked!

ATTICUS ARCHER
We're never fucked unless I tell you that we're fucked. I knew Kendrick would come to you next. And you failed.

BENNY
Then why didn't you call to tell me?

ATTICUS ARCHER
Because I didn't know if you were already wired. If he had already come to you... I trusted you would do the right thing.

BENNY
Atticus, please this--

ATTICUS ARCHER
Pack your things. You're fired.

BENNY
You can't do that.

ATTICUS ARCHER

You're right. Bissinger will give you the news tomorrow. I'm just giving you a head start.

BENNY

(tearing up)

Did you tell him?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Tell him what?

BENNY

Did you tell Ricky to say my name in his interview?

Atticus doesn't say anything.

BENNY (CONT'D)

This is my life. It's all I have.

ATTICUS ARCHER

It's time to start a new life then.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PRACTICE FIELD - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Chance walks off the practice field. GEOFF and RONNIE are waiting for him outside their car.

Close on Chance. He doesn't know what to do.

EXT. BENNY'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Atticus walks away from Benny's complex. His limp a little exaggerated. He's in pain.

BURNER begins to ring. He sits down. Answers.

MS. FLUKER

(furious)

How dare you??

ATTICUS ARCHER

What's going on?

MS. FLUKER

Your men... your... goons. They cornered Chance. Told him that I was interfering.

And for once... Atticus is beginning to panic.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Jenna, please... Chance must be
mistaken.

MS. FLUKER

Are you calling my son a liar?

ATTICUS ARCHER

No, no. I'm saying that there's
information that he isn't...

MS. FLUKER

I knew from the second you
approached me that this was dirty.

(flustered)

I haven't worked all my life just
to throw it away. We're so close.
You try and poison us. With your
money and your gifts and your
power. I see why this game is so
corrupt. It's so hard to say no. So
hard. But I always will. You're not
getting to us. You won't.

ATTICUS ARCHER

I think if you just take--

MS. FLUKER

Chance's recruitment is closed.
That's final. I never want to see
your face again.

She hangs up. Atticus bows his head. Crushed.

INT. TOOMER'S - NIGHT

Atticus barges through the door. Angrier than we've ever seen
him. Geoff and Ronnie are already seated. Well into some
whiskey.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Is all that true? What she told me?

RONNIE

We did what we had to!

ATTICUS ARCHER

Who the fuck can I trust here?? You
see what Benny's doing and then you
turn around and go behind my back?

(really furious)

What the fuck were you thinking?

RONNIE

You're in too deep with the family.
It's not about the family, it's
about Chance.

ATTICUS ARCHER

No, it's all about the family.
Where the fuck have you been,
Ronnie?

(turning to Geoff)
Whose idea was this?

Geoff clenches his teeth. Unsure where to jump in. It's getting ugly.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

There is always a plan and that
plan is *always* to be followed.
You've jeopardized everything.

RONNIE

This is our program now. You're
leaving. We can't just wait around
for you to pull a rabbit out of
your hat...

ATTICUS ARCHER

We were *so* close. We had him!

RONNIE

You can't let go!

ATTICUS ARCHER

Because this is what happens when I
do!

RONNIE

I quit. I'm out.

ATTICUS

What the fuck are you talking
about? You can't quit.

RONNIE

You're a manipulative fuck.
Control. Control. Control. The
plan. The plan. The plan. Fuck
this. I'm not living in your shadow
anymore. Things are never going to
change. I see that now.

(pause)

It's just football, Atticus.

Ronnie gets up and begins to leave.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
Lock the place up. Or don't. I
don't fucking care.

Geoff looks at Atticus, who simply checks his watch.
Recalibrating.

GEOFF
Do we have to get him? What if he
rats?

ATTICUS ARCHER
He won't rat. He says anything,
he's going to fuck himself too.
(a breath)
We don't have time to worry about
him. He's a quitter. We have jobs
to do. If you think differently,
then go ahead and walk out with
him.

Close on Geoff. Starting to worry about more than just
Ronnie.

INT./EXT. - ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

Atticus pulls up to his house. Parks the car. Takes a deep
breath. Rubs his leg. It's really hurting.

He reaches into the glove compartment and removes the orange
bottle. Swallows a handful of pills before walking in--

INT. ARCHER HOUSEHOLD - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Diane is waiting for him, drinking coffee. Sees how bad the
limp is.

DIANE ARCHER
Honey, you need to slow down.

ATTICUS ARCHER
We lost him. We lost Fluker.

DIANE ARCHER
Maybe that's for the best.

ATTICUS ARCHER
It's not. Ronnie's out. Benny's
out.

Diane rubs her temple, realizing how bad everything is.

DIANE ARCHER
And you were supposed to be out...
months ago.

ATTICUS ARCHER
We're almost done. We were so
close.

Diane is thinking. Takes a sip of her coffee.

DIANE ARCHER
You get Chance, and that's it. You
walk away for good.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Yes. That's always been the plan.

She wants to believe him. *So badly.*

DIANE ARCHER
You promise?

ATTICUS ARCHER
I promise.

DIANE ARCHER
If that's the case...
(a long pause and a deep
breath)
I have an idea.

EXT./INT. FLUKER RESIDENCE - DAY

Ms. Fluker looks out the window as THE MERCEDES pulls up to the house. She rolls her eyes. Waiting for Atticus to make his way to the door. She walks to the door. Opens it...

MS. FLUKER
I thought I told you not to--

DIANE WALKS OUT OF THE CAR. Strides to the front door. Looks confident. *Really fucking confident.*

DIANE ARCHER
Ms. Fluker. Good afternoon.

MS. FLUKER
I can't believe he sent you.

DIANE ARCHER
He? No one sends me anywhere.

MS. FLUKER
Then what are you doing here?

DIANE ARCHER
I want to talk to you. Can I come
in?

On Ms. Fluker -- still trying to take this all in.

MS. FLUKER
Yes... of course.

INT. FLUKER RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - DAY

They sit down at the table. Feeling each other out. Diane takes a deep breath and begins.

DIANE ARCHER
I've been with Atticus for almost thirty years. I've never seen him this obsessed with a recruit. And this whole time... I've been trying to figure out why. And it hit me the moment I met him: it's because Chance is a genuinely good person.

Off Ms. Fluker... Diane's right.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
I'm not saying he's not talented. Because he is. I'm not an expert with that stuff. But I am an expert at judging character... and Chance... he's different.

MS. FLUKER
Atticus did mention that.

DIANE ARCHER
Exactly. And he'd usually never say that. *Trust me.*

(she goes for the kill)
I'm not sure if Atticus ever mentioned this to you... but I grew up with a single mother. Never met my Dad. I don't like to talk about it. But I know the position you're in.

(reaches into her purse)
This is her.

She removes PHOTOS. A lot of them. All showing a young Diane with her mother. They're alone in almost every photo.

We focus on one in particular: an infant Diane and her mother on the beach. Just outside the surf. A bright summer day.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
 The one lesson my mother taught me... well, she taught me a lot of lessons, more than I could ever say, but the *most important* one was this: It's OK to ask for help. I know how hard you've worked. I know how many people have turned their backs on you. But it doesn't have to be like that. You don't have to be alone. Auburn is a family. We're here to help you, not hurt you.

Ms. Fluker is torn open. Raw and emotional. We've never seen this side of her. It's like she's been waiting her entire life for someone to say those words to her.

MS. FLUKER
 I... *thank you.*

Diane gets up. Hugs her.

DIANE ARCHER
 It's OK. You're not alone. You're never alone. Just take an official visit. You'll see exactly what I'm talking about.

MS. FLUKER
 OK.
 (a long and deep breath,
 almost relieved)
 We'll do it. I trust you.

Close on Ms. Fluker's eyes. Trust. Diane did it.

INT. ARCHER HOUSEHOLD - KITCHEN - DAY

Atticus sits at the table. BURNER: "Fluker's official is scheduled. What happened?"

Atticus pumps his fist. The most emotion we've seen. He checks his watch.

Our gaze drifts to what's on the table...

PHOTO ALBUMS, all spread open. We focus on one of them: ten photos on each side. About half of them missing. The other half all have the same thing in common: DIANE'S FATHER.

We focus on one photo in particular: Diane's father at the beach. PART OF THE SAME PHOTO DIANE SHOWED MS. FLUKER. It's been carefully cut out. The same bright day.

NOVEMBER

Over "IN GOD'S COUNTRY" by U2.

ESPN ANALYST (V.O.)
Ricky Patterson has taken the sport
by storm.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM AUBURN'S NEXT THREE GAMES

Patterson continues to dominate. Touchdown after touchdown.
All rockets and bombs.

FINAL: Auburn 35, Texas A&M 14

Ricky in his element at Quixote's. Making out with girls.
Doing drugs. Partying.

He's a new person.

FOX SPORTS ANALYST
More footage surfaced early this
morning of Auburn quarterback,
Ricky Patterson, celebrating their
victory late... or early... into
the morning.

FINAL: Auburn 38, Arkansas 10

ESPN ANALYST
Frankly, what's happening right now
at Auburn is remarkable.

FINAL: Auburn 38, LSU 7

Ricky partying more. He's out of control.

FINAL: Auburn 28, Alabama 14

ESPN ANALYST (CONT'D)
And with a victory over Alabama in
the Iron Bowl, Auburn has secured
their spot in the championship
game.

Atticus remains calm as the stadium explodes in excitement.
Auburn is going to the championship.

Sawyer and Francis wait above the tunnel. Ricky BLOWS BY
THEM. Head down.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

KENDRICK paces into the dive bar. BILL PATTERSON sits in the very back corner, his face lit only by the neon beer signs above. Bad country music blaring.

KENDRICK

Mr. Patterson. I'm glad you called.

BILL PATTERSON

I didn't want it to come to this.
But I have to do something. I can't
stand by silently anymore.

(a defiant pause)

I'm turning in Atticus Archer.

Kendrick's eyes light up.

BILL PATTERSON (CONT'D)

He gave us 20k. All cash.

THOMAS KENDRICK

You have the cash?

BILL PATTERSON

Yes, sir.

THOMAS KENDRICK

He gave it to you?

BILL PATTERSON

Well, he gave me the address. It
was in a field. In a duffel.

THOMAS KENDRICK

Do you have a record of this?

BILL PATTERSON

Of course. Of course. He called to
tell me.

Kendrick deflating. Atticus is always a step ahead.

THOMAS KENDRICK

So, you don't have a record.

BILL PATTERSON

No, I mean...

THOMAS KENDRICK

We need hard evidence. There's
nothing we can do with 20k you
found in a field. I mean, Bill...
That's actually a crime.

BILL PATTERSON
There has to be something--

THOMAS KENDRICK
They've thought these things
through ten times over. Nothing
else happened that night?

BILL PATTERSON
No, I mean-- after the emails
leaked, he was there for us.

THOMAS KENDRICK
Why do you think that was?

BILL PATTERSON
I mean, they wanted Francis and--

THOMAS KENDRICK
Bill, who do you think leaked those
emails? Who would benefit most?

It's sinking in. Holy shit.

BILL PATTERSON
I just... I want my boy back.
That's all. I just want to talk to
him. He's going down the wrong
road. That's not Ricky. That's
someone else. This isn't what we
signed up for... it isn't what we
wanted.

Kendrick sighs. There's nothing he can do.

EXT. AUBURN CAMPUS - TWILIGHT

A NEW GA guides CHANCE AND HIS ENTIRE FAMILY across campus.
All of them clad in Auburn gear. ATTICUS and DIANE wait for
them at the end of the quad.

DIANE ARCHER
(to the kids)
Looks like we have a bunch of
future Tigers here!

ATTICUS ARCHER
How was the tour?

MS. FLUKER
It was amazing.

Atticus smiles, tries to hide how excited he is. Never heard her this enthusiastic.

ATTICUS ARCHER
(really playing it up)
Now, I know Mom wouldn't usually let you have dessert before dinner, but Diane was hoping to show you boys the best ice cream on campus. Maybe she'll make an exception just this once.

A chorus of "please"'s.

MS. FLUKER
(all smiles)
Oh, fine. I might have to get some myself.

All the kids cheer. This could not be going better.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Chance and I will hang back. I want to show him more of the practice facilities. We'll get him set up for the night too.

Ms. Fluker turns and gives Chance a giant hug.

MS. FLUKER
You call me if you need anything, alright?

CHANCE FLUKER
Yes, Mom.

Atticus and Chance watch as Diane leads his family away. Once they turn the corner and are out of view--

ATTICUS ARCHER
Follow me.

Chance does... but they're walking away from the facility.

CHANCE FLUKER
Thought we were going to the practice facility?

ATTICUS ARCHER
Wanted to show you something first.

Atticus reaches into his pocket, and we can hear the *jingle* of--

KEYS.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
 I know your mom isn't going to like
 this, but when you get on campus
 next year, this'll be waiting for
 you.

They round the corner to-- THE LEXUS. The same decked out one
 that Atticus brought to the house.

CHANCE FLUKER
 Mr. Archer...

ATTICUS ARCHER
 Just take it for a spin while
 you're here. Our secret.

CHANCE FLUKER
 You sure?

ATTICUS ARCHER
 Next year it's all yours.

CHANCE FLUKER
 Thank you. Thank you so much.

ATTICUS ARCHER
 Have fun tonight, alright? Stay out
 of trouble.

Chance gives him a bear hug.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
 We're going to do great things
 together.

CHANCE FLUKER
 Yes, sir.

Hold for a long beat. All smiles. Chance's eyes gleaming.

RICKY PATTERSON (V.O.)
 Fuck you!

INT. PATTERSON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Those same eyes. Terrified.

All the visiting players on their knees. Fluker is surrounded
 by four other guys. Close on a tabletop. LINES OF COKE
 everywhere.

RICKY PATTERSON
Come on, pussy!

CHANCE FLUKER
(starting to get up)
I can't. I...

Chance has never seen a line of coke in his life. He doesn't know what to do.

TYLER CONNORS
Yo, dude. Take it easy.

RICKY PATTERSON
Nah, this is what we do to new guys.
(looks at Connors)
Right?

Patterson walks over. Forces Chance's face onto the glass table.

RICKY PATTERSON (CONT'D)
Do you want to play Auburn football or not?

CHANCE FLUKER
Yes. Yes, sir.

RICKY PATTERSON
Then fucking do it.

Chance doesn't say no to anything. When he's told to do something....

He does it. Brings his head back up, eyes rolling back. Dazed.

CHANCE FLUKER
Shit.

Everyone CHEERS.

TYLER CONNORS
How are we getting to the party?

Ricky looks around. Everyone hammered. He circles back to--

CHANCE.

RICKY PATTERSON
New guy had a nice ride. He can take us.

INT./EXT. CHANCE'S CAR - NIGHT

CHANCE BEHIND THE WHEEL OF HIS LEXUS.

The car is packed with the players. Ricky is taking a handle pull. They're loud. We're anxious. Want to look away.

Chance closes his eyes. Tries to concentrate. Drives slowly. They approach a stop light just as--

THE LIGHT TURNS YELLOW. Fuck. Chance freaks. Presses on the gas, into the intersection, but then--

STOPS. Barely avoids a car making a left through the yellow. HORNS from all directions. Fuck.

RICKY PATTERSON
Go!!! Go!!

Chance pounds on the pedal. Speeds through. Everyone looks around. Waiting for sirens or lights. After a loooong beat--

We're good. For now.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Atticus and Diane are out to dinner with Ms. Fluker. All smiles. Fancy place. White table cloth. The whole nine yards.

Ms. Fluker has never had anything close to this.

MS. FLUKER
(taking a bite of her
pasta)
This is amazing.

ATTICUS ARCHER
We'll come here every night before
game-day next year.

MS. FLUKER
I just hope Chance is doing OK.

DIANE ARCHER
Oh, I'm sure he's getting along
with the boys just great.

INT. FRAT HOUSE - NIGHT

A crazy costume party. Sweeping shot through the foyer. Black-lights, keg stands, shots, people hooking up. Repulsive to anyone not 18-21.

RICKY is standing on the bar, two girls by his side, shotgunning a beer.

Fluker walks through the party alone. He's really messed up. Accidentally bumps into a FRAT GUY dressed as an ASTRONAUT. The guy takes his helmet off.

FRAT GUY
Big man. You in the house?

CHANCE FLUKER
Uh... no... I...

FRAT GUY
I didn't think so. Then what the fuck are you doing here?

CHANCE FLUKER
(mumbling)
I'm.... here with Ricky.

FRAT GUY
Speak up!

CHANCE FLUKER
I'm here with Ricky.

FRAT GUY
(turns to Ricky)
Ricky! Is this guy here with you?

Ricky looks at him. *Super drunk.*

RICKY PATTERSON
(slurred)
Him? Fuck no!

FRAT GUY
(turning back to Chance)
Get out.

He shoves Chance. Chance shoves back. Harder.

FRAT GUY (CONT'D)
Yo, what the fuck?

The frat guy punches him to little effect.

Fluker PUNCHES back. Hits him clean in the face. The guy drops immediately. Chaos. Chance is gang tackled by HALF A DOZEN GUYS.

They bring him down. His leg CRACKS. He SCREAMS in pain. He's balled up on the floor like a child.

EXT. FRAT HOUSE - NIGHT

Chance comes *limping* out...

He looks around. No escape. Except for --

His CAR. He frantically searches his pockets for his keys...

Finds them *just* in time.... Unlocks it and crawls in...

INT./EXT. CHANCE'S CAR - NIGHT

He's still really fucked up. Tries to concentrate. He's bloody. Barely conscious at this point. Drifting in and out of consciousness.

Just as he's about to pass out, he accelerates forward-- Into an intersection. A painful beat before--

CRASH.**CUT TO BLACK****INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

ATTICUS ARCHER
(in the middle of some
story)

And I told them, this kid is the
best prospect I have ever seen--

He's cut off abruptly. BURNER rings.

Diane looks at him. *Don't answer.* He does. Ms. Fluker looks at both of them-- confused and concerned.

DIANE ARCHER
Atticus--

ATTICUS ARCHER
Hello?
(his face drops)
We have to go.

INT./EXT. ATTICUS' CAR - NIGHT

Atticus goes *speeding* out of the parking lot and into the night. Diane and Ms. Fluker riding shotgun and in the back seat respectively.

MS. FLUKER
Did you talk to Chance? Is he OK?

Atticus doesn't respond... He's already on the phone.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Kenny, I need to get rid of a car.
Do you have a guy?
(listening)
Now! Right now. I'll meet you at
the dealership.

Hangs up. Dials another number.

Diane watches. Panicked. Looks back at Ms. Fluker. Trying to figure out something to say. Nothing comes.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
Geoff, I need you to meet me on the corner of Magnolia and Lem Morrison. Hurry.

EXT. AUBURN STREET - NIGHT

The crime scene is already starting to develop. The side of Chance's car is severely dented. The COPS have already set up a perimeter.

Atticus' Mercedes comes SCREECHING to the corner.

ATTICUS ARCHER
(to Diane)
Stay here. Keep her in the car!

He nearly ejects out the door, the adrenaline practically negating his limp.

Chance lies on the ground. LEG ALMOST BACKWARDS. He SCREAMS IN PAIN. Trying to breathe.

Atticus kneels next to him.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
It's OK. It's OK.

Geoff pulls up. Rushes out of the car. Sees Fluker--

GEOFF
Oh, what the fu--

ATTICUS ARCHER

We need to get him home. I have a
guy... he's already on his way
there.

GEOFF

What about the hospit--

ATTICUS ARCHER

No hospitals.

Geoff looks at him. Holy shit.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

We need to get him in the car right
now.

They try and lift him. Atticus has trouble putting weight on
his bad leg. CRACK. Fluker's leg gives out even more. **HE**
SCREAMS.

DIANE ARCHER

(sobbing)

Atticus! He has to go to the
hospital.

Atticus turns around. Diane is standing outside the car. Ms.
Fluker is grasping onto her. Hysterical.

He thinks about it for a moment. Bites his lip. It seems like
he's ready to give in. Desperation in Diane's eyes. But--

ATTICUS ARCHER

No hospitals. Get her back in the
car!

Diane looks him in the eye. Hardly recognizes him. He's
desperate. There's no plan.

GEOFF

What do you think?

ATTICUS ARCHER

Again.

They heave. Atticus putting too much pressure on his bad leg.
Doesn't matter...

They LIFT CHANCE UP and move towards Geoff's car.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

You're ok. You're ok.

DIANE ARCHER
Atticus!! Stop! For god's sake!!

She's horrified. Tears streaming down her face.

They place him in Geoff's car. Atticus turns to the VETERAN COP, who GETS IN CHANCE'S CAR AND DRIVES IT AWAY. The rookie cops look on... says nothing.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
Atticus!!

Looks right past Diane to the front of the crowd that has gathered. Standing there is--

RICKY. He stares right at Atticus. Doesn't need to say anything. Atticus knows.

EXT. AUBURN STREET - NIGHT

Kendrick screeches to a halt. Yellow tape already up. The cops cleaning up the scene. Runs up to the ROOKIE COP.

KENDRICK
What happened to the car??

COP
What car?

KENDRICK
The car from the fucking accident!!

COP
Uh... I don't know. They must have impounded it already.

Kendrick looks around. Desperate. Can't believe it.

INT./EXT. FLUKER RESIDENCE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Atticus paces up to the Flukers' front door. GEOFF is waiting.

ATTICUS ARCHER
How is he?

GEOFF
It's... it's really not good. Your guy's here.

Ms. Fluker comes RUSHING OUT.

MS. FLUKER
You son of a bitch!

ATTICUS ARCHER
Ms. Fluker...

She POUNDS his chest. Punch after punch. She's sobbing. It's all she can do. Atticus stands. Takes it. It's all he can do.

MS. FLUKER
My baby....

ATTICUS ARCHER
Help is here. It's going to be OK.

MS. FLUKER
He's just a boy... My little boy.

She can't watch. She can't do anything. Her life as she knew it is over. Everything they'd worked for. Gone in a snap.

MS. FLUKER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
(pounding his chest)
What the hell is wrong with you?!?
That's my little boy!

There's nothing Atticus can say.

INT. FLUKER RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Chance lies on the bed. BLOOD EVERYWHERE. He's in and out of consciousness. Struggling to breathe.

An OLD MAN in a white lab coat stands over him. DR. THEROUX, or as Atticus knows him: The Night Doctor..

DR. THEROUX
Archer.

OPENS the trunk to reveal a tightly packed assortment of medical tools. DEVICES, VIALS, NEEDLES, ETC.

Examines his leg. Chance continues to WAIL in pain.

ATTICUS ARCHER
How bad?

DR. THEROUX
Broken. We'll apply a cast. But...
this will be *permanent* damage.

The word *permanent* makes Atticus flinch.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Do what you need to do.

He looks back to see DIANE waiting at the door.

EXT. FLUKER RESIDENCE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

They walk into the yard.

DIANE ARCHER
She looked at me and told me I was
a monster.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Diane.

DIANE ARCHER
Who gave him that car?

He keeps walking.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
Who gave it to him???
(Atticus still silent)
Say it!!

ATTICUS ARCHER
I was trying to help... this was
the only way to do it. He needed
something to push him over the
edge.

DIANE ARCHER
You're delusional!

Atticus doesn't say anything. He can't. *She knows.*

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
You promised that this was it.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Diane...

She HITS him the chest. He stands there. Just takes it. She's SOBBING.

DIANE ARCHER
I knew it. This is never going to
end. 30 years of my life... this
was it.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I just need a little more time.
I'll get this all figured out.

DIANE ARCHER
We don't have any more time!
(between breaths)
I can't do this anymore.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Diane, don't...

DIANE ARCHER
*It's my fault. I'm the one who
convinced them.*

ATTICUS ARCHER
No, that's not how--

DIANE ARCHER
I did it. It was me. God dammit.
How could I let you pull me into
this? I was so foolish. So foolish.
How can I look them in the eye?

ATTICUS ARCHER
It was me.

DIANE ARCHER
No....it was me. How do you expect
me to live with myself? How can I
go back in there? Do you know how
that feels? The guilt? I can't.
Atticus, I can't. I'm only human.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Diane--

DIANE ARCHER
How??

He goes to put his hand on her shoulder.

A lifetime before his eyes. The woman he loves. The woman
that loved him. Tears stream down both of their faces.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
When I get home... I don't want to
see you there. I need space. I need
time.

She pushes his hand back and walks away. Leaving him alone.
More alone than he's ever been.

EXT. FLUKER RESIDENCE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Atticus wanders deeper into the field behind the house. Deeper into the night. Holds his leg. It's hurting. Looks up to the sky. The stars in the sky gleam as brightly as ever.

Under the weight of everything. He collapses. Falls to his knees in the Southern swamp. He's covered in mud and blood and it's all his own mess.

ATTICUS ARCHER
FUCK!

Out of breath. Again.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
GOD DAMMIT!

He puts his hands on his knees. Looks to check his watch. It's not there.

INT. PATTERSON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Atticus barges into Patterson's apartment. RICKY is on the couch, shirtless. He looks stoned.

Atticus SLAPS him in the face. Patterson takes a moment to recover before Atticus SLAPS him again.

ATTICUS ARCHER
You've jeopardized the entire program. Everything we've worked for. Who the fuck do you think you are?

RICKY PATTERSON
I'm Ricky Patterson.

Atticus GRABS him and SHOVES him against the wall.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Don't fucking talk to me like that.

RICKY PATTERSON
I'm sorry he couldn't hang.

He chokes Patterson.

ATTICUS ARCHER
You son of a bitch. He's never going to play again. I thought you were above that. *I thought you were different.*

RICKY PATTERSON

Different? Fuck you! I am
different. No one can do what I do
 on the field! It's not my fault you
 set an amateur up with us. That's
 on you. I'm Ricky Patterson! I'm...
 I'm.... I'm....

He runs out of breath. Runs out of steam. Can't find his words. Can't find anything.

HE BREAKS. It happens in an instant. His face twisting. He sobs into Atticus' chest. Barely breathing. Gaspings for air between stifled shudders.

RICKY PATTERSON (CONT'D)
 I didn't want this. Oh god.

Exactly what Benny said.

RICKY PATTERSON (CONT'D)
 I want to go home. I miss my Dad.

ATTICUS ARCHER
 Good. Because you're not playing here any more.

RICKY PATTERSON
 I need to go home.

Ricky's done. Atticus removes BURNER. Dials.

ATTICUS ARCHER
 Bill, it's Atticus Archer. I'm sorry to bother you so late... but I'm gonna need you to come to campus.

INT./EXT. LYFT - NIGHT

Atticus stands at the curb as a PRIUS pulls up. He gets in.

LYFT DRIVER
 How's it going tonight, sir?

Looks back at Atticus. He's covered in blood and dirt, his clothes ripped. He says nothing.

LYFT DRIVER (CONT'D)
 Well, we've got plenty of mints and water back there. You let me know if you need anything else.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Atticus lies on the bed, staring at the ceiling. The TV is on in the background--

ESPN ANALYST
Unbelievable footage is surfacing from Auburn last night.

Blurry footage of the fight. We see it from a few different angles. All show FLUKER punching the Astronaut and being tackled. It looks like he started it.

ESPN ANALYST (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Auburn released a short statement:
We are aware of the incident late last night involving visiting recruit Chance Fluker. We regard these matters with the utmost importance but will not rush to any swift conclusions without a full investigation.

ESPN ANALYST (CONT'D)
And in much more pressing news for the Tigers, freshman phenom Ricky Patterson has left the program without notice--

Footage of Ricky coming home, it mirrors the first scene at the Patterson's. Press hounding the door.

ESPN ANALYST (CONT'D)
Sources tell us that Patterson will not be playing in the Championship Game in just a few short days.

INT. REIS' OFFICE - DAY

BARRY REIS
How the fuck did this happen?

Atticus sits across from Reis. It looks like he's still trying to answer that same question. Bags under his eyes. There's a bright Auburn colored CHRISTMAS TREE in the office.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Everything spun out of control. But there's no evidence. Car's been taken care of. Other than that--

BARRY REIS
Did he start that fight?

ATTICUS ARCHER
All I know is what's in the
footage.

Barry has his head in his hands. Shaking his head. Looks up.

BARRY REIS
Do you need to take some time?

ATTICUS ARCHER
No. We still have a championship to
win. Nothing's changed.

BARRY REIS
(moving closer)
Atticus... forget that we... I'll
use the word "work" lightly. Forget
that we work together. Just pretend
it's the two of us. Man to man. At
a bar. In the stands at a game.
(he looks Atticus deep in
the eye)
Why are you doing this?

Atticus doesn't say anything.

BARRY REIS (CONT'D)
They're not going to remember you.
They don't remember AD's and they
don't remember bag men. We don't
get trophies. We don't get
remembered. The players do. The
coaches do. If you're not in it for
the glory, then you're in it
because you love the game. And no
one can love the game this much. No
one should.

ATTICUS ARCHER
I'll see you in Dallas, Barry.

INT. KENDRICK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Kendrick is crammed in his office. Watching the reports on
ESPN. A KNOCK at the door. He opens it. Surprised.

THOMAS KENDRICK
Come in.

WE DON'T SEE WHO IT IS.

JANUARY

#2 AUBURN vs. #1 OHIO STATE**INT. COWBOY STADIUM - NIGHT**

The crown jewel of college football. All the pomp and circumstance you can imagine. Fireworks. Marching bands.

Auburn and Ohio State run out of their respective tunnels. The players pumping up the fans.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The game kicks. McGuire looks like a man possessed. Opening drive: TOUCHDOWN.

Atticus watches. But he's distracted. Something isn't right.

Ohio State answers back with a touchdown. As they celebrate--

QUICK FLASHES:

CHANCE'S INJURY. LYING ON THE GROUND BLOODY.

Atticus shakes his head. A HELMET ON HELMET HIT ON THE FIELD. Crunching bodies.

CHANCE'S SCREAMS. FLASHING LIGHTS.

Atticus has to get up. Walks into the darkness of the tunnel.

Leans up against the wall. Deep breaths.

DIANE SCREAMING. MS. FLUKER WRAPPED AROUND HER.

DIANE ARCHER (V.O.)
ATTICUS!!! He needs a hospital!!

A defensive struggle. McGuire continues to make plays. The best we've seen him. No turnovers.

14-14. Just minutes left. Auburn on the five yard line.

STEVE MCGUIRE
(to the other players)
Colt 16 Indiana!!

He throws-- TOUCHDOWN. McGuire celebrates in the end zone with his teammates. The game clock ticks to 0:00.

FINAL: Auburn 21, Ohio State 14

The Auburn bench rushes the field. Students cheering. McGuire hoisted up. Bissinger doused in Gatorade.

Atticus stands in the tunnel... silence. Alone. No one there to celebrate with him.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Auburn has done it! They're National Champions! Of all the unlikely heroes, Steve McGuire steps in and takes the Tigers to the promised land.

Confetti STREAMS down over Atticus. He's subdued. Watching the team celebrate. Silent.

They won.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Atticus walks back into his hotel in Auburn. Sits at the bar.

BARTENDER
Here you go, sir.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Sorry, don't think that's--

BARTENDER
The gentleman over there brought you a drink.

Turns to see-- KENDRICK. Sitting at a table in the corner. Atticus gets up. Walks over and sits down across from him.

THOMAS KENDRICK
Mr. Archer. I'm sorry I never got to introduce myself properly.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Whatever paper you're freelancing for is going to have one hell of a story. And I don't drink.

THOMAS KENDRICK
(takes a sip of his drink)
We have you nailed.

ATTICUS ARCHER
You don't have shit.

Atticus looks Kendrick over. Assessing his statement.

THOMAS KENDRICK
My favorite thing about the game has always been the competition.
(MORE)

THOMAS KENDRICK (CONT'D)

Competition is *everything*. There's nothing more exhilarating than staring the man across from you in the eye and knowing you're going to do everything in your power to beat him. And that he's going to do the exact same to you. I haven't felt that in a long time... not since I stopped playing. *Not until I got here.*

ATTICUS ARCHER

North Texas and "competition" aren't usually spoken in the same sentence.

THOMAS KENDRICK

It's not about the school. That's the point. *It's the game.*

(a pause)

There was something my coach told me the day of my last game. He pulled me over on the sideline and said: *this is going to be the worst day of your life. Because it's over.* It ends for everyone. It ends for high school players. It ends for college players who aren't going pro. It ends for pros, who make millions and millions of dollars but have to hang up the cleats anyway. But the more and more I get to know you, there's something I've realized. It never ended for you did it? You wouldn't let it.

ATTICUS ARCHER

(a long pause)

Figure you read the same article as everyone else. Auburn drops star prospect after leg injury. Everyone just assumes it was a football injury. Loved the game so much, what else could it be? Article doesn't say what it was because my mother didn't want anyone to know her husband was a drunk who accidentally hit his son with his car.

QUICK FLASH: A YOUNG BISSINGER sits across from ATTICUS, leg in a brace, shaking his head.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)

No coach ever told me it was over
in some poetic way. They just
pulled my offer. Said: "I believe
in Auburn Tigers Football." Program
is bigger than the individual.
Can't use a scholarship on a gimp.
(pause)

I know your story. You think you're
special? Fuck up a payment and
suddenly you're going to save every
kid from accepting money? Think
we're supposed to have sympathy for
you?

THOMAS KENDRICK

No. You're not. My life worked out
exactly how it was supposed to.

ATTICUS ARCHER

That's exactly what people say when
their life doesn't work out.

THOMAS KENDRICK

You see what money does to them? It
destroys them.

ATTICUS ARCHER

It's not the money.

THOMAS KENDRICK

It is! I can tell you firsthand
that it is.

ATTICUS ARCHER

You think you're making a
difference?? You're a cog in the
fucking machine. Take me down and
another three of me will be ready
to go next season. At every single
school.

THOMAS KENDRICK

This game can't save you. It never
has and it never will.

Atticus looks at him. Chews it over.

THOMAS KENDRICK (CONT'D)

You come clean we can offer full
immunity.

ATTICUS ARCHER

You told Benny the same thing.

THOMAS KENDRICK

Didn't think you would. But I held out hope. Think we would have worked well together. Maybe in a different life.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Sounds like a pretty fucked up life to me.

(holds his gaze)

You don't have shit.

THOMAS KENDRICK

Good luck, Atticus. Auburn is the champion. You got everything you wanted. *Congratulations.*

Kendrick downs his drink. Downs Atticus' drink too. Walks away. Atticus watches the empty glasses.

INT./EXT. - ATTICUS' CAR - MAIN STREET - DAY

Atticus drives through Main Street. Championship gear/banners everywhere. The magnolia trees have been TP'd, white strands of toilet paper drifting in the breeze.

He should be ecstatic. Should be celebrating. But he drives ahead, straight-faced. *Thinking.*

EXT. ARCHER HOUSEHOLD - FRONT YARD - DAY

He pulls up to his house and gets out. He hasn't been here in so long that it almost feels new. He limps to the front door. Takes a deep breath. Pushes it open...

INT. ARCHER HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Atticus walks through the halls. Pictures on the wall. Their wedding day. At games. College photos.

DIANE ARCHER (O.S.)

What are you doing here?

He turns. Diane waits at the end of the hall. She looks like she's aged five years. They both do.

ATTICUS ARCHER

Came to get my watch.

DIANE ARCHER

It's not here.

ATTICUS ARCHER
We won the championship.

DIANE ARCHER
I didn't watch.

He takes a deep breath. Tries to find the right words...

ATTICUS ARCHER
I want to start over. I'm done.
Done forever. No more football.

DIANE ARCHER
Get out.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Diane... please... I was wrong. You
were right. Let's go to the house.
Right now. Forget everything. Start
over.

DIANE ARCHER
House? I sold the house.

His face drops.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
You never wanted it. Not really.

ATTICUS ARCHER
That's not true.

DIANE ARCHER
It is.
(a deep breath)
Atticus, it was me.

Kendrick wasn't bluffing.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
I did it. I told them everything.
It's over.

ATTICUS ARCHER
How... Diane...

DIANE ARCHER
Because I love you. I still love
you. I always will. I'm not leaving
you... *I'm saving you*. Atticus,
you're drowning. You're so far
underwater you can't even see the
surface. You have been for months.
(MORE)

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
*For years. I'm not doing this for
me... I'm doing it for you.*

Atticus is speechless.

DIANE ARCHER (CONT'D)
*It's one thing to lose yourself.
But other people are getting hurt.*

ATTICUS ARCHER
Diane...

DIANE ARCHER
*I want you to walk out that door
and get as far away from here as
possible.*

INT. KENDRICK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Kendrick is on his computer. We see the cover of the report:
Auburn Football Investigation. He saves the file.

Loads an email he has prepared for SWANNER. Presses **SEND**.

Begins to pack up the last of his office. His work here is
done. He won.

INT. ATTICUS' HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Have you ever woken up on the morning you're going to die?

Atticus does. Strangely calm. Resigned. He's had time to
process everything. He checks BURNER. *No messages.*

Turns on ESPN, expecting to see a report: *Nothing.* They're
live in Auburn to cover the championship parade.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Geoff hiding in a motel. Peering out between the shades as he
picks up his phone and dials Atticus.

GEOFF
The fuck is going on? Haven't heard
anything.

ATTICUS ARCHER
Neither have I...

INT. SWANNER'S OFFICE - DAY

TAP TAP TAP.

Kendrick sits in Swanner's office. He's waiting. Rapping a pencil against his chair.

From down the hall-- CLICK CLACK CLICK CLACK. Swanner enters the room. Sits behind her desk.

SARAH SWANNER
Thomas, good morning.

He adjusts himself in the seat. She's being strangely nonchalant.

SARAH SWANNER (CONT'D)
I read your report last night.

THOMAS KENDRICK
And?

SARAH SWANNER
You're promoted.

KENDRICK
When's the press release going out?

SARAH SWANNER
What press release?

KENDRICK
About Auburn... the sanctions.

SARAH SWANNER
What sanctions?

KENDRICK
I don't understand... aren't we coming down on Auburn?

SARAH SWANNER
At this time, the NCAA sees no actionable issues as outlined in the report. As such, the investigation will be... *ongoing.*

KENDRICK
I don't...

SARAH SWANNER
Who do you work for?

KENDRICK
I work for you.

SARAH SWANNER
That's right. And who do I work for? You're grown up. Ask yourself what's best for the NCAA. Is two SEC schools sanctioned within a calendar year good for the NCAA? To have the FBI launch *another* investigation? They come looking again and you and I are out of a job.

THOMAS KENDRICK
The NCAA's responsibility is to be unbiased in our assessment of...

SARAH SWANNER
Thomas. Please.

KENDRICK
If we took action based on the report... I mean, it could change everything.

SARAH SWANNER
Why would we want anything to change?

She SMILES.

INT. AUBURN MAIN STREET - MORNING

Atticus walks Main Street with Reis. The parade passing by.

BARRY REIS
They're not doing anything. They sent Kendrick because they *didn't* want him to find anything. Didn't think he could.

ATTICUS ARCHER
The paper pusher...

BARRY REIS
And they still got us. *Sloppy*.

ATTICUS ARCHER
And Kendrick? He's complicit in this?

BARRY REIS

What do you think happened? It's the NCAA... He got promoted. Probably making an extra couple hundred K. We're all pawns in our own way.

Atticus shakes his head. The marching band continues to sound. Blue and orange balloons everywhere.

BARRY REIS (CONT'D)

Who the fuck cares about him? You can get out of here. Wash your hands. No one will ever know. Life goes on. Atticus...
(a long pause)
You're free.

Close on Atticus' eyes. *They don't look like the eyes of a free man.*

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Those same eyes staring at the diner crowd. Auburn gear everywhere... everyone drunk in the glory of a championship parade.

Atticus sits at his customary table drinking a glass of chocolate milk.

RACHEL UPCHURCH (O.S.)

Where the hell have you been?

UPCHURCH hurries into her seat. Atticus says nothing. Takes a long sip of his milk.

RACHEL UPCHURCH (CONT'D)

Atticus...

He *finally* looks up at her. And suddenly... she knows.

It's time.

CUT TO BLACK

Over "BACKSTREETS" by Bruce Springsteen. The piano guiding us...

ESPN ANALYST (V.O.)

A bombshell out of Auburn this morning as high-powered donor, Atticus Archer, has come clean, detailing years of illegal recruitment across the SEC.

NEWSPAPER FRONT PAGE: **The Bag Man** by Rachel Upchurch.
ACCOMPANIED BY A PICTURE OF ATTICUS.

ESPN ANALYST (V.O.)

The NCAA and Auburn have responded with a joint lawsuit claiming defamation. Archer plans to testify in court in what could be a landmark case in the debate around amateurism in athletics.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

Atticus is on the stand.

An expectant silence as he takes a deep breath. Looks around... begins...

ATTICUS ARCHER

I spent my life thinking I was fighting the man... helping the people who needed it most, but what I've come to realize over the last year, and what I hope to share with you, is that I was actually just one small cog in the NCAA's machine...

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FIELD - DAY

A public bus pulls to a stop. MS. FLUKER gets off. Makes her way to-- Chance's high school field. She climbs into the stands where she first met Atticus.

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)

That my actions were feeding into their system and hurting the very people I was trying to help.

She watches Chance coach. His leg still in a LARGE BRACE. He still smiles.

EXT. MULGA CITY COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Ricky's hair is long again. Flowing once again.

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)

The system corrupts, turning good
and well intentioned people into
something they're not...

He sits with BILL. They watch as FRANCIS practices.

INT. BENNY'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

Benny moving back in with his parents. He carries a box into his room. Sets it down. Looks up at--

An old Auburn poster on the wall.

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)

The only way I can truly help them
after all the wrong that's been
done, is to take myself down with
the ship.

EXT. CAROLINA COAST - HOUSE - EVENING

Diane sits outside her NEW HOME. A smaller cottage on the coast. She closes her eyes as the wind picks up.

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)

Even after all of this horror...
everything that happened over the
past year... the NCAA wants to
sweep it under the rug and let it
keep going...

INT. NCAA MEETING ROOM - DAY

SWANNER watches as a new group of employees give bull shit presentations in front of the room. SHE SMILES.

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)

Because if anything changes, they
lose hundreds of millions of
dollars.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

ATTICUS ARCHER
 I know that today I'm testifying
 things that the NCAA can't survive.

KENDRICK is in the audience. He's going to testify.

ATTICUS ARCHER (CONT'D)
 My Dad used to say if you love
 something, you have to let it go.
 He told me that when I couldn't
 play any longer. I never understood
 it. Always made sense to me that if
 you loved something, you gave your
life for it. But I get it now. I
 know what he meant.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
 Welcome back Tiger fans! This is
 Frankie and the Tank... live from
 Jordan-Hare stadium.

We're back at JORDAN-HARE STADIUM. Opening day. Same as all
 the others. Same as they always will be.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
 It's a beautiful day to start the
 2019 season. *We're so glad you're*
with us.

We drift away.... *Higher and higher* into the sky until all we
 can see is the facade of the stadium...

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)
 So before everything, before I tell
 you my story. Let me start with
 this statement. It's something I
 told thousands of young men and
 their families. It's something that
 was told to me a long, long, time
 ago. And... it's something I
 believed with all my heart.

Its long shadow covering the rest of the town...

SLAM TO BLACK

ATTICUS ARCHER (V.O.)
I believe in Auburn Tigers
Football.

END