

PLAYMAKER

by Andrei Ganenco

rocka.job.gan@gmail.com

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EXT. SMALL TOWN - DAY

It's the end of spring. The streets are bustling with people walking around. On the outskirts of the town, a small soccer stadium comes into view. A sign at the entrance advertises an upcoming soccer match.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

An unknown player sits on the bench, lacing up clean white boots.

After a few moments, the players make their way towards the exit, their spiked boots clattering loudly on the floor. Each player's boots and socks are muddy and worn out, except for the last player, whose boots and socks look brand new.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

The fans take their seats in the stands, eagerly anticipating the game.

On the field, the players from the men's soccer teams take their positions on their respective halves. One team wears white jerseys and black shorts, while the other team wears blue jerseys and shorts.

Complete silence. THE REFEREE stands in the center of the field, checking his stopwatch.

In the center circle stands CLYDE (18), a tall, strong guy wearing a white jersey with the number 10 on the back and a captain's armband on his shoulder.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

On the sideline, near the coaching bench, stands COACH COLLINS (50s) wearing a white club tracksuit.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The Referee faces the goal. Goalkeeper THOMAS (17) raises his hand, signaling readiness. The Referee looks at the opposing goalkeeper, who also raises his hand. Whistle.

Clyde passes the ball towards his own penalty area and immediately starts running towards the opponents' goal with his teammates. The fans applaud and cheer as the match begins.

Center-back SAM (18) receives the ball, looks up, and scans for a forward player.

Clyde stands near the opponents' penalty area, shoulder-to-shoulder with an opponent, raises his hand, and requests a pass.

A stylishly-haired guy, LEROY (17), wearing a white jersey with the number 7 on the back, dashes to the edge of the field, right on the sideline.

Sam makes a long lofted pass across the entire field. The ball rises smoothly into the air and falls softly...

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - LATER

The match is in full swing. The ball lands on the turf next to Clyde, who is battling against two opponents at once, and looks up.

Leroy skillfully evades his marker and sprints into an open zone, raising his hand.

LEROY

Clyde!

Clyde pushes off the opponent with a shove and passes the ball. Leroy receives it and, with a soccer trick, bypasses the first opponent.

The fans are ecstatic, applauding and cheering loudly in support. Some dedicated fans hold up banners with pictures of Leroy and Clyde.

In the last row, two men in business suits sit, attentively observing the match with notepads in their hands.

Leroy eludes the second opponent and swiftly maneuvers past the third. Clyde confidently runs into the penalty area, raising his hand.

CLYDE

Leroy! Over here!

Leroy, surrounded by several players, dribbles across the field with the ball and passes it to Clyde. Clyde shots at the goal, but an opponent blocks it. Clyde regains possession of the ball and passes it to Leroy.

Leroy has the ball once more, aggressively fending off an opponent, provoking him. The opponents express their frustration to the Referee, but he allows play to continue.

Leroy evades one opponent, executes a series of feints, and dodges the second player. The opposing DEFENDER #3 stops him with a rough tackle.

Leroy falls and rolls on the turf, screaming in pain. The fans rise from their seats, showing their discontent.

The Referee blows the whistle, halting the game. Leroy quickly gets up and angrily rushes to Defender #3. He shoves him in the chest.

LEROY

Are you crazy, you fucking dumb?!
You almost broke my leg!

Defender #3 pushes Leroy back in response. A scuffle ensues, and other players from both teams rush to join the fray. A brawl breaks out, and the Referee tries to separate the players.

Tension escalates. Clyde rushes over to Leroy and pulls him aside.

LEROY (CONT'D)

(to Defender #3)

You dirty bastard! I'll destroy
you!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins looks thoughtfully at the field. Not far from him stands the OPPOSING COACH, hands behind his back. He slowly turns to Collins, a sinister smile on his face.

OPPOSING COACH

It's his own fault...

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde holds onto Leroy and scans for Defender #3.

CLYDE

Who was that? Number 3?

LEROY

Yeah. Fucking scum.

Defender #3 looks at Leroy and smiles.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins calmly watches the field.

COACH COLLINS

What's his fault? Playing better
than your knuckleheads?

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Leroy calms down and breathes heavily. Clyde looks at his bleeding legs.

CLYDE

Are you okay?

LEROY

Yeah, I'm fine... Let's keep playing.

Leroy sets the ball and prepares for a free kick.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

OPPOSING COACH

If he keeps showing off like that, my guys will put him in his place.

Coach Collins turns to his opponent.

COACH COLLINS

We'll see about that.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde pats Leroy on the shoulder and looks at Defender #3.

CLYDE

Forget it! Leave him to me. I'll neatly break a couple of his ribs at the next corner kick. No one will even notice.

Leroy looks at Clyde and smiles.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

The Opposing coach smirks arrogantly and moves his gaze to the field. Coach Collins turns and looks at the bench of substitutes, then shifts his gaze back to the field.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The Referee takes Leroy, Clyde, and two opposing players aside and speaks to them. He shows Leroy and Defender #3 yellow cards in succession. The fans in the stands express their disapproval and whistle at the Referee.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

A red-haired guy, PAUL (17), loudly protests from the substitute bench.

PAUL

What?! Come on! Why Leroy?!

(turns)

Tony! Did you see that?!

On the edge of the bench sits a slender guy wearing clean white boots, TONY (17). He nervously taps his foot and looks at the field.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

On the scoreboard, the score is 0-0, with the match time is 51:44. Next to the scoreboard is a table with a gilded cup and medals.

Leroy stands by the ball. A crowd of players from the visitor team gathers in their penalty area, jostling each other, waiting for the ball. Whistle. Leroy exhales and kicks the ball.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - LATER

The intensity of the game continues to grow. The Opposing coach watches the field and shouts actively to his players.

OPPOSING COACH

Don't back down! Press them!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde engages in a physical battle with a defender. He loses, and both of them fall to the ground. The player in the blue uniform picks up the ball and runs toward Thomas.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

The Opposing coach nervously observes a dangerous moment.

OPPOSING COACH

Come on, come on! Shoot! Shoot!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Thomas cautiously steps out of the goal to meet the attacker, spreading his arms wide. The forward strikes the ball low and hard right in the corner. Thomas dives and stretches his legs wide. He deflects the shot, and the ball goes out of play.

It was very close to a goal.

The fans rise from their seats, exhaling in relief. They applaud the goalkeeper.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

The Opposing coach frustratedly grabs his head and walks towards the bench.

Coach Collins lets out a deep sigh and looks at the scoreboard. The score is 0-0, with the match time is 58:28.

Paul holds his head and breathes a sigh of relief. Tony claps his hands and watches the field.

PAUL

Phew! Thomas is the best!

Defender #3 approaches the Opposing coach. He holds his ribs and grimaces in pain. The Opposing coach takes notice and gestures with his hands.

OPPOSING COACH

What's wrong?

Defender #3 looks at the Coach with a pleading expression, indicating that he needs to be substituted.

OPPOSING COACH (CONT'D)

What?! No! Play until the end!

The Opposing coach turns around and looks at Coach Collins, who looks at the field with a sly smile. The Opposing coach eyes him suspiciously.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

A player in the blue uniform sets the ball at the corner flag. Next to the flag, the entrance to the stadium through the gate with a fence is visible. A lovely girl, ERICA (17), appears there; she hastily runs to the stands.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Tony looks at Erica and shakes his head slightly in frustration. Suddenly, the fans come alive and actively cheer on the team. The guys on the bench look at the field and jump up from their seats.

PAUL

Come on! Let's go! Leroy, you got this!

Tony looks at the field. His team launches a counterattack.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Leroy runs forward with the ball, evading opponents and heading into open space.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

COACH COLLINS
Come on, Leroy! Clyde! Clyde, get
into the box!

The Opposing coach shouts dissatisfiedly.

OPPOSING COACH
Don't let him through! Play hard!
Stop him!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Leroy dribbles past the players and attempts to pass to Clyde, but he's brought down with a hard tackle. His knee bends unnaturally.

He falls to the ground with a loud cry. The Referee blows his whistle. The fans clutch their heads in horror.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins raises his arms in exasperation.

COACH COLLINS
What the hell?! What is he doing?!

The Opposing coach looks at the field and breathes a sigh of relief.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Leroy lies on the ground, clutching his knee. The other players gather around him, pushing and shoving each other.

Clyde rushes over and grabs Defender #3 by the collar, attempting to bring him down. The Referee approaches Leroy and examines him.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins gestures to the medical staff on the bench, calling them over.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The Referee looks at Leroy and turns towards the bench, making a beckoning gesture.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

The medics rush onto the field with a stretcher. Coach Collins watches them go and clutches his neck. He turns around and looks at the bench.

All the substitute players watch the field, observing the situation.

Collins turns back, facing the field. Tony immediately averts his gaze and eagerly watches the Coach.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

The Referee shows a red card to Defender #3. The crowd erupts in joyful cheers. The medics desperate look to Collins, gesturing to indicate that Leroy won't be able to continue playing.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins sighs hopelessly.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Medics carry Leroy off the field on a stretcher. The crowd rises and applauds for Leroy.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - MOMENTS LATER

Tony looks at Leroy, who sits surrounded by medics beyond the field boundary. They examine his knee.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The Referee blows his whistle. Clyde takes the free kick. The game continues.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Leroy looks up, struggling to hold back tears. Coach Collins joins him, placing a hand on his shoulder.

PAUL

I hope it's not too serious.

TONY

Did you see how his knee bent?

A heavy pause.

PAUL

You think it's a cruciate ligament?

TONY

Very likely.

Coach Collins stands up and returns to his position. Leroy sits on the grass, crying.

TONY (CONT'D)

Poor Leroy.

PAUL

Yeah, It sucks...

(looks at the field)

Now we don't stand a chance. Clyde can't handle it alone.

Tony and Paul look at the field.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde stands in the center of the field, breathing heavily.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

TONY

Now we have one more player. And they'll probably substitute you in for Leroy, Paul.

PAUL

Me?! Are you serious? I can't play along with Clyde. If they put me in, it'll be instead of him. You're more likely to go on the field than me.

TONY

Are you kidding me? I haven't played a single minute this season.

Paul elbows Tony and smiles.

PAUL

Maybe Coach Collins was saving you just for this occasion, huh?

Tony rolls his eyes and smiles.

TONY

Yeah, very funny.

Coach Collins stands in contemplation, watching the game on the field. A player in blue uniform warms up next to him.

PAUL

Oh, come on. You and Clyde have been friends since childhood. You do all the exercises together.

TONY

With whom? Clyde? When was the last time you saw him in training?

PAUL

(thinking)

It was... in the previous... or maybe... Oh, forget it!

(smiles)

You're right.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde receives the ball and struggles against two opponents at once. They manage to take the ball away from him. Clyde looks at the Coach in frustration and spreads his arms.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Tony and Paul watch the field.

TONY

He doesn't need those training sessions anyway. He's the best in our team even without them.

PAUL

That's for sure. Training was invented for losers like you and me.

TONY

It's fucking true, bro!

Tony holds out his fist. Paul bumps it.

PAUL

And no matter how much you train, you'll never play as good as Leroy.

Tony looks at Leroy, who is receiving assistance.

TONY

Who knows. We have to believe in
the best-

COACH COLLINS

Tony!

Coach Collins stands near the bench.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

You're going in for Leroy in 2
minutes. Warm up!

Collins sits back in his seat, holding a notebook. Tony is
stunned.

PAUL

Oh, damn, man! I told you!

Tony smiles excitedly and adjusts his socks. He stands up
from the bench and puts on his pinnie.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Let's go, Tony! Show them!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Another confrontation takes place on the field. The Referee
whistles, players push and shove each other.

The match score is 0-0, with the game time is 62:56.

The Referee shows yellow cards to players and whistles. Sam
plays the ball with his teammates.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Tony does warm-up exercises along the sideline. He looks at
the stands and catches Erica's gaze.

She looks at Tony with enthusiasm and waves at him. Tony
awkwardly smiles and waves back.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.)

Tony!

Coach Collins stands near the reserve Referee. Tony rushes
over to him, takes off his pinnie, and tucks in his shirt
with the number 16 on the back. Tony's uniform hangs on him
as if it's two sizes too big.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Alright, Tony. There are 30 minutes
left, and we have the advantage.

(MORE)

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Let's put pressure on them, and they will crumble. Play simple, don't try to be fancy. If you receive the ball, pass it to a teammate.

Tony listens and nods.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Be active, distract the defenders. If you have the ball and no one to pass to, wait for your teammates or kick the ball out of line. The main thing - don't give the ball to the opponent. If they score, we'll have big problems. Do you understand?

TONY

Yes.

Collins pats Tony's shoulder encouragingly.

COACH COLLINS

Excellent! Go out there and do it!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde receives the ball and takes a shot at the goal from long distance. The ball flies high above the goal. The Referee signals for a goal kick and asks the goalkeeper to wait.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Both teams make substitutions. Coach Collins grabs Tony by the shoulder.

COACH COLLINS

And one more thing, Tony... Don't fall for their provocations.

Tony nods and looks at Leroy. Medics carry him on a stretcher towards the ambulance. Leroy looks down at his knee, depressed.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Tony rushes onto the field and takes his position as the left midfielder, right near the coach's sideline.

The fans applaud half-heartedly. Erica stands, watching Tony with hope, clenching her fists.

Tony immediately gets involved in the game. He and Clyde try to win the ball together. Out of desperation, the opponent kicks the ball out of bounds. Clyde runs past Tony.

CLYDE

Well, it's your finest hour, Tony.

TONY

More like finest 25 minutes.

Clyde looks at the scoreboard, the match score is 0-0, with the time is 65:04. Clyde runs past Tony.

CLYDE

That's fine, we've got this. We'll press them now. If you get the ball, pass it to me.

Tony nods approvingly and wrinkles his face at the smell.

TONY

Holy shit. What's that smell?

CLYDE

(burps)

Dark, unfiltered.

Clyde smiles and runs back to his position.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - LATER

Tony receives the ball, and opponents engage him in a physical battle. He struggles to make a pass and falls to the ground. Gets up, shakes himself off, and looks at Coach Collins.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins paces thoughtfully along the sideline. The match score is 0-0, with the time is 73:33.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Clyde passes the ball to Tony and runs into another area. He asks for a return pass, but Tony passes the ball into an open area for another player.

His teammate misunderstands the intention of the pass, and the ball goes to the goalkeeper. Clyde looks bewildered at him, then at Tony.

CLYDE

What are you doing? There's no one there.

Tony looks confused, points towards the opponents' goalkeeper with his hand.

TONY

The Zone 16 was open there. It was possible-

CLYDE

What the Zone 16?! Pull yourself together, Tony!

Clyde looks displeased, turns away, and runs back. Tony runs to his half of the field and looks at the Coach's reaction.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins watches the ball and shakes his head in dissatisfaction.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - LATER

The score is 0-0, the game time is 86:52.

Players jostle and engage in intense physical battles. There are many tackles and collisions.

Tony receives the ball and immediately passes it to a nearby teammate. An opponent crashes into his shoulder, almost knocking Tony off his feet.

The game is highly intense. A player in white intercepts the ball. Tony opens up and asks for a pass. He receives the ball, and a promising attack unfolds. The fans rise from their seats and start cheering more actively.

With the ball at his feet, Tony moves slowly towards the goal. He looks around and notices that the defenders have left their positions. Clyde runs towards the center-back and asks for the pass.

CLYDE

Tony! Give it to me!

Two opponents close in on Clyde. Tony sees this and gestures towards the penalty area. Clyde signals with both hands that he wants the pass to his feet.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

The Coach nervously watches the promising attack.

COACH COLLINS

Pass him, Tony! Quick!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The central defenders converge, creating more space behind them.

CLYDE
Tony, pass it!

A right defender from the opposing team approaches Tony's side at high speed. Tony persistently gestures towards the penalty area. He holds onto the ball longer.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
Come on!

Tony rolls the ball along the sideline, indicating to Clyde to move into the penalty area. Clyde spreads his arms, waiting for the pass.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
Come, on, Tony!

COACH COLLINS (O.S.)
(shouting)
Give him the ball!

CLYDE
(shouting)
Give me the ball!

Tony prepares to make the pass and swings.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.)
Back!

A defender crashes into Tony at full speed. The opponent is twice Tony's size and sends him flying three yards out of bounds.

Tony rolls on the ground and crashes into the water bottle crates placed outside the field.

Disappointed fans clutch their heads. Erica watches in horror.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins covers his face with both hands in despair.

COACH COLLINS
Damn it!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Tony lies outside the field. Clyde looks sadly at Tony, shakes his head, and runs back to defend.

Tony struggles to get back on his feet and assesses his injuries. His body is covered in scrapes, blood dripping from his arms and legs, and his shirt torn.

Tony looks at the field with an agonized face. The opponents launch a counterattack and approach the goal.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.)

Get back! Tighten up!

A forward in blue scores a goal.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins angrily kicks a water bottle.

COACH COLLINS

Fuck!

The fans are disappointed. Erica watches the field - she's broken. The match score is 0-1, with the time is 88:18.

Limping, Tony returns to the field. Coach Collins stops him.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

(angrily)

What are you doing?! I told you -
play simple!

Tony looks guiltily at the Coach.

TONY

There was the Zone. I was showing
the direction-

COACH COLLINS

What the hell Zone?! Just pass it
to Clyde!

The Coach looks at Tony with disdain. The players in white shirts return to their positions and look at Tony. Tony walks back to the field with a guilt.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Where are you going?! Look at
yourself! Go to the locker room!

TONY

But I can play-

COACH COLLINS
(shouts in a rage)
Go to the locker room, I said! This
game is over for you!

Coach Collins turns around and goes towards the bench.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
Paul, get ready! You're going in
for him!

Paul stands up from the bench and pulls up his socks. Tony looks at his teammates on the field.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde stands in the center of the field with the ball at his feet. He breathes heavily and tries to motivate the teammates.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Tony turns around, lowers his head, and leaves the stadium. Erica watches Tony's departure with a mournful gaze.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

A dejected Tony enters the locker room and walks past a mirror. He stops and stares at his reflection.

His uniform hangs loosely on his body, sleeves torn. Blood stains his elbows and knees. Tony turns away in frustration and continues on.

He opens his locker and takes out a towel. On the door hang photos of his soccer idols: Joshua Kimmich, Frenkie de Jong, Kevin De Bruyne.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - SHOWER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tony stands under the water, eyes closed, as it pours over his battered body. The water runs over fresh wounds, causing them to sting. Tony endures the pain as the water turns bloody.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tony closes his locker with the nameplate "16". He grabs his bag and zips it shut. Outside the window, the final whistle can be heard, followed by the jubilant cheers of the fans. Tony approaches the window and looks outside.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The match score is 2-1, with the time is 99:43. The home team has secured the victory.

Tony's teammates celebrate and embrace each other. Coach Collins rushes onto the field and joins in the celebration. The players gather around Clyde and Paul, waving their arms. A man with a trophy in hand approaches the team.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tony sits on the bench and takes out his notebook from his bag, flipping through its pages.

Diagrams of soccer fields, divided into numbered zones, are drawn on the pages. Positions of players are marked with crosses. Lines and arrows connect them.

Tony closes the notebook and puts it back in his bag. He closes his eyes and leans back against the wall behind him.

TONY'S FANTASY:

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Tony stands at the edge of the field with the ball at his feet. Two central defenders approach him. Clyde runs towards them and looks at Tony.

CLYDE

Tony! Pass it to me!

Tony looks towards an open area. Clyde nods and makes a sharp run towards that direction.

Tony delivers a skillful pass to Clyde. Clyde scores a goal and leisurely turns towards Tony. The fans applaud the team. Erica jumps with joy.

Tony stands at the sideline with his arms outstretched, looking towards Clyde and smiling.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins nods approvingly and watches his players.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde and Tony approach each other, synchronously jump and collide shoulders in the air.

BACK TO SCENE:

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Clyde plops down on the bench next to Tony, accidentally nudging him with his shoulder. Tony snaps out of his thoughts and looks around.

The locker room is filled with a festive atmosphere. Players are celebrating, singing, and dancing around the trophy. Paul stands nearby with an expensive sports bag.

CLYDE

Why the long face, Tony?! We won!
Are you unhappy?

Tony forces a smile onto his melancholic face.

TONY

I'm happy.

PAUL

Relax, Tony! We crushed them!

CLYDE

Yeah! Paul was the Man of the Match! He took two shots, and both hit the defender's hand! Can you imagine?

PAUL

Actually, I was aiming for that!

CLYDE

Two penalties in extra time, Tony!
Too bad you didn't see the look on those idiots' faces.

Clyde and Paul laugh, but Tony's smile fades. Clyde playfully punches Tony on the shoulder.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Don't be down... No one will even remember your mistake. Relax!

The voices of the guys in Tony's head gradually fade. He looks ahead, lost in his thoughts.

PAUL (O.S.)

But, to be honest, I didn't believe we would come back.

CLYDE (O.S.)

That's right. They immediately switched to defense after they scored. Every time I got the ball, three players rushed towards me.

PAUL (O.S.)

Yeah, I noticed. They were just chasing after you. So I started aiming for their hands.

CLYDE (O.S.)

(laughs)

Wow, Paul! You're a fucking strategist!

Pop! Tony snaps back to reality. Coach Collins stands in the center of the room with a bottle of champagne in hand. The players clap and whistle.

COACH COLLINS

Gentlemen! We did it!

The players cheer and celebrate. The Coach gestures for silence.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Guys, I want to thank each and every one of you... Thank you, guys! For your courage, for your dedication. For not sparing yourselves and giving your all in every match throughout the season.

The players listen attentively.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

We were once the ultimate underdogs in the league. But I always believed that through training, discipline, and unity, we could show everyone what we're capable of! And we did!

The players cheer. The Coach gestures for silence again and holds the trophy in his hands.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

This is undoubtedly a major victory for our humble team. And it came at a significant cost for each one of us...

Tony notices that one spot on the bench in front of him is empty. It's the spot under the locker with the nameplate "7" on its closed door.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Each and every one of us contributed to this long-awaited championship. Because we are one team!

The players cheer.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
 And it doesn't matter what role you
 played. Captain, striker,
 goalkeeper, substitute player,
 medic, or groundskeeper! We are all
 part of one team! One whole!
 Hurray!

The guys applaud. The Coach lowers the trophy and raises a
 bottle of champagne.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
 And tonight, we will celebrate this
 properly! All together! As one big
 team! As one big family!

The players cheer approvingly. Clyde turns on the music, and
 everyone starts dancing.

Tony stands up from the bench, grabs his bag, and quietly
 heads towards the exit of the locker room.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - ENTRANCE - DAY

Tony steps out of the building with a bag over his shoulder.
 Erica stands near the fence, looking at the field. Tony
 approaches from behind and silently takes her hand. Erica
 feels the touch and turns around.

ERICA
 Hey.

Erica kisses Tony on the cheek.

ERICA (CONT'D)
 Congratulations! You won!

TONY
 (looking away)
 Yeah, we won... Let's get out of
 here.

Tony leads Erica away by the hand.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Erica and Tony walk down the street, holding hands. Erica
 notices Tony's downcast state.

ERICA
 Are you going to celebrate with the
 team tonight?

TONY

I'm not in the mood.

Erica snuggles closer to Tony.

ERICA

Don't be so down. You still won. In the previous games, they didn't even let you play.

TONY

I'd rather not have played at all. I nearly let the team down.

ERICA

Don't say that... It's just the beginning. The next season will be better! You'll see!

TONY

Oh, you think so? I wonder what will happen this summer. Will I grow 10 inches taller? Gain 20 pounds of muscle? Look at me.

Tony stops and points to himself.

ERICA

Come on. There are short guys on your team too, besides you.

TONY

Yeah, but they have speed, dribbling, shooting. And me?

ERICA

And you will have them. Just don't skip training.

TONY

Oh, Jesus, Erica. Are you serious? I haven't missed a single training session. I'm the only one in the team like that. Some of our guys only show up for the games.

Tony takes Erica's hand and leads her further down the street.

TONY (CONT'D)

Clyde, for example, prefers going to clubs and bars. He even managed to drink some beer before this game. Probably started celebrating the victory in advance.

Erica chuckles lightly.

ERICA

He'll regret it in 10 years, I'm sure.

TONY

But I'm not. I bet in 10 years he'll be playing for a professional club. Such talent is hard to ignore.

Erica looks at Tony with sadness and snuggles closer to him.

ERICA

But you have the best knowledge of soccer!

TONY

What good does that do me?

ERICA

You'll become a great coach in the future.

TONY

Knowledge is not enough for that. All the famous coaches were professional players in the past. Their experience and reputation are much more important than any knowledge about soccer... And guys like me will only end up coaching local teams. Like Coach Collins.

ERICA

Don't be such a pessimist. You'll make it.

Erica kisses Tony on the cheek, accidentally brushing his elbow wound. Tony winces in pain.

TONY

Ouch!

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - DAY

TONY

Ouch!

Tony sits on his bed. TONY'S MOM (40s) is sitting next to him, treating a scrape on his elbow.

TONY'S MOM

Hang on, just a little more.

She blows on the wound. TONY'S DAD (40s) appears in the doorway, holding a phone in his hand.

TONY'S DAD
 Congratulations, champ!

TONY
 Thanks.

TONY'S DAD
 Is the season over?

Tony nods. His Dad inspects the wounds.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)
 Soon there won't be any place on
 you left untouched.

Tony tries to look around, but feels the pain.

TONY
 It'll heal. Ow!

TONY'S MOM
 Stay still!

His Mom carefully tends to the wound.

TONY'S DAD
 It's time for you to get your head
 in the game and start preparing for
 your exams.

TONY
 I'm preparing.

TONY'S DAD
 Yeah?

The Dad looks around. There are posters of soccer players on
 the walls.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)
 ...I see.
 (beat)
 Have you decided which college you
 want to go to?

TONY
 Not yet. But that's still a year
 away. I have time to choose.

TONY'S DAD
 No, Tony. You need to choose now
 and spend the next year preparing.
 Don't leave everything for the last
 moment, please.

TONY
 Okay, I understand.

His Dad shows Tony the screen of his phone.

TONY'S DAD
Have you heard about this college?

Tony looks at the screen.

TONY
Yeah. It's decent. But their team is weak.

TONY'S DAD
(confused)
What team? Hold on! You mean the soccer team?

Tony doesn't respond.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)
Tony, you're going there to study, not to play soccer! You can't combine the two.

TONY'S MOM
But he manages to do it in school.

TONY'S DAD
(to Mom)
This is not school, it's college. And he's already an adult. It's time to show responsibility and think about the future.

TONY
I'm thinking.

TONY'S DAD
(to Tony)
We sacrificed so much for you. Good schools, tutors. Do you really want all of that to go to waste?

Tony shakes his head. His Mom takes out a band-aid and looks at his Dad.

TONY'S MOM
Enough already.

Tony looks sadly at the floor.

TONY'S DAD
Understand, Tony, soccer won't give you anything in life. Sooner or later, you'll get injured and be left with nothing. And no one will need you.

TONY'S MOM
 (smiling)
 Just like your Daddy.

Tony tries not to smile.

TONY'S DAD
 (to Mom)
 What are you doing?

TONY'S MOM
 Relax. I was just joking.

TONY'S DAD
 You were just joking, but I'm just
 thinking about our son's future!

Tony's Dad exits the room in a rage.

TONY'S MOM
 Oh my God... What's gotten into
 you?

His Mom rolls her eyes and follows his Dad out. Tony looks at his posters.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - EVENING

Tony is sitting at his desk, reading a book on game theory. A video on soccer analysis plays in the background. There's a knock at the door. Tony pauses the video and his Mom enters the room.

TONY'S MOM
 Hey... How are you? What are you
 doing?

Tony silently points to the book.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)
 I talked to your father. It seems
 like he has calmed down a bit, and
 I bought you some time.

The Mom quietly approaches Tony and places some money on the table.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)
 Here's what I think... It would be
 better if you set aside your
 studies for now and go somewhere to
 have some fun. Spend the evening
 with Erica. Take a break. What do
 you think?

She puts her hand on Tony's shoulder, and he squeezes it.

TONY

Thanks, Mom.

Tony smiles gratefully. His Mom affectionately pats his head.

TONY'S MOM

Don't be down. Everything will be
alright.

His Mom leaves the room. Tony closes the book and opens a website on his computer with announcements of soccer matches. He takes out his notebook and flips it over, calculates in his mind something and makes a note.

Tony gets up and looks out the window at the street. He divides the money, putting some in his left pocket. He takes out his phone and makes a call.

TONY

(into the phone)

Hey, what are you doing?

ERICA (PHONE)

Hey, nothing much.

TONY

(into the phone)

Do you want to hang out somewhere
tonight?

ERICA (PHONE)

Yes! Great idea! How about "Goose
and Gun"?

TONY

(into the phone)

Um...

He counts the money in his hand.

TONY (CONT'D)

(into the phone)

...I'm not sure. Maybe we'll decide
when we meet?

ERICA (PHONE)

Sure, let's do that.

TONY

(into the phone)

I'll pick you up tonight.

ERICA (PHONE)

Okay.

Tony puts his phone in his pocket and grabs his notebook.

EXT. BETTING SHOP - EVENING

Two security guards, GARY (30s) and RONNIE (20s), stand by the entrance. Tony stands near a fence about 50 yards away, observing them.

A truck pulls up to the building. The guards move away to chat with the driver. Tony quickly and discreetly heads towards the entrance.

INT. BETTING SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Tony descends the stairs towards the counter. There are a few people in the room, some sitting at the computers, others watching the monitors on the walls.

Tony stands at the counter and takes out the money from his left pocket. He hands it to the cashier and receives a magnetic card in return.

He quickly walks over to an available computer in the corner of the room, sits down, and takes out his notebook.

INT. BETTING SHOP - LATER

A crowd of players gathers around the wall-mounted monitors. They nervously watch a soccer match.

Tony looks at the screen of his computer and frustratingly holds his head. The screen displays a list of 5 played matches, with their scores highlighted in different colors. One is marked in red, while the others are green.

Tony opens his notebook and flips through its pages. He looks at his calculations, opens the list of current matches, and refreshes it.

He takes out the money from his right pocket and counts it. Then he grabs his card and rushes to the counter.

INT. BETTING SHOP - LATER

A group of men stands by a monitor. They watch the match and express their dissatisfaction with each other.

PLAYERS IN THE ROOM

This match is rigged, I'm telling
you. Fucking bastards.

On the screen, a soccer match is in progress. It's the 94th minute, and the score is 0-0.

Tony sits at the computer, vigorously tapping his foot. The monitor shows a 9-match accumulator bet.

6 out of 9 matches are highlighted in green, while 3 are not lighted.

PLAYERS IN THE ROOM (CONT'D)
 Not a single chance. I can't believe it, they're throwing the game again. What a bunch of idiots!

Tony looks over his shoulder at the monitors on the wall and nervously taps his foot.

He turns back and refreshes the page. Now 8 out of 9 matches are highlighted in green. Whistle!

PLAYERS IN THE ROOM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 (screams)
 Yes! Great!

Tony turns towards the screen. The referee points to the penalty spot. Tony stops tapping his foot and freezes.

PLAYERS IN THE ROOM (CONT'D)
 Come on, score! Please! Do it!

A player approaches the ball, preparing to take the shot. He takes a long run-up.

Tony watches the screen, breathing heavily. The player strikes the ball. It flies over the goal.

PLAYERS IN THE ROOM (CONT'D)
 Oh, come on! You bitch!

The referee blows the whistle, signaling the end of the match.

PLAYERS IN THE ROOM (CONT'D)
 What the hell?! Fucking bookies!

Tony breathes heavily and with relief turns towards the monitor, refreshing the page. Now all 9 matches are highlighted in green.

After a few moments, Tony approaches the counter and hands over his card. He looks around, noticing a surveillance camera above him. He takes the money and quickly leaves.

INT. "GOOSE & GUN" RESTAURANT - EVENING

Tony and Erica sit at a table, cuddled up together on a leather sofa. Erica is enjoying her dessert.

TONY
 Is it delicious?

ERICA

Very!

TONY

Would you like something else?

ERICA

Oh no, I've had enough... It seems like you were the one planning to gain 20 pounds over the summer. Wasn't that the plan?

TONY

(smiles)

Yep. But 20 pounds of muscles, not fat.

ERICA

But you didn't even order anything for yourself.

TONY

I ate at home.

Erica takes a spoonful of her dessert and offers it to Tony.

ERICA

Maybe just a few more calories?

TONY

No need. You know I'm on a diet.

ERICA

Oh, come on. One spoon won't hurt.

Tony turns his face away from the spoon and smiles. Erica continues to offer him the spoon with the dessert, smiling.

TONY

Okay, fine.

Tony eats the bite.

ERICA

So, how is it?

TONY

Damn! It's really delicious.

ERICA

See! And nothing bad happened.

Tony's phone vibrates in his pocket. He takes it out and reads a message from Clyde. They exchange texts.

CLYDE: Where are you, killer?

TONY: I'm not coming

CLYDE: Alright

CLYDE: Then I'll drink your dose =)

TONY: Cheers

CLYDE: See you at training. Hope you missed me ;)

TONY: Omg! The Legend is back!

CLYDE: Fuck yeah

Tony smiles and puts his phone back in his pocket. Erica hugs him and looks at a group of people near the bar counter.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Are you sure you don't want to celebrate the victory with the team?

TONY

Maybe next time.

Erica affectionately kisses Tony's hand.

ERICA

Oh, I almost forgot!

She takes her bag and holds it close to her.

ERICA (CONT'D)

I have a gift for you.

Erica takes out a small red heart-shaped pillow from her bag, looks at Tony, and smiles sweetly.

ERICA (CONT'D)

This is for you!

She extends the pillow to Tony. Tony modestly smiles and accepts the gift.

ERICA (CONT'D)

I hope it will come in handy for you in the future when you want to relax after another victory.

TONY

Thank you, sweetie.

Tony puts the pillow under his neck and closes his eyes.

TONY (CONT'D)

Now I have somewhere to cry after defeats.

Tony smiles with his eyes closed. Erica smiles and looks at him with the thought: You're incorrigible.

EXT. PARK - EVENING

Erica and Tony stroll leisurely through the park, holding hands.

ERICA

I'll be flying to my grandpa's next weekend. Shall we meet on Tuesday after I come back? Spend some time together?

TONY

Yes, of course.

Erica snuggles up to Tony, and they turn onto another path.

EXT. PARK - MOMENTS LATER

Near one of the benches, three young, muscular guys in sports suits stand. There's tall KEVIN (21) and two smaller ones, JOSHUA (20) and FRENKIE (20). They play around, mimicking boxing moves.

Tony and Erica walk past them, ignoring their presence. Frenkie notices them and looks at Kevin.

FRENKIE

Hey, Kev.

Kevin runs up to Tony and Erica from behind, elegantly circumventing them. He turns around and stops right in their path.

Tony tries to go around, but Kevin blocks their way, tauntingly refusing to let them pass and smirking at Tony.

Frenkie and Joshua slowly approach from behind, laughing. Tony looks at Kevin and confidently asks.

TONY

Can we pass?

KEVIN

Where?

Frenkie and Joshua stand behind and chuckle softly. Erica looks around nervously and clings to Tony.

FRENKIE

(whispering)

Hey, babe.

Tony doesn't take away his gaze from Kevin.

TONY
We're going home.

KEVIN
Home?
(checks his watch)
It's still early.

Joshua and Frenkie laugh.

TONY
Not for us.

KEVIN
Not for you, I think... But your
little girl.
(looks over Erica)
Let her stay.

JOSHUA (O.S.)
(laughs)
Yeah. Let her have some fun with
real men.

Erica holds Tony's hand. Tony looks at Kevin and boldly asks, raising his voice.

TONY
Who told you that you're real men?

FRENKIE
What?

JOSHUA
What did you say, puppy?!

Kevin looks at Tony and smirks slightly. Joshua and Frenkie approach Tony, but Kevin stops them with a gesture.

KEVIN
(to Tony)
That was very rude. Aren't you
afraid to pay for your words?

Tony pauses for a moment.

TONY
I think you're the one who's
afraid.

Kevin laughs in Tony's face. Joshua and Frenkie smirk behind his back.

KEVIN
And who am I afraid of? You?

Kevin aggressively points his finger at Erica.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
Or your bitch?!

Tony clenches Erica's hand in anger and continues to confidently look Kevin in the eyes. Frenkie and Joshua sneer derogatory remarks towards Tony from behind.

JOSHUA (O.S.)
(to Frenkie)
Oh, man... He called her a bitch.
Did you hear that?

Tony restrains himself and maintains eye contact with Kevin.

TONY
Everyone who surrounds you... Any
normal person poses a threat to
you.

Kevin looks at Tony and smiles.

TONY (CONT'D)
That's why you're so aggressive.
It's the only way you feel safe.

A tense pause.

FRENKIE (O.S.)
What the fuck is he talking about
it?

JOSHUA (O.S.)
Come on, Kev... hit him.

Kevin looks at Tony as if he's his prey.

JOSHUA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
What are you waiting for? Come on-

KEVIN
(points to Joshua)
Shut your fucking mouth, man!

Tony continues to stare into Kevin's eyes. Erica stands closely to Tony and starts crying softly.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
(to Tony)
Well, it seems you're quite
brave... Let's see what you're made
of.

Kevin steps aside and gestures toward the road.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Go ahead. Come on.

Tony cautiously starts to move forward. Kevin provocatively stops him with the hand. Erica gets scared. Tony freezes and looks at Kevin. Kevin slowly leans towards Tony's ear.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Just be very careful as you walk
"normal person"...

(whispers)

Remember, the threat is very
close... right behind you... And
the worst can happen at any moment.

TONY

Thank you. I'll keep that in mind.

Kevin removes his hand and steps back. Tony and Erica continue walking down the road into the darkness at a normal pace. Tony confidently leads Erica by the hand. They move a few yards away.

FRENKIE

What the hell are we standing here
for? Hurry up before someone shows
up!

KEVIN

(looks at Tony's back)

Just wait a bit.

Tony and Erica walk along the road. Erica keeps looking back.

ERICA

(whispering)

Come on! Let's run away from here.

TONY

(whispering)

No! Just walk calmly.

Kevin watches them as they go.

JOSHUA

Fuck! They'll leave-

KEVIN

Shut up and wait!

Erica turns around and looks at the guys. Frenkie takes a threatening step forward to scare Erica.

ERICA

(scared)

Oh my God, Tony! It seems they-

Tony forcefully pulls Erica towards him.

TONY
Calm down! Just walk quietly beside me.

Kevin looks after them. Tony and Erica reach the corner and hide behind it. Joshua and Frenkie stand there in confusion, looking at Kevin.

JOSHUA
What the hell?! They're gone!

KEVIN
(surprised)
Hm...

Kevin smiles thoughtfully and takes out a pack of cigarettes.

JOSHUA
Damn it, Kev! What's wrong with you?
(beat)
I really liked that babe!

A brief pause. Kevin lights his cigarette.

KEVIN
Do I care?

JOSHUA
You could've had some fun with her too!

KEVIN
I already have someone to have fun with tonight.

JOSHUA
Yeah? And who?

Kevin takes a deep drag and exhales.

KEVIN
Your mom.

Joshua flips Kevin off.

JOSHUA
Oh, fuck you, asshole!

KEVIN
Didn't she tell you? You're crashing at Frenkie's room tonight.

FRENKIE
Huh, no way! Let him stay outside.

EXT. BUS STOP - MOMENTS LATER

Several people are waiting at the bus stop. Tony and Erica rush to the stop and try to catch their breath. People look at them in confusion.

TONY

Are you okay? Everything fine?

ERICA

Yeah. Just... I-

Erica covers her mouth.

TONY

What's wrong? Are you feeling sick?

ERICA

No... The dessert...

Tony smiles and calmly looks around. Erica is still struggling to catch her breath.

TONY

Yeah! That was quite intense!

ERICA

Really? You were tense?! You don't even look like it! How do you do it?

TONY

Self-control and discipline.

A bus pulls up to the stop.

ERICA

How did you know they wouldn't chase after us?

TONY

Are you kidding? I didn't know that.

Erica looks at Tony in astonishment.

TONY (CONT'D)

Anyway, I'll take you home.

They walk toward the bus. The double doors swing open. Tony and Erica step inside and stand near the door, facing the bus stop.

ERICA

I knew you wanted to hit him. I felt it.

TONY

I really did. But it would've only made things worse.

ERICA

Unbelievable. How do you contain all this hate within you? It needs to be released somewhere.

TONY

(smiles)

I have such a place.

The bus double doors abruptly close.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

The players' shoulders collide and press against each other. Tony and Clyde run along the cones set up in a line. They engage in a physical battle, pushing each other with their bodies.

Tony tries to push Clyde, who smiles and noticeably gives in. On the last cone, Clyde unleashes his full strength and pushes Tony aside. Tony falls to the ground.

COACH COLLINS

Easy, Clyde!

Tony lies on the ground. Clyde approaches him and tends a hand, helping Tony to his feet with a smile.

CLYDE

Hey, kid! Are you okay?

Tony examines himself. His elbows are bleeding again.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Looks like you're bleeding there.

TONY

Don't worry, that happened earlier.

Clyde looks at Tony's wounds, shaking his head in bewilderment.

CLYDE

Damn! I wish I had your perseverance.

Tony examines Clyde's muscles.

TONY

And I wish I had everything else.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Tony competes in a speed challenge with a teammate. They run from one cone to another. Tony finishes second.

Then, the guys play a small-sided game. Tony chases after the ball, but struggles to intercept it, always not reaching it.

The guys practice the dribbling skills. Players maneuver around the cones and take shots at goal. Tony noticeably is behind the others while completing the drill. He goes around the last cone weakly and takes a feeble shot at the goal. Thomas easily catches the ball.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Tony and Clyde perform a ball exercise. Tony throws the ball at knee level. Clyde backs up and deflects the pass back into Tony's hands.

CLYDE

Heard about Leroy?

TONY

Yeah. Cruciate ligaments.

CLYDE

It's a shame, really. Looks like his career's over.

TONY

Maybe he'll recover by the end of the season?

CLYDE

Don't talk bullshit, Tony. Such an injury is serious. Especially at his age.

Clyde and Tony switch roles.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

After something like that, even professional players never return to their peak form. What about us?

A heavy pause.

TONY

Don't you want to go see him after training?

Clyde catches the ball in his hands and looks toward the stands.

CLYDE

I don't think it's necessary.

Tony turns around and looks at the stands. Leroy, on crutches, hobbles toward the bench. Coach Collins blows the whistle and stops the training session.

COACH COLLINS

Break!

The team, along with the Coach, heads toward Leroy.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Leroy stands by the bench, smiling sadly.

LEROY

How are you guys doing?

Clyde approaches Leroy and hugs him.

CLYDE

Hey, buddy! How are you holding up?

Leroy tries to maintain an optimistic attitude, but the pain is evident in his eyes.

LEROY

Getting better... I'm on my way to the hospital. Just thought I'd stop by to see you guys.

CLYDE

That asshole, number three!
Should've broken his legs, not his ribs!

COACH COLLINS

Goddamn it, Clyde!
(looks at Leroy's cast)
Watch your words!

The Coach looks apologetically at Leroy.

LEROY

That's okay. The important thing is that we won.
(smiling)
Heard that Paul became the Man of the Match.

The guys cheer and look at Paul.

PAUL

Yeah. I'm the main star now.

The guys laugh. Tony gives a faint smile and looks at Leroy.

PAUL (CONT'D)

But don't worry, Leroy. I'll give you that title back as soon as you return to us.

LEROY

Seems like that won't be anytime soon... Yeah...

An uneasy pause. Coach Collins looks at Leroy, turns to the players, and gestures toward the field.

COACH COLLINS

Alright. Let's get back to the drills. Clyde!

The guys return to the field. Clyde turns to face the Coach.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Split into two teams. Play a match of ball control.

The Coach points to the bench.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

(to Leroy)
Let's sit down.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Clyde hands out pinnies to his teammates. He takes the green one for himself, while Tony is thrown the orange one. Clyde smiles at Tony and points at him.

CLYDE

Get ready, honey!

Tony smiles back and returns the gesture.

TONY

Get ready to die, darling!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

The Coach and Leroy sit on the bench, watching the guys.

COACH COLLINS

What are the doctors saying?

LEROY

They said it's better to forget about soccer forever if I want to walk without a crutch.

COACH COLLINS
(sighs heavily)
My goodness...

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde kicks the ball up into the air.

CLYDE
Here we go!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins tries to comfort Leroy.

COACH COLLINS
Maybe they're wrong. Maybe you can
recover... I've seen people come
back to the field after fractures.
You'll definitely bounce back! A
talent like yours shouldn't go to
waste!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde receives the ball and passes it. Tony charges at him
with a smile, attempting to push him aside. But Clyde stands
his ground and lightly shoves Tony to the side, laughing.

CLYDE
Where are you rushing, psycho?
Wanna lose your teeth again?

Tony backs off from Clyde and smiles at him.

TONY
What are you talking about?

CLYDE
(smiles)
Oh, don't pretend.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Leroy watches the field, a somber expression on his face.

LEROY
It's not just about the knee. I've
never had such serious injury... It
seems like I've never been in this
much pain before.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde asks for a pass. Sam spots him and sends a long pass his way.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

LEROY

I don't know how I'll be able to keep playing... I mean-

Leroy struggles to hold back tears. Coach Collins puts his hand on Leroy's shoulder.

LEROY (CONT'D)

I'm used to leading the game... I love dribbling past defenders, making risk. But now? Now I'm afraid to even step on my foot... What if this fear stays with me forever?

Leroy looks at the Coach. Collins takes his gaze away.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde looks for someone to pass to, but all the ways are blocked. An opponent attacks him from the left side, and Clyde shields the ball with his body, pushing with his shoulder. Tony sees Clyde from the other end of the field and runs towards him.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Coach Collins lets out a heavy sigh.

COACH COLLINS

Don't worry. This is temporary.

The Coach struggles to look at Leroy.

LEROY

I hope so.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde shoulders his opponent, who is on his left side. Tony sprints at full speed towards Clyde from the right side.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Leroy seems very depressed.

COACH COLLINS

It'll be alright, Leroy. The main thing is to keep your spirits up... In any case, it could have been worse.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Clyde instinctively senses the approaching player from the right side. He pushes the opponent on the left and swiftly moves his body to the right.

Tony collides into Clyde's shoulder at full speed. Simultaneously, Clyde's shoulder strikes Tony directly in the head. Tony is sent flying to the side, crashing onto the turf, losing consciousness...

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - LATER

Tony opens his eyes and sees a man's face in front of him. THE MEDIC shines a flashlight into his eyes.

Tony lies on the turf and grimaces at the smell of the ammonia held near his nose. Coach Collins is seen gesturing animatedly while talking to Clyde nearby.

MEDIC

Are you with us? Take it easy and don't shake your head.

Tony raises himself slightly. Collins and Clyde rush over to him. Leroy stands nearby.

COACH COLLINS

Tony, how are you feeling?

CLYDE

Buddy, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to-

COACH COLLINS

(to Clyde)

Get away from here!

Clyde steps aside and looks at Tony.

MEDIC

(to Collins)

We need to take him to the hospital. Additional tests are necessary.

COACH COLLINS

Yes, of course... Right away. I'll just let the guys go home.

Collins turns to the players.

LEROY
 (to Collins)
 Maybe I can go with Tony? I'll look
 after him until you arrive.

COACH COLLINS
 (to the Medic)
 Is that possible?

MEDIC
 Yes, I think so.

The Medic helps Tony get on his feet. Tony wobbles slightly.

MEDIC (CONT'D)
 Take it easy, be careful. Do you
 feel dizzy?

TONY
 A little.

Tony cautiously stands up and looks up at the sky.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING

Tony lies on a hospital bed, staring at the ceiling. The
 DOCTOR stands in the room, examining a brain scan.

DOCTOR
 You got lucky. It's a mild
 concussion. How are you feeling?

TONY
 Fine.

DOCTOR
 Any weakness?

TONY
 None.

DOCTOR
 Good. You'll need to refrain from
 physical activity for two weeks.
 Clear?

TONY
 Yes, no problem.

DOCTOR
 No training whatsoever. We'll wait
 for your coach, and then you can go
 home. Rest for now.

The doctor exits the room. Tony walks over to the window and looks out. The door opens, and Leroy enters the room.

LEROY

How are you? Still alive?

TONY

I'm alright. My head hurts a bit, but nothing serious. I can get back to training tomorrow. And how about you?

LEROY

I'm okay. I have an examination coming up soon.

Leroy sits on a chair and sighs with relief.

LEROY (CONT'D)

Damn crutches... My hands hurt from using them.

Tony sits on the bed and looks sadly at Leroy's leg.

TONY

What are you going to do?

LEROY

I guess I'll have to buy a wheelchair.

Tony points to Leroy's cast.

TONY

I mean about your knee.

LEROY

Oh. I don't know... I'll focus on treatment and recovery. We'll see how it goes.

TONY

Just don't lose hope!

LEROY

I'm trying.

(beat)

You know, I've only just realized that I've been living only for soccer all this time.

A brief pause.

LEROY (CONT'D)

And now I'm completely lost...
Maybe I need a break, take some
time off. And then start fresh.
Maybe pursue something else.

TONY

What else do you like besides
soccer?

Leroy ponders for a moment.

LEROY

Oh, I don't even know...
(thinking)
Um... Basketball.

TONY

Oh, really? Wow. That's... That's
great.

Tony looks at Leroy and struggles to hold back a smile. Leroy
looks back at Tony and does the same. They both start
laughing.

LEROY

But it's a dangerous sport, you
know.

TONY

Well, be careful then. Don't injure
your knee.

LEROY

Oh! Thanks for the advice, Mr.
Hospital Bed.

Leroy and Tony laugh and gradually fall silent. They avert
their gazes, looking down at the floor with sadness in their
eyes.

The door opens, and the Coach in a lab coat stands in the
doorway.

COACH COLLINS

Tony, Leroy? I came as soon as I
could.

(to Tony)

How are you feeling?

TONY

I'm fine, Coach. Nothing serious.

Leroy gets up from the chair, grabs his crutches.

LEROY

Well, it's time for my examination.
Get well soon, Tony.

TONY

You too! Everything will be fine,
you'll see!

Leroy exits the room.

COACH COLLINS

Thank you, Leroy.

The Coach approaches the bed and sits on a stool. He looks
anxious.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

(to Tony)

What did the doctor say?

TONY

Everything is fine. I'm completely
okay.

COACH COLLINS

Completely okay? You lost
consciousness!

TONY

Maybe I just fell awkwardly?

COACH COLLINS

(nervous)

I always knew that sooner or later
this would happen to you...

TONY

It could happen to anyone. I just
need to train more and get in
better physical shape-

COACH COLLINS

Tony... You've been training since
childhood. It's a miracle it
happened just now!

TONY

I'll play more cautiously.

COACH COLLINS

How do you expect to do that? It's
impossible. Soccer is a contact
sport. Injuries, bruises, damage -
it's all part of every athlete's
life. You can't avoid it-

TONY

-I understand-

COACH COLLINS

-And you're not as physically strong... You're putting yourself at even higher risk.

TONY

I'll improve my physical condition, I promise.

The Coach looks at Tony and sadly shakes his head.

COACH COLLINS

I'm sorry, Tony. But I can't take that risk... Maybe you should find something more suitable for yourself?

TONY

What do you mean?

COACH COLLINS

Try to understand me. I don't want to be responsible for your ruined future...

(looks away sadly)

I already have enough on my plate.

Tony looks at the Coach, feeling nervous.

TONY

No, wait. You can't-

COACH COLLINS

Yes, I can't stop you from playing soccer. It's your choice and your life. But I just don't want... I'm sorry, Tony. It's for your own good.

Tony sits in bewilderment. The Coach stands up and slowly exits the room. Tony watches the Coach leave with a dejected look, clenches his fists angrily, his breathing quickening. He gazes out of the window. A streetlamp lights up outside.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT

The floodlights illuminate the soccer field. A light rain is falling, and lightnings flash in the distance. Tony kicks the ball into the net after a powerful shot.

A sports bag lies near the goal. The phone inside the bag rings, but Tony ignores it and continues shooting at the goal.

Tony sets up the ball, runs towards it, and strikes. The sound of thunder. The ball hits the net, hitting the crossbar. Raindrops scatter from the impact on the crossbar. The phone in the bag rings again.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Exhausted, Tony enters the apartment and turns on the lights. Barely able to stand on his feet, he quietly places the bag on the floor. His angry Dad enters the entryway.

TONY'S DAD

Why don't you pick up the phone?!
It's already 1:00 AM! Where are you
wandering around?!

TONY

I was training.

TONY'S DAD

What?! What the hell training?! You
need to think about your studies,
Tony! What's wrong with you?!

Tony pays no attention to his Dad, takes off his shoes, and silently walks into another room.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)

Tony! I'm talking to you! Where are
you going?!

Tony quickens his pace, enters the bathroom, and locks the door. His Dad follows him, stops at the door, and knocks angrily.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)

Open the door, Tony! Open it
immediately!

Tony's Mom comes from another room.

TONY'S MOM

That's enough. It's late.

TONY'S DAD

Look at what he's doing!

TONY'S MOM

I'll talk to him in the morning. Go
to bed.

His Dad obediently goes back to his room.

TONY'S DAD

Damn it! He's completely slackened
off!

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tony sits on the floor, his eyes fixed on the wet spot. He takes off his socks and gazes at his feet. His soles are bruised and calloused. He lets out a heavy sigh and closes his eyes.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - ENTRANCE - DAY

Tony walks down the street towards the entrance, carrying his bag on his shoulder, completely focused and lost in his thoughts.

Erica sits on a bench near the entrance, wearing an angry expression on her face. Tony doesn't notice her and walks past. Erica sees him ignoring her, and confidently follows him.

ERICA

Tony, wait! What happened?! You're not answering my calls and texts!

TONY

Sorry, I was training.

ERICA

But we had plans to meet yesterday! Did you forget?

TONY

I was busy, sorry.

Tony walks briskly towards the building, and Erica struggles to keep up.

ERICA

Um, okay. When will you be free?

TONY

I don't know.

ERICA

What's wrong with you?

TONY

I need to train. The season is starting soon.

ERICA

You can't train your whole life. When will you take a break?

TONY

I don't have time for that.

Tony furrows his brows in dissatisfaction and continues walking.

ERICA
No time? Not even for me?

Tony doesn't respond. Erica follows him.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Maybe you're upset about something?

TONY
No.

ERICA
Or are you still bothered by the game?

TONY
It's not about that.

ERICA
Then tell me what's wrong. What can I do for you?

Erica grabs his hand.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Tony.

Tony abruptly stops and turns around, responding angrily.

TONY
Can you- ?

Erica scares and takes a few steps back. Tony looks around and replies with restraint.

TONY (CONT'D)
Can you just not get in my way?

A quiet pause.

ERICA
So, all this time, I've just been in your way?

TONY
No. I didn't... That's not what I meant.

ERICA
I don't understand you. I've always tried to support you. I attend all your games!

TONY

Did you ever arrive on time?

ERICA

What difference does it make?
You're never even allowed to play.

Tony raises his eyebrows in surprise, turns around, and continues walking. Erica angrily shouts after him.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Tony!

Tony keeps walking.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Tony, wait! Look at me!

Tony slowly stops and reluctantly turns around.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Why are you treating me like this?

TONY

It's not about you... I just need
to train more.

ERICA

But you already train more than
anyone else!

TONY

I need to train even more!

A brief pause.

ERICA

But what about me?

TONY

Listen... I think it's better if I
continue on my own.

Tears well up in Erica's eyes. She turns away and walks back towards the exit. Tony lets out a deep sigh and watches Erica go. He turns around and enters the building.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Tony stretches his knee and looks at his teammates. Clyde stands next to Paul, flexing his muscles and showing off. The guys are in a good mood. Paul shows his skinny arms and laughs. Clyde laughs and shows his arm to Paul.

CLYDE

Look at this. Have you ever seen anything like it?

PAUL

Stop shaking your fat. It's making me sick!

CLYDE

You could have biceps like that, too. You need to work out in a gym.

PAUL

No, thanks. I already work out at the warehouse every weekends.

A whistle blows, and the Coach approaches the players.

COACH COLLINS

Is everyone here? Warmed up?

Collins inspects the team, pausing his gaze on Tony. Tony confidently looks the Coach in the eyes. Collins raises his eyebrows helplessly and looks away.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Alright, let's get started. We'll begin with some running. Split into two teams, play keep-away.

The Coach throws a bag with pinnies in front of him. The players approach the bag and grab their pinnies.

Clyde and Paul wear orange ones. Tony puts on a green one and pats Clyde on the shoulder, smiling at him.

TONY

Get ready, darling!

Clyde awkwardly smiles in response.

CLYDE

Yeah, I am.

Tony jogs off to the side. The smile quickly fades from Clyde's face as he turns towards the Coach. Collins looks at Clyde with a stern expression, crossing his arms.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - LATER

Whistle. Green versus Orange in a confined space.

COACH COLLINS

Let's go! 1!

Green possesses the ball, passing it amongst themselves. The ball moves quickly across the field.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...2... 3...

Orange aggressively attacks, trying to intercept it.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...4-

Orange intercepts the ball and starts passing among themselves. Now Green tries to retrieve it.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1... 2... 3-

A green player intercepts the ball and passes it.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1...

Green moves well and passes to each other. Orange unsuccessfully tries to take the ball. Coach Collins observes the exercise with a whistle and stopwatch in hand.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...2... 3... 4... 5!

The Coach blows the whistle. The game comes to a halt.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
1-0!

Clyde unhappily grabs the ball.

CLYDE
(to his teammates)
Get closer to each other!

Whistle.

COACH COLLINS
Let's go! 1!

Clyde passes, playing a one-two with his teammates.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...2... 3... 4-

A green player intercepts the ball and passes it to Tony. Tony quickly passes it to another teammate.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1... 2-

Clyde aggressively challenges the green player and takes the ball away.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1... 2-

An orange player intercepts the ball and passes it to a nearby teammate.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1...

The ball reaches Tony, and he looks around. Paul approaches him.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...2... 3...

Tony has no one to pass to. Paul tries to take the ball. Tony prepares for a tough challenge. But Paul delicately attempts to take the ball with his foot.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...4... 5!

Whistle. Paul calmly backs away from Tony. Tony looks at him in confusion.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
2-0! Keep playing... 1!

Tony passes to a nearby teammate. Two opponents aggressively rush towards the player with the ball, crashing into him, but he manages to make the pass.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...2... 3... 4-

Clyde jostles with an opponent, using his shoulder and hands, almost wrestles the ball away from him. He passes it to his teammate.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1... 2... 3-

Tony gets frustrated and more involved in the challenge. He intercepts a pass in the center. Stands with the ball at his feet.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1... 2...

The green players close off passing lanes. Clyde stands in front of Tony, carefully approaching him, focusing on the ball.

Tony stands still, making a few simple feints. Clyde cautiously reacts to them instead of attacking Tony. It's unlike him.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...3... 4... 5!

Whistle.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
3-0!

Tony looks at Clyde in confusion. Clyde ignores him, looks at the ball, and backs away.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
Let's go! 1!

Tony passes the ball and moves lazily on the field. He watches the other players and how they play among themselves.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...2... 3-

Green intercepts the ball.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1... 2-

Orange intercepts the ball.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1-

Green reclaims the ball.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
1... 2-

Two players collide, and the ball deflects towards Tony. Tony and Paul run towards the ball on the same line. Tony makes a move towards Paul, trying to push him away by shoulder. But Paul shows no resistance, and Tony slips, falling onto the turf. Whistle.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
Stop!

Tony lies on the ground as Paul and the Coach approach him.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
Tony, are you okay?

Tony tries to get up from the ground.

TONY
 (in a rage)
 Hey! What the fuck?!

The Coach looks at Paul.

COACH COLLINS
 Paul, what the hell are you doing?

PAUL
 I didn't mean to. Sorry, Tony.

Paul reaches out his hand to help Tony up, but Tony ignores his assistance and gets up with an expression of displeasure on his face.

TONY
 (looking around)
 What's going on?!

PAUL
 Tony, I'm sorry. It's my fault.

TONY
 Your fault?! You didn't do anything! I fell on my own.

Tony looks bewildered at his teammates.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Why are you playing with me like I'm a kid?!

The guys look at Tony in silence.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Clyde! What's wrong with you?

Clyde silently stares into Tony's eyes.

TONY (CONT'D)
 You even take out goalkeepers with your tackles!

COACH COLLINS
 Tony, calm down.

Tony takes off his pinnie, throws it onto the ground, and quickly heads towards the locker room. Clyde looks at Tony, takes off his pinnie, and slowly follows him.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Tony angrily changes in the locker room, slamming the locker door. Clyde appears at the entrance of the room, leaning against the wall, looking at Tony.

CLYDE

What are you doing? Don't lose your mind... It's just a training.

Tony silently packs his things into his bag.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Do you want to get injured during practice? Why do you push yourself so hard all the time? You should enjoy the process.

Tony doesn't look at Clyde.

TONY

It's so easy for you!

Clyde looks at his own feet, then at slender Tony.

TONY (CONT'D)

"Enjoy the process", huh... That's probably why you only show up for games! Is it not interesting to play with someone like me?

CLYDE

Come on! It's not my fault. I used to attend a lot of practices too. That's why I became like this. And you'll become the same if you...

Tony looks at Clyde and smirks sarcastically.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Well, you get the message.

TONY

Oh, yeah...

CLYDE

You just need to eat more.

TONY

(sarcastically)

Fantastic! Of course! It's so simple... How could I not have thought of it before?

Tony zips his bag, throws it over his shoulder, and heads towards the exit. Clyde stops him in the aisle.

CLYDE

Stop being offended. Try to understand me, I don't want to turn you into a disabled for the rest of your life. I almost did that once.

TONY

I just lost consciousness, nothing serious!

CLYDE

Remember our first encounter.

TONY

That was a long time ago!

CLYDE

Well, you know, not much has changed since then. Remember Leroy!

TONY

It can happen to anyone.

CLYDE

Alright! Do you not care about yourself?! Fine! But think about the coach! He's responsible for us.

TONY

...Did he instruct you to play like that with me?

CLYDE

...Does it matter?

Clyde looks away. Tony realizes that he's right about the Coach.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Maybe you should start working with weights first?

TONY

This is my last season before college. I don't have time to start from scratch.

CLYDE

So, you need to train more.

TONY

Oh, thanks for the advice, mate! But I can't! I have no one to play with now. Everyone just caters to me.

CLYDE

(smiling)

Well, that's great... You can just play for your own enjoyment.

Tony shakes his head in despair and leaves the locker room.

TONY

Clyde, buddy... Think about it again... Why did you stop coming to training?

Tony pats Clyde on the shoulder and walks away. Clyde looks at his reflection in the mirror.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - ENTRANCE - DAY

Tony exits the building and heads towards the exit. He abruptly stops, slightly backtracks, and peeks out from behind a bush.

On the road next to the soccer field, there's a car. Leroy sits in the front passenger seat, his face filled with sadness.

Near the car stands the Coach with a man. It's LEROY'S FATHER, who is emotionally talking while the Coach tries to calm him down.

LEROY'S FATHER

How could you let this happen?! Did you see what happened to his knee?!

COACH COLLINS

Please, calm down-

LEROY'S FATHER

Was it a soccer match or a mixed fight?!

Tony watches the conversation.

LEROY'S FATHER (CONT'D)

You're the coach, damn it! Where were you looking?!

COACH COLLINS

I understand you-

LEROY'S FATHER

No, you don't understand anything! You only think about yourself! Your fucking trophies! Your tournament! You don't care about the kids!

Leroy looks out of the window and notices Tony. He looks at him sadly.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.)

That's not true. We care about the players. It's just that Leroy had bad luck-

Tony waves his hand meekly and nods questioningly at Leroy.

LEROY'S FATHER (O.S.)
 Bad luck?! I've had enough of your
 lies! You've ruined my son's
 future! I won't let this go!

Leroy looks at Tony and shakes his head hopelessly.

LEROY'S FATHER (CONT'D)
 I'll make you answer for what
 you've done! Be sure of that! I'm
 done! Get yourself a good lawyer!

Leroy's father gets into the car and drives away. Coach Collins sadly watches the departing car and walks slowly towards the field. Tony looks at the Coach and sighs heavily.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - EVENING

Tony sits in his thoughts at the table with an open book in his hand. There's a knock on the door, and his Dad enters the room.

TONY'S DAD
 Are you here? What are you doing?

TONY
 (shows the book)
 I'm studying.

TONY'S DAD
 That's good. I found a good college nearby, and scheduled a meeting for us in two weeks.

Tony nods hopelessly.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)
 We'll discuss all the conditions and details with the principal. Alright?

TONY
 Yes.

TONY'S DAD
 I'll send you the link to their website. Familiarize yourself with it and prepare any questions you might have in advance.

TONY
 Understood, I'll do it.

Tony looks away, focusing on his book. His Dad gazes at Tony with a deep look.

TONY'S DAD

And Tony...

Tony looks at his Dad.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)

I'm glad you listened and started taking your future more seriously... All these trainings and competitions... Eventually, you'll grow out of it, and it will gradually fade out from your life. You'll face new challenges and difficulties. And I want you to be prepared for them.

Tony nods obediently.

TONY

I understand, Dad. Thank you.

The Dad nods back and exits the room. Tony rolls his chair towards the computer and moves the mouse. On the screen, there's a website with a schedule of upcoming soccer matches. A notification from his Dad pops up.

Tony opens the message, which contains a link to the college's website. He opens the site and grips his neck with both hands.

Standing up from the chair, Tony grabs his phone and lies down on the bed. He looks at the screen, displaying the college website.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Tony warms up with the team. Clyde pats him on the shoulder.

CLYDE

Hey, how are you? Are you okay?

TONY

I'm fine.

CLYDE

Training together?

Tony nods silently.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Tony and Clyde silently go through the exercises. Clyde is focused, while Tony reluctantly goes through the motions.

Tony sprints and attempts a long pass to Clyde. It's highly inaccurate.

In the next exercise, Clyde and Tony run alongside the line, pushing each other with their bodies. Clyde has a significant advantage in this run. The boys jog back lightly, without enthusiasm.

End of training. The Coach blows the whistle. The players leave the field, tossing their pinnies into a bag on their way to the locker room. The Coach notices Tony. Lost in his thoughts, Tony sadly walks off the field with the team.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - EVENING

Tony enters the room and tosses his bag into the corner. A shout from his Mom can be heard from another room.

TONY'S MOM (O.S.)

Tony!

Tony thoughtfully lies down on the bed and gets absorbed in his phone. He looks at photos of Erica. His Mom enters the room.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)

Why aren't you answering? I've been calling you.

Tony doesn't take his eyes off his phone.

TONY

I didn't hear you.

TONY'S MOM

What do you want for dinner? Fish or chicken?

TONY

I don't care.

TONY'S MOM

Chicken with potatoes in the oven. How does that sound?

TONY

It's okay.

His Mom looks at Tony sadly and sits next to him.

TONY'S MOM
Is everything okay? Are you feeling sick?

TONY
Everything's fine.

TONY'S MOM
Alright.

The Mom gets up and leaves. She pauses at the door.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)
Maybe you could go to the store to get some sauce?
(leaves the money)
You can buy yourself something with the change.

She smiles and exits. Tony lifts himself up from the bed and looks at the money.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Tony has dinner at the table with his Mom and Dad. An notification pops up on his phone. Tony looks at the upcoming match announcements on his phone.

Later, Tony puts on his jacket and tucks his notebook into the inner pocket.

EXT. BETTING SHOP - NIGHT

There is no one at the entrance of the establishment. Tony stands near a tree, looking around. He cautiously approaches the building.

Suddenly, the door opens. Tony quickly hides to the side as two visitors exit the building and walk ahead. He waits until they move away before attempting to enter.

Unexpectedly, two security guards, Gary and Ronnie, come out to meet him. Tony becomes slightly startled and tries to pass them discreetly.

GARY
Hey, hold on a minute. Where are you going, kid?

TONY
Um, inside. I want to-

RONNIE
 (aggressively)
 Go home and do your homeworks.
 You're too young to be here.

TONY
 Oh, come on, guys... I'm here all
 the time.

GARY
 What are you talking about? Minors
 are not allowed inside.

Tony stands still, swaying uncertainly.

TONY
 But I... Come on, let me in.
 Please.

Ronnie takes an intimidating step forward.

RONNIE
 Are you fucking deaf? We'll get
 reprimanded because of you again!

Gary stops Ronnie with his hand and looks at him
 disapprovingly. Tony takes a step back.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
 (to Tony)
 Get the fuck out of here!

Gary turns to Tony and calmly speaks.

GARY
 You can't come in. Don't you
 understand?

Mark (30s), a man in a tracksuit, passes by the
 establishment. Tony takes out his notebook from his jacket.

TONY
 Guys, please. I have a winning bet.
 I've calculated everything! If I
 win, half of it is yours. Deal?

RONNIE
 What the fuck is this?
 (to Gary)
 "Half of it is yours"... Gary, did
 you hear that?
 (to Tony)
 Who do you think you are, you
 stupid twat? Get out of here before
 I tear you to pieces! Fucking
 puppy.

Tony becomes angry, swings his fist, and tries to punch Ronnie. But Ronnie dodges the punch and pushes Tony back.

Tony falls to the ground, dropping his notebook, and looks at Ronnie, who menacingly approaches him.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Oh, you're gonna get it now, kid!

Ronnie kicks Tony's notebook and prepares to strike him.

MARK (O.S.)

Hey, guys!

Ronnie stops and looks in the darkness. The silhouette of a man with his hands in his pockets approaches the guards.

RONNIE

(to Gary)

Who the hell is this?

Mark steps into the light and calmly walks towards the guards.

GARY

What do you need, man?

MARK

Seems unfair, doesn't it? Two against one.

RONNIE

What? You better go where you were heading. Or you'll get some too!

GARY

Mind your own business, man. If you want, we can make it two against two. But it won't make it any easier for you, believe me.

MARK

(looking at Ronnie)

I propose a one-on-one!

Ronnie smirks.

RONNIE

No problem.

He takes off his jacket, and hands it to Gary. Tony lies on the ground, looking scared at what's unfolding.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Come on.

Ronnie steps aside and assumes a boxing stance.

MARK
I didn't mean you.

RONNIE
What?

Ronnie looks at Gary in confusion. Gary looks at Ronnie, then turns to Mark and smiles.

GARY
(to Mark)
You serious, man?

Mark looks at Gary and smiles silently. Tony lies on the ground, bewildered, looking at Mark.

GARY (CONT'D)
Well, as you wish.

Gary takes off his jacket and hands both jackets to Ronnie. He steps aside, stretches his arms, assumes a boxing stance, and smiles.

GARY (CONT'D)
Come on, give it a try.

MARK
Try what?

Gary looks at Mark, puzzled.

MARK (CONT'D)
I meant the guy.
(points at Tony)
One-on-one with him.

Ronnie and Gary look at Mark, perplexed.

GARY
Are you fucking insane? He's just a kid.

MARK
Oh, really?

Mark reaches out his hand and helps Tony to his feet.

MARK (CONT'D)
I want to talk to him one-on-one.
(beat)
I think I can convince him not to bother you anymore. How do you like my idea, huh?

Gary and Ronnie silently look at each other, feeling stupid.

MARK (CONT'D)
 Why did you take off your jackets?
 It's chilly outside.

Ronnie tosses Gary's jacket back to him.

MARK (CONT'D)
 (smiling)
 You might catch a cold-

GARY
 Listen, man, you better get out of
 here. And take this puppy with you.

Mark takes Tony by the hand and leads him away.

MARK
 Well, as you wish.

Tony picks up his notebook along the way. The guards watch them in bewilderment.

RONNIE
 What was that? Who's that jerk?

GARY
 No idea... And why did you take off
 your jacket? He wanted to talk to
 him.

RONNIE
 I'm hot! Got it?!

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Mark and Tony walk along the path, illuminated by the streetlights.

TONY
 Thanks, but I could have handled it
 myself.

MARK
 Handled what? Gambling?

TONY
 I'm not a gambler. It's a sports
 interest for me.

MARK
 (smiling)
 Typical excuse of a gambler. You'd
 better engage in a real sport.

TONY
 I already do.

MARK
And what's that?

TONY
Soccer.

Mark looks at Tony with surprise.

MARK
I wouldn't have guessed.
(beat)
Are you just starting since
yesterday?

TONY
I've been playing since childhood.
I train with the local team.

MARK
Isn't that enough for you? Decided
to add some excitement to your
life?

TONY
No... I just love soccer. I watch
matches often. Analyze and take
notes of everything.

Tony takes out his notebook and shows it to Mark.

TONY (CONT'D)
I always predict how the game will
unfold... Well, almost always. And
I can make good money from it...
Well, I could.
(looks back)
But it's okay, I'll be back soon.

MARK
(points at the notebook)
Can I take a look?

Tony hands his notebook to Mark. He flips through it and
studies it carefully.

MARK (CONT'D)
Not bad...
(flips pages)
Did you ever think about applying
your ideas in practice? You're
playing in the local team, after
all.

TONY
We play differently.

MARK

Yeah, I saw that.

(beat)

I was at your last game, the one you won. Although you were supposed to lose according to logic... I don't remember seeing you.

Tony looks away, feeling embarrassed.

TONY

I came on as a substitute in the second half.

MARK

(tries to remember)

Number 11? I think you had red hair.

TONY

No, that was Paul. He came in for me.

MARK

Ah, right!

(laughs)

Number 16! Because of your mistake, you missed a goal.

Tony stops and bursts out.

TONY

It wasn't my fault! If Clyde had reacted faster, it would have worked-

MARK

(smiling)

Easy, easy... Calm down.

Tony and Mark continue walking along the road.

MARK (CONT'D)

It seemed to me like you held onto the ball for too long in that moment.

TONY

I was waiting for Clyde to run into the penalty area behind the defenders. Into Zone 17.

MARK

Zone 17? Hm, not bad.

(beat)

You should tell him about it before the game, next time.

TONY
There won't be a next time!

MARK
Why not?

TONY
I've had enough of this soccer!
It's time to grow up.

Mark slightly smiles and looks back at the road.

EXT. PARK - MOMENTS LATER

The guys reach a intersection and stop.

MARK
What's your name, mate?

TONY
Tony.

Mark shakes Tony's hand.

MARK
Well, Tony. I hope we'll meet
again... But for now, keep
searching for your own path. Don't
give up on training. You have
something that many can only dream
of.

TONY
And what's that?

MARK
(shows the notebook)
Passion! Not everyone has it,
believe me. The rest is just a
matter of finding your own
approach. And you need to discover
it.

TONY
I don't have time for that. In a
year, I need to apply to college.
Then work, then family.

MARK
(smiles)
Wow. You've already analyzed
everything here too.

TONY
It's not difficult here.

MARK

You have to understand, Tony. It's impossible to analyze everything. Life is full of accidents. A lot depends on simple luck... and bad luck. But it's up to you how you handle it.

Mark returns the notebook to Tony and pats him on the shoulder.

MARK (CONT'D)

(winks)

Don't lose hope!

Mark walks away into the darkness of the road. Tony silently watches him go.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Tony trains with the team. The players line up, each with a ball in front of them. Tony stands in the center, Clyde on the side. Thomas stands in the goal, stretching his arms.

COACH COLLINS

Let's begin!

Whistle. The first player takes a shot at the goal, but the ball goes higher of the goal. The player chases after the ball.

CLYDE

Missed! Loser!

The second player takes a shot, but it's not very strong. Thomas easily catches the ball.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)

Oh my... Lighten up, crazy.

The third player takes a powerful shot that goes high above the goal. The other guys mockingly laugh at him.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Go chase after the ball, crooked-footed.

Fourth in line is Paul. He has a good run-up and strikes the ball with power. It flies into the net under the crossbar. Thomas jumps but can't reach it. Beautiful shot. The teammates cheer and clap.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Holy shit! Paul! When did you learn to shoot like that?

PAUL
Training, sleep, training... Every
day, bro-

CLYDE
(rolls his eyes)
Yeah, yeah... and the warehouse
every weekends, we know about that
story.

PAUL
Well... If the boots were free at
the store, I'd be free every
weekends.

Tony looks at Paul's expensive boots and feels sadness
because Paul also finds his "talent" - self-delusion.

CLYDE
(looks at Paul's boots)
Latest model?! How much did you pay
for them?

PAUL
(smiling)
Don't ask, buddy.

CLYDE
Ah... so that's your secret...
Magic boots! Alright...

PAUL
(proudly)
It doesn't matter what boots you
have... It matters who's in those
boots.

CLYDE
Fuck me...
(spits)
Okay, Dominic Toretto, we got your
message.
(looks at his teammates)
Who's next?

The fifth player, Sam, takes a powerful low shot towards the
bottom corner. Thomas jumps and barely deflects the strike.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
You always shoot low! Enough
already!

SAM
It's my feature.

Coach Collins calls Paul over. Tony is up next. He takes a
short run-up and unsuccessfully strikes the ball.

It goes way over the goal.

Tony looks disappointed as the ball lands far behind the goal near the stadium entrance. Tony walks towards the ball. Complete silence.

CLYDE (O.S.)

Who's next?

Tony notices the Coach and Paul having an intense conversation. Collins points his foot to demonstrate a technique. Tony quickens his pace.

Whistle. Tony walks to the ball and turns around, looking at his teammates. The players gather around the Coach, listening to his instructions.

Tony, with pain in his eyes, throws the ball towards them. He turns and heads towards the stadium exit, unnoticed by anyone.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Tony packs all his things from the locker into his bag. He looks at the photos of his idols, takes them down, and tosses them into the bag. He closes the locker, placing the key on top. Leaves the locker room and turns off the lights.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Tony enters the room in casual clothes. He collapses onto the bed, burying his face in his phone.

TONY'S MOM (O.S.)

Tony?! Is that you?

TONY

Yeah!

Tony lies on the bed, looking at the college website on his phone. His Mom enters the room with a towel on her head.

TONY'S MOM

We are going on a visit. Don't forget to take the keys when you go for training.

TONY

I'm not going.

TONY'S MOM

But it's Friday today.

TONY

Yeah, I... I'm done with soccer.
I've had enough.

TONY'S MOM

(surprised)

What do you mean?

TONY

I just don't want to play
anymore... Besides, exams are
coming up. I need to choose a
college.

His Mom sits down on a chair and looks at Tony in disbelief.

TONY'S MOM

Did something happen?

TONY

Nothing happened, Mom. I'm just
tired of all of this. It's time to
grow up and think about the future.
You heard Dad, right?

TONY'S MOM

And what about your Dad? Just
because things didn't work out for
him doesn't mean you're meant to
fail too.

TONY

He worries about me. And I'm his
son... I have his genes.

His Mom leans closer to Tony.

TONY'S MOM

Oh, Tony, my little sunshine...
(smiles)

You have more than just his genes,
you know.

Tony looks at his Mom and smiles.

TONY

But the love for soccer is
definitely from him.

TONY'S MOM

Um, I don't think so.

TONY

He used to play too, just like me.
Isn't that right?

TONY'S MOM

Yes, he did. And he played very well, one of the best of his team. He could have been the best if he showed perseverance and desire... And a little more discipline.

TONY

What about his injury? It happened during a game.

TONY'S MOM

Yes, of course, the injury... He doesn't like to talk about it. But let me tell you a secret...

(talking quieter)

In every story he tells about that game, about how everyone turned away from him, there's something he doesn't mention.

Tony leans closer to his Mom and listens with interest.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)

Right before that match, we were out of town. I wanted to introduce him to my parents. And as it sometimes happens, the meeting lasted until the sunrise. You know your grandpa.

Tony smiles.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)

So there we were, getting ready to go to sleep in the early hours of the morning, and your father suddenly starts getting dressed. I don't understand what's going on, so I ask him where he's going. And he says to me, "Oh, sorry, honey, I forgot to tell you. I have a match today, it starts in two hours. I'll go there, play quickly, and be back by lunchtime. Please warm up the meat before my back".

Tony laughs and looks at his Mom in astonishment.

TONY

What?! No way!

TONY'S MOM

Yes! He didn't sleep all night, drank ten cans of beer, and went to "play quickly".

TONY
And how did he do it?

TONY'S MOM
Of course he couldn't do it. He struggled for ten minutes, then clumsily stumbled, and that was the end of his career.

The Mom shrugs her shoulders. Tony smiles and looks away.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)
And he had talent, unlike the other guys. He was predicted to have a great professional career. But he missed his chance, and he can only blame himself for that.

His Mom gets up from the chair, walks over to Tony, and kisses him on the forehead.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)
And I'm glad that my genes turned out to be stronger.

Tony lies there with a content expression on his face. The Mom walks toward the door, but turns back to face Tony.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)
Your Dad is just envious that you love soccer more than he ever did. And you never give up facing of adversity. Isn't that right?!

TONY
(smiles)
That's right.

She leaves the room. Tony sits on the bed and looks at his bag with his boots.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Tony enters the locker room with a bag over his shoulder, greets his teammates, and walks towards his locker. He opens the door and hangs the pictures of his idols back on it.

Clyde is sitting on the bench next to him with his head tilted back, smiling with closed eyes. Tony lightly kicks him with his foot.

TONY
Hey, what's up with you?

Clyde slowly opens his eyes and looks at Tony, smiling.

TONY (CONT'D)
Are you drunk or something?

Clyde doesn't respond, he looks ahead and continues smiling.

TONY (CONT'D)
Why are you so happy?

CLYDE
You'll find out soon, buddy.

Tony grins and looks down.

TONY
Did you get new boots?

CLYDE
I won't need to buy boots anymore.

TONY
What do you mean?

The door opens, and Coach Collins enters the locker room in a business suit.

COACH COLLINS
Hello, everyone. Guys, I need your attention for a moment. I have some important news for you.

The players sit down and look at the Coach.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
For the past 10 years, we've worked hard together, trained diligently, fought in every game, and achieved success. We've shown everyone that we can achieve the desired result even when it's not expected from us. And our success is the proof of that!

The players listen attentively to Coach Collins.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)
And finally! Our hard work has been recognized... Starting from next season, I will be the head coach of a club in the Premier Professional soccer League!

The locker room erupts with cheers and applause.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Thank you! Thank you...
Unfortunately, this also means that I won't be your coach anymore. It's hard for me to leave, I don't want to say goodbye to all of you... But I'm confident that this separation will be short-lived!

The Coach points his finger at the players, then at himself.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

Because we will definitely meet again in the top league. Because you, like me, know how to achieve the desired result! You are winners! You know how to work, and you don't know how to give up!

The players clap and cheer. The Coach gestures them to calm down.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

From this training session onwards, you will have a new coach. Young and ambitious... Treat him with kindness.

The players smile and continue to make noise.

COACH COLLINS (CONT'D)

The most important thing is to keep up the same spirit, and everything will work out! I'm not saying goodbye to you, I'm saying, see you later!

Coach Collins claps, and the players join him. He leaves the locker room amid applause. Tony stands up, takes his belongings from the locker, and prepares to leave.

TONY

Wow... So, what happens next?

Clyde looks mysteriously at Tony. Paul joins the conversation, sitting next to them.

PAUL

Holy crap! Did you hear that? Coach Collins is going to the top league. It's time for retirement, but he's getting promoted!

(laughs)

Well... It's going to be tough for him there.

CLYDE

Don't worry. He won't be alone.

Tony looks at Clyde in surprise.

PAUL

What? And who...
(looks at Clyde)
No. Fucking. Way.

TONY

(to Clyde)
Are you serious?

CLYDE

Yeah, mates. Me and Thomas. Collins
is taking us with him.

PAUL

Fuck me! Congratulations, bro!

Tony and Paul shake Clyde's hand.

TONY

Ah, that's why you came back to
training?

CLYDE

Yep. I need to get back in shape.

TONY

(smiling)
I knew there was a reason for it.
So, why are you still here?

CLYDE

We'll join later. There are some
contract issues. So, until the
start of the season, we'll be
training with you, amateurs.

TONY

(kicks Clyde)
Don't worry, we'll get you ready.

CLYDE

Oh, I hope I don't lose my form
playing against you, deadbeats.

The guys laugh and playfully kick Clyde.

PAUL

Damn! I hope the training remains
the same. I was just starting to
get things right.

The door opens, and Mark enters wearing a sports outfit. Everyone falls silent, takes their seats, and looks at Mark. Tony looks at Mark and freezes.

MARK

Good day, everyone! I'm Mark Brady,
your new manager.

The players exchange glances. Mark sits on the table and throws his bag beside him, confidently surveying the players.

MARK (CONT'D)

Well, let's get started...

A brief pause. The players look at Mark, perplexed.

MARK (CONT'D)

(shows his stopwatch)

...It's time. The most important thing you need to work on... Time is your greatest friend and enemy. We must value it and take it into account... So let's not waste it. Let's skip the introduction process and start working right now. I believe your attitude towards work will speak louder than your words.

The players listen attentively.

MARK (CONT'D)

For the time being, we'll train according to the old program. First, I want to see what you're capable of. Then we'll intensify our training with a new methodology. I'll identify your strengths and weaknesses. And then, I'll develop individual training plans for each of you.

Paul raises his hand.

MARK (CONT'D)

Do you have a question?

PAUL

What's wrong with our old approach? We actually finished first last season.

His teammates nod approvingly.

MARK

That's a good question. If you look at the final standings, you'll see that the gap between the team in first place and the team in twelfth place is just 3 points. What does that mean?

The players remain silent.

MARK (CONT'D)

It means that throughout the season, all 12 teams played at a similar level. Clubs took points off each other, made mistakes, and, in general, had an unlucky season. In the end, you were fortunate enough to come out as the leaders.

CLYDE

But we were underdogs at the start of the season.

MARK

I don't dispute that. You've shown progress. In terms of points, you're now a strong mid-table team... Yes, you've gotten better... but you won because others got worse. 1 team out of 12. That's an 8% chance of winning the championship in the final round.

CLYDE

Maybe we deserved our luck.

MARK

(smirks)

Yes, perhaps... But truly strong teams don't rely on luck. Reaching the top is not as hard as staying there consistently. And for that, you won't just need luck... and especially for you, for newcomers, who want to stay in the new league... Luck is not a constant thing.

The players gaze thoughtfully at Mark.

MARK (CONT'D)

My program will give you what you're missing. Stability and progress.

PAUL

And what's in this program?

Mark places his bag on the table and takes out books and notebooks.

MARK

From now on, your training will have a modern and progressive approach. More tactics, mental exercises, reaction drills, and technique work. We'll develop your minds.

CLYDE

What about physical exercises?

MARK

That's secondary. I've seen your training sessions. It's not enough for modern soccer. Now, we'll have more sessions focused on thinking and technique. Ahead of you, there will be logical problems, soccer analysis, tactics, philosophy... Mathematics.

Paul nervously looks around.

CLYDE

(whispering to himself)

What the hell is he talking about?

PAUL

(to Mark)

Mathematics? Uh-oh, are we in school? I come here to play soccer, not solve puzzles.

Paul stands up, grabs his bag, and heads towards the exit.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Sorry, but this isn't for me. Good luck, everyone!

Paul leaves the locker room.

MARK

Just a minute.

Mark follows Paul out of the locker room. The remaining players discuss the arrival of the new coach among themselves. Tony sighs with excitement.

TONY

Wow, did you hear that?

CLYDE

Yeah, you guys got lucky.

TONY

Come on, it sounds interesting.

CLYDE

How will math help you on the field, Tony? When two players come at you with a sliding tackle. What do you do?

Tony doesn't answer.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Will you quickly calculate how many studs they have on their boots, huh? We're not professionals. Our level doesn't suit modern soccer.

The door opens. Mark and Paul return. Paul takes his seat and listens attentively.

MARK

Let's continue!

Mark grabs a stack of notebooks and shows them to the players.

MARK (CONT'D)

I want each of you to take one notebook. Here, we'll write down all the advice, observations, and notes. Come forward and get yours.

The players timidly rise from their seats. Mark changes his tone to a more encouraging one.

MARK (CONT'D)

Come on, guys! Where's your confidence? You're about to embark on a new chapter in the history of your club. Let's make it the greatest one!

The players smile and exchange looks. Clyde sits on the bench, looking ahead and shaking his head. Tony stands in line with anticipation, wearing a smile on his face.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Mark stands on the field with the team. The players form a circle and warm up, with a ball lying in front of them.

MARK

Warm up more intensely.

Tony quickly and casually warms up his legs. He looks at the ball, getting lost in his own fantasies.

TONY'S FANTASY:

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - DAY

A soccer match is underway. Mark stands on the sidelines, watching the field intently. The score is 2-2, with the match time is 89:44.

Tony sits on the bench, watching the game.

MARK
(turns back)
Tony!

Tony quickly stands up, shrugs off his pinnie, and rushes over to the Coach. Mark places his hand on Tony's shoulder.

MARK (CONT'D)
You're going on the field as a forward. Let's practice combination A24. Do you remember your role?

TONY
Yes, of course!

MARK
Excellent, go for it!

Mark turns towards the field.

MARK (CONT'D)
Ref! Sub!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Tony steps onto the field and calls out to his teammates.

TONY
Combination A24!

The players look at each other and nod in agreement. Thomas prepares to take a goal kick. Tony stands in the center of the field, raising his arms.

Thomas looks at Tony and instructs his defenders to move forward. The defenders run towards the opposing team's goal, followed closely by the opposing team's forwards.

Tony runs towards them. He approaches the goalkeeper alone, who passes the ball to him. Tony skillfully turns around and surveys the field. An opponent approaches him.

Tony passes at his teammates and skillfully maneuvers through the entire field towards the opponent's goal.

He looks up and calmly shoots the ball between the goalkeeper's legs, scoring a goal.

The fans rise from their seats, cheering loudly and applauding. Tony runs towards the edge of the field, straight to the fans. He spreads his arms wide and closes his eyes, smiling with happiness.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Mark watches Tony and applauds with a sense of gratitude.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

With his eyes closed, Tony savors the moment. His teammates slowly approach him from behind.

CLYDE (O.S.)

Tony!

Tony opens his eyes and looks ahead. In the front row, amidst the jubilant fans, Clyde stands in a dirty soccer jersey.

He looks at Tony and gestures with his hands, asking for a pass to his feet. Tony looks puzzled.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Tony! Pass it to me!

Tony lowers his hands in confusion.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Come on! Give me the ball!

Clyde continues to actively signal for the ball at his feet.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Give me the fucking ball!

Tony doesn't understand what's happening.

COACH COLLINS (O.S.)

Give him the ball!

(shouting)

Back!

A player hits Tony at full speed. Both of them collide and fall to the ground.

BACK TO SCENE:

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - LATER

Tony is lying on the ground in his green pinnie after the collision, looking around. Clyde stands in front of him, in his green pinnie too, gesturing for the ball to be played at his feet. He throws his hands up in frustration.

CLYDE

Are you going to play or not?! What the hell is wrong with you?

Tony stands up and looks at Mark, who looks at Tony with a puzzled expression on his face.

Nearby, Tony's teammates are trying to win the ball from Orange team.

The game is intense, with a lot of physical battles and tackles. Clyde approaches Tony and lightly pushes his shoulder with his hand.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Pull yourself together! No one else is going to give in to you.

Clyde moves away and turns to face Tony.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Isn't this what you've been dreaming of?

Tony tries to regain his focus and runs towards the area with his teammates.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

The Green has possession of the ball. Tony creates space and calls for a pass. Paul notices Tony and passes to him. Tony awkwardly delivers a difficult pass - it succeeds.

Tony runs without the ball, observing the movement of the players. He spots an open zone and runs into it, requesting a pass.

Tony receives the ball and attracts the attention of the opponents. He passes the ball and runs into the open zone towards Clyde. The players in orange rush towards the ball. Clyde, in no hurry, walks towards it.

TONY

Wait.

CLYDE

What?

Tony gestures for Clyde to follow him. Both of them run towards a zone where there are no players in orange. Tony looks at his teammates who have possession of the ball and raises his hand. Paul notices Tony and makes a precise long pass to him.

The players in orange frustratingly turn around and run towards Tony. Tony and Clyde pass the ball between each other, smiling. Mark stands on the field and contemplatively watches Tony and Clyde.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Tony receives the ball again and surveys the field. He focuses on the players in green standing in a chessboard formation in front of him.

Tony calculates a passing combination and struggles to execute it. He gains confidence and literally flies across the field. But an opponent in orange tries to tackle him and spikes his supporting leg at the ankle. Tony screams in pain and falls to the ground. Mark blows his whistle.

MARK

Stop!

Tony lies on the grass with his eyes closed, clutching his foot. Players gather around him. Tony grasps the grass tightly in pain.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Tony sits on a hospital bed with his leg in a cast. The doctor enters the room with an X-ray in his hand. He smiles and looks at Tony. Tony looks down at his leg sadly.

DOCTOR

You again? I told you to refrain from training...

(looks at X-ray)

Well, don't worry, it's not that bad. You have a sprain. You could say you're quite lucky.

Tony is silent, looking depressed.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

We've applied the cast as a precaution. Just in case you decide to disobey me again.

He looks guilty and gazes off to the side.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

It can be removed in two weeks.
Then you'll need two more weeks of
rehabilitation, and everything will
be back to normal. Don't worry.

Tony notices crutches in the corner of the room.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - EVENING

Tony enters his room on crutches, his Mom standing in front
of him and gesturing for him to be careful.

TONY'S MOM

Slow down, take it easy... Be
careful.

Tony stands in the doorway, looking at his Mom while smiling.

TONY'S MOM (CONT'D)

What?

TONY

It's not that difficult, stop
worrying.

Tony enters the room and sits on the bed.

TONY'S MOM

I'm afraid for you. I don't want
you to end up disabled.

Tony's Dad stands in the doorway with a stern expression on
his face.

TONY'S DAD

But he wants to, apparently!

Tony lowers his gaze.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)

(to Tony)

I told you that nothing good would
come from this soccer. But you
didn't listen to me. This time you
got lucky... And what about
Friedman's son, Leroy? It seems
he'll be limping for the rest of
his life.

TONY

That's not certain yet-

TONY'S DAD

What is certain is that he can forget about soccer forever! And it's even good that it happened to him now. He has time to reconsider.

The Dad looks at Tony reproachfully.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)

How many more examples of other people's mistakes do you need to learn from? Huh, Tony?!

Tony doesn't respond. His Dad leaves. Tony's Mom takes a chair and places it in front of Tony. She gently puts his casted leg on the chair, inspecting it.

TONY'S MOM

Let's put something underneath.

His Mom takes a red heart-shaped pillow and places it under Tony's leg. Tony looks sadly at the pillow.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - MORNING

Tony lies on his bed and stares at the ceiling, trying to scratch his leg under the cast. He looks at the posters of soccer players scattered around the room. Grabs his phone and calls Erica.

TONY

(into the phone)

Hey.

ERICA (PHONE)

Hi. How are you?

TONY

(into the phone)

Not bad. And you?

ERICA (PHONE)

I'm okay... Why are you calling?

TONY

(into the phone)

Just... just wanted to hear your voice.

ERICA (PHONE)

Oh... Is something wrong?

TONY

(into the phone)

No. Everything's fine... Um, I also called to... to apologize.

ERICA (PHONE)
It's okay, don't worry.

TONY
(into the phone)
And I miss you a lot. And you...
and I need you.

A brief pause.

ERICA (PHONE)
I miss you too, Tony, but...

TONY
(into the phone)
Don't you want to meet up somehow?
Go somewhere together.

ERICA (PHONE)
Um, sorry, I can't. I'm a bit busy
right now.

Tony closes his eyes and grabs his neck.

TONY
(into the phone)
Okay... Um, maybe-

ERICA (PHONE)
Listen, let me call you back later,
alright?

TONY
(into the phone)
Okay.

Erica hangs up.

TONY (CONT'D)
(into the phone)
Bye.

Tony tosses his phone aside and gets up from the bed. He looks at the crutches.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Tony sits in the last row, watching the field. Mark stands on the field with the players, explaining something and gesturing with pad in his hand. Tony looks at them with sadness. He holds a notebook in his hands, opens the last page.

EXT. BETTING SHOP - EVENING

Tony walks on crutches along the street, passing by a betting shop. He hides behind a bush and watches the entrance. The door opens, and Gary and Ronnie step outside. Tony turns and walks away.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - DAY

Tony sits at a table and reads a book. There's a stack of books on the table, and a recorded lecture from the university plays in the background.

EXT. COLLEGE - DAY

A car pulls up to the building. Tony and his Dad step out of the car and look at the building.

INT. COLLEGE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Behind the desk sits the COLLEGE PRINCIPAL. Tony and his Dad sit in front of him. Tony listens to the Principal's speech and looks at the awards and certificates hanging on the wall.

COLLEGE PRINCIPAL

I believe our college would be an excellent choice for you. We have a wide range of programs where your skills would be valuable.

Tony's Dad nods with interest.

COLLEGE PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

Our professors will be more than happy to help you reach your full potential.

Tony remains silent.

TONY'S DAD

It sounds great! What do you say, Tony? How do you like it?

TONY

Yeah. I like this place.

TONY'S DAD

Do you have any questions, maybe?

TONY

No. I've already familiarized myself with everything on the website and watched some lectures by your professors online.

COLLEGE PRINCIPAL
 Excellent! I'm glad to see that
 you're taking your future
 seriously.

Tony's Dad looks at the Principal and nods approvingly.

COLLEGE PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)
 I'm confident that you won't regret
 your choice.

Tony looks at the Principal and smiles humbly.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Tony sits on the bed with his leg stretched out in front of
 him, still in a cast.

DOCTOR
 Try not to move.

The doctor removes the cast and sets it aside. Tony stands up
 and rotates his foot clockwise.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
 Does it hurt?

TONY
 No.

DOCTOR
 (smiling)
 Are you sure? No cheating?

TONY
 (smiling)
 No cheating.

DOCTOR
 Perfect. I'll give you a
 rehabilitation exercise program.
 Follow it strictly, and your leg
 will heal very soon... And this
 time, I strongly advise you to
 follow my recommendations! Alright?

Tony smiles slyly.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - DAY

Tony stands by the wall with a list in his hand. He balances
 on his tiptoes, raising and lowering his heel. In the corner
 of the room, he spots a soccer ball.

Tony juggles the ball with his foot. He tosses it up in the air and catches it with his neck. The ball rolls slowly and falls to the floor.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - EVENING

2 WEEKS LATER

The ball drops to the ground, at Tony's feet. Players stand on the field, each with a ball at their feet. Mark stands in front of the team, holding a notepad.

MARK

Well... Today, you will learn about the second most important thing in modern soccer.

Mark points to the empty soccer field.

MARK (CONT'D)

...It's space.

(beat)

Just like time, space can be used by you or against you. But if you learn to control it wisely, it will help you better gauge your strength and endurance.

(looks at Tony)

If you learn to control space, you will hold the balance of the game. You will control the rhythm.

(to Clyde)

Clyde, come here.

Clyde approaches Mark, who takes the pad.

MARK (CONT'D)

Set up everything according to the diagram.

Clyde looks thoughtfully at the screen. Mark walks towards the bench for substitutes.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Players stand on the field. They are divided into four teams of five. Mark stands alongside the players, holding a whistle. He blows it loudly.

The players engage in an unusual and complex exercise. They work on reaction speed and intelligence movements, trying to use space effectively.

Throughout the training, players often stumble and make mistakes.

Only Tony executes everything correctly and flawlessly.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

The players gather around Mark.

MARK (CONT'D)

Let's play 10 vs 10. I want to see more off-the-ball movement from you, shorter passing. No physical challenges. No tackles. Only interceptions.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

The players perform the exercise, playing short passes. The game proceeds at a calm pace. Tony receives the ball and looks up. Paul raises his hand, requesting a pass.

Mark attentively watches the players. Tony sees Paul, but opts for a less risky pass to another player. The attack loses its threat.

Clyde receives the ball and takes a strong shot from a long distance, aiming for the small empty goal by luck. He scores and celebrates. Whistle.

MARK (CONT'D)

Pick up the balls!

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - ENTRANCE - LATER

Mark walks with the team towards the locker room, players walking with him. Mark notices Tony passing by.

MARK

Tony! Don't rush.

The players continue ahead, while Tony and Mark walk together.

MARK (CONT'D)

How are you, Tony?

TONY

I'm doing well.

MARK

How's your leg? Is it still hurting?

TONY

Not anymore. But I'm still doing rehabilitation exercises.

MARK

That's good to hear. And how about everything else?

TONY

What do you mean?

MARK

Family, studies? Maybe you have a girlfriend?

TONY

(embarrassed)

It seems like everything is fine.

MARK

Seems?

TONY

Well, there are some small problems, but they're not that important.

MARK

It's very important, Tony. There has to be a good atmosphere in the team.

Tony gestures towards his teammates who are walking ahead.

TONY

How can my problems affect the team?

MARK

I'm talking about your personal team.

Tony doesn't respond and stops. Mark turns to Tony, showing him his notepad.

MARK (CONT'D)

In soccer, you don't play alone, Tony. Without a team, all your ideas will remain on paper.

Mark turns around and enters the building. Tony looks thoughtfully after Mark.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - TONY'S ROOM - EVENING

Tony sits at the table, looking at his notebook. He flips it over and opens a website on his computer, checking upcoming soccer matches on the screen.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tony approaches a mirror with his phone in hand. He types something, then puts the phone in his pocket and looks concerned at his reflection. There's a note attached to the mirror with some money.

NOTE: We've gone out of town. No food. Order something.

Tony receives a notification on his phone. He looks at the screen and sighs heavily, taking the money from the mirror and putting it in his pocket.

EXT. BETTING SHOP - EVENING

Tony stands near a bush, watching the entrance. Gary and Ronnie come out of the building.

Tony slowly approaches the security guards. He gets closer, and the guys notice him, looking surprised.

GARY

Well, well. You again?

RONNIE

You're not getting in here, don't even try.

GARY

(to Ronnie)

Easy, easy...

TONY

That's not why I'm here... I wanted to apologize.

Gary takes a cigarette from behind his ear and looks closely at Tony.

GARY

Apologize for what?

TONY

For getting you in trouble. It was because of me that you got reprimanded.

Gary and Ronnie look at each other.

RONNIE

(to Tony)

Just get lost.

GARY

Cool down, Ronnie.

Gary steps aside and points towards the door with his hand.

GARY (CONT'D)

(to Tony)

Fine, you're forgiven. You can come in. Just don't flash your face to the cameras.

Tony looks at the door, then back at Gary.

TONY

Thanks, but I don't need it anymore.

GARY

Come on. There won't be problem, I promise.

TONY

No, thanks. Good luck to you.

Tony turns around and walks away. Ronnie looks puzzled at Gary.

RONNIE

And what the fuck was that?

GARY

(yells after Tony)

It's not that easy to walk away, kid! Everyone needs a place to relax. Everyone needs a place to let out the hate that's inside.

TONY

(turns around and smiles)

I have such a place.

INT. CANDY SHOP - EVENING

Tony stands at the cash register. The shopkeeper wraps a beautiful heart-shaped pastry in a red gift box.

EXT. PARK - EVENING

Tony stands in the park with the red box in his hands, looking at a distant grassy area. He turns around and looks mysteriously ahead. Erica slowly approaches.

ERICA

Hi.

TONY

Oh, hey. You look great.

ERICA
Thanks. You too.

An awkward pause.

TONY
Um, this is for you.

Tony takes the gift from behind his back and extends the box to Erica.

ERICA
Wow. How unexpected.

Erica takes the box and examines it.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Thank you. What's inside?

Erica inspects the box.

TONY
Surprise.

Erica shakes the box. Tony flinches unexpectedly.

TONY (CONT'D)
No! Stop!

Erica gets slightly startled and smiles.

ERICA
Oops... Sorry.

Tony waves it off.

TONY
It's okay.

Erica opens the box. The dessert pastry is smeared on the sides of the box. Erica laughs and looks at Tony.

ERICA
Well, it looks quite appetizing.

Tony takes a disposable spoon out of his pocket and points to a gazebo in the park.

TONY
Then, shall we take a seat?

INT./EXT. GAZEBO - LATER

Erica eats the dessert and smiles at Tony. Tony looks at Erica affectionately. She takes the last bite in her spoon and provocatively smiles.

Tony responds with a gentle smile, taking a banana out of his pocket. He opens it and eats. Erica laughs and finishes the last bite.

INT./EXT. GAZEBO - MOMENTS LATER

Tony and Erica sit cuddled together at the table, having a sweet conversation.

TONY

Can we consider me forgiven now?

ERICA

(smiling)

You won't get off that easily.

Tony smiles apologetically.

TONY

Okay, you're right... I really fucked up. I was only thinking about myself, my dreams. And I didn't notice the support you always gave me... Thank you.

Tony pulls Erica closer. Erica looks at Tony with sadness and averts her gaze.

ERICA

Honestly... In some ways, you were right after all. It's a pity I realized it too late.

Erica takes her phone out of her bag.

ERICA (CONT'D)

When I was with my grandpa in Italy, I met someone there... I didn't want to tell you, thought it would be a surprise... Well, take a look.

Erica hands her phone to Tony and plays a video.

VIDEO:

EXT. HOTEL IN VENICE - MORNING

Erica looks into the camera.

ERICA

Ciao, my dear Tony! Sending you kisses from sunny Venice. Next to me is my grandpa.

Erica points the camera at GRANDPA.

ERICA'S GRANDPA
Ciao, Tony! You will succeed! We
believe in you!

Erica points the camera back at herself.

ERICA
What can inspire a person more than
words of support from their loved
ones?
(thinking)
Hmm, I don't even know.

Erica hands off the camera. The frame shows famous German
soccer player JOSHUA KIMMICH (28).

KIMMICH
Hey, Tony! Erica has told me so
much about you. You're a true
fighter! I wish you to pursue your
goals and never give up.
Difficulties will always lie ahead
of you! But the more there are, the
stronger you will become. Don't
compare yourself to others! Don't
strive to be the second Kimmich or
the second Messi! You are Tony...
um...

ERICA (O.S.)
Adams-

KIMMICH
You are Tony Adams! Go your own way
and be unique! I believe that you
will definitely succeed! And you
should believe in it too!

Erica takes back the camera and kisses the lens.

KIMMICH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(confused)
Oh shit. His name is really Tony
Adams?

BACK TO SCENE:

INT./EXT. GAZEBO - CONTINUOUS

Tony looks at the phone with a stunned expression. Erica
looks at him in confusion, gently takes the phone from him.

ERICA

That's it. The video is over...
Tony?

Tears well up in Tony's eyes. He looks at Erica and manages to force a smile.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

Tony takes a deep breath and embraces Erica tightly. He holds her tightly. Erica struggles to laugh.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Tony, I can't breathe.

Tony loosens his grip.

TONY

I'm sorry.

ERICA

(laughs)
It's okay.

Tony hugs Erica.

TONY

Thank you so much.

ERICA

You're welcome... Honestly, in real life, he looks completely different from your photos... Are you sure it was him?

Erica laughs. Tony hugs Erica tighter and smiles.

TONY

Um, I think it doesn't matter anymore.

INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tony enters the house. His Dad stands near the closet in the hallway, feeling his jacket.

TONY'S DAD

Hey, hi. Where have you been?

TONY

I was out with Erica.

Tony closes the door and hesitantly takes off his shoes. He sighs heavily and looks at his Dad.

TONY (CONT'D)

Dad-

TONY'S DAD

(yells)

Got it!

He takes a receipt from the store out of his jacket pocket.

TONY'S MOM (O.S.)

Where?!

TONY'S DAD

In the jacket pocket!

His Dad examines the receipt closely. Tony's Mom enters the room, holding a jar of olives in her hand, and waves to Tony.

TONY'S MOM

Well, what's there?

(to Tony)

Hey, honey.

Tony doesn't respond and looks at his Dad anxiously.

TONY'S DAD

I remember that there were two jars
in the basket.

TONY'S MOM

Maybe you put it in the cabinet?

TONY'S DAD

Let's go check.

The parents turn away. Tony looks at them and speaks with a confident voice.

TONY

Dad! Wait.

He turns around.

TONY'S DAD

What?

Tony falls silent and gathers his thoughts.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)

What's up? Speak up.

The Mom looks up at Tony. He looks back at her and confidently addresses his Dad, looking him straight in the eyes.

TONY

I've decided that I don't want to go to that college. I want to focus on soccer.

The Dad looks at Tony, barely containing his anger.

TONY'S DAD

Is this some kind of joke?

TONY

No. I believe that I have a cha-

TONY'S DAD

(slams the closet door)

What is wrong with you?! Are you doing this to spite me?!

Tony doesn't respond. He's little scared.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)

Why are you making everything so difficult for yourself?!

TONY

I'm not... I just want to be a professional soccer player-

TONY'S DAD

Look at yourself in the mirror!

(points at Tony)

Why don't you want to understand?

Only a few become professionals!

Those who have the ability, skills!

TONY

(uncertainly)

I have skills.

TONY'S DAD

What skills?! What are you talking about?!

(beat)

I was at your last season's match and I saw everything!

TONY

(surprised)

Um, what?

TONY'S DAD

Yes, I was!

TONY

It's just-

TONY'S DAD

You were almost killed out there- !

TONY

It can happen to everyone- !

TONY'S DAD

But not everyone can handle it!

(beat)

Last time, you were just lucky...

But it will happen again.

TONY

I will get better.

His Dad sighs heavily, taking a breath.

TONY'S DAD

Can't you understand, Tony? The better you play, the higher the risk of it happening again and again! You dream of recognition, of fame... But it's not as simple as you think. People sacrifice their lives for it. It cripples them, breaks them... Even the best go through it. What about you? You don't even have talent.

TONY

You're wrong. I have talent.

TONY'S DAD

What kind?

A beat.

TONY

No one can break me. Never.

The Dad exhales hopelessly.

TONY (CONT'D)

And not even you.

He shakes his head disapprovingly.

TONY'S DAD

Tony, listen... I have no desire to harm you. I just want to protect you from the mistakes I made once.

TONY

But I have my own path. I love soccer, and I want to become a professional.

The Dad holds his head in his hands.

TONY'S DAD

This is madness.

Tony's Mom approaches his Dad from behind, gently embraces him, and speaks in a soothing tone.

TONY'S MOM

Let him live the way he sees it.
There will be mistakes in anyways.
And he will deal with them on his
own.

(to Tony)

Isn't that right?

TONY

That's right.

TONY'S MOM

And if he needs support, we will
definitely help him. No matter what
it costs us.

Tony's Dad averts his gaze, calms down, and exhales. He looks at Tony.

TONY'S DAD

Alright... But promise me that you
won't act recklessly. Pursue your
dream, but always think of a backup
plan.

Tony nods.

TONY'S DAD (CONT'D)

If the day comes when you realize
that you're no longer interested in
this race, I want you to have the
opportunity to change tracks. Deal?

He extends his hand to Tony. Tony shakes it firmly.

TONY

That day will never come.

TONY'S DAD

Yeah, I hope so.

The Dad walks away to the kitchen. Tony's Mom approaches Tony and embraces him gently. Everyone leaves, and the lights in the room fade.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - EVENING

The floodlights illuminate the stadium. Players in pinnies stand on the field, divided into two teams. Tony is in the Green team, Clyde in Orange one. Mark stands in front of the players with a whistle in his hand.

MARK

Now I want you to show what you've learned during this month. I expect smart movement off the ball and full dedication from all of you. The team that scores three goals wins... But for me, the quality of your play is what matters most.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

The players are on their respective halves of the field, taking their positions. Tony stands as a defensive midfielder and looks at Clyde, making a threatening gesture.

Clyde steps back and smiles, adjusts his shorts, and dramatically crosses himself, then turns around and raises his hands, pointing at the sky. His shirt lifts, exposing his ass. Tony looks at Clyde and shyly covers his forehead with his hand.

Mark looks at his stopwatch. Erica sits in the front row of the stands, attentively watching the field.

Whistle. Green starts the game. Orange tries to intercept the ball. Green maintains possession near their own goal. Tony moves a lot the ball and gives instructions to his teammates.

Clyde and his teammates try to win the ball back. Tony skillfully outplays them and initiates an attack for his team. Clyde slips and falls on the grass.

The attack is unsuccessful. Tony receives the ball and uses the space to lure Clyde. He falls for the provocation.

SAM (O.S.)

Clyde, where are you going? Hold the position!

Clyde returns to his position. Tony deliberately positions himself next to Clyde, making him follow closely.

TONY

Get ready to die, darling.

CLYDE

You want to make my last training session memorable with your funeral, huh?

Clyde gets distracted and loses his position. Another player uses the free space and receives the ball.

SAM (O.S.)

Whose player is that?! Clyde!

CLYDE

Fuck!

The player is attacked, passes the ball to Tony.

TONY

Here!

Tony receives the ball and makes a smart pass. Green attacks, and Paul scores a goal. The players in green celebrate. Tony clenches his fist with restraint and calmly returns to his half, encouraging his teammates.

TONY (CONT'D)

Great! Let's keep it up!

Mark blows the whistle and points to the center of the field.

MARK

1-0!

Clyde stands with the ball in the center circle. Whistle. Orange starts the play, and Clyde passes to a defender before sprinting towards the opponent's penalty area, requesting a pass.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hold the ball.

Sam sees Clyde, but passes to another player. Clyde shakes his head in dissatisfaction and runs back to his teammates.

CLYDE

Damn it!

Tony's team forces their opponents to lose the ball. Tony leads them. Finally, Green regains possession. Tony controls the space and directs the attack.

Clyde tries to win the ball back, but fails. Tony's team attacks, and Paul scores a goal. Mark blows the whistle.

MARK

2-0.

Clyde stands in the center of the field with a furious expression. Green retreats, players take their positions. Clyde receives the ball and waits for the whistle. He shouts to his defender.

CLYDE

Sam! Cross the ball into the penalty area!

SAM

But we're playing the pass.

CLYDE

Cross into the box, I said!

Whistle. Clyde passes to Sam and quickly runs towards the opponent's penalty area. Sam receives the ball and makes a long pass, bypassing the opposing team.

Clyde uses his physical strength to outplay the defenders. He advances towards the goal, dribbles past Thomas, and scores a goal into the empty net. Whistle.

MARK

2-1. Ball in the center.

Clyde confidently runs to his half of the field with the ball in his hands. He places it in the center. Tony applauds and encourages his team.

TONY

Let's go, guys! We need to push them!

Green starts the play and passes to each other near their own goal. Orange presses and tries to win the ball back. Thomas makes a poor pass, but the ball luckily reaches Tony's feet. Tony initiates a promising attack.

THOMAS

(shouts to defenders)

Come on! Let's get out of here!

Green rushes forward as a unit. Tony attempts a risky pass, but makes a mistake. Orange intercepts the ball and counterattacks.

Green fails to get back in defense. Clyde makes several attempts and manages to score a goal. Whistle.

MARK

2-2.

Tony returns to his half and gestures an apology to his team. Clyde expressively celebrates the goal, running past Tony.

CLYDE

How are you doing, honey?!
(points at Tony)
Are you ready to die?

Tony silently walks past him, takes his position, and addresses the central defenders.

TONY

When Clyde gets the ball, don't
rush to him. Just move along.

The defenders nod approvingly. Tony turns around and approaches the forwards.

TONY (CONT'D)

Paul, give me a pass and run
forward.

PAUL

Why? We're playing possession.

TONY

Just do it.

Tony runs back to his position. Whistle. Paul passes to Tony. The orange players approach him cautiously.

Tony makes a precise long pass to Sam's feet. Paul looks at Tony with bewilderment and shrugs.

PAUL

What the hell?!

Tony looks at Paul and points at Sam with his hand.

TONY

Faster! Press him!

PAUL

Are you kidding me?

TONY

Come on, Paul!

Tony persistently points at Sam, who has the ball at his feet. Paul reluctantly moves towards him. Clyde runs backwards to the opponent's penalty area and gestures for the ball with both hands.

CLYDE

Give it to me! Come on!

PLAYER (O.S.)

Clyde, we need to play the pass.

CLYDE

Fuck off!

Paul is pressing. Sam plays a long pass forward. Clyde receives the ball and battles with the defenders. His teammates ask for a pass, but he tries to do it all himself.

The defenders struggle to contain him, and in the end, Tony manages to dispossess Clyde.

Tony swiftly dribbles through the center of the field with the ball at his feet. Clyde chases after him. Paul and Sam run ahead.

Clyde catches up with Tony and engages him in a physical battle of speed. Tony doesn't give up. Paul frees himself from Sam and asks for a pass. Clyde brings Tony down on the grass, but at the last moment, Tony manages to pass the ball to Paul.

Paul receives the ball and strikes it powerfully under the crossbar. It's a goal.

PAUL

Whooooa!

Tony lies on the ground and lets out a relieved sigh. Clyde slaps the grass in frustration. Paul celebrates and runs towards the edge of the field. Green players gather around him. Mark blows the whistle.

MARK

3-2! That's it! Pick up the balls!

Tony lies on the grass, taking deep breaths. He looks up at the sky. Clyde lets out a sigh of disappointment and gets back on his feet. Exhausted, Clyde approaches Tony and extends his hand, helping him up.

CLYDE

Great game, buddy.

TONY

My finest 25 minutes.

Clyde hugs Tony, sadly smiles, turns away, and heads towards the stadium exit. Joyful Paul runs past him.

PAUL

Well done, Tony! We showed them!

TONY

Thanks, Paul. What a shot you have!
Why didn't you hit like that
before?

PAUL

I did. The defenders just always
got in the way... or rather their
hands...

The guys laugh and head to the locker room.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - EVENING

Players stand by their lockers, changing clothes. Mark enters the locker room.

MARK

Guys! Thanks, everyone. I want all of you to focus on your individual sessions.

(to Paul)

Paul, you played a great game tonight. Come to my office, there are a couple of changes for you.

Mark exits, and Paul follows him. Tony looks at Clyde, who is tired.

TONY

Individual sessions? Have you already received yours?

CLYDE

And why do I need them?

Clyde looks ahead with a sad expression.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - ENTRANCE - EVENING

Erica sits on a bench. Tony exits the building and approaches her, taking her hand and smiling. Erica is slightly startled.

ERICA

Hey, how was the training?

TONY

Great.

ERICA

You played awesome! And it seems like you're smiling more.

TONY

(smiles)

Yeah, I think so too.

Tony looks at his watch, turns around, and scans the entrance for someone.

ERICA

Are you waiting for someone?

TONY

Yeah. I want to talk to Mark.

ERICA

Alright. I'll wait for you by the stadium then.

Erica kisses Tony on the cheek and walks away. Tony approaches the door. His teammates pass by him, bidding him farewell.

Clyde exits the building with a relieved yet somewhat sad expression. He stops near Tony and gazes at the soccer field. Tony notices his friend's melancholy look.

TONY

Don't tell me you'll miss us.

CLYDE

(smiling)

Not even in my thoughts.

TONY

Then why do you look so down? Your goal is within reach. You've always dreamed of this.

CLYDE

Yeah, I have.

A beat.

TONY

So, what's the matter?

CLYDE

It all came so easily to me here. What if...

Clyde looks at his reflection in the glass door.

TONY

Don't worry, you'll make it. Have more confidence in yourself!

Tony taps Clyde on the shoulder. Clyde turns to face Tony and smiles.

CLYDE

Damn it. Maybe you'll share some of yours with me?

TONY

(smiling)

No problem.

A brief pause.

CLYDE

I still don't understand how you didn't quit soccer after the first training.

TONY

(thinking)

The first training- ?

CLYDE

(rolls his eyes)

-oh, come on-

TONY

-What are you talking about?

CLYDE

Stop pretending! You remember everything.

TONY

(smiling)

No, I swear.

CLYDE

Are you kidding?

TONY

...What happened then?

A brief pause.

CLYDE

I accidentally knocked out two of your teeth with my shoulder.

TONY

(sarcastically)

Oh, Jesus. What a tragedy...

CLYDE

You couldn't even stand on your feet.

TONY

Really? I don't remember that.

CLYDE

Count yourself lucky for remembering anything.

TONY

Some knocked-out teeth won't make me quit soccer.

CLYDE

Yeah, you're right... You didn't quit playing even when everyone turned their backs on you. The team, the coach... the friends.

TONY

But it helped me realize that I've been playing it all wrong my whole life. Now, everything will be different.

Tony turns to Clyde.

TONY (CONT'D)

And things will be different for you too! You'll have to go to training again.

CLYDE

Yeah, you're right... I guess I don't have any other choice.

Clyde extends his hand to Tony.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

Good luck next year! You'll need it.

Tony shakes Clyde's hand.

TONY

You better get ready for our next encounter, darling. I won't go easy on you anymore.

CLYDE

I'll be eagerly waiting for that day... Honey.

Clyde smiles, turns away, and walks off. Tony turns toward the locker room, looks at his watch, and enters inside.

INT. SOCCER STADIUM - MARK'S OFFICE - EVENING

Mark is busy with documents on his desk. Tony cautiously enters the office.

TONY

Mark? Can I come in?

MARK

Yes, Tony, come in. Is something wrong?

TONY

I wanted to ask you. It seems like everyone have received individual training sessions.

MARK

Not everyone.

TONY

What about me? Will you give me something?

Mark doesn't answer.

TONY (CONT'D)

Maybe I'm doing something wrong?
Tell me where I need to improve!
I'll do anything!

MARK

Are you sure you're ready for this?

TONY

Yeah, I'm sure. My team needs me.

Mark approaches the coat rack and takes out a piece of paper from his jacket pocket, handing it to Tony.

MARK

This is for you.

Tony looks at the paper in his hands, puzzled. Mark returns to his desk.

MARK (CONT'D)

You can cross out the first item.
Then you work through the list.

EXT. PARK - MORNING

Erica sits on a bench with the paper in her hands, looking ahead. Tony stands on the field surrounded by scattered balls. He stretches his foot and gazes into the distance. A garbage can is positioned 35 yards away from him.

ERICA

(looking at the paper)
Three times in a row or just three times?

TONY

Three times in a row, of course.

Tony turns to Erica and takes a deep breath. He's ready. Erica watches him with interest and smiles.

TONY (CONT'D)

Let's get started.

Tony strikes the ball but misses the target. He makes a few more attempts, all unsuccessful.

EXT. PARK - LATER

Erica watches Tony with mild boredom. Tony strikes the ball unsuccessfully again, slipping on the grass and falling to the ground.

The ball bounces high into the air, lands in front of the bin, bounces once, and goes inside. Erica jumps off the bench and celebrates.

ERICA

Got it! One down!

Tony sits on the ground, looking disappointed and gazing off to the side.

TONY

It doesn't count.

ERICA

Why not? You hit the can!

TONY

I just got lucky.

Erica's enthusiasm fades slightly, and she sits back on the bench. Tony gets up and prepares for another attempt, running towards the balls.

EXT. PARK - AFTERNOON

Tony is drenched in sweat from exhaustion. Four balls are scattered around him. He strikes the first ball, almost hitting the target. Frustrated, he hits his leg with his hand and looks down, breathing heavily.

ERICA (O.S.)

And here he is, the one and only,
Tony! Adams!

Tony looks at Erica, who is shouting into a rolled-up piece of paper.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Fans at home are eagerly waiting!
Will he be able to accomplish the
impossible?! Get the ball into the
can! Three! Times!

TONY
(smiles and looks ahead)
Three times in a row...

ERICA
Three! Times! In a row!

Erica puts away the paper and pretends to cheer from the stands.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Let's go, Tony! You can do it,
Tony! Tony, I love you! Tony, I
want your babies!

Tony laughs and turns to Erica.

TONY
Everything has its time.

Tony sighs and focuses. He strikes the ball. It rises high in the air and gracefully drops right into the can. Erica jumps up from her seat and shouts into a rolled-up piece of paper.

ERICA
Yesss! Un-be-lievable! He did it!
Just a little bit more to go! He
has only two attempts left! The
tension is rising!

Erica blows an imaginary kiss to Tony. Tony looks at Erica, smiles, and responds with a reciprocal gesture.

Tony strikes the ball with a powerful kick. It soars at a medium height, hits the edge of the can, and bounces up.

Tony and Erica watch the ball, holding their breath. It descends and drops into the can. Tony clenches his fist, celebrating with restrained joy.

ERICA (CONT'D)
And he did it again! Two in a row!
Now, only one ball remains!

Tony carefully positions the ball in front of him and takes two steps back. Erica watches him, filled with anticipation.

Tony looks at the can and takes a deep breath. He strikes the ball. It gently rises and softly drops down.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

ONE YEAR LATER

The ball lands at Paul's feet after a long pass. He is the team captain.

Paul and his teammate execute a one-two against the opposing goalkeeper, scoring a goal into the empty net. The final whistle blows.

The match score is 5-1. Paul has scored 4 goals.

The fans celebrate with restrained joy. Some girls hold up posters with pictures of Paul, cheering enthusiastically for him.

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Mark respectfully shakes hands with the opposing coach and thanks him for the game.

Tony walks slowly towards the center bench. He has physically strengthened, with his jersey fitting him perfectly. He wears the number 6 on his back. White boots and socks stained with mud. Mark greets him and warmly embraces him.

MARK

Damn. Great pass... I don't remember us practicing that.

Tony grabs a bottle.

TONY

I noticed that their fullback often left the Zone 16... We just had to wait for Paul to notice it.

MARK

And he did it.

TONY

Yep... After I told him about it.

Mark smiles and pats Tony on the shoulder. Tony drinks his water and looks at the stadium. He's searching for someone. Mark leans in closer to his ear.

MARK

(whispering)

Last row, right in the center.

Tony notices three men in business suits. They are actively taking notes in their notepads.

MARK (CONT'D)

We will miss you.

TONY

They seem to be watching Paul, I guess.

Tony watches as Paul signs autographs for his fan-girls.

MARK

I don't think so. Those people understand who's really controlling the game... And they made an official request for you 3 months ago.

Tony looks surprised at him.

MARK (CONT'D)

So, don't forget about us.

Mark looks intrigued at Tony. Tony struggles to contain his joy.

TONY

Listen, Mark. If you think I should stay, I will. I believe we have a chance to become champions next-

MARK

Oh, come on! We'll manage without you!

Mark smiles and walks to the other players. Leroy walks past him.

LEROY

It's unbelievable! Is this the Tony Adams who replaced me in my last match? I'll be telling this story to my kids someday.

Leroy hugs Tony.

TONY

Hey, Leroy. How are you doing? I heard you're preparing for coaching courses.

LEROY

Yeah, the first exam is six months now.

TONY

You've chosen a tough path.

LEROY

Can't live without taking risks. Just like you, in a way.

TONY

(smiling)

Look at the scoreboard, man. No risks. Just pure calculation.

LEROY

Indeed. What am I talking about?
Great game. Congratulations, buddy.
I'm sure you still have a lot ahead
of you.

Leroy walks away. Tony scans the stands, waving at someone.
Tony's parents stand and wave back at him.

Tony continues scanning the crowd. From behind, Erica sneaks
up on him and gently hugs him from behind.

ERICA

Great game. Congratulations.

TONY

Ah, there you are! I lost sight of
you.

ERICA

Oh my, you're so wet. Didn't notice
you were running so much.

TONY

I'm a deep playmaker. I'm not
supposed to be noticed. And I don't
need unnecessary attention.

ERICA

I remember. You set the direction
and keep the rhythm-

TONY

And keep the rhythm... Exactly!

Erica stands behind Tony, looking at the fans.

ERICA

It's a shame you weren't this good
at the beginning of the season.
Then you would have definitely won
the championship.

TONY

Well, seventh place isn't bad
either. Especially for newcomers to
the league.

ERICA

But what about victory at any cost?
Glory, recognition? What's it all
for?

Tony shrugs.

TONY
I don't know... I just play soccer.
And enjoy it.

Tony looks at the stands, kisses Erica's hand.

TONY (CONT'D)
And what about recognition?

TONY'S FLASHBACK:

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Tony watches the ball flying, holding his breath. Erica stands with a piece of paper in her hand, eagerly watching as the ball lands right into the trash can. A perfect shot.

Exhausted, Tony drops to his knees, covering his face with his hands and sighing heavily. Erica screams with joy and runs towards Tony. She hugs him, and they fall together on the grass in euphoria.

BACK TO PRESENT:

EXT. SOCCER STADIUM - SIDELINE - CONTINUOUS

Tony whispers into Erica's ear.

TONY
I already have the best fan in the
world with me. What else could I
dream of?

Erica hugs Tony and kisses him. They hold hands and walk along the stands towards the exit.

THE END