

Doubles
Written By: Daniel Ehrlich

Made in Highland

NARRATOR (V/O)

I once held the theory that sports are not meant for man in his current state. Sports, after all, are beautiful expressions of competition, fully realized in concept, governed by the incontrovertible logic of their own rules and regulations, and yet easily adaptable to suit the particular ages, needs and ability levels of their practitioners. In my opinion, there is no major sport that is not the equal of chess in precision of design or constitutional democracy in durability of design. Now man, man is not beautiful. In fact, man is often quite ugly, governed by wild, intemperate passions that yield to nothing and capitulate to no one. He is cruel and stubborn and vain and ignorant, and all of these qualities are crucial to his failures, though even this he does not know. Now again, I had a theory about Man and Sports, and for most of my life I would have loved to share it with you, but then I was tasked with the job of covering the craziest son-of-a-bitch and the saddest-son-of-a-bitch the sport of tennis has ever known for my local newspaper. I still can't decide which one is which, but more importantly, I no longer hold the theory I once held.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY, ANYWHERE USA

A woman rests in a hospital bed. She swaddles a small newborn baby, SPLINTER. Seated to her right is the boy's father, RUSTIC, who speaks with a thick Russian accent. He sits with impatience, bouncing a tennis ball in a rehearsed fashion, as players do before a serve. A nurse walks into frame.

NURSE

What a, err, beautiful, err, healthy, little baby. And what a healthy, beautiful mom.

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NURSE (CONT'D)

We're just gonna need to keep you overnight for observation and tomorrow morning you can go home and start your lives together. You pick a name yet?

RUSTIC

The check.

NURSE

Excuse me?

RUSTIC

The check.

NURSE

Zeecheck?

RUSTIC

The check, we take the check.

Rustic pantomimes the signing of a check with the flick of his wrist, to the horror of the nurse.

CUT TO:

BLACK--We see the name SPLINTER? appear on the screen, before it dissolves. Narration begins:

NARRATOR

You see, this poor boy began his life without a name.

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE - DAY (SIMULTANEOUS TO NARRATION)

An old jalopy makes a hard right turn onto a dusty patch of land a few feet from a shanty house. It stops amidst a cloud of dust of its own making. There is not otherwise a sign of civilization within eyeshot.

INT. SHANTY HOUSE, RUSTIC'S BEDROOM - DAY

Splint's mother and father lie in a double bed, shoulder to shoulder, as Rustic bounces an ever-present tennis ball while his arm hangs off his side of the bed. A picture of Emmanuel Agassi with a young Andre hangs from the wall on one side of the room. A picture of Richard Williams with a young Venus and Serena hangs on the other. The room is otherwise simple and sparsely decorated, not that there is any space for stuff.

Splint's mother nurses Splint. The décolletage of her cheap, white shirt exposes her breast. A ceiling light flickers. Splint's father gets up.

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INT. SHANTY HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Rustic prepares a bottle for Splint from a box of sketchy bottles of free testosterone, all of which contain "warning" and "Keep out of reach of children" and "hazard" signs. He does not appear to know what he is doing but proceeds with a

RUSTIC

Hmph.

INT. SHANTY HOUSE, RUSTIC'S BEDROOM - DAY

We return to the POV of Splinter's mom, now nursing Splinter in a CU shot in the small bedroom. Rustic's hand, which holds the bottle, comes into frame and nudges Splinter's face so that he releases from the nipple and onto his father's bottle of ad hoc formula.

NARRATOR

And without...

Splinter resists with the maximal effort of a newborn who clings to his mother's breast.

NARRATOR

...his mother's

Rustic wears a skull ring on this hand, which overwhelms the infant.

NARRATOR

...milk.

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE BACKYARD, DAY,

TEXT READS: ONE YEAR LATER

Splint crawls up a small dirt mound. Rustic's voice can be heard in the background:

RUSTIC

Atta' boy, boy. Keep going, boy.

NARRATOR

And without...

Splinter stops his ascent. He rests on all fours about five feet from a tennis ball that sits atop the makeshift mound, which inclines at an angle too severe for an infant to crawl up and which is about fifteen feet total in elevation.

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NARRATOR
His father's...

Rustic implores Splinter to continue his crawl from atop the mound, on his hands and knees, one hand still bouncing the ever-present tennis ball, urgency in his voice. His beard is scraggly and unkempt. His round belly hangs over old, stained mesh shorts.

RUSTIC
Nyet. Nyet. Keep going, boy.

Splinter collapses from a crawl to a belly flop. He lies on the mound. His father looks on, contemptuous.

NARRATOR
...Love.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, DAY

Text on screen reads: ONE YEAR LATER.

The small dirt mound is now a makeshift tennis court, 36 X 18 feet, the size of a junior tennis court.

Young SPLINTER waddles back and forth between cones spread a foot apart in intervals along the baseline, wearing a diaper and nothing else, his feet bare. The camera tracks the boy as the narrator interjects simultaneously:

NARRATOR
Now I know what you must be thinking: How did that tennis court get there? And, why hasn't that toddler any footwear? Well, as for the first question, this boy's father, Rustic, spent the first 6 months of his son's life...

(narration to continue over the next several cut scenes of Rustic buying materials for and constructing the tennis court, which is shown in a split screen format while the tracking shot of Splint weaving through cones continues and will eventually converge into one seamless shot as the tennis court's construction is completed)

Cut to:

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INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY, COMPUTER, DAY

Rustic googles, "Inexpensive backyard materials to construct tennis court."

NARRATOR

Researching how to transform his
humble backyard into an outdoor
tennis court.

INT. HOME DEPOT, DAY

Rustic stands next to a Home Depot employee in front of a towering stack of dirt and cement bags that almost reaches the store's ceiling. He nods all the way upwards at the employee.

EXT. HOME DEPOT, DAY

Rustic wheels an especially long steel platform truck through its parking lot; a hapless employee at its rear attempts to guide the over-encumbered cart. Bags upon bags upon bags STACKED on bags upon bags upon bags. The platform truck narrowly misses colliding with first a miniature poodle and then the miniature poodle's owner. It stops when it collides against a car's trunk. Rustic walks along the platform truck to this now dented trunk and uses his keys to reveal the dented car is his, his other hand still bouncing the ever-present tennis ball.

NARRATOR

And while he may have been lacking
in certain areas...

EXT. HOME DEPOT, PARKING LOT, DAY

Rustic tosses the final bag of dirt that will fit into his trunk and then looks at the endless mountain of bags that remain on the cart.

RUSTIC

Shit.

NARRATOR

He was quite ingenious in many
respects

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, DAY, MONTAGE

1) Rustic walks with measuring tape along a chalk-marked line.

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- 2) Rustic spray paints a white line along this marking.
- 3) Rustic bounces a ball on the white line that rebounds with almost no bounce.
- 4) Now on a halfway outlined court, Rustic crouches along the back of one of the court's doubles alleys and inspects a faded line with his measuring tape.
- 5) Rustic spray paints this double's alley white.
- 6) Rustic bounces a tennis ball again. It rebounds slightly higher than it did in the previous scene.
- 7) Now on a fully outlined court, Rustic spray paints the remaining markings. He bounces a ball to an unremarkable response.

NARRATOR

And he possessed a resilience that
I've seen in no other man, except
maybe his son, which we'll come
back to later on.

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, DAY, CTD.

In a quick succession of cuts, Rustic studies the numbers as measured in feet along the measuring tape from different points on his court. Each point will be a quick camera cut.

- 8) From the first point, in which the measuring tape extends the length of the court, Rustic looks at the number 36.
- 9) From the second point, in which the tape extends the width of the court, Rustic looks at the number 18.
- 10) From the final point, the service line, in which the measuring tape extends from the opposite service line, Rustic looks at the number 12.

RUSTIC

Bingo.

- 11) Rustic hammers a rusty metal pole on one side of the court. Then he does the same on the other side.
- 12) Then he attaches a net to the posts on each pole.
- 13) Then he drops a tennis ball on the court, which bounces a little higher than before.

RUSTIC

Hmm.

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INT. SHANTY HOUSE, KITCHEN, DAY

Rustic stands over a box of sundry materials such as dirt, cement and metals marked with signs that read "illicit" and "hazardous" and "keep out of reach of children," a different one than the nursery box with testosterone liquids that make up his son's formula, which sits directly adjacent. He picks it up.

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, TENNIS COURT, DAY

14) Rustic sprinkles cement from a box marked "WARNING" on the baseline.

15) He bounces the ball. It bounces even higher.

16) Rustic repeats the action on the baseline again, this time with a plaster that reads "toxic."

17) He bounces the ball. Even higher.

18) Then plasters the baseline with cement from a container labeled "hazardous."

19) Even higher. Still not enough.

20) Then he picks up a box that reads, "Warning: Toxic and hazardous. Keep away from pregnant women and infants." He spreads its contents on the baseline of the tennis court. He drops a tennis ball. It bounces up well.

RUSTIC

Bingo.

21) He applies this specific plaster to all lines which comprise the court.

CUT TO:

Young SPLINTER waddles in and out between orange cones, a continuation from the montage's beginning, which joins the split screen of the fledgling to finished court into just one of the completed court where Splint continues his exercise.

NARRATOR

Now, as for the second question, which concerns footwear: Why couldn't a man who built a dirt and concrete tennis court from scratch with his bare hands be bothered to to procure sneakers so that his son's tender, growing feet might be protected?

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Splinter winces in pain as his heel pierces an extrusion of rock underfoot.

RUSTIC

No cry. Nyet. In and out. In and out.

NARRATOR

Well, you be the judge.

INT. SHANTY HOUSE, RUSTIC'S BEDROOM, EVENING

Splinter's mom nurses splint in a stiff, straw chair in the corner of the room. She rocks the two of them back and forth in lieu of a rocking chair. She wears the same white shirt with the plunging neckline from the previous nursing scene, Splint's mouth suckling her breast. A dirty but satisfied Rustic walks in the frame carrying supplies, including the box of hazardous mixing materials in one hand, bouncing the ever-present tennis ball in the other.

INT. SHANTY HOUSE, KITCHEN, EVENING

RUSTIC puts down the box of toxic tennis court dirts and cements and presides over the toxic box of sketchy medicine bottles of free testosterone with the overt hazard labels from the earlier scene. He uses a different, larger baby bottle into which he applies an arbitrary dosage of some ingredients marked "HAZARDOUS, keep away from children."

RUSTIC

Hmph.

INT. SHANTY HOUSE, RUSTIC'S BEDROOM, DAY

RUSTIC WRESTS SPLINTER AWAY FROM HIS MOTHER'S ARMS, AND BREAST, WHICH HIS MOUTH CLINGS TO FOR A MOMENT. RUSTIC STUFFS THE BOTTLE of hazardous testosterone formula INTO SPLINTER'S MOUTH.

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, DAY,

Text on screen reads: ONE YEAR LATER

Splinter trots along the baseline with precocity, as he zigzags between cones arranged along one foot intervals along the baseline.

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He jumps over the section where the rock abuts from the ground and skips toward the service line, which is made of a wooden flat board overlay that covers a large indentation in the court. He stops in defiance upon arrival at the wooden overlay, as though to quit this exercise, then mutters barely audibly:

SPLINTER

Nyet.

RUSTIC

What did you say, boy?

NARRATOR

Now I can't be sure what this little guy was thinking at this moment, or if he was thinking at all. After all, he had yet to utter his very first word. But I like to think that a prodigy such as Boy, aka Splinter, whose name we'll get to in just a moment, was always thinking, right from the get go. I mean, he had no other choice...

Splinter looks forward and up at the net in front of him.

SPLINTER

Net.

Rustic looks at the boy and then looks at the net.

SPLINTER

Net.

Rustic's demeanor transforms from stone-faced to searching. He catches the ever-present tennis ball that is otherwise bouncing.

RUSTIC

Net?

SPLINTER

Net!

Rustic looks at his little shanty and his beat up jalopy and slaps his belly a couple of times. He snorts out a chortle, mucus catching his mustache and repeats the word as though it represents the acceptable resolution to a long and drawn out dispute between two aggrieved parties.

RUSTIC

Net!

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DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RUSTIC'S BEDROOM, DAY

Screen reads: One Year later

INT. SHANTY HOUSE, RUSTIC'S BEDROOM, DAY

Rustic's mom sits on the same straw chair wearing the same white shirt with the plunging neckline. She bounces a noticeably larger Splinter up and down. He appears distressed.

She shoots a furtive glance in the direction of the kitchen, then removes her breast. FROM OUT OF FRAME:

RUSTIC

Don't even think about it, woman.

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, DAY, TENNIS COURT

Rustic stands on one side of the court at the net feeding tennis balls to a preschool-age Splinter, who shuffles along the baseline as he alternates between forehands and backhands. He wears only one article of clothing: cut off sweatpants at the knees. THE BELOW NARRATION OCCURS SIMULTANEOUSLY TO THIS DRILL.

NARRATOR

Now I know that for most of you,
it requires no great stretch of
the imagination to conceive of
just how Rustic turned this junior
court into a regulation court.

INT. HOME DEPOT, DAY

Rustic points to the uppermost shelf of dirt and cement bags, an employee by his side.

RUSTIC

I take all of them.

NARRATOR

Or how boy's training proceeded

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, DAY, TENNIS COURT CTD.

Splinter does effortless suicide sprints from service doubles alley to center court to opposite side doubles alley without breaking a sweat.

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NARRATOR

Or how the boy's nutrition
proceeded.

INT. HOUSE, DAY

Mother eats porridge. Pan to Father eats porridge. Pan to Splint, who eats porridge but winces as we see from the side of the screen a syringe that sticks into his arm.

NARRATOR

Or how the boy's neuroses would
begin to manifest.

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, DAY, TENNIS COURT

Splint zigzags effortlessly from side to side of the court, whipping forehands and backhands while deftly jumping over every rock and crag on the dirt sections of the court.

RUSTIC

Satisfactory, boy. Satisfactory.

Splint now hits serves to the forehand side of the court, one after the next after the next. Perfect

RUSTIC

Satisfactory, boy. Satisfactory.

Splint runs to the net to hit an approach shot fed by his father. He stumbles on the small wooden flat board that overlays the patch of indented court where the service line would be.

SPLINTER

Oww.

RUSTIC

Unsatisfactory, boy,
unsatisfactory.

SPLINTER

My foot is bleeding. There is
wood in it.

RUSTIC

It nothing. It a splinter. Just
like you are. A Splinter.

NARRATOR

And that's how it happened, folks.
(MORE)

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NARRATOR (CONT'D)

At the age of four, our young tennis prodigy was finally given a name by his father: Splinter, simply because the court lacked the proper materials for safe construction. Meanwhile, on the other side of town a very different boy was leading a very different life.

Cut To:

BLACK: We see the name SAMUEL on screen before fading to:

INT. HOSPITAL, DAY

ELOISE grunts and groans in the labor pains of birth. Moments later a baby is born. It is a boy, SAMUEL.

NURSE

What a beautiful, big baby boy.

Eloise cries with tears of joy.

ELOISE

He's so beautiful and so big!

Her husband, KURT, hugs her as the nurse places baby Samuel in her arms.

NURSE

And my God. Not an ounce of fat on him. I've never seen such a specimen.

KURT

That's my boy, Samuel, a perfect specimen, future kickass, rockstar, Yankees shortstop, president of the good ol' US of A.

NURSE

Usually we like to keep new moms and their babies overnight for observation, but this rockstar appears like he should already be looking after us.

ELOISE

Who's so hungry? Who's so hungry? Come in here for mommy's milk.

Eloise brings Samuel to her bosom, which he takes to with alacrity.

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NARRATOR

And what a specimen he was. 14 pounds, 7 ounces and, as the nurse said, literally not an ounce of baby fat on him. Really.

EXT. KURT'S LARGE HOUSE, BACKYARD, BATTING CAGE

NARRATOR

Having avoided the traumatic experiences of Splinter's early infancy, we begin young Samuel's journey a little bit later in life. Like Splint, young Samuel's backyard was built for his prodigal athletic abilities.

Young Samuel, aged 3, slams a baseball off a batting tee. Kurt replaces the ball followed by another slam.

KURT

Crack!

And another.

KURT

Crack!

And another.

KURT

Crack!

And another.

KURT

(Yelling to Eloise) We got ourselves a crack baby, Elle. Derek f'in Jeter, ladies and gents. Derek f'in Jeter

Young Samuel slams another baseball and we hear a clank offscreen of the ball hitting a metal beam. Still offscreen we hear a tiny voice.

SAMUEL

Dewick f'in Jetew.

INT. PRESCHOOL, DAY

A retinue of children exits off a small yellow bus one by one. Each child is dressed in normal garb.

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Finally, Sam is revealed. He's wearing a superman costume, cape and all. He walks in slow motion from behind the rest of the crew, his chest up like a superhero. As he approaches a small series of stairs, which his peers negotiate with care, he leaps off the ledge and lands five steps below on the ground in a crouched hero's pose.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAYGROUND, DAY,

Two young boys, Samuel, now aged 6, and an unnamed boy pick a kickball team from among a host of boys crowded in a circle.

Eric. SAMUEL

Alan. BOY

Danny. SAMUEL

Nick. BOY

Richie SAMUEL

Tommy. BOY

NARRATOR
And if you'll notice, as captain Sam and his buddy picked teammates for their game of kickball, there was a diminutive child in the back of the rest, just waiting, patiently, perhaps with some sadness, hoping to be called. Does he look familiar to you?

SAMUEL
Uhhh. You. Boy back there.

Splint slowly walks in the direction of Sam.

SAMUEL
Where do you think you're going?

Splint is silent.

SAMUEL
Get behind home plate. You're catching.

(MORE)

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SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Your job is to throw the ball back to me after each pitch. That's it. In the unlikely scenario that someone on their team is running home, get out of the fuckin' way. Then I'm the catcher.

Little Splint nods with timidity.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL, DAY

NARRATOR

And so the boys' lives went in such a fashion, Samuel's like a rockstar, kickass, future Yankees shortstop and President of the United States of America and diminutive Splinter's in the shadows, a nobody at school and an overworked, underdeveloped tennis machine under the tutelage of his tyrannical father.

Samuel huddles behind his locker with an entourage of friends.

SAMUEL

Check these out.

DANNY

Are those...

RICHIE

Condoms.

SAMUEL

Condoms?! Condoms are for bitches. Read the label, ladies. These are magnums.

DANNY

You planning a 6th period water balloon fight.

RICHIE

I don't know. I saw the way Jenny looked at him the other day.

Just then, a girl, ROSE, walks by the boys. She waves coyly:

ROSE

Hi, Sam.

Then another girl, Jenny, walks by, waves coyly:

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JENNY
Hey there, Sam.

SAMUEL
Magnums (affirmatively).

DANNY
I take it back. So just who are
all these magnums for?

SAMUEL
Gentlemen. The question is not:
who are THE magnums for. The
question is: Who AREN'T the
magnums for?

Another girl, tall and gawky, ANNA, walks by and waves shyly in Samuel's direction. He turns away toward his friends and giggles.

SAMUEL
For her, they aren't for her.

The two friends bow in praise at their exalted leader. From the opposite side of the lockers, Splint is looking on, half piqued, half annoyed. Meanwhile, Anna turns away dejected and catches eyes with Splint, who immediately looks away from her.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD, MIDDLE SCHOOL, DAY

Crowded bleachers decked in the team colors of Sam and Splint's middle school. An entire section occupied by Sam's female followers in matching skirts. When Sam notices them, they all open up their legs briefly and giggle. Anna sits far away on the other end amidst mostly parents. Seated two rows above her is Splint. Next to Splint is a man with notepad, scribbling and seemingly unaware of his surroundings.

NARRATOR
See that guy, the preoccupied one
next to Splint and two rows below
the girl jilted by Sam. That's
me. I guess now is the time to
reveal: I'm not merely the
narrator of this story. I'm a
sports journalist for the town's
newspaper.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

And it just so happens that it's at this baseball game, in which Sam will pitch a no-hitter and one of his female admirers will later regret not wearing a tampon, that I begin writing a much larger story than the one taking place here, tonight, only I don't know it yet. I just know that it's the first of many headlines to read like this:

CUT TO:

Newspaper clipping:

1) Hometown Hurler tops 70 MPH

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL BATHROOM, DAY

Sam rips open a magnum. A young beautiful female grins widely as he approaches her.

Newspaper clipping:

2) Little Big League Shuts Out Crosstown Foes

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD, BEHIND DUGOUT

Sam rips open a magnum. A brunette girl smiles and bends over for Sam.

Newspaper clipping:

3) The Boy Who Throws Like a Man

INT. CLASSROOM, DAY

Sam smiles at his beautiful blond teacher. She smiles back. He rips open a magnum.

TEACHER

Excuse me you freak. Detention.

Samuel smiles again at her. Her indignation melts into a smile.

Newspaper clipping:

4) City Phenom Poised to send the Hornets to the State Championships

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INT. MASKED SEX PARTY, MANSION, NIGHT

Samuel wears the mask from Eyes Wide Shut. He rips open magnum after magnum after magnum with his teeth as a harem of topless girls who wear exotic masks themselves throw their bodies in his direction.

NARRATOR

But as God giveth, God just as soon taketh away.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD, DAY

The crowd quiets as a two run homer eclipses the wall. Samuel walks the next batter. The coach comes to the mound and takes him out of the game

5) Invincible Until Now, Superman Sam Encounters Kryptonite

NARRATOR

And just as soon as my days covering young Samuel's ascent began, they ended.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE, DAY

Kurt and Samuel are in a doctor's personal office. The doctor is holding x-rays of Sam's pitching elbow.

KURT

But you can't be sure.

DOCTOR

It's tendinitis. I've seen it a million times. And it's bad. There are multiple chips in your elbow.

The doctor holds out the x-ray, pointing to the sites of the chips.

KURT

But they can be healed.

SAMUEL

I can be fixed!

DOCTOR

You're not broken, but parts of your elbow are.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

If you ever have a chance to pitch again, you are going to need to undergo extensive physical therapy. And even then, it might still require surgery. And even then...there are no guarantees.

KURT, SAMUEL

This is bullshit! Jinx.

KURT

When will my son be back on the mound.

DOCTOR

I don't make predictions. It's not my job. My job is to diagnose and to talk about strategies for healing.

KURT

C'mon son. This doctor is a quack. Let's go.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD, MIDDLE SCHOOL, EVENING

Bleachers are half filled. Samuel looks up to the cheering section. No girls, no skirts. From the mound he looks up at the score. It reads AWAY: 11, Home: 2. He lets out a sigh. He looks to the end of the bleachers and sees Splinter, who watches on. He looks just to Splint's right and sees the journalist. He looks back at his catcher, shakes his head and throws a pitch. The ball is crushed for a home run.

EXT. WALKWAY OF HIGH SCHOOL CONNECTING THE BASEBALL FIELDS AND TENNIS COURTS

Samuel walks down the hill connecting the baseball fields to the adjacent tennis courts. He is despondent and in his own world. Then there is a sound and another sound. A screeching. Sneakers squeak followed by silence followed by a squeak. He turns his head to his left and sees a boy doing suicide sprints. It's the boy from the bleachers, Splint. Samuel watches the boy, who makes sure never to touch a line during his sprints. After a moment of pause, Samuel resumes his walk. As he turns the corner to the gate where the tennis courts are located, he hears a voice:

SPLINTER

Hey.

Samuel ignores the voice. Again.

SPLINTER

Hey.

SAMUEL

Kid, I'm not in the mood.

SPLINTER

I've watched you out there.
You've got a great arm.

SAMUEL

Listen, I don't mind stalkers, but
I do mind when they're guys.

SPLINTER

I'm not a stalker. I'm the best
athlete at this school.

Now Samuel is paying attention. He stops in his tracks to let out an obnoxious guffaw.

SAMUEL

Nice try, but you're not gonna
bait me with your bullshit.

SPLINTER

I don't bait. I don't lie at all.
I grew up expecting a beating if I
told a lie so I just don't tell
them.

SAMUEL

Listen, shithead. I'm not in the
mood for much right now, except
maybe a fight. So keep up this
shit and I'll walk into that fag
cage of yours and knock you out.

SPLINTER

You couldn't even catch me, let
alone knock me out.

With that, Samuel drops his baseball gear and beelines for the tennis court's opening gate. He pushes through and starts chasing after Splint. He rushes straight at Splint but almost tumbles forward after Splint jukes out of the way. He rushes after him again. Same outcome. This goes on for some time, Samuel running full speed ahead and Splint foiling him with balletic precision. He is never close to being touched AND he never steps foot on a line. After 45 seconds of this, Samuel collapses on the ground crying.

SPLINTER

Stop crying. It shows weakness.

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SAMUEL
I'm not crying, you fag.

SPLINTER
Calling me that doesn't make your
tears any less real.

SAMUEL
Listen, I don't need this
bullshit. You're lucky I didn't
beat the shit out of you.

Samuel stands up, composes himself and walks away before
turning back.

SAMUEL
How did you do that, by the way.

SPLINTER
I told you. I'm the best athlete
at this school. You were never
going to catch me.

SAMUEL
I mean with the lines. You never
touched a line that whole time.

SPLINTER
I have OCD. I can't touch lines.

SAMUEL
What's OCD, obsessive cocksucker
disorder?

SPLINTER
Your meanness doesn't take away
from the fact that you can't pitch
anymore.

Samuel feints an attack at Splinter who doesn't move.

SPLINTER
We really gonna do that whole song
and dance again? I have OCD,
obsessive compulsive disorder. I
don't touch lines.

SAMUEL
Just like you don't touch women.

SPLINTER
Just like your fastball can't
touch the strike zone without
getting hammered.

SAMUEL

What do you want from me, weirdo?

SPLINTER

I want to see if you can serve a tennis ball without pain.

SAMUEL

I'm not playing tennis.

SPLINTER

Well from what I see out there, unfortunately, you're not really playing baseball either.

Samuel looks furtively around, making sure not to be seen by anybody he might know. With resignation.

SAMUEL

Fine, give me one of those sticks.

SPLINTER

That's actually what us tennis players call them.

Splinter hands a racket to Samuel and leads him to the baseline.

SPLINTER

Stand here and try to serve in that box (pointing).

Samuel throws up the tennis ball and hits it far away into oblivion.

SAMUEL

(Sarcastically) Did it land in the box?

SPLINTER

Did it hurt?

Samuel mulls over the question.

SAMUEL

No.

Splinter walks to the other side of the baseline and gets into a service motion.

SPLINTER

Watch me this time. Then try again.

Made in Highland

Splinter tosses a perfect serve into the advantage box. Sam's face expresses subtle, fascinated intrigue.

SPLINTER

Now you try.

Sam tosses up another serve, this time imitating Splinter's toss to almost comic effect. Still, he hits a much better serve than before as it clips the tape for a fault, a fast fault.

SPLINTER

That was incredible.

SAMUEL

It didn't go in.

SPLINTER

How many tennis balls have you hit in your life?

SAMUEL

These two.

SPLINTER

Then that's incredible. I could turn you into a great tennis player.

SAMUEL

Well isn't that great. Why don't you just turn me into gay porn's best bottom bitch.

Samuel turns around and walks away, leaving Splinter on the court to hit serves into the night.

INT. SHANTY HOUSE, RUSTIC'S BEDROOM, DAY

Rustic lays in bed, pale and weak, tennis ball in hand, not bouncing. His wife sits up next to him. She observes her distressed husband.

WOMAN

Can I get you a glass of water.

RUSTIC

No.

WOMAN

A bite to eat.

RUSTIC

No.

Made in Highland

WOMAN (yelling to Splinter)
Splint, get your father some milk
and toast.

RUSTIC
(Weak but stern) Woman I said get
me not one goddamned thing.

Kurt gets up from bed and walks to his dresser, where an assortment of medicines with "hazard" and "warning" signs reside. He resumes bouncing the tennis ball, only to stop and pop open the tab of a bottle to chug it. Immediately after, he collapses to the floor, tennis ball with him.

INT. HOSPITAL, DAY

DOCTOR
We tried everything we could to
resuscitate him. It was too late.
There was nothing to be done.

WOMAN
What was the problem.

DOCTOR
A tumor the size of a tennis ball
in his brain. Malignant.
Probably been growing for years.

CUT TO:
Splint and his mom look at the doctor, nonplussed but without a hint of sadness.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL, DAY

Splinter opens the lock to his locker. A girl taps him on the shoulder from behind. It's Anna.

SPLINTER
Huh, Hi.

ANNA
I heard about your dad. I just
wanted to to say I'm sorry. I can
only imagine how sad you must
feel.

SPLINTER
I'm uh, hmm

ANNA
Lost for words.
(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)

It's completely understandable. I lost my father too. Well it's more like he ran away from us when I was four to be with his other family. But he's dead to me.

SPLINTER

Well I'm sorry to hear about that.

ANNA

Don't be. I don't think I discovered happiness until it was just me and my mom.

SPLINTER

I can kind of relate. I...

Just then Samuel interrupts from beside them as an interloper to their conversation.

SAMUEL

What's up stick boy?

ANNA

Excuse me, but we were talking.

SAMUEL

Sorry, I guess I didn't notice anyone. Anyway, Splint, or whatever your name is, I thought about it and thanks but no thanks. I'm sure my arm'll be better before next season. I appreciate the offer, though, and if I see any pansies in the hallway I'll be sure to send them your way. I'm guessing you could use more teammates.

Samuel walks away.

ANNA

God, he's such an asshole.

SPLINTER

He's also right. Our team sucks, if you can call it one. We have like eight players and I'm not sure any of them know what a backhand is. We coulda really used Sam.

ANNA

Sam's own family probably can't even find a use for Sam. Sorry, I make too many anti-family jokes and this probably isn't the time.

SPLINTER

Don't sweat it. I hated my dad. Maybe now I'll start to discover happiness.

Anna's hand brushes against Splinter's as the bell rings. She winces at the sound, turns to leave and waves good bye. Splinter smiles for the first time.

NARRATOR

The rest of spring of 7th grade came and went uneventfully for all. Sam's arm didn't get any better and he was unable to rejoin the team.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD, EVENING

Sam watches his old team get lit up from the bleachers, which are lonely and empty.

NARRATOR

Splinter played number one singles for the worst tennis team in the county, going undefeated despite his quirks.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENNIS COURT, MIDDLE SCHOOL, DAY

Splinter skips over lines and jumps over boxes while hitting crushing winners against baffled opponents.

NARRATOR

Splinter and Anna had the occasional locker rendezvous but his confidence in dealing with bullies did not translate to confidence in talking to girls, especially Anna, who grew more beautiful by the day.

CUT TO:

Anna smiles at Splinter while walking through the hallway.

Made in Highland

Splinter smiles back and starts to say something until he realizes he has nothing to say. His mouth keeps opening but no words come out. She seems disappointed but equally awkward as she turns away palming her forehead while Splinter does the same in the cover of his locker.

EXT. FAST MOTIONS THROUGH THE CHANGING OF THE SEASONS

NARRATOR

Pretty soon over a year had gone by and middle school had not gone to plan for Splint or Sam. For Sam, it seemed like he'd lived out out a comically premature facsimile of a Springsteen song, with his glory days long behind him. For Splinter, life was no better without his father. His mother was poor and worked long hours as a cleaning lady, a fact which remained secret to nobody in the school. Mostly he retreated to the backyard tennis court his father had built him, running suicides and hopping over every line on the court like each was a pit of lava. Who knows just how bleak things could have become if not for a serendipitous encounter between Sam and Splint in the middle school library where each was conducting research for their graduation thesis. Well, at least Splinter was. Sam, on the other hand...

INT. LIBRARY, MIDDLE SCHOOL, DAY

Splinter sits in front of a computer at the end of a row of computers, a large gulf between him and his nearest peer. A Microsoft Word document appears on the screen before him with the cursor blinking back at him. Exasperated, he cranes his head to the left and notices Sam. Then, Sam notices Splint and shoots Splint an aggressive look.

SAM

What are you doing?

SPLINT

My thesis. What are you doing?

SAM

Uhh. My thesis.

Made in Highland

Splinter stands up to walk to Sam's computer.

SPLINT
What's your thesis on?

As Splint approaches the screen, he notices a bevy of half naked women on the screen.

SAM
Pussy.

SPLINT
Really, because all I see are breasts.

SAM
Well this is the early stage research. (Peeved) What the fuck do you want?

SPLINT
(More to himself) What the fuck do I want? (A pause) Do you know who Novak Djokovic is?

SAM
I do watch ESPN.

SPLINT
Now, do you know who Novak Djokovic's wife is?

SAM
No.

SPLINT
Give her a Google search.

Sam reluctantly abides.

SPLINTER
Would you use a Magnum on her?

SAMUEL
I might peel one off.

SPLINTER
Google Rafael Nadal's wife.

Sam abides.

SPLINTER
And would you use a magnum on her?

SAMUEL
I could probably reserve one for her.

SPLINTER
Now google Andy Roddick's wife?

Sam abides.

SAMUEL
Isn't she an actress.

SPLINTER
Well if you wanna be technical, she was a model first, then an actress.

SAMUEL
I'd raw dog her, fuck the Magnums...

As he says this, a young, attractive girl walks by them.

ATTRACTIVE GIRL
Ugh, you're so gross. I'm so glad I only gave you a blow job.

SAMUEL
(Whispers to Splint)
Don't listen to her. I double bagged that hoe. Twice.

SPLINTER
Do you see what I'm trying to do here?

SAMUEL
Yes, you are trying to help me change the topic of my thesis.

SPLINTER
No. That's definitely not what I'm doing.

SAMUEL
Yes, it is. Because my previous thesis was - Tennis sucks and it's a game for fags and my new thesis is - Tennis sucks but hot chicks don't know that.

SAMUEL and SPLINTER share a smile.

SPLINTER

You know, your hostility toward the sports isn't even fair. Roger Federer was a soccer stud. You know why he chose tennis?

SAMUEL

The pussy?

SPLINTER

No, because he fell in love with the game. It called to him. And Nadal, did you know he was a great soccer player as well, probably could have gone pro. Do you know why he chose tennis?

SAMUEL

The pussy?

SPLINTER

No, again, the game. The game of tennis is great. Andy Roddick. Guy was also a high school stud athlete, basketball superstar. You know why he chose tennis?

SAMUEL

Yes, I get it. He loved the game.

SPLINTER

No, it was the pussy. He wasn't *that* good at basketball and he knew it, but you get the drift.

SAMUEL

So what are you saying, that I should choose tennis?

SPLINTER

I'm saying you have no choice in the matter. Early in life you chose pussy, and now pussy is choosing you through a vehicle you never could have expected.

Sam enters a pensive state. Just then his teacher walks by in front of him but without seeing the contents of his computer. Sam furtively minimizes the screen.

TEACHER

Samuel, I must say, I never thought I'd see you here in the library working so thoughtfully at your computer on your thesis.

SPLINTER

I'm proselytizing him to the purpose of higher education.

TEACHER

Proselytizing. Wow, somebody has been studying his vocabulary words.

She walks away.

SAMUEL

What the fuck does proselytizing mean?

SPLINTER

It means to try to convert someone to something important, usually religion.

SAMUEL

Well you did try that. You tried to proselytize me by the pussy.

SPLINTER

Proselytization by the pussy.

NARRATOR

Of course, it was too late that year for proselytization by the pussy to occur for Samuel and the game of tennis. The season was almost over, and with the exception of Splinter, the team was abysmal. Splinter continued to win all of his singles matches, though he struggled navigating the the whole court with all those lines.

CUT TO:

Splint runs acrobatically around the court, chasing down balls while hopping, skipping and leaping over lines, in each case followed by a wallop of a winner over a succession of points and opponents.

NARRATOR

Samuel never did finish his thesis, though he did form a definite opinion on whom the hottest wife of a tennis player was.

CUT TO:

Samuel ogles over various photos of Bridgette Wilson, the wife of Pete Sampras

NARRATOR

The school decided to graduate him to high school anyways, mostly out of pity for the injury he suffered, but also because there wasn't a teacher who could afford to...

CUT TO:

The blond teacher who fucked him scores Samuel an A - for the year in her grading book

NARRATOR

or who wanted to endure another year of him.

CUT TO:

The teacher who believed she saw Samuel work on his thesis overlooks the thesis he turns in. It's just his name and a series of pictures of Brigette Wilson.

NARRATOR

For this, I'm thankful, because I happen to cover the high school tennis circuit and it's in the spring of the following year where our story resumes.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, HALLWAY, DAY

NARRATOR

After half a year of nonstop rejections from girls...

CUT TO:

Sam approaches a girl at her locker. She closes it on him and walks away.

NARRATOR

Samuel was growing sexually frustrated for the first time in his young life, which he couldn't believe, because his new high school fed from 3 regional middle schools, which meant there were lots of ladies. What he could never wrap his head around is that popularity is a contest and his was at an all time low after his well-known injury precluded him from participating in baseball. It also didn't help that every girl with whom he'd had relations in middle school...

CUT TO:

Sam waves to Rose in the hallway, who immediately tosses her hair away from him

NARRATOR

hated him for being a selfish man whore and were ashamed of themselves for having lost their virginities to him. Hell, even I can't believe so many lost their virginities to him, but this was a post COVID-19 world and the youth were living free. Anyways, as fate would have it, Splint's locker was directly across from Sam's. Though they hardly ever spoke, Sam considering Splint, ironically, a social pariah, neither was ever too far from the other's mind.

INT. LOCKER, HALLWAY, HIGH SCHOOL

SPLINT

Sam!

SAM

Don't ask me about fag sticks.

SPLINT

It's March. Are you trying out for the baseball team?

SAM

You already know the answer to that.

Made in Highland

SPLINT

I have a hunch because I haven't seen you with the guys from the team but I don't know if you're giving it a go.

Sam turns around to face Splint's locker. His arm is revealed to be in a sling, kept hidden by the taut sleeve of his jean jacket.

SAM

Next year.

SPLINT

Then why don't you play tennis this year. Even if you can't serve, you're a natural. You can underhand the serves and slam backhands and forehands like...

SAM

Like I slam pussy.

SPLINTER

C'mon, meet me at the courts today at 4. Tryouts are beginning. I'm close with the coach. You already have an in on the team.

SAM

Tell the coach he can suck my dick.

SPLINTER

K. I'll be sure to tell *her*.

Splint catches Sam's eye and winks at him. Splint tosses Sam one of the rackets he has in his locker. Sam catches it with the hand in the sling.

SPLINTER

See you at 4.

EXT. TENNIS COURTS, AFTERNOON

All courts are occupied by players rallying from the baseline. Sam saunters up, obviously late. He looks down at his iPhone. It's 4:20. He gazes at the courts, Splinter's being obvious due to the screeching made by his sneakers from the quick split steps he's forced to make to avoid lines. Sam walks up to behind the court.

SAMUEL

Don't step on the line. It has
cooties like girls do.

Splint turns around. A smile appears.

SPLINTER

You made it. And you remembered
the racket.

Samuel holds the racket with two hands, gripped like a baseball bat. He takes a mock swing and watches the imaginary ball soar through the air, following its trajectory until it lands on a slamming hot ass in yoga pants, CHERRY'S ass.

SAMUEL

Who the fuck is that.

SPLINTER

That, my friend, is Ms. Cherry,
the tennis coach

SAMUEL

1. Don't ever call me your friend
and 2. I'm gonna pop that cherry
because even if it's been hit a
thousand times before, only I can
pop it.

Ms. Cherry catches Sam glaring at her and begins walking toward him, her eyes never leaving his gaze. After what feels like an eternity, she is next to Splinter's court, standing outside it next to Samuel.

MS. CHERRY

So you must be Sam. You were
quite the talk of the sports town,
at least a couple of years ago. I
remember a few years back, Mr.
Stringer thought he had his future
shortstop and pitching stud in the
pipeline.

SAMUEL

Well the stud part is still true.
I've just decided to take my
talents elsewhere. For now.

MS. CHERRY

Well I think you made a great
decision. This team could use
some athleticism. Our doubles
teams are really lacking.

Made in Highland

SAMUEL

Wait, wait, wait. Doubles?

MS. CHERRY

Doubles, you know, two partners on each side of the court.

SAMUEL

Partners? Like two dudes sharing the court together as partners.

MS. CHERRY

Like a team. A doubles team.

SAMUEL

Oh, fuck this. If I'm playing tennis, I'm a singles player. In fact, I'm not even a tennis player at all. I'm just a player. And I'm playing for the puss...

SPLINTER

Possibility of getting in shape for next year's baseball squad. And Ms. Cherry, I was thinking maybe I could be his partner. You know how tough the lines are for me to manage. Doubles might make the game a bit more manageable for me. Besides, I'm still not ready to be the varsity #1 singles player. Jeremy's got me beat with that serve of his. Our doubles squad needs leadership.

MS. CHERRY

Splint, you're too important to this team for me to tell you what to do. I'm giving you carte blanche to play whatever you want, including first singles, because we both know you can wipe the floor with Jeremy from here to Tuesday wearing a blindfold. But this decision is yours.

SPLINT

I pick doubles. Sam?

Sam holds his racket like it's got cooties.

SAM

Is this thing what the gay community calls a phallic symbol.

Made in Highland

SPLINT motions with his hand to MS. CHERRY to walk away like he's got this under control.

SPLINTER

This thing is going to get you laid by girls with short skirts, long legs and an appreciation for the greatest sport on God's green Earth. (Whispering) And I saw the way Cherry was looking at you - and it was not like a student. Now you have a lot to learn, so we're gonna practice together as singles players, while I teach you how to hit the basic shots. You won't be on my side of the court and you won't be my partner til it's time to play a match.

SAM

Did you say she's Ms. Cherry or Mrs? You know what, that never matters. Alright, we can play tennis together during matches. But this does not make us friends, buddies, mates or most of all partners. I'm only partnering in this sport for the

SPLINTER

Pussy. I got it. The pussy.

NARRATOR

The two partners began practicing immediately and even I have to say, the early days were a bit homoerotic. First, Splint showed Sam how to hold the grip of a racket.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENNIS COURT, EVENING

Splint gently places his hand over Sam's; the sensuality is palpable. Sam gets it wrong but Splint gently wraps his hand back over Sam's to correct his grip. A ball machine begins to feed them with Splint guiding Sam to each ball.

NARRATOR

Then they moved on to forehands.

Made in Highland

Splint holds Sam by the waist, crotch-to-crotch, keeping his body parallel with the court as he guides the backswings, forearm over forearm.

NARRATOR

And then backhands.

Splint again holds Sam by the waist, crotch-to-crotch, keeping his body parallel with the court as he guides the backswings, forearm over forearm again.

NARRATOR

Followed by approach shots to the net.

Splint shadows Sam from behind, guiding him forward with his hands along Sam's waist, taking little forward steps like ballerinas. When they reach the net, Splint reaches around Sam's chest to bring Sam's racket to chest level.

NARRATOR

And finally serves.

Splint stands behind Sam, left hand on Sam's left hand guiding the holding of the ball, his right hand over-gripping Sam's right hand as he holds the racket. Splint leans his chin over Sam's shoulder and guides Sam's left hand as he bounces a patented 3-bounce serve preparation.

SPLINT

Just keep catching the ball and dropping the ball, catching the ball and dropping the ball till you're in a good rhythm. Now, serve.

Sam serves perfectly.

SAMUEL

(Impressed and with sincerity)
Well now that wasn't so gay.

NARRATOR

Listen, the guy came from the baseball world. It's all ass grabbing and tight hugging.

EXT. TENNIS COURT, EVENING

Sam and Splint hit balls for the first time. Splint pushes Sam to retrieve balls from both sides of the court. Sam retrieves and relays the balls with uncanny ease. This rally should be over.

Made in Highland

Finally it ends with an unforced backhand error in the net by Sam.

SAM
How am I doing?

SPLINTER
Not too bad. You had a good teacher.

SAMUEL
Bullshit, I'm a fucking machine. Not too bad my left testicle. I thought you never lie.

SPLINTER
Maybe I just have high expectations.

SAMUEL
What do you want me to do, outclass you on the first day?

They resume hitting. Splint ends the rally with a drop shot so deft it doesn't leave the service box.

SAMUEL
You never taught me how to do that.

SPLINTER
I thought you were a natural. Didn't think I had to hold your hand through every step. Though I kinda did, didn't I.

SAMUEL
I know what you're trying to do. You're trying to get in my head. Don't forget that I was a pitcher. You think I'm a moron but...I'm not.

SPLINTER
I don't think you're a moron. If I did. I wouldn't risk my college scholarship on you.

INT. LOCKER ROOM, SCHOOL, EVENING

SAMUEL
(MORE)

Made in Highland

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

What's that shit about a scholarship you mentioned back there?

SPLINTER

You and I...we're gonna play doubles at Indiana University.

SAMUEL

What?

SPLINTER

And the school's gonna pay for it.

SAMUEL

Are you on crack?

SPLINTER

And you might even get some pussy again. Maybe.

With that, Sam lunges at Splint but again Splint is too quick. They perform a dance around a wooden changing bench, each dodging and feinting at the other, bound to attack. Suddenly they hear a shower go on.

SAMUEL

What was that?

SPLINTER

I think it's a shower.

SAMUEL

It's too far away. How can you tell.

SPLINTER

I think it's coming from the women's locker room.

Samuel tiptoes in the direction of the sound until he reaches the door of the men's locker room. He begins whistling low and tunelessly, then turns his head back to Splint. He nods as if to say, follow along with me. Splint raises both hands in toward his chest as to reject the offer and Samuel continues his tiptoe through the passageway that connects to the women's locker room. He peeks his head inside the women's locker room and sees nobody, but the whoosh of the shower becomes louder. He decides to enter, still on his tiptoes, still whistling. He now crosses into the section where the lockers are when BAM! A tall, topless girl, wet from the shower, clocks him in the head with the shaft of a tennis racket. He falls down stone-cold unconscious.

Made in Highland

Splint hears the commotion from the men's locker room and runs to the women's where he sees Anna, wet and naked standing over Sam.

SPLINTER

Oh my God!

ANNA

Oh my God!

She whips around behind the locker and grabs a towel to cover up.

SPLINTER

I'm so sorry I didn't see anything!

ANNA

(From behind the lockers) What the fuck is going on?

SPLINTER

I don't know. My dumb friend heard a shower on.

ANNA

From the women's locker room?

SPLINTER

I know.

ANNA

So he thought he'd inspect.

SPLINTER

He's a fucking moron.

ANNA

He's a creep.

SPLINTER

I know.

ANNA

And now you're creeping in here.

SPLINTER

No. I just heard the commotion. I wanted to make sure everything was okay.

ANNA

Nothing about this is okay.

SPLINTER

Is he?

They look at the floor. Sam lays motionless.

ANNA

He's not dead. I barely hit him.

Splint crouches down to check for signs of breathing. Sure enough he is. Pretty soon his breathing turns into a snore.

SPLINTER

He hasn't been this pleasant since I met him.

Anna laughs. She looks at Sam, the closest thing she's had to a male friend, and relaxes her countenance.

ANNA

He hasn't been this pleasant since he was born.

SPLINTER

How'd you know he was creeping from all the way in the shower?

ANNA

He was whistling. Not loud, but I heard it. I have this...condition.

Splinter perks up, knowing that here is his dream girl, half naked and about to reveal something intimate about herself.

ANNA

You see. Um. You know when you hear an annoying high-pitched sound and it bothers you.

SPLINTER

Yeah, of course.

ANNA

Well most people react...calmly.

SPLINTER

Not everybody.

ANNA

Yes, not everybody. For example, I don't.

SPLINTER

Well you did have a creep stalking you in the shower.

ANNA

I know. Thank God.

SPLINTER

Thank God you had a creep stalking you in the shower.

ANNA

Thank God I have an excuse for cleaning his clock, because I'd have done the same thing if he passed me by in the hallway whistling that stupid whistle.

SPLINTER

What do you mean?

ANNA

I have a condition. It's called misophonia. It's a neurological condition. Basically when I hear high pitch frequencies I become a psychopathic bitch and go into beast mode.

SPLINTER

So you can't handle annoying sounds.

ANNA

I can't handle annoying sounds.

They share a laugh.

SPLINTER

Well that's nothing. Wanna hear something about me.

ANNA

Definitely.

SPLINTER

I have something called OCD.

Splint recounts to her the story of his life and OCD. It is told through deep stares shared between the two, laughter, tears and finally a hug. As they release their embrace, Samuel comes to. He sits up and asks

SPLINTER

Where the fuck am I?

ANNA

Oh, you don't know.

SAMUEL

No, I don't.

ANNA

Let's just say you trespassed
where you didn't belong and got
what was coming to you.

She looks at Splint and he at her. They smile.

SPLINTER

What the fuck are you two smiling
about? Did you two just bone?
Was I part of it? I must have
been part of it. I don't mind.
Look at that little squib. I get
if you needed to borrow one of my
parts.

Anna takes her tennis shaft and knocks his head back to the
floor where he falls unconscious.

ANNA

I think he belongs in this state.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, LOCKERS, DAY

Splint and Sam are at their lockers. Splint turns toward Sam's
locker with trepidation, minding the previous day's
altercation. Sam turns toward him, the splint still on his
right arm, a black and blue over his forehead. They make eye
contact.

SAMUEL

What are you looking at, shithead.

SPLINTER

Nothing, just wondering how you're
feeling after yesterday.

SAMUEL

Yesterday, what happened
yesterday?

SPLINTER

You know, the locker room, your
head.

SAMUEL

Oh yeah, that. I'm not your
bitch.

SPLINTER
I know. I would never.

SAMUEL
So then you know I'm not your meal ticket to college.

SPLINTER
Exactly, I would never hurt...your what?

SAMUEL
Your college meal ticket. Your pathway to a scholarship. This tennis venture is for one year while I wait for my arm to heal.

Splinter looks away for his moment, the realization that Sam has no memory of what took place in the locker room yesterday. He breaths a sigh of relief and returns his glance to Sam.

SPLINTER
You're right. That was presumptuous of me. One day at a time.

SAMUEL
Whatever. What time is practice today.

SPLINTER
(Thinking) Today, today, today's our first match. Home, 4:30. No practice.

SAMUEL
Ahh. Got it.

Samuel turns away from Splint, then returns his gaze.

SAMUEL
By the way, you have any idea why my forehead looks like a blueberry muffin.

SPLINTER
(Shaking his head) No. No.

Samuel turns away from Splint again.

SPLINTER
Oh, by the way, you're gonna need these.

Splinter tosses Sam his uniform - a pair of pocketed mesh shorts and a reversible polyester mini-mesh shirt.

SPLINTER

See you at 4:15.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL, TENNIS COURTS, AFTERNOON, HOME

Splinter looks at his watch. It's 4:10. He has arrived at the courts early. He performs a shoulder stretch and a quad stretch. He checks his watch. It reads 4:15. He runs a suicide sprint on the court. He checks his watch. It reads 4:20. His teammates are now on the court rallying. Coach Cherry is standing along Jeremy's court, observing his warmup. Splinter does 10 jumping jacks. He looks at his watch again. 4:28. No sign of Samuel. The other team finishes its warmup and walks toward the gate at which both teams meet up before dividing up onto their respective courts for their respective matches. He checks his watch again. 4:33.

SPLINTER

Where is he?

From across the street, Sam strolls forth decked in a black NIKE hoodie and matching sweats wearing wireless BEATS headphones. He appears on camera in slow motion, spins the racket in his hand like a pistol and spits a loogie on one of the cars parked in the lot. Splinter exhales a sigh of relief.

SPLINTER

Where were you.

SAMUEL

I'm here, early apparently. The matches haven't even started yet.

SPLINTER

Well, it's tough to start the matches without the players.

SAMUEL

Don't get smart with me, boy. And I say that not as a sign of disrespect. That just happens to be your name, am I not right?

Splinter sighs.

SPLINTER

Where's your uniform.

SAMUEL

Donated it to Good Will. Don't ever say I'm not charitable.

SPLINTER
C'mon, put it on.

SAMUEL
I'm not wearing that costume. I
feel like I'm at Sunday morning
soccer as a 7-year-old all over
again.

SPLINTER
C'mon, tell me you're wearing it
underneath.

SAMUEL
The only thing underneath this
sweet-ass Nike jumpsuit is an
eight pack and a giant dong.

SPLINTER
C'mon.

He tugs Samuel along to their court for warmups. Samuel
recoils at Splinter's touch.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL, TENNIS COURT, AFTERNOON

SPLINTER
Alright, so I'm gonna cover balls
on this side (points to his left)
because I have a stronger
backhand. You are gonna cover
balls on this side (points to his
right).

SAMUEL
You don't have a stronger anything
than me. Don't forget that.

A whistle occurs. Time to begin the matches. From the
bleachers, Anna screams,

ANNA
Ahhh.

Splinter turns his attention to the bleachers and sees her. He
waves. She composes herself and smiles.

SAMUEL
That girl looks familiar. Wonder
if I boned her.

Splinter keeps his sangfroid and shrugs off the comment. The
opposing team serves to Samuel.

He hits a clean winner down line in the doubles alley. The next serve is to Samuel's forehand. He clocks the ball with adult force up the middle for a clean winner.

CUT TO:

A flurry of points flash across the screen, Splinter using balletic precision to dance over lines and sweep winner while Samuel hits brute force winners. It's now the final game of the match. We see the score posted on the net. It's 6-0, 5-0 Samuel and Splinter. A crush job. Anna cheers from the bleachers. Samuel turns around.

SAMUEL

That chick looks so familiar. I must have banged her.

Splinter looks at his partner with mild disdain.

SPLINTER

(To himself) Just stay focused.

SAMUEL

What was that.

SPLINTER

I said to stay focused.

SAMUEL

Don't tell me what the fuck to do.

Splinter crouches in anticipation of the serve at 0-30. The server faults.

SAMUEL

Maybe she gave me a beej. That must be why she looks so familiar.

Splinter grits his teeth and anticipates the serve.

SAMUEL

No, I remember every girl to give me a beej and she did not give me a beej. Did I titty-fuck her?

The second serve lands in the box and Splinter catapults it into the grating of the fence behind the court for an out shot.

SAMUEL

What the fuck was that?

SPLINTER

My wrist slipped.

Made in Highland

SAMUEL

Really, with all the jerking off
you do, you still don't have
enough wrist strength?

Splinter glowers at Samuel who gets into receiving formation. The serve is hit inbounds and Samuel backhands it up the line for a winner.

SAMUEL

Look at that beautiful one hander.
Right up the line. And I don't
even have to jerk it for arm
strength.

It's now 15-40, match point. Splinter has absolutely had it. His composure is shot and he throws down his racket. He runs toward Samuel, hops over the service line and jumps onto his back in an attempt to force him to the ground. Samuel tries to grab Splint's head but Splint is too agile for Sam to land a hand on his face. Due to Splint's diminutive stature and Samuel's largeness, it appears as though a monkey is climbing a tree trunk. Finally, Samuel shakes Splinter off of him and Splinter lands on his feet in a tucked position.

SAMUEL

What the fuck do you think you are
doing?

SPLINTER

Who the fuck do you think you are
talking about Anna that way?

SAMUEL

Who the fuck is Anna.

From the sidelines, Ms. Cherry and the opposing team's coach scurry to the sidelines of the court. In unison:

MS. CHERRY, OPPOSING TEAM'S COACH

What the fuck is going on.

The opposing team looks at each other. Sam and Splint look at each other. Then, flummoxed, one of the teammates from the opposition declares:

OPPOSING PLAYER #1

They're kicking our ass.

INT. LOCKER ROOM, EVENING,

Sam, Splint and Ms. Cherry sit together for a meeting on the wooden bench in the locker room.

Made in Highland

MS. CHERRY

You know, as a lady, I'm not even supposed to be inside here, but desperate times and all.

SAMUEL

It's fine with me.

SPLINTER

I'm fine.

MS. CHERRY

Well you don't seem fine. Nothing about what took place out there was fine, except maybe the final score.

MS. CHERRY

Do you want to share with me what was going on?

SAMUEL

I don't know what the fuck was going on?

MS. CHERRY

Splint?

Splinter demurs when asked.

SAMUEL

What I think happened is I think Splint over here has a thing for some girl I boned two years ago and wants my head for it.

SPLINTER

Believe me, you never boned Anna.

MS. CHERRY

Oh, God. Not this. Listen, you two are going to have to resolve this or I'm just going to have to separate you two...and I don't want to have to do that because for the first time in ages, our team's outlook doesn't look so bleak.

SAMUEL

(Sarcastically) Separate me...from my partner. You can't do that to me Cher.

MS. CHERRY
It's Ms. Cherry.

SAMUEL
Ahh, so it's Miss.

MS. CHERRY
What?

SAM
Well I'm so sorry. I don't know
what Splint was thinking.

MS. CHERRY
You're blaming this on him.

SPLINTER
Actually, it was my fault.

Ms. Cherry is taken aback by this admission.

SPLINTER
He's right. I like Anna. I blew
my lid.

MS. CHERRY
Well do you think Anna's gonna be
impressed by you attacking your
doubles partner.

SAMUEL
I'm gonna have to call you Cherry
if you keep calling me his
partner.

SPLINTER
(ignoring Sam's comment) It won't
happen again. I'm moving on.
Sam, I'm sorry.

SAMUEL
Apology accepted, little man.

Ms. Cherry sighs.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL, TENNIS COURTS, AFTERNOON

In a montage of matches, Sam and Splint alternate between hitting winners and fighting like cats and dogs. Never does Sam wear his uniform.

First bicker clip: Sam tries to tip Splint onto a line with his racket while they're both at the net. He tips Sam, who doesn't budge and returns the volley back in play.

Made in Highland

The ball is hit back to Splint at the net as Sam tips Splint again; Splint successfully volleys without touching a line but without putting the ball away. This occurs two more times before he finally puts the ball away, still tipped and still doesn't touch a line.

NARRATOR

Been a while. Until now there's been nothing much to report from the world of Hornets' sports, unless you're curious to hear reporting of the men's gymnastics team - and that's a whole other can of beans. Well let me tell you, the antics of these two put Sam back on the journalistic map, just not in a way he would have liked.

CUT TO:

Newspaper Clipping:

Ex-Hornets Clipper Takes a Stab at the Net - And His Partner

In the second clip, Splint screams at Sam to come to the net, gesturing with his hand and racket, while Sam plays and wears his Beats headphones and ignores Splint's exhortation.

CUT TO:

NARRATOR

Still despite their bickering, and their ignoring of one another, tennis fans in town took notice and the seats started to fill.

Sequence of bleachers with camera **fades** to more and then more and then more fans. Anna is a mainstay from the beginning in which there are only a few fans to the later fades, in which the bleachers are filled. These fades are interspersed with the above and below footage of the on court fights.

Newspaper Clipping 2:

Tuning Out Tennis - All While Winning

In the third clip, Sam imitates Splint's many split steps he takes to avoid lines in the middle of a point, split stepping himself as though he's performing a tap-dance impression of his partner.

NARRATOR

And while Sam did everything he could to splinter his partnership with Splint and while Splint's rituals grew increasingly more distracting and complex, the duo remained undefeated.

CUT TO:

Newspaper Clipping 3:

Dueling Duo Takes Tennis Circuit To New Highs and Lows

In the fourth clip, the two scream at each other ceaselessly while the opposing team just stares at them with their arms crossed over their rackets, which are pressed against their chests.

NARRATOR

Remember when I told you earlier that Man was not ready for sports. Well it was watching these two at this moment in their partnership that almost cemented that view for me.

Newspaper Clipping 4:

They Don't Like Each Other Very Much - Summerfield's Own Connors and McEnroe Get In a Row

CUT TO:

NARRATOR

Also, if you notice, Anna hasn't missed one match, even though she and Splint remain just friends. My sources tell me that a lot of the fighting you see on the court stems from Sam chiding Splint for not taking things to the next level with her. It was even reported to me that Sam often recounts, mid-match, anecdotes of the many times she gave him, allegedly, quote, the best head of his life. So as you can imagine, despite accepting blame and apologizing for his blowout at Sam to Ms.

(MORE)

Made in Highland

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Cherry in the locker room, there was a reason nothing had changed in the decorum between the two.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, LIBRARY, DAY

A Microsoft Word document in front of Splint. It' long. The camera slowly zooms in on it. Splint types furiously while we zoom in. As we get our first view of the letters, we see it reads: I need a new doubles partner. Ad infinitum. As the camera stops its zoom, Splint writes something new: I need to ask Anna out.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, LOCKERS, DAY

Splint is at his locker, jumpy and jittery and shaking around. From beyond his shoulder, Anna is exchanging books in her own locker. Splint turns around. He meets eyes with Anna, then turns back around to face his own locker. He sees a reflection of himself in the locker's metal sheen. In the reflection, a superimposition of his father appears.

SUPERIMPOSED FATHER

I always knew you were just a boy.

With that, Sam swings around from his locker and locks eyes with Anna. She appears ready for his initiation. He walks over to her and plants a deep kiss on her lips.

SPLINTER

I'm sorry.

Anna reciprocates the kiss.

ANNA

Don't be.

They resume the kiss at her locker.

The camera pans back out to Splint's still open locker where the wraith of Sam's father still appears as a reflection on the metal sheen. As the kiss lengthens, he disappears from the locker's reflection.

NARRATOR

And that was the day boy became a man and Splint's father really died.

Anna whispers into Splint's ear.

Made in Highland

ANNA

Meet me at court 6 next to the track tonight at midnight. Make sure to bring your racket.

INT. SAMUEL'S HOUSE, BEDROOM, DAY

Sam is masturbating to Bridgette Wilson, Pete Sampras's wife, on his bed using his iPad when he hears the garage door open. He pulls up his pants, hits the home button and assumes a casual position. He turns on the tv and acts nonchalantly when there is a knock at the door.

KURT

Son.

SAMUEL

Yeah dad, in here.

As Kurt opens the door, the contents of the tv reveal themselves. It's a pornography.

KURT

Oh God, I'm sorry. I didn't realize.

SAMUEL

No, dad, I wasn't watching. I just turned the tv on and...

KURT

Listen, I know things have been tough since you blew out your arm. You don't need to justify yourself. And I know you lived a pretty privileged life before that took place, if you know what I mean.

They both smile.

KURT

I just want you to know I'm still proud of you. I've been reading the paper lately and I'm not sure if you know, but you've been featured quite heavily.

SAMUEL

I've heard things.

Made in Highland

KURT

Well these things are nothing to be ashamed of. You know, when I served in the Gulf War, my buddies and I used to play racket ball to pass time. We had a court on the military base and your father was pretty damn good with a racket.

SAMUEL

Really, you never told me.

KURT

You never expressed any interest in racket sports till the injury. It just never came up.

SAMUEL

Hmm.

KURT

This partner of yours seems like a pretty interesting feller.

SAMUEL

Oh God, even you with the partner.

KURT

Is that not what he is?

SAMUEL

He's a freak. That's what he is.

KURT

Well when I served in the war, I was surrounded by nothing but freaks, so let me be the judge.

SAMUEL

He has something called OCD. He can't step on lines. Sometimes I catch him repeating certain motions over and over again. He's a weirdo.

KURT

You ever hear me talk about my buddy Marco.

SAMUEL

I think. Name sounds familiar.

KURT

He's actually just Marc, but he was a bit strange, so people called him Marc the whacko. Pretty soon it was just abbreviated to Marco. Anyways, when I first met him, I thought he was a whacko too. Turns out, he'd been serving longer than I had and he'd seen some things. Guy was shellshocked.

Sam listens intently to his father.

KURT (ctd.)

Anyways, I wasn't always the nicest to him. Of course that was before I knew what he'd gone through. Once I got to know him though, we became best buds. Only guy from the war I still keep in touch with.

SAMUEL

You telling me I should be nicer to the weirdo.

KURT

I'm not telling you anything other than a new story about your father you'd never heard before. But I'm proud of you. And I'm looking forward to seeing you slay your next opponents like Marco and I did to those Iraqis.

SAMUEL

Weren't you supposed to be liberating them?

KURT

Ahh, who the hell knows.

EXT. TENNIS COURT #6, SCHOOL, NIGHT

Anna waits for Splint in the beam of light on the center of court six, which is exposed from large lampposts that keep the track lit for nighttime runners, court six being adjacent to the track. Splint rides his bike into an empty parking lot below the courts and drops his bike in a parking spot, careful that it doesn't touch the line on either side. From there he can see the silhouette of a girl on court number six.

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He walks toward the court.

EXT. TENNIS COURT #6, SCHOOL, NIGHT

Splinter and Anna meet at the net. He smiles at her and she smiles back at him. She wears a short tennis skirt and white tank top. She looks beautiful. There is an awkward moment of silence as Splint studies her.

ANNA

I see you brought your racket.

SPLINTER

I did.

ANNA

That's good. You're going to need it.

She smiles at him and runs back to the baseline. Splint follows her lead, retreating as well to the baseline.

SPLINTER

What are we doing (shouts)

Anna hits a ball well, deep into the court where the blindspot is severe. Reflexively, Splint reaches toward the ball but he cannot see it, and more importantly, cannot see the lines. The ball goes unreturned and hits the fence.

ANNA

We're playing LOVE tennis.

SPLINTER

What's love tennis.

ANNA

It's a game. And you have L, which means you have to take off your shoes.

Splint smiles to himself and replies

SPLINTER

I never learned this game from my dad.

ANNA

It would worry me if you did.

He hits a ball to her this time. She returns it well but he can see the ball and where it is in relationship to the lines on the court. He steps around the ball, avoiding the baseline and rips a winner.

SPLINTER

So what happens now in LOVE
tennis.

ANNA

It would appear I have L too.

She delicately takes off her shoes; he notices she wears high
socks that match her skirt.

ANNA

The next part of the game is
trickier. This time we serve.
But no faults or you get the
letter O.

Anna serves a stone-cold ace up the line. Splint doesn't even
move.

SPLINT

What just happened to me?

ANNA

Oh (pronounced with emphasis for
the double entendre), boy. You
got aced. Now take off your
shirt.

Splint blushes in the light of the lamppost but obliges. He is
in exquisite shape. Anna blushes when she sees him.

SPLINTER

My serve.

Splint retreats to the baseline to the deuce side of the court
and winds up his serve. He catches his toss.

SPLINTER

I can't see my toss. How can I
hit it.

ANNA

Try using your racket, silly
(laughing).

Splinter tosses up the ball again. This time he frames the
ball and we hear it land on the grass outside the courts.

ANNA

Uh oh.

SPLINTER

Uh oh what?

ANNA

Well, if I refer to the rulebook, which I did consult before coming here, you now have V. V involves dropping your shorts.

Splint is nervous. He looks around but there is nobody in site but Anna. After a brief pause, he tugs off his shorts, revealing boxer-briefs. Anna laughs and puts her hands to her mouth.

ANNA

I'm not sure if you know, but you're losing at LOVE.

SPLINTER

But I haven't lost yet, have I?

ANNA

No, not yet. Now you have to come to the service box for a game of mini tennis. And I should warn you, there are lots of lines.

They both walk forward.

SPLINTER

I grew up playing tennis on a mini court when I was 2 years old. I know the dimensions of service line tennis like the back of my hand. I'm not worried about line location

Anna and Splint each step up to the service line.

SPLINTER

We playing cross court?

ANNA

Always

Splinter lobs a ball over the net, crosscourt, within bounds of the service box. Anna returns it with a loopy forehand. Splint returns it with a slice backhand to bring her in toward the net. She returns it deep but he lobs it over her head inside of the service box for the winner.

SPLINTER

I believe you have another letter.

ANNA

Oh that, it's just a little O, nothing serious.

She removes her top to reveal a sports bra. Her breasts are large and perky and her torso is long and flat. Sam looks for a second too long.

ANNA

LOV to LO. Now for the fun part.

SPLINTER

This hasn't been the fun part?

Anna laughs.

ANNA

Volleys. Ball can't touch the court, but no winners either. First to make a mistake.

SPLINTER

I don't make too many mistakes volleying. And the light on this part of the court is pretty good. And since we're not hitting winners, I don't have to worry about lines.

As he is saying "lines," she starts the volley. They go back and forth, back and forth. The camera zooms out to reveal two players who really know what they're doing. This could go on forever. Suddenly there is the sound of a runner on the track. Splint momentarily loses concentration and looks to the track, then back at the ball, which he frames into the net. He looks at Anna, she at him, then she at his boxer briefs.

ANNA

E.

Sam looks to the track, the runner oblivious to the goings on at the tennis court, then at Anna. He smiles and steps backward into the dark spot on the court, then drops his drawers. She can't see him. He can't see her.

ANNA

(From the other side of the court)
Uh uh. Them's not the rules.

For the first time tonight, Splint is bashful. The reality of the moment seizes him. He's paralyzed. As time crawls to a standstill, Anna emerges from the blindspot of her side of the court. She's topless and as beautiful as Aphrodite.

ANNA

You can't just leave me here like
I'm the one who lost at LOVE.

Made in Highland

Splinter emerges from his paralysis and walks with confidence to greet her at the net, butt-naked. We track him from behind as he reaches her, the net separating them.

SPLINTER
Uhh, good game.

Anna looks down.

ANNA
Wow. I really did win.

Splinter reaches out his hand for a shake but she brushes it up against her cheek and allows herself to feel his hand through her hair. She leans in and kisses him. He kisses her back and their arms begin fumbling for each other's parts. Because the net is blocking them they begin to sidestep and laugh because they do not want to separate but are also impeded by the net. Finally, they reach the net post and are in each other's arms for the first time.

SPLINTER
I didn't bring protection.

ANNA
What do you think I meant when I said to bring your racket.

SPLINTER
(Stuttering) I, I

ANNA
I'm kidding. I took this (shows him a condom) from the nurse's office, though I'm not sure it's the right size.

She smiles at him again as they make love on the floor of the court. The jogger stares in their direction as he passes by and smiles to himself like he has been there, in this moment, once upon a time.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, HALLWAY, DAY

Sam and Splint are at their lockers simultaneously between classes.

SPLINTER
Sam.

SAMUEL
Yeah.

SPLINTER

I don't know if Cherry told you
but today's match isn't gonna be
like the others we've played.

SAMUEL

We using baseball bats this time?

SPLINTER

We're playing the state champions
from last year, these two
brothers, the Benningtons.

SAMUEL

So.

SPLINTER

So, they're pretty damn good.
They're kinda like us, 9th graders
who already have colleges looking
at them.

SAMUEL

We have colleges looking at us?

SPLINTER

I don't know if you've been
reading the paper much, but we're
kinda a big deal.

SAMUEL

So I heard.

SPLINTER

Well yeah, we do have some
colleges that are interested. But
they have even more. I've watched
them on YouTube and they're pretty
good.

SAMUEL

Well my dad's gonna be in
attendance today and we're gonna
slay the Benningtons like they're
a couple of Iraqis.

SPLINTER

Huh.

SAMUEL

It doesn't matter. I'm not scared
of a couple of brothers named
Bennington.

Just then the sound of thunder claps. Then a deluge follows, the pitter patter pounding the rooftop.

SPLINTER

Fuck.

SAMUEL

Guess we'll be playing them next week.

SPLINTER

Fat chance.

SAMUEL

Why?

SPLINTER

Their school is three hours away. We're lucky if we can arrange a match with their school once a decade. The only reason we were able to this time is because of how good the two of us are. I didn't tell you before because I didn't want to add any pressure. Plus, I wasn't sure we'd last together long enough to make it to the match.

SAMUEL

Well fuck the Bennington Brothers. I've never heard such a fruity name in my life. I'm sure when we play them we'll kick their asses.

Just then Anna arrives at the lockers. She walks over to Splinter and plants a deep kiss on him.

SAMUEL

Holy Hell has frozen over. What in God's name am I seeing.

ANNA

Don't be jealous.

SAMUEL

Jealous. Of my ex-girlfriend.

Splint glowers at him.

SAMUEL

I'm kidding. I'm, what's that word, *happy* for you both.

Thunder, followed by lightning as seen through the windows of the school, ruptures the sky as a torrent of rain falls.

SAMUEL

Hey, Splint, I'm sure we'll kick their asses when we play them in college.

Samuel winks at Splinter.

NARRATOR

The next three years went easy peasy for the two partners, as the growing pains of youth transitioned to the maturity of young adulthood. I'm of course kidding.

CUT TO:

Screen reads: Sophomore Year

Sam tries to tip Splint onto a line with his racket while they're both at the net. He tips Sam, who doesn't budge and returns the volley back in play. The ball is hit back to Splint at the net as Sam tips Splint again; Splint successfully volleys without touching a line but without putting the ball away. This occurs two more times before he finally puts the ball away, still tipped and still doesn't touch a line.

NARRATOR

Does this look familiar? Like deja vu. Of course it does, because despite last year's words and apologies and attempts at growth, these were still two teenagers after all. And one of them was still Samuel.

CUT TO:

Screen Reads: Junior Year

Samuel, wearing a NIKE jumpsuit and Beats headphones, cracks a forehand winner that pegs the opponent in the head, knocking him backwards and onto the ground.

NARRATOR

And while no serious blowups occurred again...

Splinter hits a great shot that an opponent just barely returns in the form of a lob to Sam, who should put it away but is staring at some girl's boobs who watches from the bleachers, getting hit by the ball in the head.

Made in Highland

NARRATOR

They had yet to truly dovetail as a great team. Great players, yes. Great players playing together, yes, but a team?... Still, anytime they played at home, the bleachers were packed.

CUT TO:

Anna in the bleachers on one end, Kurt in the bleachers on the other, with a vast array of townsfolk occupying the remaining space.

NARRATOR

And yet despite their fallibilities, they achieved a feat that no doubles team, not even the Bennington Brothers, achieved at the high school level.

CUT TO:

Screen Reads: Senior Year

Quick Montage: Sam crushes an ace; Splint split steps at the net as he straddles the center service line and puts away a volley; Sam runs backwards on a lob and hits a tweener winner; Splint chases down a ball and skips over the service line, both doubles lines and the doubles alley of the adjacent court where another match is being played to crush a double crosscourt winner.

NARRATOR

They never lost a single set in all four years playing together. And that was them playing at a subpar level, playing as individuals who just so happened to share the same side of the court. I'm telling you - I feel privileged to have covered such great tennis. But they did little to change my position on Man and Sports.

Newspaper Clipping: Hometown Duo To Take Their Talents to Indiana State

NARRATOR

And so they took their talents to Indiana, just like Splint prophesied, only there is no way he could have imagined it would begin like this.

Made in Highland

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, DAY

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Do you gentlemen know who I am?

SAM, SPLINT

No.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

And do you know why you've been summoned here?

SAMUEL

To play tennis.

The dean bangs the table and snuffles, the first of many times.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

I don't mean this goddamn school.
I mean here, this office, right now.

Sam and Splint look at each other. They do not.

SAM, SPLINT

No.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

You're her because of my kindness,
my generosity, my beneficence. I
took a chance on you two misfits.

SPLINTER

I understand our reputation
precedes us.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Silence (snuffles)! Did I say you
could talk. Did I grant you
permission. Did my countenance
suggests that I was remotely
receptive to a reply (snuffles
again)?

SPLINTER

My apologies.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Your apologies amount to words and
do you know what words are?

SPLINTER

No, sir.

(MORE)

Made in Highland

SPLINTER (CONT'D)

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Words are meaningless. My wife told me she'd love me till death do us part. Did those words mean a goddamned things?

SAMUEL

I don't...

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Silence, you numbskull. I know who you are and let me tell you. While all words are meaningless, yours are distinguished for their meaninglessness.

SAMUEL

I'm sorry.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Did you really just say sorry? Using words? Meaningless words for a meaningless gesture? My God, perhaps I have made a mistake. Perhaps I have let my generosity cloud my judgement (sniffles). It would not be the first time (sniffles).

SAMUEL

I'm sorry.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

You're sorry again (sniffles). Well let me tell you something about sorry. We're all gonna be sorry if you two shitheads make a mockery of this university whose reputation has been built on my blood, sweat and tears. Now I asked you a question. Do you know why you are here?

SAM, SPLINT

No.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Well finally we have some honesty. You are here to receive your first and final warning about your conduct here at this school and especially on the tennis court.

(MORE)

DEAN TOBLOWSKY (CONT'D)

You see, my wife (quickly correcting) - or rather I - was privy to the newspaper clippings of your hometown tennis feats and I thought - my God, could a man of charity such as myself not give these two scalawags a chance at redemption? No, of course I could not deny two young men a chance for penance of the sins of youth. So in my infinite grace, I - and I alone - extended scholarship opportunities to the two of you for the singular opportunity to change your lives around and make something of yourselves.

SPLINTER

While words may be insufficient, I would like to let you know that your grace and generosity mean everything to me - and I think I can speak for my partner Sam as well.

SAMUEL

Absolutely sir.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Partner. Are you two, hah (sniffles), partners. My God, this will make my proffer so much easier.

SAMUEL

No, we're not partners like that. I'm definitely not like that. For a while I though Splint, but no, he's not

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Silence, you fool! I don't care about what goes on in your bedrooms, only that you two live together for all four years. For I fear, Samuel, from what I've read, that without Splint's more tempering influence, you would have yourself kicked out of this institute of higher learning before the very first tennis practice took place.

(MORE)

Made in Highland

DEAN TOBLOWSKY (CONT'D)

And I took a gamble (snort) - a very large gamble - on the success of you both. And I will not be made to look the fool if you cannot conduct yourselves according to the exacting standards of Indiana University. Do you understand.

SPLINTER

I understand.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

And you, the impetuous one, do you understand.

SAMUEL

I understand.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Good. That settles it. You may leave.

The two leave. The dean opens his desk drawer and removes a vial filled with cocaine. He opens the vial and snorts violently.

INT. DORM ROOM, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, DAY

The divide between Sam's side and Splint's side of the dorm room could not be starker. Splint's is meticulously organized, books arranged in rows, a poster of Andre Agassi hanging on his wall, sneakers and shoes neatly arranged on a shoe caddy and his work desk spare and neat with a work chair whose four feet are encased in tennis balls. Sam's side looks like a hurricane blew through it.

SAMUEL

I don't know how we work through living together. We've barely made it this far, so I've decided to write down and recite some ground rules.

SPLINTER

I think that's responsible of you.

SAMUEL

Shut the hell up and listen, as that's rule 1. Rule 1: We don't talk unless it's prepping for a match. We're not friends.

(MORE)

Made in Highland

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

We are doubles teammates and forced roommates. Things will be better this way.

SPLINTER

That's gonna be

SAMUEL

Did you not just hear rule 1? Rule 2: There's gonna be lots of bitches here. Lots. When they're here, this is a dorm room of 1, not 2. I don't care where you go or who you're with. It's just not here. Rule 3 - if you somehow comply with rules 1 & 2, maybe I'll throw a butterface your way every now and then.

SPLINTER

You realize Anna and I are still

SAMUEL

Do I have to scream at you like the dean? Rule number 1. Quiet. We don't talk. You listen. Now, rule 4 - On nights where there are multiple bitches here, the lesser one gets your bed to sleep in. Rule 5 - No eating fish in here for obvious reasons, unless it's pussy, which you don't have to worry about. Rule 6 - if I have a paper due, you have to write it for me. I'm not the one who was looking for a scholarship. Rule 7
-

He looks up. Splint's long gone.

INT. ANNA'S ROOM, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, DAY

SPLINTER

When do you think the last time was that Sam got laid.

ANNA

You could not possibly conceive just how little effort I've ever put into thinking through that question.

Made in Highland

SPLINTER

He's just being a bigger dick than usual and it got me thinking. Do you know any chicks that slept with him in high school.

ANNA

No. I think most came to their senses by then.

SPLINTER

I think we may need to find him a lady.

ANNA

I think we have a better chance of finding a needle in a haystack.

SPLINTER

He's tall. He's handsome. He's batshit crazy. Is that not what college chicks want? I'm gonna go crazy - crazier than I already am - living with him if he doesn't get laid.

Anna stands up and gives Splint a kiss.

ANNA

I'll see what I can do. There's a sorority on the floor upstairs where it's always wine cooler o'clock.

INT. MEN'S LOCKER ROOM, INDIANA STATE, DAY

It is day 1 of the tennis season. The boys are lacing up their shoes and putting on their nylon shirts and shorts. Sam still wears his Nike jumpsuit with his hoodie pulled over his head while his BEATS headphones blare indecipherable rap music.

SPLINTER

You know it's gonna be different out there today than it's ever been.

SAMUEL

Are you trying to father me, because unlike you I have a dad.

SPLINTER

Forget it, I'm going to heed rule #1, even though we're not in our room.

SAMUEL

Smart.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENNIS COURTS, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, DAY

Sam and Splint hit balls with teammates who keep up rallies with them for the most part. Still, Splint and Sam are clearly the dominant team, as their warmup opponents net more balls than Sam and Splint.

COACH REGINALD, a man who looks too old to still be coaching, and who has led Indiana for over four decades, blows his whistle to initiate the start of a scrimmage.

COACH REGINALD

It's time fellas. Everybody remembers their first, that is, their first scrimmage of the year. I've matched everybody up - singles players with their closest equals and doubles teams with their closest equals. I expect some competitive tennis out there today. Pretend this counts, because it does, so do Coach Reggie proud. but more importantly, do yourselves proud.

CUT TO:

Sam and Splint meet their opponents at the net. An opponent flips a coin.

SAMUEL

Heads.

It is heads.

SAMUEL

We'll serve.

SPLINTER

Go get em.

Samuel serves four consecutive aces to begin the match. Each serve goes untouched. The players switch sides.

Made in Highland

SAMUEL

I was thinking I'd take backhand today.

SPLINTER

But I've got the better backhand. And like the coach says. This matters. We're playing for #1 doubles.

SAMUEL

All the same, I'm gonna take the doubles alley.

Samuel asserts himself, walking briskly by Splint, skimming him in the process and nearly knocking him off balance so as to force him to hop over a service line.

SPLINTER

(To himself) What the fuck?

SAMUEL

What was that?

SPLINTER

I didn't say anything.

SAMUEL

That's what I thought.

The opponents' server goes out wide, which Splinter returns down the line for a winner. Sam retreats behind the baseline in a crouch, waiting for his first attempt at returning from the backhand side. The opponent serves wide to Sam's backhand, which he nets poorly. 15-15. Splint returns the next serve cross court to induce a volley error. 15-30. The opponent again exploits Sam's weak backhand return, which is netted. 30-30. Splinter returns the next point well but when the opponent's hit Splint's return at Sam's backhand volley, Sam punches down too quickly and nets the volley for 30-40. Splint looks at Sam.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, DAY

The players change out of their tennis clothes. Some shower. Some walks through the changing area. Sam and Splint are seated far apart, teammates between them, looking in opposite directions. The coach walks into view.

COACH REGINALD

I liked what I saw out there today
- for the most part.

(MORE)

Made in Highland

COACH REGINALD (CONT'D)

Now I have this custom that's been in place since I was a young man coaching football. And that is this: at the end of the first practice of each year, we give a compliment to one of our teammates. In football, the players would choose whom to compliment but with tennis, I've arranged that each singles player compliment his opponent from today on one aspect of his game. Doubles teams, you are to give your partner one compliment. Everybody find your partner and let's go.

Sam and Splint turn around, find each other and stare unblinkingly at the other. Coach Reginald walks over to them.

COACH REGINALD

I don't know if you listened closely, but I said today that I liked what I saw: *for the most part* You have any ideas why I added "for the most part?"

SAMUEL

You noticed Splint was a waste of a spot on the team and scholarship money.

COACH REGINALD

I can't say that was it.

SPLINTER

You didn't like our camaraderie, or absence of it.

COACH REGINALD

Exactly. And now with this exercise, I hope we can rectify that.

SAMUEL

Don't blame me. This freak doesn't like to high-five.

SPLINTER

I have OCD. I just don't like touching people if I can avoid it.

COACH REGINALD

I've been around a long time. This isn't my first rodeo with eccentricities. When I coached football in Canada I had a receiver who literally bathed his hands in butter to make it tougher to catch the ball. I had a punter who put stones in his shoes to make it harder to kick. And I've damn well seen superstitious players who don't step on lines. So do either of you really think I'm here because I worry about a couple of eccentricities.

SPLINTER, SAM

No/Nope.

COACH REGINALD

Alright then. You two look like you've never had a nice word to say about the other, and based on the articles I read about the two of you, this doesn't surprise me. So now it's time to turn a new leaf. Shoot.

SAMUEL

I've got nothing to say.

SPLINTER

I've got nothing to say to someone who has nothing to say.

COACH REGINALD

Do you know how old I am.

They shake their heads no.

COACH REGINALD

Neither do I. That's how old I am. I remember when white players wouldn't talk to black players and black players wouldn't talk to white players. Football wasn't quick to integrate. One day after a particularly contentious practice in the early 60s, I walked up to every white player in the locker room and gave each a compliment. Totally broke the ice in the room. And believe me it was an icy locker room.

(MORE)

Made in Highland

COACH REGINALD (CONT'D)
Hollywood could have made a movie about that one day, I was so inspiring. Now are you telling me that two WASPS who've known each other their whole lives can't think of one nice thing to say about the other?

SAMUEL
I've got nothing.

SPLINTER
You see what I'm dealing with.

COACH REGINALD
If you both can't see something good in the other then you're blinder than I am. And the first number in my eyesight exceeds my age. Splinter, the way you have accommodated your mental illness to have become a collegiate athlete is nothing short of awe-inspiring. When I heard we'd secured you for our doubles squad, I was ecstatic. Sam, I'm a football player at heart. The only reason I got this job coaching tennis is because in 1980, no university wanted to hire a black man to coach their football squad and no university wanted the PR of not hiring a black man for the job. So they asked me to coach the tennis team. And I'd never even picked up a racket. But a black man did not turn down a job in Reagan's America. So Sam, when I think about your story, do you not think I can relate to transitioning to a sport completely separate from your identity? You are two remarkable young men. I could think of compliments for each of you till the sun goes down. So now, when I request you compliment each other, you best be sure it's not an option.

Splinter and Samuel look at each other. Splint reluctantly goes first.

Made in Highland

SPLINTER

I admire Sam's height. He's got a good height.

COACH REGINALD

That could be the worst start to this tradition I've ever witnessed but it's a start.

Sam cuts in

SAMUEL

You're the size of my cock in its flaccid state. Of course you admire my height.

Coach Reginald shakes his head.

COACH REGINALD

Sam, if you can't do this, you can't be on the team

Sam mulls this ultimatum over

SAMUEL

(Quickly and dismissively) OCD should have put you in a looney bin. Instead it got you into college. Yada yada yada, compliment.

Coach Reginald take a deep exhale.

COACH REGINALD

The both of you have until next practice to come up with a real compliment for the other. You're dismissed. (To himself) *This'll never be in a Hollywood movie.*

EXT. INDIANA UNIVERSITY, JUST OUTSIDE THE TENNIS FACILITY

From the corner of his eye, Splint notices Sam about 150 yards ahead of him. He's not walking in the direction of the dorms. He's walking in the direction of the BASEBALL FIELDS! Splint's intrigued. He skulks behind Sam, keeping this distance so that Samuel cannot see or hear him. Finally, Splint stops walking. Samuel sits in the bleachers. He watches the Indiana baseball team practice. This is where he wants to be. Splint decides to follow him there.

EXT. INDIANA STATE, BLEACHERS, BASEBALL FACILITY

SAMUEL

I thought I could smell you behind me.

SPLINTER

I guess you know me too well.

SAMUEL

You know, (pointing to the field) that's where I should be.

SPLINTER

I know.

SAMUEL

With those guys, not you.

SPLINTER

I know.

SAMUEL

Tossing the ball around, cracking the bat (pantomimes swinging)

SPLINTER

I know.

SAMUEL

Instead I feel like some stalker, watching some chick from afar while she bones her boyfriend.

SPLINTER

Maybe it's not too late. The field is right there. We both know you've got more talent than anybody out there.

SAMUEL

You don't think I've tried throwing a ball since the injury. Every six months or so I'll toss the ball with my dad. The first couple of throws will go alright. But sure as shit, once we start a long toss and I have to extend my arm...the pain...it always returns.

SPLINTER

Can I ask a question?

SAM
We're not in our room. Ask away.

SPLINTER
Does tennis give you any satisfaction.

SAMUEL
(Thinks) I don't know.

SPLINTER
Well when you crack a serve that's unreturnable, how do you feel?

SAMUEL
It's okay I guess.

SPLINTER
What about when you hit one of those ridiculous tweeners from the baseline that makes everybody's jaw drop?

SAMUEL
It's alright.

SPLINTER
What about when you crack a forehand so hard at an opponent at the net that he doesn't have time to move out of the way and it hits him smack dab in the middle of the head and he falls to the court unconscious.

SAMUEL
That feels pretty good (laughs).

An Indiana batter fouls a ball to the bleachers, which cuts hard in the direction of Sam and Splint. Sam lifts his left hand and catches the ball, preventing it from hitting Splinter in the face, as if doing so is second nature. He tosses the ball back to a member of the baseball team who looks at him baffled. Then Splinter looks at Sam with fear and awe. Sam exhales.

INT. INDIANA UNIVERSITY, ANNA'S ROOM

Splinter knocks at Anna's door. She opens to a smiley Splint.

SPLINTER
I think had a breakthrough with Sam.

Made in Highland

ANNA

Be careful with those expectations. It is Sam.

SPLINTER

I know, but I got to see him as a person today. I think I finally know him.

ANNA

I'm not sure there is a him to know.

SPLINTER

You know he saved my life.

Anna looks piqued.

SPLINTER

We were talking at the bleachers of the baseball field. I followed him there like a stalker. He was there stalking. Anyways, a guy hit a foul ball and he reflexively stuck out his arm and caught the ball before it could strike me in the face.

ANNA

Reflexively is the key word there. A ball comes in Sam's way and he catches it. It's not necessarily the sign of a breakthrough.

SPLINTER

I know what you're saying, but I think we connected there.

ANNA

Well in case you didn't make as strong of a connection as you think, I had a breakthrough today myself.

SPLINTER

Oh yeah.

ANNA

Yeah. Those sorority sisters upsstairs. They're throwing a party Saturday night. I pretended I might be interested in joining. They sent me an invite and told me to invite any cute guys I know.

INT. LOCKER ROOM, INDIANA, DAY

Sam and Splinter change into their tennis clothing. Samuel wears his uniform for the first time. They chat with each other as the coach looks on with surprise.

COACH REGINALD

You two look like you could finally compliment each other.

SPLINTER

The guy's a lifesaver

COACH REGINALD

That's a pretty extreme reversal.

SPLINTER

No, he literally saved my life.

SAMUEL

It's true.

SPLINTER

Coach, everything you said about us last practice was true. I don't think either of us could ever have said the words ourselves, but I feel we are finally coming to understand each other.

SAMUEL

What he said.

COACH REGINALD

In my opinion, having a mutual understanding is the highest compliment one can pay another

Samuel and Splinter look at each other.

SPLINTER

I understand you.

SAMUEL

I can't fuckin' fathom yo...just kidding. I think I'm beginning to understand you.

COACH REGINALD

Well those might be the two best compliments I've heard in my (counts on fingers) too many decades of coaching.

(MORE)

Made in Highland

COACH REGINALD (CONT'D)
 Now let's get out there for our
 first match of the season. I
 invited my good friend Ashe to
 watch. Maybe you've heard of him?

Splint looks awkwardly at Sam.

SPLINTER
 You hear what he just said.

SAMUEL
 Yeah, that we're a couple of
 sentimental fruitcakes.

SPLINTER
 No, he said the name Ashe. Do you
 know who he's talking about?

SAMUEL
 How would I know coach's friends?

Splinter sighs.

SPLINTER
 True. Alright, let's kick some
 ass.

Montage: Samuel hits ace after ace after ace. Splint hits
 running backhand winner after running backhand winner, jumping
 over lines on each running one. Splinter hits a tweener. They
 go to high-five. Splint recoils at the thought and Sam slaps
 him on the ass like a baseball player would. Samuel hits some
 more aces and clocks a forehand so hard that the opponent's net
 player ducks while the scorcher kisses the baseline. The two
 teams shake hands, Splint gives a fistpound. The match is
 over.

INT. LOCKER ROOM, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, DAY

Sam and Splint are changing. The coach walks over to them.

COACH REGINALD
 I was impressed out there. With
 both of you. Might have been the
 most one-sided match I've ever
 seen. And guess who felt the same
 way?

SAMUEL
 Who?

COACH REGINALD

Arthur. He said he hasn't been so impressed with two young players since he first saw a young firebrand named Connors.

SAMUEL

Wow (unknowing the allusion).

SPLINTER

You don't say.

COACH REGINALD

I do. In fact, something strange happened that almost never does, though I'm remiss to tell you because, and you never heard this, I'm not a big fan of his.

SAMUEL

Connors?

COACH REGINALD

No, Dean Toblowsky. He was here for the match. Told me to send you two to his office after the match today. Arthur thinks he's a real piece of shit but I don't talk out of turn.

SPLINTER

Arthur Ashe?

COACH REGINALD

Is there another Arthur?

SPLINTER

Nope, just checking.

COACH REGINALD

Anyways, he said to tell you two to stop by his office around 5 today. I told him I'd relay the message.

SPLINTER

Thanks.

SAMUEL

Tell Arthur we appreciate his kind words.

The coach stands up and is received by another player on the team.

Made in Highland

SAMUEL

Well that sounds promising. You know who Ashe and Connors are?

SPLINTER

I do. I do.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, DAY

Splinter knocks on the door promptly at 5 pm; a clock on the wall confirms their punctuality. A loud voice from within:

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Come in, come in.

The two enter his office.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

That was impressive today, boys, impressive.

SAMUEL

Thanks.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

For a moment I almost thought I was watching the Bennington Brothers.

SAMUEL

(Under his breath) Fuck the Bennington Brothers.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

What was that?

SAMUEL

Nothing, a cough.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

It absolutely was not. Speak up, boy.

SAMUEL

I said, fuck the Bennington Brothers.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

Fuck the Bennington Brothers, huh. Is *that* what you want to do, you couple of queers.

SAMUEL

What?

Dean Toblowsky looks at his mantle where there rests a picture of the Bennington Brothers chest bouncing each other.

SAMUEL

Why do you have a picture of the Bennington Brothers?

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

The temerity to ask. I should kick you out if I had yet to tell you what I have to say.

SPLINTER

Which is?

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

The Bennington Brothers are the greatest doubles team to ever emerge in the sport of tennis. A decade from now when you walk the halls of Arthur Ashe Arena, there will be plaques honoring the major titles they've accrued there. And you know who won't be in those hallowed halls?

SPLINTER

Actually, I don't.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

You. The two of you. Punks, bastards of the sport. You two won't be there. Do you know, do you really know whom you have to thank for being here at Indiana University?

The two nod in the negative.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

My whore ex-wife. She is the one who convinced me that you two were the recruits the school needed, before I caught her in an act of afternoon delight with the Dean of the English department. By then it was already too late: we'd extended an offer of scholarship to you while the Bennington Brothers had committed to Florida. Because of a whore my reputation is ruined.

(MORE)

DEAN TOBLOWSKY (CONT'D)
 And because of you, our school
 will fail to capture the national
 championship, doubling my
 repetitional ruin.

SPLINTER
 We're gonna kick the Bennington
 Brothers' asses. Then we're gonna
 go pro and we're gonna kick their
 asses again at the US OPEN. Then
 we're gonna kick their asses in
 Australia and France and England.

Dean Toblowsky laughs giddily, like a school girl.

DEAN TOBLOWSKY
 Why I hoped you'd say that.
 Because I've felt a bit moody
 today and needed a good laugh.
 Now good day. Get the fuck out.

Dean Toblowsky removes a vial of cocaine from his desk as the
 door slams behind him.

INT. INDIANA UNIVERSITY, SORORITY PARTY, NIGHT

Splinter, Sam and Anna show up together. Sam looks different
 than he has in previous scenes, composed, put-together,
 confident. Splinter and Anna hold hands, she nearly six inches
 taller than he in her high heels. Still, Splinter is the face
 of confidence.

SORORITY GIRL #1
 Glad you could make it.

ANNA
 Happy to be invited. This is my
 boyfriend, Splint, and his friend
 Sam.

SORORITY GIRL #1
 Hey. (Directed to Sam) Hi, Sam or
 is it Samuel.

SAMUEL
 Just Sam.

SEXY SORORITY GIRL #2 steps into frame

SORORITY GIRL #2
 Hi there, Samuel.

Made in Highland

SAMUEL

Hi there. (He looks at Splint and Anna). I think I'm gonna pour myself a drink.

SPLINTER

Not too high, we got practice tomorrow.

Sam gives Splint a friendly middle finger.

ANNA

You're right, he seems different. Happier.

CUT TO:

Sam and Splinter are chugging beers together in a room within the sorority's house. Two girls start kissing each other. Drunk, Sam leans in to Splint and whispers.

SAMUEL

This is fucking awesome.

SPLINTER

It's...pretty sweet (slurred).

SAMUEL

You know, and I'll kill you if you tell anybody this, I haven't been with a chick in a while.

SPLINTER

You? No.

SAMUEL

Yeah. I never knew how to approach a girl because they used to just approach me, kinda like this.

SPLINTER

I remember middle school.

The word "middle school" seems to bring Sam down for a moment. Then one of the girls, SORORITY SISTER #2, approaches SAM

SORORITY SISTER #2

Why the long face.

SAMUEL

I was just thinking about something.

SORORITY SISTER #2

Well you should have been thinking about me.

She abruptly removes her top and starts kissing him on the neck. The other sorority sister in the room approaches Splinter. She proceeds to remove her top and start kissing Splinter on the neck. Samuel leans in to Splint and whispers.

SAMUEL

I can't believe I'm about to ask you this (beat). Do you have a rubber.

SPLINTER

There's a question I thought you'd never be asking me.

While the girls continue to seduce the two with their breasts in Sam and Splint's faces, Splint reaches in his pocket and produces a Magnum.

SAMUEL

What are you doing walking around with condoms for me?

SPLINTER

They're not for you.

SAMUEL

No way. Are we big cock brothers.

SPLINTER

I think we are.

The girls overhear this.

SORORITY SISTER #2

What's that I hear?

Just then, Anna walks in and sees SORORITY SISTER #3 kissing Splinter's neck, topless.

Anna looks at Splinter and gasps. Then she runs out of the room. Splinter awakens from his stupor and runs out after her.

SORORITY SISTER #2

(To Samuel) Don't even think about it. You're staying here with me.

CUT TO:

Splinter chases after Anna through the veranda of the sorority house so that they're both outdoors where a couple of drunk people look on.

Made in Highland

ANNA
Get away from me.

SPLINTER
It wasn't what it looked like.

ANNA
Really, you're gonna say that to me, with a straight face.

SPLINTER
I was just sitting there. I didn't initiate anything.

ANNA
You didn't seem to say no either.

SPLINTER
I was drunk. I am drunk.

ANNA
So am I? Did you see my tits in some rando's face?

SPLINTER
Anna, I'm sorry.

ANNA
Go back to the party with Sam. You two belong together.

SPLINTER
Anna.

ANNA
Now I see what you're understanding with him is all about.

She walks away. He's too drunk and too despondent to chase her.

CUT TO:

INT. SPLINT AND SAM'S ROOM, INDIANA U, MORNING

We see Samuel with a smile on his face. His eyes are closed. He has his arms around two different girls, one nestled in each arm. On the other side of the room, Splinter lays in the fetal position on his bed, his eyes open, as he looks unblinkingly at nowhere in particular.

NARRATOR

As Sam lay there that morning he knew he had made a mistake the night before, but he didn't know just how grave a mistake it would turn out to be. After an hour of sulking, he worked up the courage to walk over to Anna's dorm room to address the events of the night before. By the time he arrived, it was too late.

CUT TO:

Splinter knocks on Anna's door. No response. He knocks again. A sleepy girl opens the door, ANNA'S ROOMMATE.

SPLINTER

Where is she?

ANNA'S ROOMMATE

She left in the middle of the night crying. Said she was going home.

SPLINTER

She lives 300 miles away.

ANNA'S ROOMMATE

I heard her say something about a Greyhound.

Splinter stands in the doorway, shocked, as we fade into further narration:

NARRATOR

It seems like it should have lasted longer than it did, their college careers. After all, for the first time in their lives, Sam and Splint were approaching what could be described as friendship. They were finally playing tennis as teammates, even partners. Everything was going so perfectly. And yet

CUT TO:

Splinter drives past the tennis court, as his teammates practice. He makes a hard right turn and exits campus.

NARRATOR

Dean Toblowsky would be proven right.

(MORE)

Made in Highland

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The college had made a mistake taking a chance on the two high school misfits whose contrasting styles had taken the tennis world by storm.

CUT TO:

INT. DEAN TOBLOWSKY'S OFFICE, DAY'

DEAN TOBLOWSKY

(laughs maniacally at the framed picture of the Benningtons). Fuck my wife. You're my boys.

He snorts from his vial of cocaine.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNA'S CHILDHOOD HOME, DAY

Anna weeps in bed, looking at pictures of she and Splint on her wall.

NARRATOR

Anna would stop talking to Splint.

CUT TO:

Splint calls Anna. She looks at the phone and does not pick up.

NARRATOR

Without Splint there to moderate Sam's more nihilistic tendencies, Sam would soon fail out of Indiana and get kicked off the tennis team

CUT TO:

Sam at a party. Sam drinks from a beer bong. Sam wakes up with a girl as he smiles.

FADE TO:

Sam drinks from a beer bong. Sam wakes up with a different girl. His smile wanes.

FADE TO:

Sam drinks from a beer bong. Sam wakes up with a different girl. No smile.

NARRATOR

Soon, both Sam and Splint were college dropouts with no future path laid out before them. In a way, neither expected much for himself but in another way, the expectations for both had always been great. As for me, covering the Hornets back home was a drag after the salad days of Sam and Splint. The tennis team was mediocre. The gymnastics team - well, like I said, that's another story, but even sadder. I was no longer even covering the middle school baseball team. And the newspaper business itself was nothing to write home about. I missed covering those boys. I missed the madness. That's when I had an epiphany. That my theory about Man and Sports was all wrong. Man in his current state was absolutely meant for sports. Because success in sports is all about the ugly, wild, intemperate passions that yield to nothing and capitulate to no one. These are the states of Man that keep him most competitive, most hungry and most human. Basketball had Rodman. Baseball had Pete Rose. Football had, well, a lot of hotheads. And tennis had Sam and Splint. And you know what, I and the rest of the tennis world wouldn't have it any other way. So again, I was wrong about man and sports. Sports were meant for man exactly in his present state. And if nobody else would, I was going to do something about their absence from the tennis world. Of course, it wouldn't be easy.

CUT TO:

INT. RANDOM GIRL'S ROOM, DAY

Splinter takes a huge bong hit, blows out the smoke in a hacking cough and laughs at the girl who sits aside him. She is not Anna.

Made in Highland

NARRATOR

Splinter was in a haze, blowing off steam and living without a sense of direction or guidance for the first time in his life. He told himself this was happiness, but the pot told him it was not.

CUT TO:

Splinter stares at himself in a bathroom mirror. He tries out different faces but settles on sadness.

INT. SPECIAL EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL, FLORIDA

Samuel blows a whistle in the gym. A bunch of special education students respond and start walking laps around a makeshift, indoor track comprised of cones.

NARRATOR

Samuel was teaching in Florida, the only place he knew of where all one needed was a high school diploma to get a job as a teacher.

CUT TO:

A child tries to open the door from the gym to the outside.

SAMUEL

Hey, kid, get away from there.

Samuel whistles. Then whistles again. And again. The child does not listen. He escapes.

SAMUEL

Hey, kid. Help. Help!

NARRATOR

Of course, I knew it wouldn't be too hard either. For starters, the life of a pothead was never going to work for Splinter.

CUT TO:

Splinter back at home, on his homemade tennis court, joint in his mouth, serves tennis balls one after the next after the next, all hit perfectly.

CUT TO:

Samuel runs after the escaped student, dodges a car that first almost hits the child, then almost hits him. He catches the kid and has to pick him up, kicking and screaming, and carry him back inside.

Made in Highland

NARRATOR

And Samuel as a teacher. Hah!

NARRATOR

I knew I'd have to go to Splint first. After all, we were living in the same town and the task of bringing the band back together would surely rest on his participation. I'll admit, I had butterflies in my stomach on the day I drove to his little shanty house, a year after his traumatic exit from university, to the site of so much tennis and so much childhood trauma, to induce him to give the game another go. Still, I had an ace up my sleeve.

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, DAY

A Toyota Camry makes a hard right turn onto a dusty patch of land a few feet from a shanty house. The house has not changed a bit. It stops amidst a cloud of dust of its own making. There is not otherwise a sign of civilization within eyeshot.

The NARRATOR walks to the door. He takes a deep, composing breath and knocks. Splinter's diminutive mom answers in broken English.

SPLINTER'S MOM

Hello.

NARRATOR

Hi, I was wondering if Splinter's home.

His mother looks to the left, then invites the stranger into her home by stepping backward and further opening the door.

SPLINTER'S MOM

There.

The Narrator walks just a few feet and knocks on a door. There is no reply. He knocks again. No reply. He turns toward the mother. The mother motions for him to just open the door.

The Narrator opens the door and finds Splinter, long-bearded now, laying on his back on his bed, a pair of BEATS headphones wrapped around his ears, a joint in his mouth.

NARRATOR

It smells (beat) green in here.

Made in Highland

SPLINTER
(Piqued) Like a tennis ball.

NARRATOR
No, not like a tennis ball.

SPLINTER
I know who you are.

NARRATOR
Really, cause I barely recognize you.

SPLINTER
It's been a rough year.

NARRATOR
For you and me both (beat). But that could change.

SPLINTER
You come here to deliver me a winning lottery ticket.

NARRATOR
In a way, yes.

Splinter takes off the BEATS headphones and sits up at attention. He offers the journalist a hit off his roach.

NARRATOR
No thank you. I want to make sure I'm clear in what I have to offer you.

SPLINTER
Okay.

NARRATOR
And I want to make sure you are clear in your understanding of what I'm about to offer you.

SPLINTER
I'm all ears.

NARRATOR
When I was in college, I had an internship writing for Challenger level tennis events. I was pretty tight with one of the tournament directors.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Well to make a long story short,
that tournament director reached
out to me last week.

SPLINTER

No thanks, I'm not interested in
playing the minor leagues. I've
never given singles the devotion
required and I'm not in the
headspace to start now.

NARRATOR

I'm not here to ask you to play
the Challengers (beat). I'm here
to ask you to play at this year's
US Open.

Splint is in the middle of taking a drag on the joint as this
news is relayed. He hacks up a lung.

SPLINTER

What'd you just say.

NARRATOR

Turns out that my buddy is now the
managing director of the US Open
and they're desperate to bring
some interest back into the men's
doubles game. He can hardly fill
Ashe for the their finals match
each year and he's looking for a
story. You and Sam - he believes.
you two are that story. I agree.

SPLINTER

We don't even have a ranking.

NARRATOR

You don't need one when you have a
wild card entry. Can you think of
a better wild card than you and
Sam?

Splinter's eyes light up.

SPLINTER

Where's Sam?

CUT TO:

Made in Highland

INT. GYM, PUBLIC SCHOOL, FLORIDA

A mess of school children with special needs are running around a gym, shooting basketballs, kicking soccer balls, swinging tennis rackets with no sense of order. Sam is yelling at them in all different directions to stop what they are doing.

SAMUEL

(To the basketball shooter) Give me that ball! (To the soccer players) And that ball too, period's over!

He blows the whistle. No response from the students. He blows the whistle again. And again.

From the wings of the gym

NARRATOR

Looks like we've found him.

SPLINTER

Can I just enjoy watching this for a few more moments.

Samuel blows the whistle, this time at the kid with the tennis racket. The child does not stop bouncing a ball, wrist up, as he struggles to keep up with the changing direction of the bounce. Sam intercepts the racket and keeps the ball tap going in the air for a while, then takes his anger out by slamming the ball against the wall of the gym. The child is aghast and runs away. Samuel blows the whistle again.

SAMUEL

Ms. Jeffries, can I have some help here please?

SPLINTER

I don't see a Ms. Jeffries here.

Samuel looks at this small, bearded man.

SAMUEL

No way.

Splint walks into the gym

SPLINTER

Nice forehand. See you still haven't lost your touch.

SAMUEL

You can't be.

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SPLINTER

But I am. And I come with your golden ticket.

SAMUEL

I don't know what that means but if it can get me the hell out of this Godforsaken place, I'm down.

Splinter smiles at the Narrator.

SAMUEL

Who the fuck is this guy?

CUT TO:

INT. SAMUEL'S APARTMENT, FLORIDA, DAY

Splinter and the Narrator are seated at a small messy kitchen table in a small, messy kitchen. Open, unfinished water bottles and beer bottles are scattered throughout.

SAMUEL

Can I offer you guys anything? Seltzer, a beer, an ounce of Sour D?

NARRATOR

I'm good, thanks.

SPLINTER

Nah.

SAMUEL

(To Splint) So you just come here a year after jilting me at the alter, asking me to come back into your loving arms?

SPLINTER

I lost my head. I didn't know where to go but I couldn't stay there.

SAMUEL

I guess I know what that feels like.

NARRATOR

Do you realize what kind of opportunity this is, to get a wildcard to play at the US Open?

SAMUEL

What's the US Open?

Made in Highland

SPLINTER

It's just the biggest tennis tournament in the world.

SAMUEL

I don't know. I was never a tennis player. I feel like this all went down for a reason. My arm's even begun feeling better. Maybe

SPLINTER

We get \$17,000 just for showing up.

SAMUEL

Do we split it.

SPLINTER

Yes.

SAMUEL

Still. Damn.

SPLINTER

And they put us up in a nice hotel.

SAMUEL

Not bad.

SPLINTER

And we get limo service to and from the grounds each day.

SAMUEL

Are we gonna be famous?

SPLINTER

We could become. And guess who decided to quit college too?

SAMUEL

I don't know. Who?

SPLINTER

The Bennington Brothers

SAMUEL

Why?

SPLINTER

To win the US Open.

SAMUEL

I'm in.

Splinter smiles at the narrator. Then they all look at each other and smile.

SAMUEL

Time to put in my two week's notice.

SPLINTER

Perfect, because the tournament starts in two weeks.

SAMUEL

That gives us no time to practice.

SPLINTER

Practice?! When have we ever practiced?

CUTO TO:

Montage, series of scene fades:

EXT. ARTHUR ASHE STADIUM, DAY

Sam and Splint walk through the grounds of the Billie Jean King Tennis Center. Tennis is played around them, both singles and doubles. Splint is still bearded. He wears a conventional tennis outfit. Sam wears his high school Nike tennis hoodie and sweats with the BEATS headphones, despite oppressive heat.

SAMUEL

So how does it work, this US Open?

CUT TO:

EXT. BILLIE JEAN KING TENNIS GROUNDS, COURT 22, 2 HOURS LATER

SPLINTER

Well, we start on this eyesore of a court. It's about as glamorous as our high school days, with makeshift bleachers around us for whichever fans can't get onto the show courts, where the singles action happens. Don't worry, we won't be here for long

CUT TO:

Match action. Sam serves big. Splint puts away an easy volley.

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He approaches a line after reaching for the volley and hops over it. The following interaction plays out

SAMUEL

These guys have no game. They're just lumbering jackasses who serve big but got nothing else.

SPLINTER

That's why they're doubles.

SAMUEL

They still get good pussy?

SPLINTER

Look at the bleachers.

Two supermodels look on.

SAMUEL

Let's keep winning.

CUT TO:

Newspaper Clipping: These Two Wild Cards Make Good On Their Wild Card

CUT TO:

EXT. BILLIE JEAN KING TENNIS GROUNDS, COURT 22, 2 DAYS LATER

SAMUEL

This court ain't much better. You sure we're still on the grounds of Ashe?

SPLINTER

That's because we're on the same court again.

SAMUEL

Oh yeah.

Splinter whispers to Sam.

SPLINTER

Alright, these two schmucks are completely different from our last opponents. They're small and scrappy like me, but they're not as good. The only thing they have over us is that.

He points to two more supermodels in the bleachers.

Made in Highland

One of their opponents serves to Splinter. He hits a crosscourt return that the opponent runs down but can only return weakly to Samuel at the net, who puts it away. Sam approaches Splint after the point

SAMUEL
Piece of cake.

CUT TO:
Newspaper Clipping: Unlikely Wild Cards Make a Surprise Splash at US Open, Reach the Round of 16.

**EXT. BILLIE JEAN KING TENNIS GROUNDS, COURT 17, 2 DAYS
LATER, 11 AM**

Sam and Splint walk through the gate and onto Court 17, a small show-court.

SAMUEL
Holy Shit

SPLINTER
Holy shit.

They look around them. There's hardly a person there. It's a complete let down.

SAMUEL
Why such a larger stadium if nobody shows.

SPLINTER
Because we're doubles and the first match of the day. Everybody is still at work.

SAMUEL
Still pretty great. I almost feel like a pro athlete.

Splint smiles.

SPLINTER
Good, because you are. We are. And we're gonna kick these two guys' asses.

SAMUEL
How are you so sure.

SPLINTER

Because they're retired ex-singles players who are old and lost their game. Just don't look at their player box?

SAMUEL

Why?

SPLINTER

Intimidating pussy.

Samuel looks at two of the most gorgeous supermodels he's ever seen sitting in the players' boxes.

SAMUEL

Intimidating. Hardly, man. That's inspiration right there.

CUT TO:

EXT. BILLIE JEAN KING TENNIS GROUNDS, COURT 17

It's the 3rd set. The scoreboard reads 6-7, 7-6, 3-3. Samuel is the server. Splint motions Sam to come in for a brief huddle:

SPLINTER

Serve out wide to this guy's backhand. He's going to hit a chip backhand crosscourt that I'm gonna put away.

Samuel serves just as told and the point unfolds exactly as prophesied. Sam huddles in with Splinter.

SAMUEL

Alright, Nostradamus, where to next.

Splinter winks at him.

SPLINTER

The quarterfinals. But first down the lines to this southpaw's forehand.

Samuel serves down the line. The southpaw hits the ball right at Splint for an easy put away volley.

CUT TO:

Newspaper Clipping: No Joke: Two No-Namers Hammer Away to the Final Eight.

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On a Collision Course with the Bennington Brothers

CUT TO:

EXT. LOUIS ARMSTRONG STADIUM, NIGHT, FULL ARENA

Sam and Splint look around them. The digital clock reads 7:00. They are match 1 of the evening session. The stands are more than half full.

SAMUEL
Holy Shit.

SPLINTER
I know.

SAMUEL
I feel like I'm in a minor league ballpark.

SPLINTER
But this ain't the minor leagues. You leave here tonight a wealthy man. The world is your oyster from here on out

SAMUEL
I feel like I should hug you.

SPLINTER
Maybe after the match. Let's go kick some ass and maybe steal their women.

Samuel laughs.

CUT TO:
End of the match. Samuel and Splint are at the net shaking hands. We see the scoreboard read 8:14 PM. Then we see the score. It reads 6-2, 6-1. Then it pans to the names. Sam and Splint are easy victors.

SPLINTER
Holy Shit.

SAMUEL
How much money did we just win?

SPLINTER
I'm not even going to tell you.

Sam looks at his own player's box; his father gives him a big thumbs up. He looks to the opponents' player's box. One of the supermodels smiles at him. He smiles back.

Made in Highland

SAMUEL (Out of the side of his
mouth)
I think I might have just netted
myself a piece of ass.

CUT TO:
NEWSPAPER ARTICLE: Splint and Sam Stun the Tennis World, Appear
Destined to Duel With the Bennington Brothers

CUT TO:

EXT. LOUIS ARMSTRONG STADIUM, NIGHT, FULL ARENA

Sam and Splint look around them. The digital clock reads 7:00.
They are match 1 of the evening session. The stands are three
quarters full. They walk out onto the court

SAMUEL
Holy shit!

SPLINTER
I know.

SAMUEL
I feel like I'm in a minor league
stadium.

SPLINTER
That's because we're on the same
court again.

SAMUEL
Oh yeah. Hey, check out our
player's box.

SPLINTER
Yeah, I invited some supermodels
for us. Apparently we have a
Facebook Group called -
Supermodels for Sam and Splint

SAMUEL
No shit.

SPLINTER
I know. You can meet them after
we beat them (points to the
opponents).

One of the supermodels gets too comfy with Kurt, to the dismay
of Eloise. Another supermodel puts her arms around the
Narrator, who blushes. Another supermodel gets comfy with
Splint's mother, who embraces her.

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CUT TO:

3rd set. Again, the score reads 7-6, 6-7, 3-3

SPLINTER

We've been here before.

SAMUEL

I can't figure out this guy's serve.

SPLINTER

His head gives it away. Observe how far back he tilts it when he goes out wide. When it's up the line, it's like he's looking at the sun.

Sure enough, on the next serve, the opponent turns his head way back for a serve hit out wide. Sam reads the serve perfectly and crushes a cross court backhand winner.

CUT TO:

Match Point. 7-6, 6-7, 7-5, 5-3, 30-40 Sam and Splint are receiving. Splinter and Sam huddle.

SPLINTER

Remember, his head is his giveaway.

Sam returns to the baseline and assumes a crouched, return position. The server hardly looks up and hits a flat, fast serve down the center of the court. Sam is ready for what would have been an ace and chips it back, deep into the court, which forces the opposition net player to scramble back. He hits an over-the-shoulder forehand to Sam, who return with a slice backhand. The opposition goes wide to Splint's forehand, deep off the court. Splint skips over both doubles alleys without touching them and leaps toward the ball; he scorches it cross court to keep the point alive. It arrives just beyond the net, where an opponent crouches to reach a low half-volley. He gets the ball back but leaves a hanger. Sam crushes the overhead for the win. The two run at each other. They almost hug but, instead, Sam slaps Splint in the ass like a baseball player would. Splint returns the favor. They share a laugh and go to the net. Sam shakes hands. Splint gives the opponent a fist bump.

CUT TO:

Newspaper clipping: Our Hometown Heroes: How Two of the Sport's Most Unlikely Partners Made For the Perfect Pairing.

CUT TO:

INT. WOLFGANG'S STEAKHOUSE, NYC, EVENING

Made in Highland

The dinner before the final. Attendees are Splint, Sam, Splint's mom, Sam's parents and the Narrator. The table has fresh tomato and mozzarella, a shrimp cocktail platter and sizzling bacon. The steaks arrive and Splint lifts his glass of water to make a toast.

SPLINTER

I never thought in my wildest dreams that tonight would ever be a possibility. And I don't think Sam did either. In fact, I don't think anybody at this table ever believed that what happened over the past two weeks would ever take place. And yet here we are. It took a village to get us here and I just want to express how thankful I am to everybody at this table for helping me and my, is it okay to call you my partner?

Samuel smiles

SPLINTER

My partner, Sam, get to this point. As far as I'm concerned, we're both winners and everything else is gravy. But oh how tasty that gravy would be if we beat the Bennington Brothers. So if everybody would raise a glass, I wish to make a toast.

Everybody raises his and her glass.

SPLINTER

To Dean Toblowsky: Fuck you and fuck off. We're going to destroy the Bennington Brothers.

SAMUEL

Here, here.

The table erupts into thunderous applause.

CUT TO:

INT. ARTHUR ASHE STADIUM, DAY, LOCKER ROOM

Sam and Splint wait in a highly decorated lounge for their names to be called out to enter the court. They watch a tv that broadcasts pregame coverage. Samuel wears his token Nike sweatpants and sweatshirt. Splint remains bearded.

Made in Highland

JOHN MCENROE

Don't adjust your screen, folks. I'm John McEnroe, sitting in for my baby brother Patrick, who would normally provide color commentary for the doubles final while I the singles, but with such colorful characters making it to the finals, ESPN requested I step up and work double duties, or should I say, doubles duty.

PAUL ANNECONE

And I'm Paul Annetcone, here to discuss what is the most shocking, most talked about doubles match that I can remember in my life.

JOHN MCENROE

I haven't seen players with this degree of mental instability since, well, since I played. I mean, this Splint guy, can you believe him? He plays tennis without ever stepping foot on a line. I've seen superstitious baseball players who hop over the first-base line when they take the field, but this is a new league of insanity.

PAUL ANNECONE

Well I think what you're saying is that we have in Splint someone with a serious case of OCD who has managed to overcome, or perhaps more appropriately, accommodate his condition and apply his strengths to the game of doubles. And might I just ask, Splint what? Does anybody know his last name?

JOHN MCENROE

No. And we haven't even mentioned his doubles Partner, Samuel McArthur, who thinks he's some kind of two-sport athlete out there. Though maybe he is. Apparently he didn't even touch a racket till 8th grade, only starting after a pitching injury sidelined him from the one sport he truly loves.

Sam and Splint tune the tv out.

Made in Highland

SPLINTER
How you feeling today?

SAMUEL
Fine. Just ready to go out and
kick some Bennington ass.

SPLINTER
I'm a bit nervous.

SAMUEL
Me too.

An assistant walks in.

ASSISTANT
It's time, guys.

Sam and Splint stand up and follow him. From the outside PA,
they hear their names called.

PA
And here on a wildcard, with no
professional experience behind
them, are the two most
inexperienced doubles partners to
ever reach a grand slam doubles
final. Here they are: Samuel
McArthur and Splint. I'm sorry,
Splint's mother actually came to
our headquarters before the match
and apparently her son's official
birth name is Andre.

CUTO TO:
The crowd erupts in applause. Sam and Splint's families cheer
wildly. The models in their player's box do as well. Sam and
Splint walk out to the court. Sam turns around to face Splint.

SAMUEL
Holy Shit. Your name is Andre.

SPLINTER
Holy shit. I have a name.

SAMUEL
Do you have a last name?

Splinter shrugs.

PA

And walking in just behind them
are Florida state collegiate
champions and first time Grand
Slam doubles finalists - The
Bennington Brothers, Edward and
Cooper.

The fans cheer but they do not receive the thunderous applause
that Sam and Splint do.

SAMUEL

I think they want us to win.

Splint nods in bewildered agreement.

CUT TO:

Coin flip: Samuel chooses heads. It's tails. The Benningtons
elect to serve.

CUT TO:

Warm up: Sam nets too many backhands. Splint moves without
grace. They are clearly nervous. The Benningtons move with
ease and grace, like they've done this hundreds of times
before, because they have.

PA

Time.

This word initiates the start of the match. Edward Bennington
begins the match with an ace.

SAM (to Splint)

Did you know Ed was a lefty?

SPLINTER

Of course.

CUT TO:

INT. ARTHUR ASHE STADIUM, DAY

The Benningtons give each other a chest bump after winning a
point to go up 5-0. The crowd is quiet. The early stadium
buzz is now hardly a hum. It is Splint's service game. He
steps up to the baseline to serve. He nets it. He hits his
second serve, a double fault.

CUT TO:

JOHN MCENROE

Paul, watching these two guys, it's really hard to see how they made it this far. Do you think this is indicative of nerves or is there just this large a gulf in talent between the Bennington brothers and Sam and Splint, or rather, Andre.

PAUL ANNECONE

You know, it's still too early to tell, but as Yogi Berra used to say, it's getting late early.

CUT TO:

PA
Game, set, 6-0 Bennington Brothers.

CUT TO:

Another chest bump.

CUT TO:

Sam and Splint huddle together. Sam waits for Splint to say something.

SPLINT

I've got nothing to say.

SAMUEL

Okay then

They break huddle. Cooper walks to the baseline and bounces a few balls before his serve. He tosses an ace. Then another. Then another.

CUT TO:

Another chest bump between the Bennington Brothers as they look up at the scoreboard. We see it's 5-0 already in the second set.

JOHN MCENROE

It's like deja vu all over again this set. Has it even been ten minutes since the end of the first?

CUT TO:

The score is 5-0. Deuce. Splint is serving. He walks back to Sam.

Made in Highland

SPLINTER

Hey, you probably don't know this because I never told you but tennis is a lot like baseball between a pitcher and a catcher.

SAMUEL

What do you mean?

SPLINTER

Well the net player is supposed to give the server a sign, like a catcher would a pitcher, to tell him what kind of a serve to hit.

SAMUEL

Why didn't you ever tell me this?

SPLINTER

Well, because we really just started talking like adults to each other recently.

SAMUEL

True.

SPLINTER

Anyways, let's keep this simple. If one of us puts up a 1 behind our back, the serve goes out wide. A 2 means into the body. A 3 means up the line.

They break from huddle. Samuel places his hand behind his back and puts up the number 2. Splint hits a heavy topspin serve into the body. Cooper hits a jammed lob to Sam, who smashes it for the winner. Advantage Sam and Splint. Sam puts up the number 3. Splint hits a perfect serve up the T. Edward just gets enough racket on it to serve up a smash to Sam. 5-1. They huddle again.

SAMUEL

If you told me tennis was like baseball back in middle school, we might have avoided a decade of conflict.

Splint smiles.

SPLINTER

(Smiles) The conflict is what made us great.

CUT TO:

Made in Highland

Game #7, second set. 40-0, Benningtons. Edward hits an ace. 6-0, 6-1; Two sets to love. The Benningtons chest bump.

CUT TO:

JOHN MCENROE

Folks, I'm thinking maybe I should make a call to my brother in the bullpen to relieve me so I can prep for the singles final. This one looks to be over.

CUT TO:

Sam and Splint talk amongst each other at the baseline. The Benningtons just wave at the crowd and to members of their box, including two perfect tens who sit with their parents.

PA

Time.

Sam's serve. He steps up to the service line. Splint puts up the number 1. Sam cracks and ace. Splint puts up the number 3. Sam cracks another ace. Splint puts up a 2. Sam hits a serve down the center so hard it hits Edward Bennington in the forehead. 40-0. Splint puts up a 1. Ace. 1-0 Sam and Splint to start the 3rd set.

JOHN MCENROE

Now this is why we all came today. This is the type of tennis we had heard these two were capable of producing.

PAUL ANNECONE

One wonders though: Down two sets to love, can one good service hold really cause the swing in momentum they'll need to get a foothold in this match.

CUT TO:

A flurry of points are played. Some are won by Sam and Splint, some by the Bennington brothers. No single point is of major importance. After each flurry of points we fade to:

FADE TO:

1-1.

CUT TO:

Another flurry of points, these won by Sam and Splint.

CUT TO:

1-2.

CUT TO:

Another flurry of points, these won by the Benningtons.

CUT TO:

2-2

CUT TO:

The scoreboard reads 5-5, 30-40. Splint on serve. He takes a deep breath. This is a virtual match point.

JOHN MCENROE

We're at virtual match point. If Splint can't salvage this service point, all the Bennington's need to do is hold serve and they'll be crowned the US Open champions, just shy of 20 years of age.

CUT TO:

The crowd is dead silent. Splint tosses a ball in the air. A loud whistle pierces the stadium. The crowd laughs and Splint catches the ball. He tosses again. Another piercing whistle. Cheers and boos. Splint tosses a third time. This time the whistle is louder and nearer. He catches the ball with fury and turns around. Who is standing in the lower box, just behind the baseline? It's Anna, who whistles at Splint. Splint sees and runs over to her.

SPLINTER

Oh my God. You showed up.

ANNA

I've been here for every match, silly. Where do you think you've gotten your lady luck? Those hoes who sit in your box?

SPLINTER

But, that's impossible. I've been here for every match (he laughs). I haven't seen you.

ANNA

I've been very sneaky.

SPLINTER

I'm so sorry for what I did.

ANNA

I'm sorry for how I reacted. We should have talked.

SPLINTER

Did you just whistle at me.

ANNA

I've been working on my
misophonia. I'm at the point
where my own whistling doesn't
bother me.

SPLINTER

I love you. I want to talk to
you. This match will be over
soon.

ANNA

It better not be. I see two
douchebag brothers who aren't half
the team that you and Sam are.

Splint smiles at her. He kisses her.

CUT TO:

JOHN MCENROE

What is going on?

PAUL ANNECONE

Are players allowed to take a
reconciliation with their ex-lover
timeout?

JOHN MCENROE

I've read the rule books quite a
few times. I don't believe such a
statute exists.

CUT TO:

SPLINTER

Alright, I'm gonna go out and try
to kick some Bennington ass.

ANNA

Don't try. Like Sam's uniform
demands, Just do it.

Splinter begins walking back to the service line.

ANNA

Oh, and Andre.

Splint smiles.

SPLINT

Yes.

ANNA

Nice beard.

Made in Highland

Splint sprints back to the service line.

CUT TO:

JOHN MCENROE

Well, I'm not sure what that was
but I think we're ready to return
to some tennis.

PA

30-40.

Sam puts up the number 2. Splint serves another heavy topspin serve deep into the body of Edward who hits a weak lob to Sam. He smashes it for a winner. The crowd erupts.

PA

Deuce.

Sam puts up the number 1. Splint serves out wide. Cooper returns a perfect crosscourt winner, except Sam extends his right leg out, which lands his footing square on the line, and reflexively hits a clean winner up the doubles alley. The crowd goes wild.

CUT TO:

JOHN MCENROE

Holy shit.

PAUL ANNECONE

Holy shit.

SAMUEL

Holy shit.

ANNA

Holy shit.

SPLINTER

Holy shit. I touched a line.

SAMUEL

Dude, you just touched a line.

SPLINTER

I know.

SAMUEL

How do you feel.

Splint mulls it over.

SPLINTER

Great.

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The crowd erupts. They know what they just witnessed. The Bennington Brothers express consternation for the first time in their body language. Sam slaps Splint's ass like he would to a baseball teammate.

CUT TO:

SAMUEL puts up the number 3. Splint hits a perfect serve down the T. Edward hits a deep lob that bounces on the baseline. Sam runs backward to chase it down. He faces the crowd and hits a tweener between the legs. It scorches down the doubles alley and lands within the lines for the winner. The crowd erupts. 6-5, Sam and Splint. Edward to serve.

CUT TO:

Edward and Coop confer with each other at the baseline. Splint and Sam do the same.

SAMUEL

What do you think they're saying?

SPLINTER

Nothing. They're just trying to get in our heads. Let's just pretend to talk like we're game-planning but not actually game-plan. I think we play better on the return when we're loose.

SAMUEL

Couldn't agree more. So how about that Anna?

SPLINTER

I know.

SAMUEL

You know I knew.

SPLINTER

What?

SAMUEL

I saw her at our first match. She was hiding but I caught her. I pretended like I didn't see her, so I don't know if she knew I knew.

SPLINTER

You sneaky bastard.

They smile at each other. Sam slaps Splint's ass again. Edward walks to the service line. He hits a returnable serve down the line to Splint's backhand.

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Now unconstrained by the lines, Splint hits a scorching backhand winner low and up the center of the court. The brothers look at each other as it whizzes by. They cannot believe it.

CUT TO:

0-40. Edward hits a body serve to Sam who returns with a strong backhand crosscourt. Cooper hits a slice volley drop shot, which Splint runs to with alarming speed. He just gets there, stepping on lines along the way, and lobs the ball up deep to the baseline. Cooper retreats with deftness, reaches the ball and turns around to hit a strong forehand down the middle. Both Sam and Splint lunge for the ball. Their racket heads meet and the frames provide a board from which the ball springs with strange sidespin over the net for the winning shot. 0-6, 1-6, 7-5. The crowd goes wild.

JOHN MCENROE

This game just gets wilder and wilder. Have you seen a shot like that?

PAUL ANNECONE

Whose racket did it hit? If it hit more than one of theirs, they lose the point.

JOHN MCENROE

But is there a challenge option available for a point like that.

PAUL ANNECONE

I don't believe so.

JOHN MCENROE

Just incredible.

CUT TO:

Set 4 is shown through a series of montage fades: Sam serves aces. Then Edward serves aces.

CUT TO:

Score shows 2-2.

CUT TO:

Cooper runs down a near winner and redirects the ball for a winner himself.

CUT TO:

3-2.

CUT TO:

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Sam returns the favor as he runs down a ball all the way off the court and into the stands, a la Derek Jeter in the playoffs; he dives into the stands to hit the ball crosscourt for a clean winner, as his body slumps awkwardly into the first row of seats.

3-3. CUT TO:

We see an Edward serve. CUT TO:

4-3. CUT TO:

We see a Sam serve. CUT TO:

4-4. CUT TO:

We see a Cooper serve CUT TO:

5-4. CUT TO:

We see a Splint serve. CUT TO:

5-5. CUT TO:

Sam and Splint's player's box. Anna is whistling through her teeth. Kurt is yelling. CUT TO:

KURT
Go get em my rock star, racket
wielding, perfect specimen, future
president of the good Ol' US of A.

Splint's mom holds one of the hoe's hands. They both cheer wildly. Then Sam notices somebody else. Ms. Cherry is there, wearing sexy yoga pants and a tight shirt with a plunging neckline.

CUT TO:
SAMUEL (to Splint)
Holy shit. Ms. Cherry's here.

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SPLINTER

I may have had something to do
with that.

SAMUEL

You sly dog.

CUT TO:

Ms. Cherry gives Sam a sultry look, which Sam returns to her.

CUT TO:

Splint walks to the service line to begin his service game.

Splint is about to serve when out of the corner of his eye, he sees somebody familiar in the Bennington's player's box. He blinks. Then looks again. There he is: Dean Toblowski. Dean Toblowski makes eye contact with Splint and laughs maniacally. Splint shrugs it off. Splint tosses his serve. Boom. An ace to begin the game. Sam and Splint win the next point with an easy serve-and-volley 1-2 punch. 30-0. Splint's next serve is returned for a clean winner. 30-15. Samuel puts up the number 3 behind his back and inches closer to the center of the service line. Splint responds with a perfect serve up the line. Sam punches the weak return away for the winner. 40-15. Splint closes the game with an Ace. 6-5. Edward's serve. They change sides.

CUT TO:

Sam and Splint talk as they walk to the other side of the net.

SPLINTER

You're playing like a rockstar.

SAMUEL

Lead singer.

SPLINTER

Mick fucking Jagger.

SAMUEL

That's right, my big cock brother.
Now let's finish off these little
pecker bros.

CUT TO:

The Bennington Brothers talk.

COOPER

We need to expose Sam's backhand.
It's all slice.

EDWARD

It's hard to even find an
opportunity to exploit it. They
finish the points so fast.

COOPER

Which is why you need to serve to it.

CUT TO:

SPLINTER

Oh, and listen, Mick. They're gonna go after your backhand this game. Just an FYI.

CUT TO:

The service line. Edward tosses an ace that even Splint can't reach for the first point of the game. Sure enough, the next serve is out wide to Sam's backhand. Sam crushes it crosscourt and shallow so that Edward is tripped up trying to reach down for it. 15-15. Edward serves to Splint's body. Now unencumbered by his OCD, Splint takes a split-step and steps around the serve to his forehand side and crushes a winner up the middle of the court in between the two opponents. 15-30.

CUT TO:

EDWARD

What the fuck?

COOPER

C'mon Bro. These guys don't even play tennis.

CUT TO:

Sam and Splint overhear this.

SAMUEL

(To Splint) What did he just say?

SPLINTER

I think he said we don't even play tennis.

CUT TO:

Service line. Edward tosses an ace. 30-30.

EDWARD

C'mon!

He and his brother chest pound. Edward walks back to the baseline. He tosses a serve that lands out wide to Splint's forehand. Splint hits an immaculate return by extending his reach, baseline be damned as his foot skirts it, which lands cross court inside the doubles alley. 30-40.

CUT TO:

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Splinter calls Samuel in for a quick huddle.

SPLINTER

Remember, they're chasing your
backhand.

They break huddle and Sam assumes the returner's position. Instead of going after his backhand, they serve down the line. This serve would ace anybody else but Sam sees it early, like a batter sees a pitch before it leaves the pitcher's hand. As the ball crosses the plane of the net in slow motion, Samuel asserts:

SAMUEL

Oh no you didn't.

He crushes a forehand with such verve at Edward's body that he cannot get out of the way of it. It slams Edward in the chest. Set. 6-0, 6-1, 5-7, 5-7

CUT TO:

JOHN MCENROE

Boy am I glad I didn't phone up my
little bro. I haven't felt this
much buzz in a stadium since the
07' Wimbledon men's singles final.

CUT TO:

Sam and Splint's coaching box is ecstatic. Kurt is hugging his wife. A model kisses Splint's mom on the cheek. Two models flash Sam. Cherry joins them. Anna gives a sarcastic eyeroll.

CUT TO:

PAUL ANNECONE

John, I must admit, I did not
expect a 5 setter and certainly
not one with this kind of kinetic
energy. The floors of Ashe are
literally shaking as I speak.

CUT TO:

Sam and Splint talk between the sets in their baseline changeover chairs.

SPLINTER

It's all led to this. All our
fights and squabbles, our ups and
downs, my many proselytization
efforts. The question is simple:
Can we beat the Bennington
Brothers?

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SAMUEL

Fuck the Bennington Brothers.
 Fuck them and their chest bounces.
 Fuck them for inviting Dean
 Toblowski. Fuck them and their
 stupid name. We got this.

SPLINTER

Good, that's exactly what I wanted
 to hear from you.

SAMUEL

You got it my friend.

They stand up. Sam spanks Splint on the ass. The crowd has
 grown to react to this with laughter.

CUT TO:

EDWARD

Are they making fun of us.

Cooper is despondent and doesn't hear his brother. Suddenly
 the crowd erupts into a spontaneous cheer:

CROWD

Sam & Splint! Sam & Splint! Sam
 & Splint!

CUT TO:

NARRATOR

As I sat there for the last set,
 taking notes on the bloodiest of
 blood baths since the French
 Revolution...

CUT TO:

Sam hits an ace.

CUT TO:

Splint hits an astounding winner.

CUT TO:

Splint runs down what would be a winner against anybody else
 for a redirected winner.

CUT TO:

Scoreboard reads 1-0.

FADE TO:

Scoreboard reads 2-0.

FADE TO:

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Scoreboard reads 3-0.

NARRATOR

I couldn't help but think to myself, this can't be real. How did I get so lucky to cover these two phenomenal sons of bitches. How did they overcome their demons. How did we end up here today? It all seems so fantastical.

4-0

CUT TO:

Sam hits another ace. The Benningtons are dejected.

CUT TO:

Splint hits a backhand winner up the line, leaving the Benningtons paralyzed at the net.

CUT TO:

5-0.

FADE TO:

NARRATOR

I'd love to say the answer hit me like a ton of bricks. I'd love to say it cam down on the wings of a dove and presented itself to me gift wrapped in some sort of divinely informed present. But the truth is I'd known it all along, hard as I tried and stubborn as I was, I knew. We got here because these two began their careers cruel and stubborn and vain and ignorant. And that's exactly where they needed to be to get to the place they were today. I'm a snob. I always wanted my sports to be played by the perfect people but there are no perfect people, only perfect sports played by imperfect people. Sam and Splint, they were the two most perfectly imperfect people the sport could have asked for.

Match Point. 40-0. Splint returns a lukewarm serve deep into the court. Edward returns it back to him. The crosscourt rally continues for 7 more shots.

CUT TO:

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Then Sam explodes in front of the eighth crosscourt shot to cut it off for a volley winner. The crowd explodes. Sam and Splint jump into each others arms. Sam holds Splint, slapping him in the ass over and over as the crowd goes wild. Dean Toblowski breaks down into sobs.

CUT TO:

DEAN TOBLOWSKI
My Benningtons. My beautiful,
sweet Benningtons.

CUT TO:

Sam and Splint's player's box. Kurt jumps around like a maniac, his Eloise in his arms. A model kisses Splint's mom on the lips. Splint's mom returns the favor. The models flash their tits and bounce up and down. Anna is in tears. She runs to the court, Cherry behind her. Anna jumps into Splint's arms and they kiss. Cherry jumps into Sam's and they do the same.

FADE TO:

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE, BACKYARD, NIGHT

Splint and Anna are at the net in the midst of an infinitely long volley, each has his or her shirt and pants off. They are deep into a game of LOVE tennis.

NARRATOR

(Over this unending volley)
Dean Toblowski came out of the closet shortly after the Bennington Brothers lost in that first US Open final to Sam and Splint, or should I say Andre. He found happiness with the Dean of the Physics department and finally put down that vial of cocaine. Sam and Andre went on to become the greatest doubles team to ever play the game, amassing 27 Grand Slam trophies and a stunning 12 US Open trophies. Sam would go on to have sex with more women than Wilt Chamberlin, before the age of 25. Ultimately though, he would settle down with Ms. Cherry, or should I say Mrs. As for Andre and Anna, well as you can see, they rediscovered their love.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

They married soon after the US Open and had three children together, all of whom left the hospital with a name, at least a first name. As for me, I wrote a story about this whole lot of crazy characters, to which you've just been witness. I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have.

FADE TO BLACK:

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