

PRIDE BEFORE THE FAIL

C: 2022

FADE IN:

**INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY**

CHARLES BEASLY (40), perched in a chair at a small table. His hands interlocked, resting on his stomach - weirdly calm.

A cup of coffee and a microphone in front of him.

In a chair across from him - DETECTIVE MANN (50), notepad and pen in hand.

BEASLY

Aren't you concerned with motive?

DETECTIVE MANN

We'll get there. Just trying to settle on some details --

BEASLY

I'd like to speak to it now.

Mann leans back in his chair, rolls his hand - *go ahead*.

DETECTIVE MANN

It's your show.

BEASLY

You should ask the question first.  
(re: the microphone)  
For the record.

A roll of the eyes from Mann. Then he leans in.

DETECTIVE MANN

Why did you do it?

BEASLY

Have you heard of Alex Haley?

DETECTIVE MANN

What does that have to do with --

BEASLY

He authored Roots.

DETECTIVE MANN

And...?

BEASLY

Which never would have been published had he not first received the proper due for his work on the autobiography of Malcolm X.

DETECTIVE MANN  
You're losing me.

BEASLY  
Malcolm X hired Haley as a ghostwriter. Never to be credited with his own work. He would have never sold Roots. He would have remained an unknown had events transpired differently.

DETECTIVE MANN  
What fucking events?

BEASLY  
Malcolm X died before the book was published. Had he not, the book would have simply been titled the autobiography of Malcolm X. Instead, it became... *As told by Alex Haley.*

DETECTIVE MANN  
I'm losing patience.

BEASLY  
A writer must take pride in their work. And there can be no pride in the absence of credit... My motive was pride.

**INT. MALIBU MANSION - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Built and furnished for the very wealthy. Glossy redwood beams glisten under a vaulted ceiling.

**SUPER: ONE YEAR EARLIER**

RYAN MONROE (40), Hollywood handsome, leans against a majestic GRAND PIANO in the center of the room.

He has a MANUSCRIPT in hand, rubs his chin as he reads under the watchful eyes of --

Charles Beasly, perched on a chair near an antique desk. A laptop computer in front of him.

CHARLES  
What do you think?

RYAN  
You're not capturing my... My essence. The energy of my life. Your writing... it's boring.

CHARLES  
I think it is nuanced.

RYAN  
It's uninspired, Chuck.

CHARLES  
I've told you, I prefer Charles.

RYAN  
Sorry, I keep forgetting that  
you're a pretentious little fuck.

A clench of the jaw and a grimace from Charles.

RYAN  
I've got a fucking Oscar. I've  
dated every starlet under the age  
of thirty. I've been to the God  
damn Whitehouse.

Ryan tosses the manuscript at Charles.

RYAN  
I want more of that. Fuck your  
purple prose. I want less of you.  
More of me. Understood?

Charles, eyes frozen in anger - nods.

RYAN  
Where are we on the final chapter?

CHARLES  
Have you thought about my request?

RYAN  
What request?

CHARLES  
A writing credit.

RYAN  
I hired you as a ghostwriter.  
Christ, you should be happy I  
haven't fired your ass.

CHARLES  
I realize that. But I also realize  
that it's only appropriate that get  
credit for my work.

RYAN

If you didn't want to be a ghostwriter, then you shouldn't have cashed the fucking check now.

CHARLES

Perhaps a co-writing credit.

RYAN

It's an autobiography. You do understand the meaning of the term - yes?

CHARLES

It's only fair.

RYAN

Nobody gives a shit about you. If they did, you wouldn't have to be ghostwriting in the first place.

Charles grimaces - vibrates with tension.

RYAN

Now, do you want to keep at it or would you like me to hire someone else? Guys like you are a dime a dozen. What'll it be?

CHARLES

I wish to continue... I need to use the restroom first.

RYAN

Whatever. Make yourself useful and grab me a beer on your way back.

#### **BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Charles bursts in, shuts the door behind him, slides to the floor - muffles a scream in his hands.

He removes a prescription bottle from his pocket - XANAX.

Charles pops the top off - taps out two pills, stares at them in the palm of his hand.

#### **KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER**

Charles at the counter carefully dropping a dozen XANAX pills into the neck of a beer bottle.

RYAN (O.S.)

Let's move it. Time's a wasting.

CHARLES  
Coming...

**GARAGE - AN HOUR LATER**

Charles rummages through boxes and shelves. Finds a ROPE and a box of large ZIP TIES.

**LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

An empty beer bottle sits on a small end table. Next to it --

Ryan sprawled on the floor - out cold.

His hands behind are behind his back, wrists bound together with several large ZIP TIE. There's --

A NOOSE around his neck.

The rope attached to that noose has been swung over a large ceiling beam. The loose end coiled around Charles's hand.

Charles bends down near Ryan's ear.

CHARLES  
Are you ready?

He SLAPS Ryan's face.

CHARLES  
Wake up, my prince.

RYAN  
(muttering)  
What....? Happened...?

Charles stands, removes the XANAX bottle from his pocket.

CHARLES  
Xanax abuse.

Charles pours several pills onto the table. Then --

Moves to the Grand Piano and curls the rope around the leg.

He pulls the rope with a steady tension.

Ryan's groggy head is forced upwards - panic fills his eyes as he feels the zip ties on his wrist.

His face reddens as the noose pressed into his neck.

CHARLES  
Get to your feet.

Ryan manages to right himself, relief from the choking. But it's only temporary as Charles continues to pull the rope.

RYAN

Stop!

Charles pulls the rope. Ryan attempts a step towards him - no good - the rope presses into the flesh of his neck.

Ryan, now on the tip of his toes, fighting for air.

Charles slides the piano bench towards him.

CHARLES

Save yourself. Use the bench.

Ryan struggles to his feet, sits on the bench and finds a moment of relief. But only a moment as Charles --

Pulls the rope tighter.

Ryan stands, struggles to find air. Charles --

Pulls the rope tighter. Then wraps and knots the end of the rope on the leg of the piano.

The only thing between Ryan surviving or hanging - the piano bench.

RYAN

What the fuck are you doing!?

Charles rises, returns to the antique desk and his laptop.

CHARLES

You wanted to complete the final chapter... There are two ways we could go. I'd like to get your thoughts. It is your autobiography after all.

RYAN

What the fuck are you talking about!?

CHARLES

We could go with suicide or autoerotic asphyxiation. Personally, I favor the latter. Suicide's been done to death, no pun intended. And it's not nearly as interesting as sexual deviation. Your thoughts?

RYAN

Why are you doing this?

CHARLES

All you had to do was allow me credit for my work.

RYAN

You can have it.

CHARLES

Too late I'm afraid. I'm in a little deep, don't you think?

Charles rises from his seat - approaches Ryan.

RYAN

I have tons of money. I'll pay you whatever you want.

CHARLES

I don't want money. I need recognition. I need to feel proud of my work. Why couldn't you understand that?

Charles kicks the piano bench away from beneath Ryan's feet.

Ryan swings his feet wildly as his neck veins bulge and his face reddens. Saliva foams on his lips.

Charles observes with all the passion of a man watching a documentary.

**INT. MALIBU MANSION - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

In the wee hours...

Charles at the antique desk, laser-focused on the screen of his laptop, his fingers feverishly tapping the keyboard.

SQUEAK... SQUEAK... SQUEAK...

CHARLES

Could you hold it down!? You're making it impossible to focus.

SQUEAK... SQUEAK... SQUEAK...

CHARLES

For Christ's sake.

Charles turns towards --



The RED-PURPLISH FACE of Ryan's corpse, suspended by a rope from the beam above him.

His dead hands, now free from the Zip Tie, dangle at his side.

As Ryan's body gently sways, the rope creates a SQUEAK.... SQUEAK.... SQUEAK as it rubs against the ceiling beam.

Charles steadies the body.

CHARLES  
That's better.

Charles unbuckles Ryan's belt, then lowers Ryan's slacks and underwear down to his ankles.

CHARLES  
Since you failed to weigh in, I decided to go with autoerotic asphyxiation.... I'm going to need to sell that though. So, and I know this goes against a biographer's creed, I inserted some fictional material in the earlier chapters to reflect your struggles with porn addiction.... As well as the Xanax, of course.

Charles returns to the antique desk - opens a drawer and retrieves Ryann's laptop.

He sets it on the grand piano facing Ryan's dead eyes.

He searches for porn sites - boots one up and hits play.

CHARLES  
I hope it's something you fancy.

Charles returns to the antique desk.

Taps away at his keyboard.

**INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT**

Charles and Detective Mann at the table.

DETECTIVE MANN  
And you have provided these details without coercion or duress?

CHARLES  
Indeed.

Detective Mann looks towards a dark glass mirror.

DETECTIVE MANN  
(at the mirror)  
I'm ready for the transcript.  
(at Charles)  
You're sure you don't want an  
attorney present for this.

CHARLES  
I do not.

An OFFICER enters, a printed transcript in hand. He gives it to Detective Mann - then exits.

DETECTIVE MANN  
This is a transcript of your  
confession. You need to sign and  
date it on the last page.

Mann slides the transcript and a pen towards Charles. He immediately goes to the last page - scribbles his name.

CHARLES  
There you go, Detective... Oh, I  
nearly forgot.

Charles retrieves a briefcase by his side, opens it and removes a BOOK --

*THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RYAN MONROE, AS TOLD BY CHARLES BEASLY.*

CHARLES  
I thought you might like a copy.

Charles places the book on the table.

CHARLES  
Would you like me to sign it?

Detective Mann, transcript in hand, stands.

DETECTIVE MANN  
Naw, I already got the signature I  
needed.

CHARLES  
Very well.

Detective Mann goes to the door - grabs the handle.

DETECTIVE MANN  
Why?

CHARLES

Pardon?

DETECTIVE MANN

You got away with it. Everyone bought the story. Why confess now?

CHARLES

I thought it was obvious.

Detective Mann shakes his head.

CHARLES

The book hasn't been selling. What use is a writer's credit if no one reads your work? I believe a trial is just the thing to boost interest. Maybe even a film. I do write scripts as well.

DETECTIVE MANN

(turning the door handle)  
Okay then...

CHARLES

You obviously don't understand pride, Detective.

DETECTIVE MANN

Pride is basically about who is right. I'm more of a - what is right - type of guy.

Detective Mann opens the door.

DETECTIVE MANN

(as he exits)  
I think most people are.

As Detective Mann slips out the door, Charles picks up the book from the table. He glides his hand over the cover and --  
Beams with pride.

FADE OUT.