

COURT 17

Written by

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OVER BLACK:

The rhythmic sound of cloth rubbing against leather.

Its incessant repetitiveness takes us into -

INT. U.S. OPEN PLAYER'S LOUNGE - SAME

Blistered and beaten hands *shake* as they anxiously wrap grip-tape over the vinyl handle of a tennis racket.

WE PULL OUT: to see the hands belong to NOA SCHULMAN, 37, slouched on a bench.

She's tall and lean, yet battered and abused by her decades as a professional athlete. Tattoos riddle her arms and legs.

She carries a deep look of consternation in her eyes as she deepens her focus on the racket handle.

Noa stops to reach up and tug on a Hamsa necklace that dangles from her neck. The palm-shaped, gold amulet has a phrase etched on its backside.

Noa rubs the engraving three times in a circular motion. She slightly calms as she mutters quietly to herself...

ERIC (O.S.)

Hey.

Noa drops the necklace into her shirt and returns to the racket handle as her coach, ERIC LARSON, 39, approaches. He's got that same worn look from one too many decades on tour.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Ready? On in ten.

A slight air bubble forms on the grip.

NOA

Twelve.

Noa removes the grip-tape... has to start all over again.

NOA (CONT'D)

It's 7:48.

Eric notices only two rackets with fresh grips in Noa's tennis bag.

*PRE-LAP: Deafening **popping** sound of a tennis ball struck -*

CRACK!

EXT. U.S. OPEN PRACTICE COURTS - SAME

The beautifully manicured practice courts situated on the fringe of the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center.

Several hundred FANS have managed to peek over fences and stalk nearby vantage points to watch what we can only hear -

CRACK!

CRACK!

The fans awed by every strike of the ball.

We follow their gaze towards... ANYA KHRUSHCHEVA, 18, the new phenom on tour.

There is an underlying beauty to Anya's intimidating stature - 6 foot 3 inches of dense muscle wrapped around bones made of pure Russian steel.

Her team surrounds her on the court - her father/coach, YURI, 44, two AGENTS, two assistant COACHES, and a TRAINER.

Yuri is short with a large belly. His callused hands belong to a man who's worked for everything in his life.

An Assistant Coach feeds Anya an errant ball. Anya chases it down and WHIPS a forehand right at the Assistant that NAILS him in his eye socket.

The Assistant hits the pavement like a sack of wet dough.

Anya looks to her team - BEAT - they smile at one another.

ANYA
(to Assistant)
You okay?

NOTE: Despite hailing from Russia, Anya speaks English with an American accent.

The Assistant rolls over, a fresh welt around his eye socket.

Anya yells at her father in Russian.

ANYA (CONT'D)
This the best you can find?

Yuri sends the second Assistant onto the court as he scolds the first Assistant with his thick Russian accent.

YURI
Let's go! You're off!

The second Assistant hurries onto the court as his disgraced co-worker meanders off.

Yuri pulls the first Assistant to the side...

YURI (CONT'D)
Who told you to make her run?

ASSISTANT COACH
I didn't mean to.

The Assistant blinks away the pain from his puffy eye.

YURI
Don't be such a pussy.

Meanwhile, the second Assistant feeds Anya a perfect ball.

Anya steps in and CRACKS another flawless ball down-the-line that *whizzes* by the second Assistant's head.

EXT. U.S. OPEN FLUSHING MEADOWS GROUNDS - DAY

The USTA National Tennis Center is a 46.5 acre facility with 22 tennis courts as well as restaurants, shops, bars, a food court, etc. A giant, bougie tennis fairground.

Noa walks at a brisk pace down a walkway through the Tennis Center as Eric tries to keep up. Their giant tennis bags slung over their shoulders.

Noa's much taller than Eric, at least by half a foot.

ERIC
Can you slow down?

NOA
I had a good showing at Indian Wells.

ERIC
Let's focus on today.

NOA
This fucking point system.

ERIC
You win today, you don't need to worry about the Asian Swing.

NOA
And if I don't?

ERIC
Back to 125's...

Noa clenches her jaw.

ERIC (CONT'D)
I know you think it's the minors,
but if you don't win here, you'll
need those points to get you back
into the bigger tournaments --

NOA
Fuck that. I'd rather retire.

ERIC
Let's just focus on today...

Noa and Eric both notice a beautiful WOMAN, 33, carrying a sandwich as she walks past them in the opposite direction.

She wears a classically tailored, Balmain pantsuit with a Simon and Garfunkel t-shirt and white Air Force Ones.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Fuck me.

Eric turns around to check out the Woman.

ERIC (CONT'D)
I think that's the new on-site
clinician.

NOA
You see her shirt?

ERIC
If that's my therapist, I don't
miss an appointment.

Noa and Eric hold on her for a beat - then --

NOA
Practice starts in 3 minutes.

Noa turns back towards the -

EXT. U.S. OPEN PRACTICE COURTS - MOMENTS LATER

Noa and Eric reach the gate for their practice court.

Eric checks his watch - 7:59am.

Standing just inside the gate with his back to them is Anya's Assistant Coach with the fresh black eye.

NOA

Hey.

The Assistant Coach doesn't turn around.

NOA (CONT'D)

We've got the court at eight.

ASSISTANT COACH

We're almost finished.

Beyond the Assistant Coach is Anya's practice. She hits balls even harder than before.

Nobody on the court looks like they have any intention of ending practice anytime soon.

Noa reaches her hand up to open the gate, and WALKS IN.

Eric follows her as they glide past the Assistant Coach, he runs around them to block their path.

ASSISTANT COACH (CONT'D)

I said we'll let you know when we're finished.

NOA

And I'm letting you know that you're finished now.

Yuri marches towards them as the practice continues.

YURI

What are you doing?

NOA

Your secretary doesn't seem to know how to tell time.

ERIC

(to Noa)

Why don't we give them a few more --

NOA

We hit at 8.

Anya *striking* the tennis ball catches Noa's attention - she's hypnotized by the Russian's raw power and control.

YURI (O.S.)

We start late.

Anya *cracks* a forehand with carefree aggression.

YURI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You think a few minutes will make a
difference?

Noa watches Anya *annihilate* an equally devastating backhand.
Anya notices Noa staring at her and stops.

ANYA
They're right.

Anya casually jogs to her bag and stuffs away her racket.

ANYA (CONT'D)
Let's go. Pack the shit up.

Her team rushes to pick up all the equipment like a battalion
of well-trained soldiers.

Anya lifts her bag and walks towards the exit.

ANYA (CONT'D)
(smiles to Eric)
Good luck today.

She *decks* Eric with her shoulder - knocks him over.

ANYA (CONT'D)
Oops --

NOA
Hey!

Noa *shoves* Anya in the back as hard as she can - Anya
stumbles, before catching her balance at the last second.

Anya quickly turns back and storms into Noa's face.

We notice how similar their physiques are - Anya's a souped
up, younger version of Noa's.

But Noa maintains a stoic death gaze, not backing down.

Anya clenches her fist, about to smash Noa's face in --

EXT. U.S. OPEN FLUSHING MEADOWS GROUNDS - LATER

Noa and Anya are being escorted through the grounds by JUDY,
53, the over-worked tournament director.

That's right, these two are playing each other in the first
round of the U.S. Open.

Noa can't help but notice the fandom around Anya. EVERYONE has their phones out as they take photos and videos.

Judy's walkie blares.

WALKIE (O.S.)
Court 17 good to go.

JUDY
(into walkie)
We've got Noa and Anya on their way
for Court 17.

This is one of the cooler things that happens at the US Open.

When you're not on Center Court, you must physically walk the grounds to get to your court just like everyone else.

This creates a heightened sense of excitement as all of the fans get to see the competitors up close and personal right before their match.

And EVERYONE wants to see tennis's newest star.

RANDOM FANS
"TAKE HER TO THE WOODSHED, AK!" "AK-
47!" "WE LOVE YOU, ANYAAA!"

EXT. USTA FLUSHING MEADOWS TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - LATER

Not one of the three main courts at the USTA Tennis Center, although it has a mini-stadium feel to it.

Nicknamed "The Pit," the actual tennis court is sunk 8 feet into the ground.

Hundreds of FANS enter to fill up the 2,800 capacity structure while -

Noa and Anya, rackets in hand, face each other at opposite sides of the net. Between them is the CHAIR UMPIRE, 48, going through the basic rules of the match.

Everything about the Umpire is prim and proper, her hair pulled back into an extremely tight ponytail.

Anya and Noa are locked onto one another. Like two apex predators in the wild. No one dares blink first.

Noa grits her teeth. She forces a deep, therapeutic sigh through her clenched jaw.

CHAIR UMPIRE (PRE-LAP)
WELCOME TO THE 2023 U.S. OPEN
FIRST ROUND MATCH BETWEEN ANYA
KHRUSHCHEVA AND NOA SCHULMAN. MS.
KHRUSHCHEVA WILL SERVE FIRST.

NOTE: ALL CAPS WHEN THE UMPIRE SPEAKS INTO HER MICROPHONE.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - LATER

Noa methodically paces at the back wall - she intentionally stays in between the baseline and sidelines.

Then stops. Glances over at --

ANYA. Nonchalantly inspecting tennis balls before she gets ready to serve.

Noa goes through her "return ritual": she shuffles towards the baseline, then backpedals three steps.

She brings the Hamsa necklace up to her lips - gives it three kisses - then mutters again to herself.

On the other side, Anya now in her service stance as she calmly bounces the ball against the freshly paved court.

Even the way Anya bounces the ball is daunting. Each time it hits the court, it seems to shake it.

BOOM.

BOOM.

BOOM.

Noa's hands slightly tremor - she wraps them tightly around her racket handle until her knuckles stretch into whiteness.

Anya tosses the ball in the air - it seems to hang there forever, a neon green circle in a sea of deep blue, and then -

CRACK!!!

The ball FLIES off Anya's racket and SHOOTS down the middle of the T.

Noa can barely see the ball as it races by her -

ACE.

She glances at Anya - then over at Eric, sitting court-side, opposite the Chair Umpire, with the crowd.

Eric scribbles something onto a piece of paper - then looks up at Noa. Their eyes meet.

Eric tries not to acknowledge the obvious... that neither of them have ever seen a serve that fast, that powerful.

Noa shifts her focus back to the court - where Anya is waiting on the other side, ready to serve again.

CHAIR UMPIRE (O.S.)

15 - LOVE.

Noa walks over as she tries to shake off the previous point.

NOA

Come on...

Noa begins the same return ritual - she walks up to the baseline, then, just as she takes her first step back --

Anya PUNISHES an even harder serve out-wide. Another ACE.

CHAIR UMPIRE (O.S.)

30 - LOVE.

Noa wants to object, *she wasn't ready*. But that serve was too perfect - she couldn't have returned it, regardless.

Noa rushes to the other side - Anya's already set up to serve, bouncing the ball impatiently as she waits for Noa.

Noa takes a deep breath. And just as she takes her first step towards the baseline --

Anya nails another BOMB, this time into the net - it was struck so hard, the ball lodged itself into the stitching.

The audience HOOTS and HOLLERS despite the miss.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)

SECOND SERVE --

Anya doesn't waste any time as she immediately hits a nasty kick serve right into Noa's body.

The ball has considerably less pace but was hit with such insane top-spin that it takes a giant bounce over Noa's head.

Noa reaches up and blocks the ball back.

Anya charges the net and -

Like the freak athlete she is -

Elevates into the air and hits a jumping overhead SLAM so hard it bounces off the court and into the crowd.

CHAIR UMPIRE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
40 - LOVE.

The crowd EXPLODES with glee as Noa gets back to the Ad side.

NOA
(to herself)
Don't let her rush you...

Noa tries her ritual, again... walks up to the baseline --
But Anya immediately serves her hardest ACE yet.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Noa stands there in a daze - her feet stuck to the concrete.

Anya sprints over to her bench, her body language screams *just getting warmed up* as she flashes a cocky smile at Noa.

Noa looks over at Eric for something. *Anything.*

But her coach is just as helpless as she is...

MONTAGE THROUGH THE REST OF THE MATCH -

It's WINNER after WINNER from Anya - who continues to *control* the pace of the match.

It doesn't matter where or what Noa hits, Anya has an answer for everything. This chick has no weaknesses.

Noa follows a rare short ball into the net. Anya tees up and SLAPS a forehand at Noa which PEGS her in the tailbone.

Anya turns to the crowd and pumps her fists.

ANYA
Let's go!

The crowd erupts with her.

CROWD
(in unison)
AN-YA! AN-YA! AN-YA!

Noa's back throbs as much as her pride while she sets up to serve the next point - the crowd noise gets louder.

Noa looks over to the Chair Umpire.

CHAIR UMPIRE
(to crowd)
PLEASE...

The fans don't really quiet down.

Noa spots Anya's team, sitting just a few rows away from Eric, they cheer and laugh with the crowd.

LATER IN THE MATCH

Noa's desperation escalates as she tries different tactics to take down this behemoth of an opponent.

She tries to overpower Anya - but this causes Noa to miss more shots.

Noa tries to be more consistent - but then her shots are too weak and Anya puts them away with even greater ease.

Serve and volleying doesn't work.

Focusing on Anya's backhand doesn't work.

Ultimately -

It.

Doesn't.

Matter.

Every point another reminder that nothing will work.

Noa sits at her bench as she takes a sip of water, then shakily places the bottle down next to other sports drinks.

All her beverages organized by height, shortest to tallest, the labels facing away from the court.

Noa checks the scoreboard. She's lost the first set: 6 - 2.

She looks over at Eric, he puts on a brave face.

Yuri whispers something to one of Anya's agents. The timber in their voices amplify as they echo in Noa's ears.

They both catch Noa staring at them, and laugh.

NOA
(to Chair Umpire)
Can you shut them up?

They laugh harder.

CHAIR UMPIRE
They are allowed to talk on change-
overs. Let me worry about them.

The team's laughs continue to echo all around Noa.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
TIME.

Anya *leaps* from her bench and hustles to the baseline -
Noa slowly lurches up out of her seat.

EVEN LATER IN THE MATCH

The ass whooping continues as the score ticks all the way up
to: 6 - 2, 5 - 1.

Game score: 40 - Love.

Triple Match Point for Anya.

Anya LAUNCHES a monster serve right at Noa, Noa just barely
gets out of the way, as the ball *whizzes* by.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Noa turns to Eric. His sad eyes meet hers.

Anya turns to the fans and bows to each corner of the stadium
like a Samurai. The fans clap and cheer with adoration.

No one acknowledges Noa as she hustles to the net.

A TITLE *MATERIALIZES* ONTO THE CENTER OF THE SCREEN:

COURT 17

PATRICK MCENROE (V.O.)
Well, Anya Khrushcheva warned us she would make quick work of Noa Schulman in what is most likely Schulman's last match of her career. I met Noa after the Orange Bowl win that cemented her as the top junior in the world. My brother and I didn't miss a match during her undefeated season at the University of Texas. She was special. She had that explosive, all-court game that is so rare for someone her size. We all thought she was the next great American phenom. But, sometimes, talent just doesn't translate into victories on the pro tour...

EXT. USTA BILLIE JEAN KING NATIONAL TENNIS CENTER - SUNSET

Noa and Eric walk back through the US Open grounds.

ERIC
They fucked you on the draw.

NOA
Shocker.

ERIC
You'd think they would look after their own.

Eric looks over at Noa.

NOA
What?

ERIC
Nothing, what?

NOA
You're giving me that look.

ERIC
What look?

NOA
Just stop.

ERIC
I'm not doing anything.

NOA
I don't know if I can do the Asian
Swing, man.

ERIC
Actually, I wanted to talk to you --

They come up against a WALL OF FANS, who block the walkway as they cheer and holler.

Noa and Eric follow their cheers to a giant ESPN booth, where CHRIS MCKENDRY, 53, and PATRICK MCENROE, 54, conduct a post-match interview with Anya.

NOA
Jesus Christ.

Pat says something to Anya, who then turns to the crowd and raises her hands - they all SCREAM for her, going crazy.

Noa, in an effort to avoid Anya's eye-line, tries to find a way around the mob.

But there isn't one.

Noa and Eric push their way through the sea of raucous fans.

EXT. CENTRAL BARK DOGGY DAY CARE - LATER

Noa and Eric approach the entrance of Central Bark, a day care facility for dogs on the USTA grounds.

A spritely, energetic male EMPLOYEE, 25, greets them.

EMPLOYEE
Welcome to Central Bark!

NOA
Hi, I'm here to pick up my dog.

EMPLOYEE
What's the name?

NOA
Shai.

EMPLOYEE
Oh, Shai! You're Shai's owner?

NOA
Yup.

EMPLOYEE

You know... he's not so *shy*.

The Employee laughs to himself. Noa's not in the mood.

EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)

I'll be right back!

He hustles inside.

Noa stares forward, a lot on her mind - Eric sizes her up.

ERIC

Okay, um. So...

(beat)

I got a call last week. From Sarah Greenberg. The new AD at Texas.

NOA

The fuck does she want with you?

ERIC

They, uh... offered me the head coaching job.

NOA

You're not serious?

ERIC

I'm sorry, there was no right time to tell you. I have to start next week --

NOA

Shit.

ERIC

If I had a choice --

NOA

Holy shit.

ERIC

If I had a choice, I'd stay. It's just the money...

Eric thinks of what to say next.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I still think you should --

NOA

Don't... do that.

ERIC
You've got a lot of solid tennis
left.

NOA
What about the Asian Swing?

ERIC
I think you should play it.

NOA
Oh, do I have permission?

ERIC
If you're not gonna retire, you'll
need points for next season --

NOA
I'm aware!

An awkward silence.

NOA (CONT'D)
So that's it? You're just giving up
on me?

ERIC
It's been twenty years. Don't you
think it's time for a change?

NOA
No.

ERIC
You know, I don't get you. When was
the last time you even let me lead
practice? You don't even want a
coach, you want a hitting partner.

NOA
Oh, so this is punishment because
I'm not some pushover who just
listens to everything you say?

ERIC
No, I didn't mean that. I just...
look, I need this. For me.

Eric's face is genuine, his eyes pleading. Noa softens...

NOA
Okay.

Noa unenthusiastically raises her right hand - extends her index and pinky finger while grasping the second and third fingers with the thumb.

NOA (CONT'D)
Hook 'em horns --

Just as a fawn-colored Weimaraner/ Pit Bull mix jumps over the counter and lands at Noa's feet.

NOA (CONT'D)
(baby voice)
And who is this handsome boy?!

Noa's mood lightens instantly as she shifts focus and gingerly bends down to play wrestle with her dog, SHAI, 3.

Shai goes nuts for Noa and wags his tail uncontrollably as he darts around frantically in her arms.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - LATER

Noa, Eric and Shai head for the exit gate.

ERIC
You seem pissed.

NOA
I'm not.

ERIC
Noa --

SAMMY (O.S.)
Noa Schulman! Can I grab you for an interview with the Tennis Channel?

A Journalist, SAMMY HENLEY, 34, rushes up. She has stark blond hair and a voice that could disintegrate your eardrums.

Her sleep-deprived CAMERAMAN, 46, sets up his camera to film as Sammy shoves a microphone into Noa's face.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Just wanted to get your thoughts on the match and your plans for the future.

NOA
No, thanks.

SAMMY
What did you think of Anya's game?

NOA
She's good.

SAMMY
The tennis world hasn't been this excited for a female player since you joined the tour.

NOA
Okay.

SAMMY
Do you have any advice for her?

Noa gives her nothing.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Do you have regrets with how your career turned out?

Noa stops.

ERIC
Noa, let's go.

SAMMY
It's a terrible loss to end on.

NOA
Who says my career is over?

SAMMY
Even if you have a really good showing at the Asian Swing, you'll need bigger tournaments to keep your points.

Noa gives Sammy an annoyed look.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
I mean, we all know the Asian Swing is the minor leagues. But you've had a hard time getting points at those bigger, tougher tournaments for the past 15 years. The ones that count.

ERIC
Noa. Come on.

SAMMY
Is there a part of you that feels like you never lived up to --

NOA
Where the fuck do you get off?

ERIC
Noa --

NOA
I just fucking lost.

SAMMY
I'm just trying to --

NOA
You're trying to get a sound bite
that'll distract your shit-bag
bosses from your lack of talent.

SAMMY
I just thought that since this was
your dad's favorite tournament --

Noa *grabs* the mic out of Sammy's hand and *slams* it on the ground. It shatters.

Noa storms off as Eric and Shai follow.

Sammy smiles as she turns to her Cameraman.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Did you get all that?

EXT. EAST RIVER GREENWAY - MANHATTAN - NIGHT

Noa and Shai run along the East River as the beautiful glow of the Brooklyn and Queens skylines flank them.

Noa sweats through a burnt orange University of Texas shirt while her AirPods play Simon and Garfunkel "Bridge Over Troubled Water."

The tune seems to crawl into Noa's soul - she starts to reminisce as WE JUMP into her thoughts and see *images* of -

FLASHBACK

- A young NOA, 5, takes lessons on a decrepit tennis court from her handsome yet aged, Israeli FATHER, 35. He wears the Hamsa necklace.

Noa misses a ball - he yells at her in Hebrew - then orders her to stand in a specific spot on the court.

As he feeds more balls, Noa hits everything beautifully, cleanly - like a pro trapped in a 5-year-old's body.

Her father smiles, then kisses his Hamsa necklace three times.

Noa "takes out" her own pretend, invisible necklace and mimes kissing it three times as well - mimicking him.

He laughs at how cute his daughter is.

- Her father, now 43, drives cross-country with a teenage NOA, 13. A GERMAN SHEPHERD, 3, sits in the back seat of their shitty SUV amongst various tennis equipment.

Noa's dad turns up the radio, "Bridge Over Troubled Water" gets louder. They share a smile as they sing along.

- NOA, 17, enters her dorm room at the University of Texas, by herself - *her dad's not there.*

She wears his Hamsa necklace. She rubs it three times, then kisses it three times, as --

WE SNAP BACK to present day Noa --

The Simon and Garfunkel song pauses - Noa gets a call from an international number - she ignores it. The music returns.

Noa looks back at Shai, observes how happy he is to just be running outside with his owner --

Noa gets a *ping* of a voicemail message. She plays it.

The music pauses again as we hear the voice of a Lady with a thick Mandarin accent in Noa's AirPods.

VOICEMAIL LADY (O.S.)
Hi, Ms. Schulman. This is Zihan from the Jiangxi Open following up again to see if you will be playing in this year's tournament. We are past the deadline, so if I do not hear from you, I will have to replace you. Thank you.

The message ends - the music resumes once again.

Noa chews on the message - she looks down at her phone, we notice that slight tremor returning to her hand.

Noa refocuses on the run as she leads Shai off the path and into the concrete jungle of Manhattan.

NOA
 (to Shai)
 Come on!

Shai gets a turbo boost of excitement as he sprints forward. Noa does the same - they race each other through the streets.

Noa takes the lead as she lets her anxiety and adrenaline fuel her all at once.

As they hustle through a crosswalk, Noa looks back at Shai.

NOA (CONT'D)
 Come on, boy! Come on --

A yellow Taxicab **BARRELS** right into Noa --

She bounces off the hood of the car and **SMACKS** onto the pavement as her skull **cracks** against the curb.

Her arms immediately stiffen into an unnatural position - her forearms flex in mid-air.

Noa lies motionless, her Hamsa necklace exposed. We can barely make out the inscription on it:

Courage is ... to fear, mastery ... not absence ...

A pool of blood collects around her head.

Shai rushes up and licks Noa's face, but Noa doesn't move, doesn't blink, doesn't breath...

SHE'S DEAD.

The cab DRIVER and other PASSERBYS crowd around Noa's lifeless body.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Eric talks on his phone in the backseat of a U.S. Open player shuttle. He stares out the window with sadness in his eyes.

ERIC
 (into phone)
 You guys need some sort of court reservation app.
 (into phone)
 No, I know it's not your fault.
 (then)
 (MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

Yes, can I reserve a practice court
for 8, tomorrow?

As we PULL OUT, we find Shai sitting next to Eric...

And NOA passed out next to Shai.

Noa slowly wakes as Shai licks her face -

Noa looks out the window - they're driving on Highway 495
from Manhattan into Queens.

NOA

What...?

ERIC

(into phone)

I feel like this is the 100th time
I've given you guys the Player ID
number. Don't you have some sort of
database?

Noa looks down, she wears the same clothes as yesterday. She
feels her head - no wound, no blood, nothing.

NOA

Did I -- ?

ERIC

(to Noa)

Hey, what's your ID number?

Noa looks to the trunk of the car, empty. No luggage.

NOA

Where are we going?

Eric spots the Player ID necklace sticking out of Noa's
tennis bag.

NOA (CONT'D)

Eric.

Eric ignores Noa - he grabs her Player ID from the bag and
recites it to the operator on the other end of the phone.

Noa *snatches* Eric's phone and hangs it up.

ERIC

Jesus fuck, Noa, I was on hold for
almost 30 minutes!

Eric yanks his phone back from Noa. Shai gets riled up,
excited for play time.

NOA
What are you doing? Where's all my
shit?

ERIC
What?

Eric shoots Noa a dirty look, then turns back to the window.

EXT. U.S. OPEN FLUSHING MEADOWS GROUNDS - DAY

Noa considers her surroundings as her and Eric, giant tennis bags slung over their shoulders, walk down the walkway.

ERIC
That's a fucked up dream, man.

The same beautiful Woman wearing the same exact outfit, carrying the same sandwich walks by them.

The Woman smiles at Noa this time.

Eric turns around to check her out.

ERIC (CONT'D)
She just smiled at us.

Noa doesn't register, in a haze.

EXT. U.S. OPEN PRACTICE COURTS - LATER

Noa and Eric reach the practice courts.

Eric checks his watch - 7:59am.

ERIC
I'm sure they'll be done soon.

Noa slowly turns to Eric, doesn't know what to say.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Hello?

Noa turns back to Anya - who's punishing balls with the same intensity as "yesterday."

Eric follows Noa's gaze to the Russian phenom...

EXT. U.S. OPEN FLUSHING MEADOWS GROUNDS - LATER

Noa and Anya are being escorted by Judy.

Noa's state of shock maintains its numbness - she clenches her fists as a similar tightness grows in her chest.

JUDY
 (into walkie)
 We've got Noa and Anya on their way
 for Court 17.

The same exact fans crowd around them.

RANDOM FANS
 "TAKE HER TO THE WOODSHED, AK!" "AK-
 47!" "WE LOVE YOU, ANYAAA!"

EXT. USTA FLUSHING MEADOWS TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - LATER

Noa, Anya and the same Umpire at the net. Anya indifferent to Noa this time.

CHAIR UMPIRE (PRE-LAP)
 WELCOME TO THE 2023 U.S. OPEN,
 FIRST ROUND MATCH BETWEEN ANYA
 KHRUSHCHEVA AND NOA SCHULMAN. MS.
 KHRUSHCHEVA WILL SERVE FIRST.

CUT TO:

Noa grips her racket tightly, glares at --

ANYA. Who calmly inspects tennis balls as she gets in her service stance -

Anya bounces the ball against the freshly paved court -

Tosses the ball in the air -

And then... CRACK!!!

The ball SHOOTs down the middle of the T. THE SAME ACE.

Noa glances over at Eric, once again scribbling something onto a piece of paper. Eric looks up and meets Noa's eyes.

The same helpless look on his face.

MONTAGE THROUGH THE REST OF THE MATCH -

The match progresses as Anya dominates Noa with even more power and greater consistency.

It's WINNER after WINNER after WINNER. Anya steamrolls Noa even worse than yesterday.

The score ticks up to 6 - 0, 5 - 1.

Game score: 40 - Love.

Triple Match Point for Anya.

Anya launches a monster serve out-wide. ACE.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Anya turns to the fans and bows to each corner of the stadium like a samurai. The fans clap and cheer with adoration.

EXT. USTA BILLIE JEAN KING NATIONAL TENNIS CENTER

Noa and Eric walk back through the US Open grounds by themselves.

ERIC
That was a lot closer than the
score showed...

They walk in silence until they reach the same WALL OF FANS blocking the walkway in front of the ESPN booth.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - LATER

Noa, Eric and Shai head for the exit gate.

SAMMY (O.S.)
Noa Schulman! Can I grab you for an
interview with the Tennis Channel?

Sammy approaches with the same Cameraman.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
I just wanted to get your thoughts
on the match and your plans for the
future.

Noa picks up her pace as she rushes towards the exit - then spots the beautiful Woman locking up a door to a temporary office in the Player's Village.

The Woman notices Noa and smiles.

INT. NOA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Noa and Shai enter the messy hotel room. The burnt-orange University of Texas shirt draped over a chair.

The TV plays footage of Anya's post-match press conference.

Anya sits in front of a microphone with a U.S. OPEN/RALPH LAUREN branded step-and-repeat behind her.

A group of reporters, off-camera, sit in front of Anya.

REPORTER (ON THE TV)
Do you enjoy this "villain" role
you've taken on?

ANYA (ON THE TV)
You seemed way too excited to --

Noa shuts the TV off. Shuts off the lights in the room.

She takes her clothes off and rushes into the bed to hide underneath the covers.

Noa forces her eyes closed - the quicker she falls asleep, the quicker this nightmare will be over --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Noa wakes to Shai licking the sweat off her face.

She takes a big gasp, the air soothes her lungs.

Eric on the phone next to her.

Noa looks out the window - they're driving on Highway 495 from Manhattan into Queens.

ERIC
(into phone)
You guys need some sort of court
reservation app.

NOA
No fucking way.

CUT TO:

Noa's state of shock carries her through the Player's Lounge - the Practice Courts - another brutal loss against Anya.

It's surreal, a wave of helplessness washes over Noa.

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Noa wakes up in the same shuttle, on the same patch of highway 495 with Eric on the phone.

ERIC
(into phone)
You guys need some sort of court reservation app.

NOA
Eric...

ERIC
(into phone)
No, not 8 p.m. 8 a.m.

NOA
Eric...

ERIC
(into phone)
I feel like this is the 100th time I've given you guys the Player ID number. Don't you have some sort of database?
(to Noa)
Hey, what's your ID number?

NOA
Eric, hang up the phone.

Eric spots the Player ID necklace sticking out of Noa's bag. He grabs it and recites it to the operator on the other end.

Noa yanks Eric's phone and hangs it up.

ERIC
Jesus fuck, Noa, I was on hold for almost 30 minutes. Now I have to --

NOA
I don't know what's going on.

ERIC
What?

NOA
I'm freaking out.

Eric checks his watch.

ERIC
We've got over an hour. Plenty of
time to get on the court by 8.

NOA
Not the match. Fuck the match.

ERIC
What's wrong with you?

NOA
I died.

ERIC
You died?

NOA
I was running with Shai. I got hit
by a Taxi and then I woke up here.

ERIC
Last night?

NOA
I thought I was dreaming. Then I
woke up here, again. This is the
third time. I've lived this day
three FUCKING times!

Noa unravels faster than she can process.

Eric holds on her for a beat - then breaks into laughter.

ERIC
Wow, that was good.

NOA
I'm serious!

ERIC
Where was that sense of humor these
past 20 years?

NOA
Eric! Please --

ERIC
Alright, now you're trying too
hard.

Noa leans back in her seat. Helpless. Frustrated.

INT. NYC SUBWAY 7 TRAIN - DAY

Noa, in her tennis clothes, rides the subway by herself with the same mindless glare.

CUT TO:

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Noa wakes with a gasp, Eric on the phone beside her.

EXT. WEST VILLAGE - DAY

Noa wanders the charming cobblestone streets like a zombie.

CUT TO:

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Noa wakes up with a gasp, Eric next to her.

She explains the situation to Eric again - he laughs even harder than before --

CUT TO:

Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes up --
 - Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes
 up -- Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes up -- Noa
 wakes up -- Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes up -- Noa wakes up --

EXT. U.S. OPEN FLUSHING MEADOWS GROUNDS - DAY

Noa and Eric walk to the practice courts.

Noa's face pale, her gaze dead.

That same beautiful Woman walks by them, smiles.

Noa studies the Woman's shirt - Simon and Garfunkel. She can almost hear "Bridge Over Troubled Water..."

ERIC

You okay?

Noa clenches her fists tightly, checks in with Eric, then turns around and heads for the Woman --

ERIC (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

-- but Noa's already gone.

NOA
Excuse me.

The Woman turns around - *fuck*, she's beautiful. BEAT.

WOMAN
Yes?

NOA
I'm Noa. Schulman.

WOMAN
Hi, I'm Roxanna. Griffith.

NOA
I'm a player.

ROXANNA
(re: Noa's equipment)
I gathered that.

Noa's stuck for another BEAT.

NOA
I think I need... I mean, can I
talk to you?

ROXANNA
No.

NOA
No?

Roxanna holds on Noa - then laughs.

ROXANNA
Just kidding!

Roxanna keeps laughing, Noa doesn't.

Noa looks back at Eric, then the practice courts in the distance. All she can hear are the *popping* of Anya's shots.

She clenches her fists tighter as her breath shortens, her vision blurs.

She turns back to Roxanna, who's still speaking to her, but the sounds are muffled.

It takes Noa a few seconds to --

ROXANNA (CONT'D)

Noa?

NOA

Yeah, yes. What?

ROXANNA

I said I was just about to eat breakfast, but you could join me.

NOA

(beat)

I think I'm fucked.

ROXANNA

(smiles)

We all are.

Noa locks eyes with Roxanna, calms just a little. There's chemistry there. But Noa can't even begin to process it.

INT. ON-SITE CLINICIAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Roxanna's office is tastefully decorated with both warmth and modern furnishings.

Noa sits on a Barcelona chair while Roxanna inhales the over-priced breakfast sandwich at her desk.

Noa notices a photograph on Roxanna's desk of Roxanna, her HUSBAND, 41, and her SON, 9. The beautiful mountain range of Yosemite behind them.

NOA

Am I dead?

ROXANNA

I don't think so.

NOA

Then what the fuck is going on?

ROXANNA

So you wake up in the same spot at the same time every day?

NOA

It didn't feel like a dream. This feels fucking real.

Roxanna pushes the sandwich aside, leans back. She calmly notes how tense Noa is, her extremities clenched tightly.

NOA (CONT'D)

Maybe it's like a psychological thing. Like, it's all in my head.

ROXANNA

Repetitive Compulsion is a repeat of certain events. What you're describing seems more... extreme.

NOA

How do you get out of that?

ROXANNA

By treating whatever psychological wound is causing the trauma.

NOA

I don't have psychological wounds.

ROXANNA

We all do, honey. Some more than others.

NOA

Okay, what's my wound?

ROXANNA

Well, let's start with tennis.

NOA

But, I love tennis.

ROXANNA

Good. Why?

NOA

(beat)

I don't know...

ROXANNA

Almost all my patients say the court is the only place where they feel in control. Would you agree with that?

Noa and Roxanna lock onto each other, once again - Noa's gaze pleads for an answer.

INT. NOA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Noa lays on her bed and stares at the ceiling with that same helpless expression.

The sound of the TV and Shai chewing his tennis ball invade the room.

ON THE TV: Anya's post-match press conference.

REPORTER (ON THE TV)
Do you enjoy this "villain" role you've taken on?

ANYA (ON THE TV)
You seemed way too excited to ask that question.

The reporters laugh.

ANYA (ON THE TV) (CONT'D)
I don't know, I don't view myself as a villain. I just try and entertain fans.

REPORTER 3 (ON THE TV)
Noa Schulman's coach forfeited the match today just hours before you were supposed to play.

Noa angles her head towards the TV.

ANYA (ON THE TV)
Was that a question?

The reporters laugh again.

REPORTER 3 (O.S.)
What's your take on that?

ANYA
I mean, is she injured?

REPORTER 3 (O.S.)
They gave no explanation.

ANYA
I guess that's why they say never meet your heroes.

REPORTER 5 (O.S.)
Is Noa Schulman your hero?

ANYA
(laughs)
No. But I watched her matches when I was little.

REPORTER 2 (O.S.)
That why you have such similar
games?

ANYA
If by similar, you mean mine is a
more advanced, evolved and just
better version...? Then yes.

Even more Reporters laugh.

REPORTER 2 (O.S.)
Do you ever worry about ending up
like Noa Schulman?

ANYA
Definitely not.

REPORTER 2 (O.S.)
Noa Schulman was the most touted
player when she was your age --

ANYA
Next question.

BEAT.

REPORTER 5 (O.S.)
You said in your interview with Pat
McEnroe that Schulman defaulting
actually hurts you in this
tournament.

ANYA
Yeah, I prefer to get the reps.

REPORTER 5 (O.S.)
So you know for a fact that you
were going to beat Schulman?

ANYA
You're really trying to get me to
say something mean, aren't you?

REPORTER 5 (O.S.)
What if she brought her "A" game?

ANYA
She can bring her "A++" game and it
wouldn't matter. I could play her
100 times, and beat her every time
in straight sets.

(MORE)

ANYA (CONT'D)

I'm better than her now, I'm better than her when she was my age, and I'll always be better than her. Happy? Now you have your headline.

Everyone laughs.

Anya seems pleased with her performance as she peers into the barrel of the camera, as if right at Noa.

ON NOA: sitting up, laser focused on the screen. Furious. It's as if Anya is talking directly to her.

Noa holds on Anya's image like a black mamba snake stalking its prey in the Serengeti.

Noa breaths in the utter disrespect. And exhales. In and out.

In.

And out --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Noa *shoots* out of her sleep. Eric on the phone.

His conversation with the U.S. Open operator slightly muffled in the B.G as Noa slowly comes to...

ERIC

(into phone)

No, not 8 p.m. 8 a.m.

(listening)

I feel like this is the 100th time I've given you guys the Player ID number. Don't you have some sort of database?

That number "100" echoes in Noa's skull.

EXT. U.S. OPEN PRACTICE COURTS - LATER

Noa and Eric on the practice court drilling. They're in a long cross-court rally.

ERIC

Stay consistent!

Noa dials in with revitalized energy - each shot executed cleanly with that satisfying *pop* of a perfectly struck ball.

She can almost see Anya's smug face at the press conference --

NOA
(under her breath)
Fuck that.

Noa leans in and ANNIHILATES a forehand WINNER down-the-line.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17

Noa goes for the same down-the-line winner but Anya is all over it - Anya OBLITERATES a backhand down-the-line WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

CUT TO:

EXT. U.S. OPEN PRACTICE COURTS - THE NEXT MORNING

Noa and Eric on the practice courts, drilling some more.

Noa drenched with sweat, she gives it her all as she SMACKS forehands and backhands all over the court.

ERIC
Stay with the point! Don't go for
it too early --

Noa steps into a deep ball and SMASHES it past Eric. He throws his hands up in the air.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Come on, Noa...

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17

Noa SMASHES a similar ball as she rushes the net.

Anya attacks the ball, hits a clean forehand BOMB right at Noa - Noa can't avoid it as it NAILS her in the shoulder.

CUT TO:

EXT. U.S. OPEN PRACTICE COURTS - THE NEXT MORNING

Noa and Eric hit back and forth. Eric feeds Noa a slightly short ball, Noa CRUSHES it even harder this time.

ERIC
No! Stay with it!

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17

Noa leans into the same short ball and comes to net - Anya, all over it again, SMACKS it back at Noa.

This time Noa *avoids* the ball that lands inside the line.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

CUT TO:

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

CUT TO:

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Noa looks over at Eric as he scribbles in his notes.

ROXANNA (*PRE-LAP*)
He's your coach.

INT. ON-SITE CLINICIAN'S OFFICE - LATER THAT EVENING

Noa sits across from Roxanna, who inhales a large slice of pizza this time.

NOA
And?

ROXANNA
Maybe he can help you.

NOA
He can't.

ROXANNA
People can surprise us at times.

NOA
Not after 20 years.

ROXANNA
Didn't you say you were the top
junior in the world?

NOA
Yeah.

ROXANNA
So you could've chosen any coach?

NOA
My dad developed my game.

ROXANNA
And Eric?

NOA
Let's just say he was there at the
right place and the right time.

ROXANNA
Is he a good coach?

Noa thinks.

NOA
I don't know... I guess so.

ROXANNA
Would your dad know how to beat
Anya?

NOA
(sarcastic)
Oh, he knew everything.

ROXANNA
So you listened to his advice?

NOA
I didn't really have a choice.

ROXANNA
What do you mean by that?

NOA
Ugh, please, never mind.

ROXANNA
Have you felt an overwhelming lack
of control in your life?

NOA

I'm feeling an overwhelming sense of frustration right now.

ROXANNA

Did you choose to play tennis?

NOA

I was 3 when my dad put a racket in my hand.

ROXANNA

He choose a lot of things for you?

NOA

He did what he thought was best for me.

ROXANNA

What about what *you* think is best for you?

NOA

What does any of this have to do with Eric?

ROXANNA

There is a refreshing element to your relationship with him.

NOA

And what's that?

ROXANNA

He's the only component in your life that you feel you chose.

NOA

So?

ROXANNA

So why not *choose* to listen to him?

EXT. U.S. OPEN PRACTICE COURTS - MORNING

Noa and Eric in practice. They *blast* balls back and forth, back and forth -

ERIC

That's great, keep it up!

Noa stays with the rally, doesn't go for it.

A giant smile organically creeps onto Eric's face.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - LATER

Noa and Anya in a similar rally. Noa doesn't go for it, stays consistent -

Anya leans in and *annihilates* a down-the-line WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Noa looks over at Eric.

INT. U.S. OPEN PLAYER'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A fine dining restaurant reserved for those playing in the U.S. Open.

Noa and Eric sit across from each other at the table, while Shai sleeps underneath.

NOA
Even when I stayed consistent, she
did the same shit to me at 4-1.

Noa spots Anya, Yuri and the rest of their team as they enter the restaurant.

Yuri's arm around Anya. You can see how much he loves his daughter - his smile filled with pride --

ERIC (O.S.)
Don't beat yourself up over one
match.

NOA
Theoretically, if I were to play
her again and she was playing like
this... is there anything we could
do? Anything at all?

ERIC
I guess you could've mixed it up
more to keep her off balance.

NOA
I tried in the second set. Then I
over-adjusted to make her earn
every point. But my balls were so
weak, she hit even more winners.

(beat)
(MORE)

NOA (CONT'D)

Then I tried to fuck with her rhythm by taking more time in between points.

ERIC

(remembers)

But she jumped right back in.

Noa holds on Eric for a BEAT...

ERIC (CONT'D)

What?

NOA

You always bitch that I don't listen to you. So, go ahead. I'm listening.

ERIC

What do you want me to say? It's over.

NOA

Right, doesn't affect you anymore now that you're leaving for Texas.

ERIC

What do you want from me?

NOA

I want you to fucking tell me how I could have beat her!

ERIC

Why?!

NOA

Because you're my FUCKING COACH!

The entire restaurant quiets. Everyone stares at Noa.

Including Anya.

NOA (CONT'D)

What the fuck are you looking at?

Anya turns to her team - Yuri whispers something to the table - they all die laughing.

INT. ON-SITE CLINICIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Noa stares at the picture of Roxanna with her family. Shai lays next to her this time, chewing his ball.

ROXANNA

Where are you right now?

NOA

I did what you said. I listened to Eric's bullshit advice. I let him lead practice. It didn't help.

ROXANNA

Why are you playing Anya?

NOA

Because they fucked me on the draw. Again.

ROXANNA

Is there anything you can learn from her?

NOA

An 18 year old who's barely been on tour?

ROXANNA

Weren't you an 18 year old once? With little experience and all the potential in the world?

NOA

Why do you answer questions with more questions? Can you just give me a straight answer?

ROXANNA

I think it's purposeful that you're playing Anya.

Noa laughs.

ROXANNA (CONT'D)

That you two were brought together for a reason.

NOA

Is it because Mercury is in retrograde? Or because my star sign is aligning with hers?

ROXANNA

Are you jealous of her?

NOA

Get the fuck outta here.

ROXANNA

What part of her game do you wish you had?

NOA

None of it. I was way better than her at that age.

ROXANNA

Did you have more fun back then?

NOA

The fastest way to stop having fun is to become really good at something.

ROXANNA

Do you believe that?

NOA

Jesus, it's a joke!

ROXANNA

Do you think Anya enjoys the game?

NOA

She plays with reckless abandon because she's young. Let's see her do that in 20 years.

ROXANNA

Explain that to me.

NOA

She's not even in her physical prime yet.

ROXANNA

How is it different for you?

NOA

Uh, I'm a fucking dinosaur? I don't know which tournament will be my...
(clears her throat)
Will be my last.

Noa gets emotional, tears form in her eyes - some even sprint down her cheeks.

ROXANNA

Let it out. You're safe here.

Noa wipes her tears, clenches her fists, and chokes down the pesky emotion.

ROXANNA (CONT'D)
Tell me why you're upset.

NOA
I'm not. I'm fine.

Noa stands to exit but Roxanna blocks her path.

Noa and Roxanna have a stand off. Noa's grief turns into anger, but something about Roxanna softens her.

Noa relaxes her fists and falls into Roxanna like a giant, hurt child - she balls her eyes out, Roxanna holds her.

The flood gates open as decades of pent-up, emotional repression finally gush out.

Noa looks up at Roxanna, their faces centimeters apart. Roxanna wipes the tears off Noa's cheeks.

Noa gets lost in Roxanna's kind gaze, she can feel her warm breath bouncing off her own.

INT. U.S. OPEN PLAYER'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Noa, deep in thought, sits at a table by herself. Shai lays on the floor beneath it.

A few empty U.S. Open branded cups in front of Noa.

ERIC (O.S.)
Sorry, those Honey Deuces are
runnin' through me!

Eric plops down and stares at Noa.

ERIC (CONT'D)
You okay?

Yuri and Anya walk in - chummy as ever.

ERIC (CONT'D)
You played well today.

NOA
Yeah.

ERIC
I'm serious. If you had another
shot at her, maybe you take her
out.

NOA
Was I always like this?

ERIC
Like what?

NOA
Didn't we used to have more fun?

Noa can't take her eyes off Anya.

ERIC
This tour chews you up and spits
you out. You gotta worry about
money, your ranking... it's a shit
show.
(beat)
Hey.

Noa turns to Eric.

ERIC (CONT'D)
You fucking played your heart out,
okay? I'm proud of you.

NOA
Thanks.

ERIC
You wanna play loose? You got the
Asian Swing coming up.

NOA
I'd give anything to play the Asian
Swing right now.

ERIC
That's the attitude. You get to
start fresh tomorrow.

Noa checks back in with Anya, as she laughs with Yuri.

ERIC (CONT'D)
The best and worst thing about this
sport? What you did yesterday don't
mean shit.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - DAY

Anya BLASTS a serve. Noa gets there but misses the return
into the net.

Noa takes a deep breath - wiggles her arms and legs - tries to stay loose as she takes in the scoreboard.

Anya leads 6 - 3, 5 - 3.

Noa goes through her return routine as she walks towards the baseline and rubs her necklace.

NOA
(quietly, to herself)
Who gives a shit, man. C'mon, where you at, young Noa? Have fun.

CHAIR UMPIRE
40 - 30. MATCH POINT, MS.
KHRUSHCHEVA.

Noa backpedals as Anya tosses the ball in the air --

Noa isn't ready - she signals with her hand *give me a minute*.

Anya didn't see it - and BLASTS a serve down the T. **ACE**.

Anya RAISES HER HANDS in celebration --

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
LET. FIRST SERVE, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Anya slowly puts together what just happened.

ANYA
No! NO NO NO NO NO! That was an ace!!

CHAIR UMPIRE
Ms. Schulman signaled that she needed more time.

ANYA
More time?!

Anya glances over at Noa, then rushes to the Umpire's chair.

ANYA (CONT'D)
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?! SHE HAD NO CHANCE AT THE BALL! SHE DOESN'T NEED MORE TIME!

The audience whistles and jeers as the Chair Umpire returns to her iPad.

Anya SLAMS her racket against the side of the Umpire's chair.

ANYA (CONT'D)
Are you FUCKING listening to me?!

CHAIR UMPIRE
WARNING, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

The boos and whistles intensify. Noa has never seen this side of Anya before, her carefree confidence diminishes --

Anya SLAMS her racket against the Umpire's chair even harder.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
POINT PENALTY, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.
DEUCE.

The crowd's BOOS escalate with each passing outburst.

ANYA
I'm not playing. THIS MATCH IS
OVER!

CHAIR UMPIRE
Ms. Khrushcheva, if you continue, I
will be forced to assess a game
penalty.

ANYA
Hahahaha, I'd LOVE to see that!

Anya has completely unraveled into an unrecognizable relic --

Then catches Yuri's death stare - his stern brow gives her
pause - A LOT of pause.

Anya bites her tongue as she quickly returns to the baseline -
gets ready to serve.

She checks back in with Yuri - then SLAMS a serve at Noa.

CHAIR UMPIRE
OUT. SECOND SERVE.

Anya *slams* another.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
DOUBLE FAULT. ADVANTAGE, MS.
SCHULMAN.

NOA
Stay loose, Noa, stay loose...

Noa's hands relax around the racket handle, the color returns
to her knuckles.

Anya serves to Noa's forehand - Noa winds up and puts all her bodyweight into a DEVASTATING return WINNER cross-court.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, MS. SCHULMAN.

Time stops for a brief millisecond as Noa finds her bearings -
She just broke Anya for the first time!

NOTE: A break is winning your opponent's service game.

Anya is beyond pissed as she rushes to her bench with her head down.

Her anger seethes and rises through a **montage** of the rest of this set.

A set in which Noa is in complete *control* -

She stays loose as she hits WINNER after WINNER by Anya - the tables are beginning to turn.

This is her chance.

The scoreboard ticks up to 6 - 5 for Noa!

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
SET POINT, MS. SCHULMAN.

Holy shit. Noa tries to stay loose, but the real pressure mounts. It pushes deeper and deeper onto her ribcage.

She grits her teeth and balls up her fists as she coaxes stilted breathes through her clenched jaw.

Noa looks up at the sky. Fluffy clouds float by as if unaware of the tennis match below them.

Noa rubs her necklace three times, then checks in with Anya - still pissed - still holding on to those damn penalties.

Noa hits a respectable, high percentage serve at Anya.

Anya winds up and buries the ball into the net!

ANYA
FUCK!

CHAIR UMPIRE
SET, MS. SCHULMAN.

The crowd quiets. Everyone in disbelief -

NOA WON A SET!

Noa turns to Eric. He pumps his fist with excitement!

THIRD SET

Noa competes FIERCELY.

But Anya has finally calmed down and elevated her game to an even scarier level.

She is unconscious - she can't miss as she unleashes all her bodyweight into every shot.

She pulls Noa from side to side - toying with her.

Then CRUSHES a cross-court forehand - Noa runs after it, but is out of gas. She stumbles and falls to the ground. WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Noa rolls over onto her back, HEAVING IN AIR.

INSIDE NOA'S POV: Staring up at the Heavens, those same big, white puffy clouds drift slowly across an endless blue sky.

INT. ON-SITE CLINICIAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Noa, on edge, sits across from Roxanna. Shai lays on the floor next to Noa and chews his tennis ball.

NOA
I got so fucking close.

Noa turns her attention to Shai, her nerves ease as she observes his teeth gnarl the inner-lining of the ball.

ROXANNA
(re: Shai)
What's his name?

NOA
Shai.

ROXANNA
Shy?

NOA
Was my dad's name. S-h-a-i.

They both observe Shai chewing...

ROXANNA

He chews just for the sake of chewing.

NOA

Yeah...

ROXANNA

It's done as an end in itself. Not to achieve anything.

Noa looks up at Roxanna.

ROXANNA (CONT'D)

It's a quality that a lot of us lose as adults. We're always chasing something, trying to earn money, stay on tour...

(off Noa)

Make our dad proud.

Noa breaks eye contact with Roxanna - refocuses on Shai.

ROXANNA (CONT'D)

There was a time when you played tennis for the sake of playing tennis. That's it. Because it made you feel alive.

Noa holds in her emotion.

ROXANNA (CONT'D)

You miss your dad?

NOA

It's hard being alone.

(re: Roxanna's picture)

We're not all so lucky.

Roxanna studies the picture of her family with a tinge of sadness - things are not as they seem.

NOA (CONT'D)

Sorry. I, uhh, didn't --

ROXANNA

It's okay.

Roxanna disengages from the photo and recommits to Noa. Noa rubs her necklace - Roxanna notices the etching.

ROXANNA (CONT'D)

What does that say?

NOA

Courage is resistance to fear,
mastery of fear - not absence of
fear.

ROXANNA

Was your dad courageous?

NOA

He came to America with nothing.
Worked his ass off to build a life
for me. So I can be here.

ROXANNA

How does that make you feel?

NOA

Guilty. Like I didn't do enough
with what he gave me.

ROXANNA

You're a professional tennis
player.

NOA

But he moved us here so I could be
the best. I was supposed to win the
U.S. Open... many times.
(Israeli accent)
This tournament is the epitome of
the American dream.

They both laugh at Noa's impression.

ROXANNA

Ruthless perfectionism...
(re: necklace)
What does that quote mean to you?

NOA

For my dad, life wasn't about
adversity... it was about how you
dealt with it.

A dull silence invades the room as Roxanna studies Noa...

INT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - DAY

Noa *slams* a forehand at Anya. They're in an another arduous
rally. Both players HIT THE SHIT out of the ball.

Noa plays with more confidence than we've ever seen. She's
looser as she hits through the ball with carefree aggression.

Anya hits a deep ball to Noa's backhand - Noa saw it coming and gets there with plenty of time.

Noa squares her feet and UNLEASHES a cross-court WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE
SET, MS. SCHULMAN.

LATER IN THE
MATCH:

Noa and Anya in a similar rally.

Noa tries the same shot - this time Anya is there and CRUSHES the ball by Noa.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

CUT TO:

Noa hits a WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
SET, MS. SCHULMAN.

Anya hits a WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

CUT TO:

Noa win a set -- But loses the match -- Noa win a set -- But loses the match -- Noa win a set -- But loses the match -- Noa win a set -- But loses the match -- Noa win a set -- But loses the match -- Noa win a set -- But loses the match --

INT. ON-SITE CLINICIAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Noa and Roxanna sit on opposite sides of the room.

Shai's giant head lumped on Noa's lap as she pets it.

NOA
I can't fucking do it.

ROXANNA
Do you feel in control?

NOA
I'm stuck in this thing and I can't get out.

ROXANNA
How does that make you feel?

NOA
(mimics)
How does that make you feel?
(then)
ANGRY!

Roxanna stays calm despite Noa's aggression. BEAT.

NOA (CONT'D)
Sorry.

ROXANNA
It's okay.

NOA
Are the other players as fucked up
as I am?

ROXANNA
(smiles)
No.

NOA
(smiles back)
Dick.

BEAT.

NOA (CONT'D)
Too bad you weren't around when I
joined the tour.

ROXANNA
Why's that?

NOA
No one gave a fuck about mental
health 15 years ago.

ROXANNA
What would you do differently if
you were your younger self, today?

NOA
I don't know... practice harder.
Put less pressure on myself.

ROXANNA
I've heard that from other players,
too. That practice takes the
pressure off their matches.

NOA

Not when you have to play the same person every day.

ROXANNA

How can you get rid of the pressure you feel in this match?

NOA

What do you mean?! I have to win!

ROXANNA

What if you didn't *have* to win?

NOA

Then I'd be stuck in this nightmare forever.

ROXANNA

How do you know?

NOA

Because I tried everything else!

Noa grabs Shai.

NOA (CONT'D)

Forget it.

She sighs and heads for the exit.

INT. NOA'S HOTEL HALLWAY - EVEN LATER THAT NIGHT

Noa struggles as she carries an inebriated Eric to his room.

NOA

One too many Honey Deuces, dude.

ERIC

(slurring)

You're... too many... honeys.

NOA

Good one.

Eric's feet drag along the carpet as Noa supports his weight.

ERIC

I reeeally love Honey Douches.

NOA

You got your key card?

ERIC

I do!

NOA

Where is it?

Eric points to his pocket.

NOA (CONT'D)

Well, fucking get it.

Eric clumsily searches around his pocket.

As he pulls out the key, folded papers fall onto the floor.

NOA (CONT'D)

Jesus --

Noa kneels down and picks them up.

Eric opens his door, stumbles in and plops himself on the bed. Noa follows him in.

ERIC

You play so good today.

(passing out)

I... have... fun tonight.

NOA

Yeah, you did.

Noa throws the papers on the bed - turns to leave --

ERIC

I'm sorry... about Texas.

NOA

It's fine.

ERIC

No. You don't... let me, anymore.

NOA

I don't let you, what?

ERIC

You don't let me... fucking
coach... coach you, Noa...

Eric passes out and immediately starts snoring.

Noa notices Eric's papers on the bed. There's notes on them -

- Square your feet on the forehand approach.

- Keep her guessing.
- DON'T PLAY IT SAFE!
- Move back on the first serve.
- Cut off angles.

Dozens of pages of observations jotted down during the match.
Noa sits to read them as Eric snores...

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Noa wakes with a gasp as Shai licks her face.
Eric on the phone - Noa studies him.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - DAY

Noa squares her feet - hits a forehand down-the-line.
Anya BLASTS a cross-court WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

INT. U.S. OPEN PLAYER'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Noa and Eric sit at the table with Shai. A couple empty Honey
Deuce cups in front of them.

ERIC
One more round?

NOA
I was thinking you could help me
strategize tonight.

ERIC
For what?

NOA
Asian Swing.

Eric forces a smile, vacillates...

NOA (CONT'D)
Come on, think of it as our last
session... for old times' sake.

Noa spots Anya, Yuri and the rest of her team as they enter the restaurant.

INT. NOA'S HOTEL ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Noa and Eric sit on opposite sides of the room.

Eric's notes litter Noa's bed.

Shai chews his tennis ball next to them.

NOA

Yeah, but even on points when I stayed cross-court, kept it deep, and did everything by-the-book. She would still have her way with me. She could pass me whenever she felt like it, or just fucking pummel me with the ball.

We see a different side to Eric here - in his element. He's cool and smooth whenever he talks technical strategy.

ERIC

What about your feet?

NOA

What about 'em?

ERIC

Whenever you squared them up, she knew where you were going.

NOA

So hit the ball in the opposite direction of my stance?

ERIC

Not always.

(off Noa)

Nuance. Just once in a while. Players like Anya have to be in control. Gotta keep them guessing.

Noa nods, then takes in Shai, in his state of bliss as he chews the shit out of the ball.

INT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - DAY

A long rally between Noa and Anya. Both players hit the ball deep into the court, both players laser focused.

Noa gets a short ball.

This time she squares her feet up as if to go down-the-line -

Then WHIPS a cross-court shot -

Anya stumbles and can't get to it. WINNER.

Anya stares down Noa, surprised she went there.

ON THE SCOREBOARD: Anya leads 6 - 3, 4 - 6, 3 - 2.

LATER IN THE MATCH:

Noa tries the same shot - but Anya has crept up to the net to hit a beautiful volley WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

INT. NOA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Noa and Eric in a similar set up.

ERIC
Why do you think her volleys are so good?

NOA
Cause she's a freak of nature with long ass arms and insane hand-eye coordination?

ERIC
Cause she never had to worry about you lobbing her. You have to keep a player of that caliber honest.

NOA
So lob more?

ERIC
Lob City, baby.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - DAY

Anya closes in on the net.

Noa hits it at her HARD, Anya volleys it back with ease.

Noa replies with a BEAUTIFUL TOPSPIN LOB over Anya's head.

IN.

The crowd makes that delighted, "OOOOOH" sound that Anya is used to only hearing on her shots.

ON THE SCOREBOARD: Anya leads 6 - 3, 3 - 6, 5 - 4.

LATER IN THE MATCH:

Noa hits another lob -

Anya runs back and hits an in-between the legs return - the crowd "OOOOOH'S."

Noa CLOBBERS it back - but Anya is all over it as she slices a cross-court WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Noa peeks inside the empty conference room. She looks around. In the far corner, she spots a big WHITE DRY ERASE BOARD.

INT. NOA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Eric stands next to that same DRY ERASE BOARD.

A tennis court has been drawn on it. On one side is written "Noa." On the other, "Asshole."

ERIC
You made it easy on her and hard on you.

NOA
What the fuck does that mean?

ERIC
A slice passing shot?
(using marker)
You didn't cut off the angle. You hit your shot, then waited here instead of following the ball.
That's where you needed to be.

Eric draws a line to where Noa should've gone.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You left the whole court open. My nana could've hit that winner.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - DAY

We join a **montage of matches** as Noa battles Anya -

And loses -

But continues to **strategize with Eric**, regardless, as the montage *jump cuts* between matches and strategy sessions...

Noa sets up to serve - delivers a BOMB down the T.

Anya handles it with ease but doesn't see Noa at the net - serving and volleying.

Noa cuts off the angle and delivers a sweet, cross-court volley WINNER.

Noa sits at her bench as she takes a sip of water. Her hands steady as rocks.

Noa puts her water bottle down in the ascending order of height, all the labels facing away from the court.

She glances over at Eric, furiously scribbling in his notebook.

In the hotel room, Noa and Eric study those same notes.

On the court, Noa wins more points - gets closer and closer and closer.

In the hotel room, Noa and Eric strategize more and more.

On the court, Noa serves. This time staying back, a heated baseline-to-baseline battle kicks off.

Anya UNLEASHES a down-the-line shot that Noa chases down.

Noa squares her feet as if to go down-the-line - but at the last second fires a cross-court WINNER.

The stadium quiets.

Noa looks to Eric - his face stiff as a board.

CHAIR UMPIRE

40 - 30. MATCH POINT, MS. SCHULMAN.

No way - Noa checks the scoreboard - *it's true*.

She has a **MATCH POINT** against Anya.

Noa gets set to serve. She tries to take her time, slow things down as she methodically bounces the ball.

She grips the shit out of her racket handle as she tries to take a deep breath. Then another.

But these breaths don't do shit - that pressure now an 800 pound weight crushing her chest. It's insane.

She checks in with Anya who crouches down like an assassin as she waits to return Noa's serve.

Noa rubs her necklace three times.

NOA
(quietly)
Come on, Noa.

She checks back with Eric. He nods to her.

Noa's grip on her racket so tight now that the white skin on her knuckles could tear.

Noa *blasts* a serve right into Anya's body - Anya skids to the side as she *cleanly* returns the ball.

Noa answers with her own solid forehand down-the-line that she follows in. Anya hits a sharp cross-court backhand, but --

Noa cuts off the angle once again and executes a beautiful, down-the-line volley WINNER!

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. SCHULMAN.

BEAT. BEAT... BEAT.

A stark, white noise invades Noa's eardrums.

She can't hear a thing.

ERIC (O.S.)
(muffled)
LET'S GO!

Noa turns to Eric - he jumps up and down as he claps and shouts - he's the only one.

SHE.

JUST.

WON.

THE.

MATCH!

As Noa approaches the net, she can't seem to take a full, deep breath - that pressure has somehow strengthened.

Noa ignores this lack of respiratory ability as she navigates the silent ambiance of the mini-stadium.

A shocked fanbase watches in awe as Noa lumbers to the net to shake hands with the **loser**, Anya.

EXT. USTA BILLIE JEAN KING NATIONAL TENNIS CENTER - SUNSET

A slight pep to Noa's step as her and Eric meander through the US Open grounds.

NOA
I can't believe it.

ERIC
It's huge.

Noa stops - turns to Eric -

NOA
You were right.

ERIC
About what?

NOA
I should've listened to you more.
That's all gonna change. I promise.

ERIC
Noa, I --

NOA
I'm giving you half.

ERIC
Half?

NOA
Of my prize money, for this
tournament.

ERIC
Noa --

NOA

I win a couple more matches, you'll make more here than a full year at Texas.

ERIC

How did you -- ?

Noa pulls Eric in for an awkward hug.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Noa, you can't give me --

NOA

Fuck off, Eric. Time for you to reap the rewards of your hard work.

A pimpled ESPN ASSISTANT, 26, approaches.

ESPN ASSISTANT.

Hey, Noa. Do you have a minute for an interview with Pat and Chris?

Noa turns to the giant ESPN booth - no wall of Anya fans - then back to Eric, a huge smile on her face.

NOA

Grab Shai, will ya?

And before Eric can reply -- Noa follows the ESPN Assistant towards the booth.

EXT. ESPN BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

Noa gets mic'd up at the ESPN booth under the hot, bright lights. Across from her is Pat McEnroe and Chris McKendry.

This booth is the epitome of sports journalism - state-of-the-art screens and lavish furnishings riddle its interior.

Noa gawks at it all, it's been years, maybe decades, since she's experienced this. And before she can refocus --

CHRIS MCKENDRY

Thanks for sticking with us here at Flushing Meadows, where we have the surprise upset of the tournament thus far, Noa Schulman. Noa, thanks for joining us.

Noa stares at Chris for a BEAT...

CHRIS MCKENDRY (CONT'D)

Noa?

It's hard for Noa to hear anything as her ears ring, her chest expands with nerves -

PAT MCENROE

Hey, Noa, you okay?

Noa finally snaps back to --

CHRIS MCKENDRY

Noa?

NOA

Yeah, sorry. Thanks for having me.

PAT MCENROE

Thanks for being here. It's been quite a day for you.

CHRIS MCKENDRY

That was some match against Anya Khrushcheva, who was my dark-horse favorite to win the tournament.

NOA

I'm sorry to disappoint.

Pat and Chris laugh.

CHRIS MCKENDRY

Tell us, Noa. What was your mindset going into the match with Anya today?

PAT MCENROE

Correct me if I'm wrong, but you two never played?

NOA

I mean, I studied her on tape a bit. I watched her matches.

CHRIS MCKENDRY

You did an amazing job staying with her power. It seemed like you knew exactly where she was going to go.

NOA

Was that a question?

Noa slightly relaxes as Chris and Pat laugh again...

CHRIS MCKENDRY

This win must mean a little extra.
To beat Anya.

NOA

Why's that?

CHRIS MCKENDRY

Well, she's the hottest young
player on tour. You were that
player once upon a time...

NOA

Well, to me, it's just another
match...

(beat)

Just kidding! That. Was. SWEET!

They laugh even harder - Noa joins this time.

PAT MCENROE

You have Madison Brengle next. You
beat her last year in Toronto.

NOA

(smiles)

I did.

PAT MCENROE

This draw is set up really nicely
for you, now. You don't see another
top 15 player until the quarters.

CHRIS MCKENDRY

Is this the official comeback tour
of Noa Schulman?

NOA

Feels like it.

PAT MCENROE

With no WTA tournament titles under
your belt, how magical would it be
for you, an American, to make a run
at your home Grand Slam?

NOA

It's everything.

Noa smiles wider, her eyes well up as she rubs her necklace.

INT. U.S. OPEN PLAYER'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Noa and Eric at the table. A graveyard of empty Honey Deuce cups in front of them. Noa cheers Eric -

Then slides over and pulls him in for a loving headlock.

NOA

We gonna win this thing?!

Eric pushes Noa off, just as she spots Anya and Yuri walking by the restaurant. Their mood significantly less upbeat.

NOA (CONT'D)

Oh, look who it is...

Noa gets up -- as Anya and her father walk by the entrance.

NOA (CONT'D)

I'll be right back.

ERIC

Noa, leave it.

But Noa's already *rushing* out the restaurant - towards them.

EXT. U.S. OPEN PLAYER'S LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

Noa hears screams from an alley between the restaurant and Arther Ashe Stadium.

She peers around the corner.

Anya yells at Yuri - he yells back - all in Russian. They're in each other's faces, really going at it.

Even though Anya towers over her much smaller father - Yuri holds his own with his deep, baritone Russian cursing.

** We notice a stark similarity between how Yuri yells at Anya and how Noa's father yelled at her in the flashback.*

Yuri and Anya yell more - back and forth - back and forth --

Suddenly - Yuri open-handed *SMACKS* Anya across the face.

The slap echoes between the brick walls.

Anya stops in her tracks - holds onto her red cheek.

Yuri stares at his daughter - beat - then softly pats her on the shoulder as he quietly mutters something in Russian.

Yuri exits in the opposite direction, leaves Anya all alone in the dark alley.

For the first time, Noa sees the Russian's vulnerability - like a lost, scared child.

Anya turns and spots Noa - she immediately stands up straight and chokes down her tears and emotions.

Noa is drawn to Anya, wants to approach, wants to help --

ANYA

What the fuck are you looking at?

But against her better judgement, Noa leaves Anya by herself.

INT. NOA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Noa sits up in bed, in her sports bra - giant bags of ice saran-wrapped around both her knees.

Noa massages her sternum, tries to get rid of that tightness in her chest.

Shai's chewing distracts her. He's euphoric as he grates the fuzz off the tennis ball with his teeth like corn on the cob.

Almost sensing Noa's gaze, Shai glances up at her. The tennis felt hanging out of his mouth.

NOA

Tomorrow's a new day.

Shai holds on her for a BEAT - then returns to his ball.

Noa catches sight of the University of Texas shirt - then lays on her back, stares at the ceiling.

She rubs her necklace three times with her shaking hands.

NOA (CONT'D)

Tomorrow's a new day...

Noa tries another deep breath, but it's even shorter than the previous one. She coaxes her eyes closed.

SMASH CUT TO:

Noa calmly wakes and takes a deep, soothing breath.

She softly opens her eyes as Shai licks her face. This is it.

As Noa's eyes adjust... she realizes she's in the --

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Eric on the phone next to her.

ERIC
 (into phone)
 You guys need some sort of court
 reservation app.

Noa snaps upright --

ERIC (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
 No, I know it's not your fault.
 (then)
 Yes, can I reserve a practice court
 for 8, tomorrow?

NOA
 Eric...

ERIC
 (into phone)
 No, 8 o'clock. Not 8 people.

NOA
 Eric, I won, right?

ERIC
 (into phone)
 No, not 8 p.m. 8 a.m.

NOA
 Eric!

ERIC
 What?!

NOA
 I won.

ERIC
 Won what?

NOA
 (beat)
 I beat Anya. Yesterday.

Eric wrinkles his brow, *what the fuck are you talking about?*

ERIC
 (back to phone)
 Yes, sorry, I'm still here.

Eric spots the ID tag in Noa's bag, takes it out.

INT. ON-SITE CLINICIAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Noa paces like a lion in its cage as Roxanna sits and calmly watches her.

NOA

What more do I need to do?

ROXANNA

Sounds like you've done everything.

NOA

This is bullshit!

ROXANNA

What is?

Noa stops pacing - takes in Roxanna.

NOA

I let Eric coach me, I let go of control, I did all that shit! I beat her!

ROXANNA

Great.

NOA

Then why am I still fucking here?!

ROXANNA

Letting go means being at peace.
With everything.

NOA

Are you just making this shit up as you go along?

ROXANNA

How did it feel to win?

Roxanna leans into her desk, clasps her hands. Noa studies Roxanna... and then...

NOA

I need to do it again.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17

Noa *nails* a backhand down-the-line but Anya is all over it - Anya OBLITERATES her own backhand cross-court WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Noa looks over at the scoreboard: 6 - 2, 6 - 4.

She's lost by straight sets. AGAIN.

CUT TO:

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17

Noa SMASHES a down-the-line forehand.

Anya attacks it, hits a clean backhand BOMB that skids off the sideline.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

6 - 3, 6 - 2. This is *bad*.

CUT TO:

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

6 - 1, 6 - 2. And it's only getting *WORSE*.

CUT TO:

INT. ON-SITE CLINICIAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Noa's sprawled out on the ground in front of the chair. Shai sprawls out next to her.

Roxanna watches them both.

NOA
There's no way out.

ROXANNA
What else comes up?

NOA
Even when I win, I lose. I'm a fucking loser.

ROXANNA
But you said you beat Anya.

NOA
And I'm still here...

ROXANNA
So it didn't matter that you won?

NOA
Bingo.

ROXANNA
Maybe it doesn't matter if you win
at all?

NOA
Yeah, maybe. Fuck it.

ROXANNA
Exactly.

Noa lazily lifts her head up to look at Roxanna.

NOA
That's your advice? Fuck it?

ROXANNA
Yes.

NOA
Thank you. So now on top of being a
loser, I'm a quitter.

ROXANNA
Letting go isn't quitting. There is
strength in accepting what is.

NOA
Whatever --

Noa **slams** the back of her head against the floor. Too hard.

NOA (CONT'D)
Shit!

ROXANNA
You okay?

Noa inspects her head, it's a little tender - a quick *flash memory* pops up of her getting hit by the Taxi.

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Noa slowly wakes to Eric on the phone, Shai next to her.
She studies Eric as he talks on the phone -

ROXANNA (V.O.)

Fuck it...

Rings over and over in Noa's head like a bad headache --

EXT. U.S. OPEN FLUSHING MEADOWS GROUNDS - LATER

Noa and Anya being walked by Judy across the grounds.
Noa observes Judy. All of Anya's fans surrounding them --

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - LATER

Noa observes Anya as she gets ready to serve --

CUT TO:

Then observes the Chair Umpire as she exclaims -

CHAIR UMPIRE

GAME, SET, MATCH, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA --

EXT. USTA BILLIE JEAN KING NATIONAL TENNIS CENTER - LATER

Noa continues to study the events of the day:

- The wall of fans block the walkway
- The ESPN Booth with Anya, Pat and Chris.
- The Employee at Central Bark.
- Sammy, the Journalist, shoves the microphone in her face.
- All of it...

EXT. ON-SITE CLINICIAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Noa, Shai and Roxanna in the room. Noa sits on the chair.

NOA

It's like none of it matters.

ROXANNA
There's meaning to everything.

NOA
Not this.

ROXANNA
What are the advantages of the
situation you're in?

NOA
Fuck.
(beat)
I guess, um... well, I mean I never
have to worry about money, or my
ranking. I get to spend more time
with Eric...

ROXANNA
That doesn't sound so bad.

NOA
... and you.

Roxanna slightly blushes.

BEAT.

Noa breaks into manic laughter - she can't stop.

ROXANNA
What's so funny?

NOA
I guess it's not so bad.

Roxanna laughs with her.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING
Noa's eyes calmly blink open to Shai licking her face.
Noa sits still as she fully inhales... then exhales...
Eric on the phone next to her.

EXT. U.S. OPEN FLUSHING MEADOWS GROUNDS - DAY
Noa and Eric walk towards the practice courts.

Roxanna walks by - smiles at Noa. Noa stops.

ERIC
She just smiled at us.

Noa turns to Eric.

NOA
Thank you.

ERIC
For what?

NOA
For being a great coach.

ERIC
What are you -- ?

Noa **bear hugs** Eric - holds the embrace for a BEAT.

Then takes off the Hamsa necklace.

ERIC (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

NOA
I know about Texas.

ERIC
Noa, I was gonna wait 'til after
the tournament --

NOA
I support it. It's the right move
for you. For us.

Noa and Eric share a glance. Noa raises the necklace.

ERIC
I thought it was bad luck to take
it off.

NOA
I think he'd want you to have it.

ERIC
No, he wouldn't.

Noa clasps the necklace around Eric's neck.

NOA
Yeah, maybe not. But, I do.

ERIC
I can't take this.

NOA
If it's not meant to be, you can
give it back to me tomorrow.

EXT. U.S. OPEN PRACTICE COURTS - DAY

Noa and Eric walk onto the practice court.

YURI
Give us few more minutes, yeah?

Noa stops - notices Yuri, the Assistant with the black eye,
the other members of Anya's team, they're all staring at her.

She turns to Eric.

NOA
Fuck it.
(to Yuri)
We'll wait.

ERIC
Really?

Noa leads Eric to the exit.

Anya watches them out of the corner of her eye as she
continues to *annihilate* practice ball after practice ball.

EXT. U.S. OPEN FLUSHING MEADOWS GROUNDS - LATER

Noa and Anya escorted by Judy.

RANDOM FANS
"TAKE HER TO THE WOODSHED, AK!" "AK-
47!" "WE LOVE YOU, ANYAAA!"

Noa soaks in the pandemonium.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING MEADOWS TENNIS CENTER - COURT 17 - LATER

Noa and Anya, rackets in hand, face each other at opposite
sides of the net.

Anya locked onto Noa with severe intensity - Noa casually
stares back, not breaking eye contact.

Noa's arms hang loosely by her side, her breathing steady, no discomfort in her chest.

CHAIR UMPIRE (PRE-LAP)
WELCOME TO THE 2023 U.S. OPEN
FIRST ROUND MATCH BETWEEN ANYA
KHRUSHCHEVA AND NOA SCHULMAN. MS.
KHRUSHCHEVA WILL SERVE FIRST.

CUT TO:

Noa takes another deep, soothing breath as she stands at the back wall and surveys:

The crowd - as they pile in and take their seats.

The Chair Umpire - as she sets up her station.

Anya's team - as they also take their seats and laugh with one another.

Eric - as he scribbles in his notes. His new Hamsa necklace dangles from his neck.

Almost as if taking it all in for the first time, Noa fully enjoys the pageantry of it all... then --

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

Anya bouncing the ball shifts Noa's focus back to the court.

Noa takes another deep breath.

Then another. In and out.

In and out.

In.

And out -

And, suddenly... the life on the court **slowwwwwwws** - the volume drops.

Noa's body and mind slow as well. She becomes one with the present - she shifts into a warrior mindset.

And then...

FWIP - The sound returns.

Noa confidently steps up to the baseline to begin her return routine. Goes to grab her necklace, but it's not there.

She refocuses on Anya - who bounces the ball three more times. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

Noa abandons her return routine - doesn't take any steps back. She loosely clasps her hands around the racket handle as she just *waits* for Anya's serve.

Anya tosses the ball in the air - it seems to hang there forever, a neon green circle in a sea of deep blue, and then -

CRACK!!!

The ball FLIES off Anya's racket and SHOOTs down the middle of the T.

Noa *pivots* with swift conviction, a blink and you miss it backswing - leans in, racket meets ball and -

--CRACK--

HITS A CLEAN WINNER past Anya.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
LOVE - 15.

Anya glances back at Noa, then at Yuri and the rest of her team. None of them expected that.

Noa heads to the Ad side - catches Eric's glance. They share a smile. *Let's have some fucking fun.*

MONTAGE THROUGH THE FIRST SET -

A series of intense rallies, the kind that make even you, the viewer, tired.

Anya dictates the points but those points never come easy. Noa gets everything back.

Anya may be winning but Noa is *fighting*.

Anya's team talks during a point in which Anya leans in and hits a WINNER by Noa.

Noa turns to the team, about to give them a piece of her mind - but stops - she looks over at Eric, forces a smile.

On the next point, Anya hits a weak ball over to Noa. Noa WHIPS a swinging volley that just misses wide.

NOA
(to herself)
Shit...

CHAIR UMPIRE
SET, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Noa looks over at the scoreboard: 6 - 4.

Then over at Eric. He nods as he pumps his fist, *you're in this. Keep it up.*

SECOND SET

Noa works a long rally against Anya, refusing to go for a winner. She stays with the point.

It's methodical. But Noa is laser focused. Anya finally MISSES into the net.

Noa hits a drop shot that Anya barely gets to. Noa LOBS her, Anya *shifts* direction too quickly and falls on her ass.

Game score: 30 - 40. Break point for Noa.

Anya serves 115 MPH out-wide - kicks off another rally.

Noa capitalizes on a short ball, follows it up to the net.

But Anya gets there and slaps a low backhand that barely clears the net.

Noa bends her knees all the way to the ground so she can hit the very low forehand volley.

She flubs it, pops it up - Anya moves in like an assassin.

She has the entire court - she could go right or left - Noa knows this and seems to concede.

If this sounds familiar, that's because it is.

Noa's seen this point before. And, for that reason, she knows where Anya is going --

Anya lines up to hit Noa with her shot - *swings!*

Noa jerks out of the way at the last second so that when Anya CRUSHES the ball at her - Noa's racket is waiting -

The ball **ricochets** back and SMACKS Anya in the stomach!

CROWD
OOOOOOOOOOHHHHH!

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, MS. SCHULMAN.

Noa puts her hand up towards Anya - apologizing. Anya either doesn't see or doesn't care about the apology. Her main focus is avoiding Yuri's gaze as she approaches her bench.

That same anger builds in him that we witnessed in the alley.

Noa sits on her bench and takes a sip of water. As she goes to place the water bottle down, she thinks...

Then places the bottle out of place, not in order of height, the label facing *towards* the court -

Score: 6 - 4, 2 - 4.

Anya and Noa in a forehand-to-forehand exchange - each shot hit harder than the previous.

Noa so dialed into the rhythm - hits everything so cleanly.

Anya yells as she puts all her might into a down-the-line WINNER. Noa nods her head.

NOA
(genuine)
Great shot.

CHAIR UMPIRE
GAME, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Anya's broken back.

People from the outer courts are starting to file in as word of this match has spread through the USTA Grounds.

The set continues and the games tick up as Noa plays out of her mind, but so does Anya.

The second set goes into a tie-breaker: 6 - 6.

In the midst of a long backhand to backhand rally, Anya loses patience and leans into a down-the-line shot which *clips* the net and falls back on her side.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
6 - 4, MS. SCHULMAN.

That's two set points for Noa.

Noa's hands slightly tremor. She squeezes her fists and clenches her jaw as the pressure quietly introduces itself back into her chest with a familiar, sharp pain.

Noa takes her time... with each breath, the nerves ease slightly more as she prepares to serve.

Noa *slams* an impressive serve - Anya meets it and *blasts* an even more impressive return down-the-line. WINNER.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)

6 - 5.

One more set point for Noa.

Anya sets up to serve next - CRUSHES an ACE out-wide.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)

6 - 6.

Squandered set points are the most frustrating thing in tennis. Noa could rip the skin off her face.

But the next point is huge. Both players wait for the increasingly raucous New York crowd to calm down.

Noa takes the opportunity to calm herself - takes another deep breath as she feels her feet on the ground, her racket in her hand. The pressure eases just a bit more...

Once the stadium quiets, Anya NAILS a serve down the T. ACE.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)

7 - 6, MATCH POINT, MS.
KHRUSHCHEVA.

And just like that, it's match point for Anya. Noa glances over at Eric, who's on the edge of his seat, nervous as hell.

The crowd's screams grow so loud you can't hear yourself think.

Noa kicks a serve out-wide. Anya *blasts* a cross-court return. Noa chases the ball down and begins the cross-court rally.

Back and forth. Back and forth. Back and forth.

That light ease returns to Noa's face as she executes beautifully struck ball after beautifully struck ball.

For now, she's unaware of the pressure, she's in the moment, in rhythm - she is one with the point.

We've seen long rallies before, but this one feels infinite.

Anya loses patience again and SLAMS a shot down-the-line.

Noa gives chase with the intention of hitting a cross-court backhand. Anya sees this and starts to cheat over.

Then, at the very last split-second, Noa leans into a down-the-line WINNER that completely fools Anya, just like her and Eric practiced!

NOA POINTS TO ERIC!

The crowd ROARS.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)

7 - 7.

Noa and Anya set up on the deuce side.

Noa, feeling herself, serves a body shot to Anya, who awkwardly punches it back. This gives Noa an easy forehand.

Not to be fooled again, Anya knows Noa's going down-the-line this time and cheats over.

But at the last second, Noa *scoops* under the ball, and hits a risky but perfect drop-shot WINNER.

CROWD

OOOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHH...

It's one of those rare times Noa's made Anya look silly.

Eric, huge smile, *pushes* the fan next to him as if to say, *did you see that?!?!?*

CHAIR UMPIRE

8 - 7, SET POINT, MS. SCHULMAN.

Anya sets up to serve as she catches Yuri's glance - he's beyond furious. Anya tries to shake off his disappointment -

And delivers a BOMB down the T. Noa is on it immediately, hits to Anya's backhand and COMES INTO THE NET.

Anya hits a CRUSHING backhand cross-court. Any other time and it's a winner.

But Noa does exactly what her and Eric worked on and instinctively shoots forward DIAGONALLY, cuts off the angle, and puts the volley AWAY.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)

SET, MS. SCHULMAN.

The crowd ERUPTS.

Noa stands in the middle of it, allowing the thickness of the noise to wash through her --

And then it all goes quiet - Noa sees Eric, fist up.

She calmly jogs to her changeover chair.

RANDOM GUY FROM CROWD (O.S.)
...check it out, it's Johnny Mac...

Noa, and the entire crowd, look on as JOHN MCENROE, 62, BRAD GILBERT, 59, and CHRISSY EVERT, 66 enter the press box situated above the stadium.

This is tennis's A-Team for commentating and can only mean one thing, their match has become *the* premier match being played today. ESPN will be nationally televising the --

THIRD SET!

Anya PLASTERS dozens of powerful shots at Noa from all over the court.

Noa hangs in there, not letting her nerves get the best of her. She runs everything down.

She has found that perfect balance of putting her all into every point while maintaining patience. Maintaining her cool.

Scoreboard: 6 - 4, 6 - 7, 6 - 6. Duration of the match has reached almost 4 hours.

A 3RD SET TIE-BREAKER!

*** The most exciting event in tennis ***

The score: 3 - 2 for Anya in the breaker.

Noa, once again, ditches her return ritual as she calmly rocks side to side with that warrior's intensity.

Anya delivers a nasty slice serve that curls off the court.

Noa sprints her heart out to track down the return as another long rally commences.

This one fueled by pure adrenaline as both women struggle to fight through their exhaustion.

Anya hits the ball a little short. Noa steps into it and *whips* a sharp-angled cross-court WINNER past Anya.

The crowd EXPLODES!

CHAIR UMPIRE

3 - 3 --

ANYA
 (to herself)
 WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

Anya *slams* her racket against the court. It cracks in half.

The points get more intense as the score ticks up to 10 - 10.

Noa dials into a heart-stopping 28-ball rally. Then Anya leans in and ANNIHILATES that green ball past Noa.

CHAIR UMPIRE
 MATCH POINT, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Noa stays calm as Anya rushes to the baseline with two balls in her hand - quickly deposits one in her pocket.

Anya hurriedly bounces the other, looks up at Noa --

Then BLASTS a serve down the T. ACE --

Just as that other ball falls out of Anya's pocket and rolls onto the court.

Anya didn't see this as she RAISES HER HANDS in celebration --

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
 LET. FIRST SERVE, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

Anya slowly puts together what just happened.

ANYA
 No! NO NO NO! That was an ACE!!

CHAIR UMPIRE
 The ball fell out of your pocket and rolled onto the court. It is a let. First serve.

Anya rushes to the Umpire.

ANYA
 WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?! WHAT DOES IT MATTER?? I aced her way before the ball fell out!
 (re: Noa)
 SHE HAD NO CHANCE!

The audience whistles and jeers. Anya SLAMS her racket against the side of the Umpire's chair.

ANYA (CONT'D)
 This is BULLSHIT!

CHAIR UMPIRE
WARNING, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.

The boos and whistles intensify.

ANYA
AND a warning? After you just gave
her a fucking... PASS?!

The Umpire's shaken. Anya is keyed in on her, furious.

ANYA (CONT'D)
I'm talking to you!

Anya SLAMS her racket against the chair even harder.

CHAIR UMPIRE
POINT PENALTY, MS. KHRUSHCHEVA.
SCORE IN THE TIEBREAK 11 - 11.

The court vibrates with the crowd's BOOS.

Noa observes as Anya looks over to Yuri for guidance - but he gives his daughter nothing, his face made of pure stone.

ANYA
(back to Umpire)
Call the supervisor right now call
the supervisor right now, call the
supervisor right now, CALL THE
SUPERVISOR RIGHT NOW!

Anya manically paces as Noa rushes the net -

CHAIR UMPIRE
Ms. Khrushcheva, if you do not
play, I will be forced to assess a
game penalty, which will result in
your default.

ANYA
Hahahaha, I'd LOVE to see that --

NOA
Dude, stop!

ANYA
(walking in circles)
Supervisor. Supervisor. Supervisor.
Supervisor.

Noa tries to calm the spinning Anya, gets right in her face and grabs her racket.

NOA
 Hey, let's just go back and play.
 This isn't worth it --

ANYA
 (points to Umpire)
 Why aren't you calling the
 SUPERVISOR?! Are you that DUMB?

The Umpire leans into the microphone...

CHAIR UMPIRE
 CODE VIOLATION --

NOA
 WAIT, DON'T!
 (then)
 Please.

The Umpire hesitates - holds on Noa.

Noa turns back to Anya, veins bulging from her forehead.

NOA (CONT'D)
 Don't focus on her. Hey! Don't
 focus on her. Focus on me.

Anya's focus gradually shifts towards Noa.

NOA (CONT'D)
 This isn't about her. Right? This
 is about us. You say one more thing
 to her, we don't get to finish this
 match.
 (beat)
 Hey! Come on, this has been too fun
 of a match not to finish.

Anya locks eyes with Noa - her anger begins to melt.

NOA (CONT'D)
 You're not gonna change her mind.
 Just accept it. You can only
 control what you do, right now, in
 this moment. And if you wanna beat
 me? Your best shot is serving the
 ball.

Anya slowly grabs her racket back, but Noa holds onto it,
 establishing tension between the two.

Then lets go.

Noa and Anya head back to the baseline, the crowd shows their appreciation for Noa's efforts.

CHAIR UMPIRE

11 - 11.

Anya sets up. Then BLASTS a serve at Noa.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)

OUT. SECOND SERVE.

Anya BLASTS an identical serve, this one hit even harder as it goes right by Noa.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)

DOUBLE FAULT. 12 - 11, MATCH POINT,
MS. SCHULMAN.

That serve was so fast, Noa couldn't even see where it landed - but it was out.

Noa sets up to serve, when it dawns on her...

She has another **MATCH POINT** - the match, once again, on her racket. Noa takes a deep breath as she bounces the ball.

There's no tightness in her chest. She feels none of the pressure she's felt thousands of times before.

Noa looks to Eric. His presence brings a smile to her face.

She observes Anya - who favors the middle of the court, daring Noa to hit an impossible serve out-wide.

Why not, **fuck it** --

Noa launches a kick-serve to that impossible angle. It catches the line!

Anya channels all her anger as she sprints to it and SMASHES a beautiful, cross-court backhand.

Noa MOVES IN to cut off the angle but the ball has too much pace, Noa's a split-second late as the ball sprays wide.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)

12 - 12.

Noa takes a minute to collect her thoughts. She takes a deep breath. In and out. In and out.

Then sets up to serve.

Tosses - and SLAMS a serve out-wide.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
 FAULT, SECOND SERVE.

Noa stays calm as she sets up to serve again. Then hits the same serve out-wide, but this one isn't wide enough.

Anya steps in and ANNIHILATES a return. Noa cuts off the angle and SLAPS a SUREFIRE WINNER cross-court --

-- but the ball clips the top of the net, which slows the shot down and allows Anya to pounce on the floating ball.

Anya *attacks* the shot, comes in behind it.

Noa sees Anya closing in hard so, at the last second, she dips her racket and hits a PERFECT TOP-SPIN LOB over Anya's backhand side.

Noa knows instantly that it's gonna be a clean winner!

It has to be!

--UNTIL--

Anya backpedals and ELEVATES more than 3 feet off the ground, SLAPPING down the hardest shot in tennis - a backhand overhead, cross-court WINNER.

Audience members freeze with a *how the fuck did she just do that* expression.

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
 13 - 12. MATCH POINT, MS.
 KHRUSHCHEVA.

Undeterred - Noa heads to the Ad side - shakes it off. Even though she's down a match point, she's still having *fun*.

Noa goes to grab the Hamsa necklace. Not there.

She mimes bringing it up to her lips and kissing it three times *just like she did in the flashback*.

Noa crouches down in her return stance - eyes laser focused on Anya. Her hands lightly wrapped around the racket.

Noa takes her deep breaths - in and out... in and out...

In... out...

Until once again --

Everything sloooowwws.

But... it slows waaay more this time.

Anya bounces the ball against the court.

BOOOOOOOM. BOOOOOOOM. BOOOOOOOM.

Anya looks at Noa, and holds on her for what feels like an eternity... then tosses the ball.

It climbs and climbs until it hangs at its peak - Anya's racket reaches into the air as it connects with the ball.

Noa's dreamlike state maintains as the ball slowly approaches her. Noa makes solid contact with the return.

Which kicks off a rally. Slow ball to slow ball, Noa and Anya ANNIHILATE deep shots back and forth. Dozens of times.

Anya loses patience and moves up on a ball anyone else would've stayed back on. She hits her *approach* down-the-line.

The shot selection surprises Noa, she gives chase...

The ball is traveling so slow, and yet so is Noa. It's unclear if she'll make it there in time.

She somehow manages to get her racket on the ball - her arm at full-extension as she *slices* it back.

Anya, now at the net, executes an almost impossible, angled drop-shot off the bounce.

As the ball travels to the sideline, Noa starts to realize she may not get there in time.

But that doesn't stop her from trying! She *SPRINGS* towards the ball with every ounce of energy she's got left.

No way she's going to get there --

But she scratches -- she claws --

She reaches her racket out... it's simply too far away...

Noa can only watch with the rest of the crowd as -

The ball heads towards that line - it will either land in or out. It's up to fate now.

The ball *skids* millimeters from the line. Too close to call. Did it catch?

The entire stadium waits for the Chair Umpire... BEAT.

Then, in a slow muddled voice, as if underwater --

CHAIR UMPIRE (CONT'D)
 GAME... SET... MATCH... MS...
 KHRUSHCHEVA...

Anya pumps her fist at her team.

The muddled sounds of Noa's surroundings dissipate. Soon, we are back in real time.

Noa stands at the baseline. For a long moment...

Then smiles. Satisfied with her effort on the court.

She casually jogs to the net to shake hands with Anya.

As the cheers for Anya grow, Noa notices a shift in the tone, something different from the countless number of times she's taken this walk before.

She stops to look around before realizing why -

The crowd isn't cheering for Anya.

They're cheering for NOA. As the crowd's rowdiness grows, in **this** moment, a realization inspires within Noa -

She doesn't care if she won, doesn't care if she has to do it all again tomorrow - **she had fun** - she gave it her all -

Noa has finally relinquished control.

Noa continues to the net, on the verge of unleashing a rush of emotion -- she shakes hands with Anya.

ANYA
 Nice match.

NOA
 You too.

Anya is about to leave, thinks, then turns.

ANYA
 (quietly)
 ... thank you.

You can tell Anya wants to say more but Chrissy Evert is already grabbing her for an interview.

As she pulls on her, Noa nods back at Anya. It's a small gesture, but it's a charged moment.

Two warriors who just left their heart and soul on the court.
Noa watches Anya walk away with mixed emotions.

Then goes to her bench - spots Eric standing up along with everyone else, clapping.

They lock eyes.

Noa extends her index and pinky fingers while grasping the second and third fingers with the thumb on her right hand.

Hook 'em horns.

Eric does the same.

EXT. USTA FLUSHING TENNIS CENTER - SUNSET

FANS mob Noa as her, Eric and Shai try to make their way to the exit gate.

Noa takes selfies with the fans, signs tennis balls, etc.

SAMMY (O.S.)

Noa Schulman! Can I grab you for an interview with the Tennis Channel?

Sammy and her Cameraman rush up to them.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Just wanted to get your thoughts on the match and your plans for the future.

Noa spots Roxanna as she locks up her office door.

Noa's focus narrows solely onto Roxanna as the questions from Sammy drone on and dissipate into the background.

Then --

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Noa?!

Noa turns back to Sammy.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Are you upset at the way your career turned out?

NOA

(beat)

Not at all.

SAMMY

Do you think your dad would be
proud of your performance today?

Noa zones back in on Roxanna - Roxanna notices this time,
smiles. A whirl of emotions stir within Noa - and then --

FWIP - everything stops.

Noa's eyes well up as her nervous system calms into static
stillness. Her heart filled with gratitude for the time she
spent with Roxanna through this bittersweet journey.

Noa stares back at COURT 17 - studies its exterior.

NOA

I hope so...

Then walks towards Roxanna.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. U.S. OPEN SPONSORED MERCEDES BENZ SUV - MORNING

Noa slowly blinks her eyes open.

She tilts her head towards the window - out at the 495 as the
shuttle drives through Queens.

AS WE PULL OUT:

We notice Eric not in the shuttle. Just Noa and Shai, by
themselves. Noa still not wearing the Hamsa necklace.

Noa's luggage in the trunk of the SUV with her tennis bag.

Noa re-examines Shai - then double checks her surroundings as
she carefully scans the interior of the shuttle.

Is she dreaming? Is this real? Is it really the next day??

Noa's phone *buzzes* - she takes it out - an incoming call from
a New York number.

Noa grapples with lucidity - checks back in with Shai, then
picks up.

NOA

Hello?

VOICE (PHONE)

Hey Noa, it's Judy from the U.S.
Open.

Noa looks around the cabin of the car...

JUDY (PHONE)

Noa?

NOA

Hey. Yes.

JUDY (PHONE)

I called to congratulate you. I know you'd prefer to be in the second round but that was one of the best matches I'd ever seen.

NOA

Thank you.

JUDY (PHONE)

Your match was the most viewed first round match in U.S. Open history.

NOA

Well, that's a nice consolation.

Judy laughs... then -

JUDY (PHONE)

The USTA wants to offer you a Wild Card for next year's tournament.

BEAT.

JUDY (PHONE) (CONT'D)

Noa?

NOA

Wow, that's... huge, I mean... wow.

JUDY (PHONE)

You earned it. You showed the world that you belong here.

This catches Noa off-guard. She bites her lip.

JUDY (PHONE) (CONT'D)

Once we get our ducks in a row, I'll email Eric all the details.

NOA

Actually, just email them to me.

JUDY (PHONE)
 Sounds good. Good luck at the Asian
 Swing. We'll see you next year.

NOA
 Looking forward to it.

Judy hangs up.

Noa turns to Shai. He watches the passing cars with his
 trademark sense of blissful presence.

Noa gives him a kiss on his big, wide head -

Then remembers...

She digs into her tennis bag - finds a tennis ball.

Written on it, with sharpie... "Roxanna 917-358-6862 xoxo"

Noa rubs her callused thumb over the ink-blotted felt that
 bears Roxanna's name.

She can't help but smile as she turns to look out the window
 with a sense of calm.

A sense of peace with what is.

PRE-LAP: The rhythmic sound of cloth rubbing against leather.

Its incessant repetitiveness takes us into -

INT. PLAYER'S LOCKER ROOM - MORNING

Blistered and beaten hands calmly wrap grip-tape over the
 vinyl handle of a tennis racket.

WE PULL OUT: And see Noa, slouched on an aged, rusting bench.

This locker room has seen better days. Nothing has been
 renovated or refurbished for a few decades now.

Noa mutters quietly to herself as she methodically wraps the
 handle of her racket -

Her hands slightly shake causing an air bubble to form --

VOICE (O.S.)
 Noa?

Noa looks up at a short, yet imposing, Chinese WOMAN, 48. We
 recognize the voice to be Zihan's from the voicemail.

ZIHAN
We're ready for you.

NOA
I'll be right there.

Zihan smiles at Noa, then exits the locker room.

Noa looks back at the racket handle, at the bubble...

NOA (CONT'D)
Fuck it.

Noa chucks the unfinished racket into her bag, only two rackets have their grips on.

Noa gets up and slings her tennis bag over her shoulder.

She inhales the musty, locker-room air as it travels down her trachea and into her lungs.

She feels her feet on the ground. The strap of the tennis bag gripping her shoulder.

Everything slowwwwws for her once again. And just as Noa exits the locker room --

WE HEAR: The deafening *popping* sound of a tennis ball being struck -

CRACK!

SMASH TO BLACK:

THE END.