



# ECHO LAKE

ENTERTAINMENT

PERSONAL BEST

Written by

Ryan Hoang Williams

A True Story

ALEXI (PRE-LAP)  
Dear Admissions Board of Princeton  
University: My name is Alexi  
Indris-Santana.

EXT. SOUTHWESTERN RANCH - NIGHT

A beautiful night sky glistening with thousands of stars.

ALEXI (V.O.)  
You will find that part one of the  
application for admission is  
incomplete, for I have not attended  
organized schooling since my return  
from Europe in 1984.

TILT DOWN to a lush green ranch bathed in moonlight. Among  
the roaming cows and horses is a single tree, its century-  
old branches billowing in the breeze.

ALEXI (V.O.) (cont'd)  
In the ensuing three years -- from  
ages 14 to 17 -- I have been  
employed as a ranch hand in the  
Southwestern United States.

Beneath the tree is ALEXI, a lanky, handsome teen with long  
hair. He lies in cowboy boots and hat, gazing up at the sky.

ALEXI (V.O.) (cont'd)  
My father passed when I was eight.  
My mother resides in Switzerland,  
where she is a celebrated painter.

EXT. CATTLE STOCK - DAY

Alexi guides cattle through the stock, examining each animal  
before letting them back out to pasture.

ALEXI (V.O.)  
They promoted a life rich with  
experience. That philosophy has  
taken me from the streets of Paris  
to the farmlands of Utah. During  
this time, I have made a concerted  
effort to self-educate.

INT. ALEXI'S BEDROOM - RANCH - DAY

From beneath his wooden twin cot, Alexi pulls out a box of  
books, authors like Sartre and Descartes on top.

ALEXI (V.O.)  
 Whether it's the original French translations of Foucault my mother ships me or Louis L'Amour paperbacks from the local trading post, I love to read.

INT. RANCH BARN - DAY

Alexi sits between haystacks, reading *Being and Nothingness*.

ALEXI (V.O.)  
 Philosophy is a personal favorite, followed by histories of the Western United States. Despite my lack of a formal education, I recently scored 1510 on the Standard Aptitude Test.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

A cowboy among Reaganite teens, Alexi is the first to complete his test. Spurs clanking, he confidently struts down the aisle and hands his Scantron to the PROCTOR.

ALEXI (V.O.)  
 I am also an accomplished long distance runner.

EXT. SOMEWHERE, AMERICANA - DAY

A 5K race held through an idyllic town's Main Street. Far ahead of the competition is Alexi, toes gaping out of worn-out Nikes. He crosses the finish and casually walks away.

ALEXI (V.O.)  
 I have personal bests of four minutes and 10 seconds for one mile, eight minutes and 59 seconds for two, and 14 minutes, 42 seconds for five-thousand meters.

EXT. UTAH RANCH - DUSK

The setting sun casts an orange hue across the badlands. Alexi stands atop a hill along the only road into the ranch, an envelope beneath his arm and a tin mailbox beside him.

ALEXI (V.O.)

I desire a new chapter in my catalog of experience. I yearn for the storied marble halls I've read of in Fitzgerald novels -- its esteemed professors and bright young minds. I hope an institute as fine as Princeton can accept a man as unorthodox as myself. Until then, I eagerly await your reply.

He takes the envelope -- postmarked to Princeton -- sets it in the mailbox, lifts its red lever and walks away.

CUT TO BLACK:

ALEXI (V.O.) (cont'd)

If only any of this were true.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a Commodore 64 monitor. The square cursor blinks beside the sentence *If only any of this were true*. A beat. Then the cursor backtracks and deletes the sentence, stopping at *I eagerly await your reply*.

He turns to us, the VIEWER: It's Alexi. He isn't dressed like a cowboy though. He looks no different than your average college male -- unfit jeans, a UT Austin hoodie.

HOGUE

(to us)

Every year, 27,000 teenagers will apply for undergraduate admissions to Princeton University. Only 1900 will be accepted. Of those, only 189 will have a 4.0 grade point average and only 264 will have scored over 1500 on the SAT. That means 90 percent of admitted applicants weren't accepted because they were the best of the best. Yet we're told the Ivy League contains our nation's brightest, which is patently false, it is not true.

(beat)

My name isn't Alexi Indris-Santana, if you haven't figured it out already. It's James Cooper Hogue.

INT. UT AUSTIN LIBRARY - NIGHT

Alexi -- who will now go by his real name JAMES HOGUE -- walks through rows of catalogs while speaking to us.

HOGUE

I was born in 1966, making me 21 years old -- not 17. I grew up in El Paso. I'm finishing junior year as a mechanical engineering major at University of Texas at Austin. It's the type of school that impresses my parents' neighbors, which means zilch, zippo, nada.

He looks at the spines of the catalogs: Titles like *Stanford Admissions Brochure -- 1977* scribbled in sharpie.

HOGUE (cont'd)

My father isn't dead, unfortunately. Mom is though.

(glances at us)

That I do feel bad about -- I'm not a sociopath.

(back to brochures)

You're probably wondering why an engineering major at UT knows so much about Ivy League admissions. Well the inspiration for my ruse began in my science elective...

INT. UT AUSTIN LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

Hogue is one of hundreds of students. He stares at the front of the class, petrified.

HOGUE (V.O.)

Crammed in a humid room with 300 of my future competitors, suffering through a lecture from a Texas Instruments recruiter.

An OBESE MIDDLE-AGED MAN, his shirt sweat drenched and ink stained, rambles to the class words unheard by us.

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)

This guy was going on and on about how we were Texas's future: "Come to the Silicon Prairie... It ain't Silicon Valley, but it pays."

Hogue looks around in disbelief: The rest of the class fixates on the Fat Man's every word about job prospects.

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 We were sows being force-fed  
 forage, fattening us for slaughter.

CLOSE ON the Fat Man's shirt buttons straining to keep his shirt on. CLOSE ON Hogue's face, caked in sweat and panic.

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 A life of middle class comfort 'til  
 our knees buckle and brains decay  
 and our hearts burst and --

BACK TO:

INT. UT AUSTIN LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

HOGUE  
 (to us)  
 No. The Soviets already showed us  
 the folly of promised contentment.

He pulls out what he was looking for: *Princeton University Admissions Brochure - Class of 1990*. Takes a seat.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
 Back to those accepted: If they weren't the best academically, then why were they accepted over others who weren't? Well when an application survives the savagery of the admissions panel, the final say comes down to the Dean of Undergraduate Admissions. He doesn't care about grades or test scores. He's only focused on one thing: *The essay*.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Hogue tirelessly types away on his Commodore 64.

HOGUE  
 (to us)  
 This is your chance to make your case. But like anyone, a Dean is armed with bias -- bred by the institutions for which he plays gatekeeper. He will read your 600 words and make the following categorization:



EXT. UPPER EAST SIDE ROOFTOP - DAY

Wealthy white, male UPPER CRUST and their SONS mingle with the DEAN OF ADMISSIONS, a view of Central Park below.

HOGUE (V.O.)

One: You are of his cloth. He knows your dad. You're from the same town. You were molested at the same prestigious Catholic school.

EXT. BRONX STREET - NIGHT

A bookish, black HIGH SCHOOLER walks down a main drag, backpack in tow. Nothing eerie, save a lack of streetlights.

HOGUE (V.O.)

Two: You're from a background that is in polar contrast to the Dean's. This isn't just plain old lower middle class. No, your plight better be anecdotal...

From behind the High Schooler, an SUV speeds alongside a lowrider while they shoot at each other! This isn't an ordinary gang shooting -- it's some 80s action movie shit.

Faster and faster, the cars gain steam alongside the High Schooler as he runs away in horror. He drops his bag but still can't escape the maelstrom. He's left with no choice:

He reaches into his waistband and withdraws dual pistols, returning fire in an act of heroic self-defense!

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)

Whoa, wait!

The frame freezes:

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)

You can't be a product of your environment! No, no, no.

INT. BRONX HOME - NIGHT

From the safe confines of a kitchen table, we peer out the window at the same SUV and lowrider exchanging gunfire.

PAN WITH the action to the High Schooler, sitting at the table. He watches the violence from behind a typewriter.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 You must be the miraculous  
 incarnation of Ivy League prestige,  
 tragically spawned in the pit of  
 Inner-City America like the fucking  
 Dalai Lama.

The High Schooler writes his essay. CLOSE ON the paper: *As I look out my window, I see a world unfamiliar to me...*

BACK TO:

INT. UT AUSTIN LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

HOGUE  
 And then there is the third  
 category: You are an ordinary,  
 above-average intelligence person.  
 (wryly)  
 You don't want to be in this  
 category.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

In front of the mirror, Hogue tries on his "Alexi" outfit: Cowboy boots and hat, denim jeans and shirt, capped with a southwestern print poncho. Western chic.

HOGUE  
 (to us)  
 College admissions is merely a game  
 of salesmanship and I can't simply  
 sell an exaggerated version of  
 myself. I'm not rich. I'm not  
 black. No, I have to give the Ivy  
 Leagues something they don't know  
 they need.

Hogue turns to us, bland white boy turned Clint Eastwood.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
 This is a classic tale of American  
 reinvention.

INT. NEWARK AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

Standing among family and friends at the arrivals gate are two remarkably thin young men. DAVID LYNN (20 and affable) and BILL BURKE (21 and intense) wait, *Princeton Cross Country* across their chests.

BURKE  
Is this kid for real?

DAVID  
That's what this is about, isn't  
it? To find out.

BURKE  
Coach ain't above wasting our time.  
Can he take any longer? We still  
gotta get a run in.

DAVID  
That him?

From DOWN THE HALL, "Alexi Indris-Santana" walks with city slickers, canvas sack slung over his shoulder, face hidden beneath a straw hat. Hogue approaches his hosts.

DAVID (cont'd)  
Alexi?

HOGUE  
Hey.

DAVID  
Nice to meet you! Heard so much.

Impatient, Burke takes Hogue's bag without asking.

BURKE  
*Come on.*

INT. BURKE'S CAR - DAY

A vintage diesel Mercedes. Pretty nice whip for a college kid. Burke drives recklessly down I-95, David shotgun, Hogue in back like a child behind two bickering parents:

DAVID  
What's the rush, Burke?

BURKE  
I don't wanna run in the fucking  
dark!

HOGUE  
(to us)  
Bill Burke isn't just Princeton's  
best runner. He's one of the best  
in the nation. 3:58 miler. And he  
can give two fucks about recruiting  
me. That's David Lynn's job. He's  
(MORE)

HOGUE (cont'd)  
 team captain despite only being the  
 fifth best guy. A real team before  
 me kind of guy.

David turns back toward Hogue:

DAVID  
 So why Princeton, Alexi? No  
 offense! Just your life and all.

HOGUE  
 Aren't you supposed to tell me?

DAVID  
 (guffaws - to Burke)  
 I like this kid!

Burke shakes his head and keeps weaving through traffic.

INT./EXT. BURKE'S CAR / PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - DAY

BURKE  
 Alexi, you got your running stuff?

HOGUE  
 Yeah.

BURKE  
 Good, 'cause we're heading straight  
 to the track.

Hogue peers out the back window, in-awe of the storied campus of PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, stone buildings standing tall above trees with yellow fall leaves.

EXT. WEAVER FIELD - DAY

COACH ELLIS  
 Mr. Santana!

In running clothes, Hogue eagerly shakes the hand of COACH LARRY ELLIS (60, black). They stand on the infield between Princeton's cinder track with the men's and women's teams.

COACH ELLIS (cont'd)  
 Team: This is our recruit, Alexi  
 Santana. He's a 4:10/8:59 guy.

Impressed whistles scattered about.

COACH ELLIS (cont'd)  
 He's staying with David in Whitman.  
 Make sure you introduce yourselves,  
 show him what we're about.  
 (to Burke)  
 How much you doing?

BURKE  
 Nine.

COACH ELLIS  
 All right. Everyone else do seven  
 with Burke except David. You take  
 Alexi on the scenic route.

The team dismisses for the track's exit with Hogue. Coach stops David a step behind everyone else:

COACH ELLIS (cont'd)  
 Be nice, but push the pace. See if  
 he's for real.

EXT. PRINCETON TRAILS - DAY

Hogue and David running through a Jersey forest:

DAVID  
 Don't mind Burke, by the way. He  
 can be a bit intense.

David gradually picks up speed, surging around a tree.

DAVID (cont'd)  
 Me and him are actually southwest  
 boys like you. I'm from Colorado.  
 Burke's from Texas but he's lived  
 all over -- Dad's in oil.

David's constant chatter distracts from the run's quickening pace. He bursts five meters ahead but Hogue stays with. They head off the trail and onto a paved bike path alongside --

EXT. CARNEGIE LAKE - CONTINUOUS

DAVID  
 So what's the competition like if  
 you're not enrolled in school?

David runs a step ahead while politely quizzing Hogue. No problem: He's ready to respond.

HOGUE

Not great. Why I want to come here.  
Faster runners. Smarter people.

With moxie, Hogue pulls stride for stride then passes David, now pushing the pace on him. He's the real deal. David smiles, glad to see it as they speed along the water.

INT. COACH ELLIS'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A tiny office brimming with track history. Coach gives Hogue a moment to look around at framed mementos on the wall.

COACH ELLIS

David told me you had a good run?

HOGUE

Oh yes. We don't have views like that where I'm from.

HOGUE (V.O.)

Coach Ellis is a legend in the world of track & field. Under him, Princeton has won 16 conference championships and an NCAA title in 17 years. He coached Bob Beamon to gold in '68.

CLOSE ON a B&W photo of Bob Beamon long-jumping to glory. 16 Ivy League Heptagonal Championship plaques. An NCAA trophy.

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)

But most notably: He was Head Coach of the Men's Track Team at the '84 Los Angeles Olympics. This is a coach who takes you from good to the best.

In awe, Hogue stares at a large photo of Coach Ellis with the Olympic Track Team, flanked by greats like Carl Lewis.

COACH ELLIS

Alexi, you seem like a man of few words so I'll cut to the chase: If you want to be here, we want you.

HOGUE

I'd love that.

COACH ELLIS

Great. The Ivy League doesn't have athletic scholarships, but I know you're from limited means. I'll use  
(MORE)

COACH ELLIS (cont'd)  
 what pull I have, get you some  
 academic money. Let's try and make  
 this work, OK?

INT. DORM ROOM - UT AUSTIN - NIGHT

Hogue sits at his desk, feverishly crunching Princeton tuition numbers. He desperately wants to make this work.

INT. UT AUSTIN DORM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The communal phone rings. A passing UT STUDENT answers.

UT STUDENT  
 Hello...  
 (listening, then:)  
 James Hogue!

Hogue runs out of his room and takes the receiver.

HOGUE  
 This is James.

He listens. Then a look of concern grows on his face.

EXT. I-10 EXIT - NIGHT

Hogue's beat up MG passes *EL PASO CITY LIMITS. POP. 479,899*

INT. EL PASO HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

In a hospital bed is an obese older man, conscious but unable to speak. This is JAMES HOGUE SENIOR. Hogue watches his dad unsympathetically while a NURSE tends to him. James Sr. stares back, not happy to see his son either.

NURSE (PRE-LAP)  
 He had a stroke.

INT. JAMES SR.'S HOME - DAY

Hogue struggles to push his dad in a wheelchair into the unkempt home.

NURSE (V.O.)  
 Are you the closest relative?

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 Geographically? Ummm yeah, yes.

INT. JAMES SR.'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hogue now struggling to pull his dad into his bed.

NURSE (V.O.)  
Someone needs to watch him closely.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
How long are we talking?

NURSE (V.O.)  
I'm not sure. Weeks? Months? He  
won't fully recovery. He just needs  
to be taken care of until...

His dad finally in the bed, he goes to sleep while Hogue watches him with disdain.

EXT. EL PASO ROAD - DAY

Hogue runs like a metronome down a barren desert road, the loneliness of the long distance runner.

INT. JAMES SR.'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hogue feeds his father. Some of the soft food rolls down his chin. Hogue goes to wipe it away when --

JAMES SR.  
You f-fucking, ass. Just, just,  
just p-put the food in my...

Annoyed, Hogue stops feeding and stares at him.

JAMES SR. (cont'd)  
Fine. G-get me a beer, you...

Shaking his head, Hogue sets the food down and leaves.

INT. JAMES SR.'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Hogue stops in the living room and looks at us, contemplating his dilemma. Then he impulsively exits --

EXT. JAMES SR.'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Gets into his car and drives away.



EXT. INTERSTATE-25 WEST - NIGHT

Hogue drives down the pitch black, one-lane desert highway, past the *Welcome to Utah* sign.

INT./EXT. POST OFFICE - ST. GEORGE, UT - NIGHT

*United States Post Office - St. George, Utah 84770* sits in the center of the small rural town, not a soul awake. Hogue pulls into the empty parking lot. The post office is closed but its lobby with PO Boxes is unlocked. He enters and goes to PO Box 1958. He unlocks and opens it.

Sticking out among the assorted mail is a single giant envelope, a Princeton University emblem on its corner.

Hogue pulls out the acceptance package, bittersweet. He doesn't rush to open it. He just stares at its size, its postmark. He looks at us, speechless. Does his best to hold back tears. But upset, he smacks the aluminum boxes.

EXT. POST OFFICE - ST. GEORGE, UT - DAWN

Hogue stands at a pay phone outside.

HOGUE

Coach Ellis, it's Alexi Santana.

EXT. INTERSTATE-25 EAST - DAY

The sun rises. Hogue drives back home.

HOGUE (V.O.)

Sorry to get your machine. I just received my acceptance letter. Thank you so much. However...

EXT. ARIZONA GAS STATION - DAY

Hogue leans against his car while it fills up.

HOGUE (V.O.)

I wanted you to hear this first, but I have to defer my enrollment.

Hogue looks around: A TRUCKER gets out of his cab and spits. A STRESSED MOTHER tries to corral her THREE MESSY KIDS.

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
I recently received word from my  
mother in Switzerland. She has  
fallen ill and I must tend to her.

EXT. JAMES SR.'S HOME - DUSK

Hogue stares at front of his dilapidated childhood home like  
a prison he doesn't want to return to.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
I'm not sure how long I will be  
away, but I hope to be a member of  
your team in due time.

But defeated, Hogue walks back inside.

EXT. JAMES SR.'S HOME - DAY

Hogue slouches in a chair on the porch reading a paperback.

HOGUE  
(to us)  
If you couldn't tell by my rotting  
childhood home, my dad did little  
to give me a bright future.

INT. JAMES SR.'S KITCHEN - DAY

Hogue scrubs every countertop and crevice while:

HOGUE  
(to us)  
He was a drunk, always unemployed.  
Not the least bit dependable  
growing up. It's almost poetic how  
his death is disrupting my plans.

EXT. EL PASO ROAD - DAY

The same desert road. The same monotonous run.

INT. JAMES SR.'S HOME - DAY

Hogue massages his right knee, ailing in pain.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 But even when you're doing time,  
 you can't stop. Always keep  
 pushing. Always try to be better.

INT. EL PASO BAR - DAY

Hogue closes shop at the dingy dive bar he now works at.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 You don't have to be defined by  
 your circumstances. No. Life is  
 what you make of it...

INT. JAMES SR.'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A storm wages outside. James Sr. is asleep. Hogue sits at his bedside, feet propped on the bed reading Nietzsche. The only sound is the rain outside until --

James Sr. violently coughs, spitting up saliva then vomit. Hogue sits upright. The coughing intensifies. Unconscious, James Sr. is choking and unable to roll onto his side.

Yet Hogue just watches his dad apathetically, even as he heaves on his own fluids. He leans forward and whispers:

HOGUE  
 It's just you and me here -- the  
 only remaining Hogues. Some legacy.  
*So make it quick.* Because every  
 huff out of your fat, fucking snout  
 isn't just a blemish on our name.  
 It's another second I have to live  
 with it. And I'm not going to let  
 you tie me down anymore...

James Sr. struggles for breath, vomit stuck down his throat.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
 When I coughed as a boy, you used  
 to smack my back until it was red.  
 Why shouldn't I do the same now?

Hogue waits for an answer he obviously won't get. Is he really going to let his dad choke to death?

HOGUE (cont'd)  
 But I'm not you.

With his foot, Hogue pushes his dad onto his side. In one full swoop, vomit rolls out of James Sr.'s mouth. Finally able to breathe, he goes back to sleep.

Hogue glares at us before returning to his book.

INT. I-25 NORTH - DAY

Hogue drives while housing a chocolate bar for sustenance.

HOGUE

(to us)

I would've picked a closer mailing address but less than one percent of students are from Utah and Nevada, so they're desperate for qualified kids from there. Guess Princeton hates Mormons and fat people as much as I do. Now you get why I want to go there so badly.

INT. POST OFFICE - ST. GEORGE, UT - DAY

Patrons pass Hogue as he checks his PO Box. Hogue sees one envelope with Princeton letterhead. He opens and reads.

HOGUE

(to us)

"...With your deferment expiring, you must mail or fax your intention to re-enroll by April 16th or else your acceptance is rescinded." What the fuck am I supposed to --

He pauses as someone passes. Once they're out of earshot:

HOGUE (cont'd)

It's been a year watching Dad. Respectfully, how much longer do I have to wait for him to just die?

EXT. EL PASO RUNNING TRAIL - DAY

The sun beats down and Hogue runs with angry intensity.

INT. JAMES SR.'S KITCHEN - DAY

Still in running clothes, he makes his dad a PB&J and slams a jar of peanut butter atop a newspaper. Its date? May 1, 1989. Two weeks past the deadline for re-enrollment.

INT. JAMES SR.'S BEDROOM - DAY

James Sr. is asleep, daytime TV on. Hogue with his sandwich:

HOGUE

Dad...

Hogue shakes his shoulder. James Sr. doesn't wake. When he pats his father's cheek, James Sr.'s head rolls to the side.

Hogue stops. He checks for a pulse: Nothing. Hogue stares despondently at his dead father, unsure what to feel.

EXT. JAMES SR.'S HOME - DAY

James Sr.'s things are on the front lawn for an estate sale. There isn't much but people peruse while Hogue watches.

EXT. JAMES SR.'S HOME - LATER

The TRASH MEN pick up what remains. Once they leave, Hogue walks to his car, already packed with his belongings.

EXT. HOGUE'S CAR - I-85 EAST - NIGHT

Hogue's car is the only vehicle on the empty highway.

HOGUE (PRE-LAP)

Hi Coach, this is Alexi Santana.

INT. HOGUE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Hogue rehearses an imaginary phone call to himself:

HOGUE

Sorry if the signal is bad. I'm calling from Switzerland. I apologize for the late notice, but I have been in mourning. My mother passed away last month.

EXT. I-85 GAS STATION - DAY

Middle of nowhere America. Hogue stands inside a phone booth on the side of the highway as cars and trucks fly past.

HOGUE  
 (on call)  
 I know the deadline for re-  
 enrollment was in April. But given  
 the circumstances, I hope you'll  
 understand...

INT. I-85 EAST - NIGHT

Hogue chugs a coffee while driving overnight.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 ...and reconsider my enrollment  
 into Princeton University.

INT. HOGUE'S CAR - INDIANA REST STOP - NIGHT

Hogue sleeps, hidden between his luggage. A ray of light  
 shines through a window onto his face. He wakes.

EXT. INDIANA REST STOP - NIGHT

Hogue stands sheepishly outside his car while an INDIANA  
 STATE OFFICER dresses him down and checks his vehicle.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 No one is above the rules, I know.  
 But I assure you: I'm more of a  
 Princeton man than the one accepted  
 15 months ago.

Yet there stands Hogue, a bearded drifter.

COACH ELLIS (PRE-LAP)  
 Hi Alexi, it's Coach Ellis.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PHILADELPHIA - DAY

Hogue listens to a message from a grimy pay phone:

COACH ELLIS (V.O.)  
 Sorry we keep missing each other. I  
 spoke with the university and after  
 some coaxing, they budged.

INT. PUBLIC RESTROOM - DAY

Hogue stands shirtless in front of a defaced mirror. He  
 analyzes his emaciated frame. His musty face. His stringy

hair. He opens his toiletries bag and pulls out a razor. Hogue trims his beard, revealing that familiar boyish face.

COACH ELLIS (V.O.)  
 First day of practice is the 23rd.  
 You show up then, you got yourself  
 a spot at Princeton University.

Hogue scrubs himself in the sink, dirt dripping off.

He combs his long hair, obscuring his receding hairline.

He puts on a plaid flannel shirt.

He takes his straw hat and places it precisely on his head.

The transformation from James Hogue to Alexi Indris-Santana is complete.

EXT. PUBLIC RESTROOM - CARNEGIE LAKE - CONTINUOUS

New Jersey's familiar Carnegie Lake glistens beside the public park. Hogue steps out of the restroom and peers at:

Princeton University. Drove of cars packed with parents, students and their belongings drive the main road to campus. Hogue gets in his car and pulls out of the park, right into that line of parental vehicles.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY QUAD - DAY

Parents and freshmen frantically scurry from cars to dorms. Bemused upperclassmen lounge on the grass and watch, collars popped and blazer sleeves rolled up in yuppie fashion. Hogue walks around, in disbelief that he's finally made it.

HOGUE

(to us)

There are a few rules I follow when pulling wool over someone's eyes.  
First: It might seem intuitive to make your lie as close to the truth as possible. Don't. That's an exercise in futility. Make sure a lie is just that: A big whiff of imagination. After all, how can they prove you wrong if it's all from your head?

INT. HOLDER HALL - DAY

One of Princeton's most illustrious residences. The wood halls bustle with kids carrying belongings to and fro.

Hogue is a wallflower, pressed against a window as kids fly by. He peels off into a quiet corner, away from the chaos.

HOGUE

(to us)

Rule number two: When you must, captivate. Don't abuse this -- you don't want unnecessary attention. But people love a tall tale, especially here. They're not paying 30 grand a year for your mundane true story.

He looks down the hall: At the entrance of a dorm room, he sees two YOUNG MEN carrying belongings. Hogue's roommates.

HOGUE (cont'd)

(to us)

And if you're ever scared, always remember rule number three: People are stupid... even at Princeton.

And with a wink, Hogue walks toward his new home.

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

This place would be an in-demand studio in SoHo. Wood floors. Floor to ceiling windows. A fucking fireplace.

HOGUE (V.O.)

I've got two roommates. First guy I like. His name's --

ARI

You Alexi? Ari Mendes.

ARI is a Sephardic Jewish kid with a NY Mets Yarmulke. Hogue shyly tilts his hat and shakes Ari's hand.

ARI (cont'd)

I like your hat!

HOGUE

Thanks. I like your...

ARI

My yarmulke? Mets fan -- just means I was born to lose.



HOGUE (V.O.)  
Ari doesn't shut the fuck up.

JUMP CUT TO:

Ari talking Hogue's ear off, not even stopping for air.

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
He'd be annoying for anyone else to  
live with, but not if you're a  
fabulist with an undeveloped  
backstory. Who worries me more is:

ARI  
Evan! The third roommate's here!

EVAN NGYUEN is a Vietnamese kid with a skeptical exterior.  
He gives Hogue a half-hearted handshake:

EVAN  
Evan.

Evan looks at Hogue's outfit and tries not to say anything.  
Hogue shakes his hand a beat too long too, sizing Evan up.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
I'm not sure if Evan's going to be  
the roommate who sleeps until three  
in the afternoon or a potential  
pain in my ass. But I'd encourage  
him to take all the rest he needs.

EXT. WEAVER FIELD - DAY

Practice. Coach Ellis addresses the team, but everyone stops  
listening when they see Hogue arrive -- the prodigal son.

COACH ELLIS  
Glad to see you got my message.

Hogue cheerily shakes his hand, ecstatic to finally be a  
member of Princeton Track and XC. David gives him a big hug.

DAVID  
Two years too long, man. Meet your  
fellow freshmen, Trevor and Harris.

TREVOR SAUNDERS is a handsome SoCal boy, HARRIS MITT an un-  
athletic teen with a sunken chest. They and the rest of the  
men's and women's teams introduce themselves. Burke watches,  
just ready to fucking run already.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 Now I expected bitchy Burke and  
 suspicious roommates. What I didn't  
 predict was --

COACH ELLIS  
 Alexi!

Standing on the periphery with Coach Ellis is a man with a notepad, frumpily dressed. Hogue jogs over.

COACH ELLIS (cont'd)  
 Alexi, this is Harvey Yavener of  
 the Trenton Times. He was doing a  
 write-up on our upcoming season  
 when I told him about you.

His first test and he looks like a student who didn't study.

HOGUE  
 Nice to meet you, Mr. Yavener.

HARVEY  
 Please -- Harvey. I write for the  
 local paper not the Times.  
 You've got quite the story. My  
 condolences, by the way.

Condolences? Fuck -- Alexi's fictional dead mom, *right*.

HOGUE  
 Yes, um, thank you.

HARVEY  
 You just came back from Europe?

HOGUE  
 Yes. Between Geneva and Basel.

HARVEY  
 What is that, Bern?

HOGUE  
 (caught off-guard)  
 Yes, close to Bern.

HARVEY  
 Believe it or not, I'm a well-  
 traveled man. But you're from where  
 exactly?  
 (consults notes)  
 Address I have is a PO Box.

HOGUE

Yeah, that was my mailing address  
while I was working at --

HARVEY

The Lazy T Ranch?

HOGUE

In Nevada, yes.

HARVEY

So what do you say when people ask  
where you're from? Lazy T, Nevada?

HOGUE

Um, you know: If anyone asks, I'll  
just tell them I'm from Princeton.

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Hogue walks in. Ari & Evan lounge on the couch and stare at him as he enters. Hogue notices Ari holding a copy of the Trenton Times. He sets his bag down and lies on his bed, tipping his hat over his eyes like he's the Marlboro Man.

ARI

Long day, John Wayne?

He laughs. Even Evan cracks a smirk.

ARI (cont'd)

There's, ummm, some interesting  
shit about you in the paper.

HOGUE

That so?

ARI

(reads from article)

"While other teens were occupied  
with extracurricular activities,  
Santana was erecting barbed wire  
fences across a southwest farm. The  
last classroom he remembers was a  
15 person schoolhouse at the  
foothills of the Swiss Alps."

(to Hogue)

Who the fuck are you?

While Ari glows with glee, Evan is more suspicious.

ARI (cont'd)

What did you score on the SAT?

HOGUE

I don't know, it was awhile ago.  
1520 or so?

ARI

Christ. You got a 1520 *home-schooled*?

HOGUE

Self-educated, technically.

ARI

(refers to article)  
And you ran a sub-nine minute two  
mile with no coaching?

EVAN

All makes sense to me...

Evan's sarcasm sucks the enthusiasm out of the room. Silence and tension follow. Hogue glances at us before responding:

HOGUE

You can time me around the track if  
you'd like.

EVAN

Can I watch you take the SAT too?

HOGUE

You'll have to call College Board  
for that one.

ARI

C'mon Evan, don't be accusatory.  
We're all just getting acquainted.  
For all we know, I like spending  
money and you got a big dick.

Ari chortles at his own racist joke. But Evan isn't easing up. Hogue feels his mounting skepticism and it worries him.

INT. FRIST CAMPUS CENTER - DAY

Freshman Orientation. Students hold copies of Alexi's newspaper profile: The 1989 equivalent of going viral.

FRESHMEN surround Hogue, eager to meet him. Trevor & Harris watch, in awe of his fame. An ALGERIAN GIRL speaks to Hogue.

ALGERIAN FRESHMAN

You came here from Switzerland?

HOGUE

Yes.

ALGERIAN FRESHMAN

Enfin, quelqu'un avec qui je peux  
parler Français!

Hogue freezes: He doesn't speak French.

HOGUE (V.O.)

Fuck.

Before he has to lie, another BOY mercifully pulls him away:

FRESHMAN BOY

Dude, you gotta tell us about the  
ranch. Did you, like, milk cows?

ACROSS THE ROOM, Evan watches Hogue...

HOGUE (V.O.)

Popularity draws scrutiny. More  
chances to fuck up...

INT. HOLDER HALL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Evan is surprised to find Ari sitting outside their room.

EVAN

What's going on?

ARI

Alexi is hosting some guests.

EVAN

Guests?

ARI

Fucking girls, man! Hot ones too!  
Door's locked.

Off Evan's incredulity:

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Hogue is surrounded by FIVE PRETTY FRESHMEN GIRLS. A  
bottle of wine and a plate of cheese are passed around.

HOGUE (V.O.)

But popularity has its perks too.

HOGUE  
 (to girls)  
 After Dad died, his friend Mr.  
 Oswalt let me live and work on his  
 ranch. Gave me a home and a  
 purpose. Best years of my life.

While Hogue speaks to a captive audience, he makes eye contact with FELICIA, a mature brunette.

INT. HOLDER HALL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ari naps on the floor. Evan anxiously paces back and forth. Finally, the door opens. The girls file out of their dorm.

FRESHMAN GIRLS  
 Thanks for having us! / Bye Alexi!

Hogue waves. Last is Felicia, hanging back a step.

FELICIA  
 That was fun. Lets do it again.

HOGUE  
 That would be nice.

FELICIA  
 Bye, Alexi...

She turns and bashfully walks past his roommates.

ARI  
 Bye...  
 (to Hogue)  
*Sensei.*

Annoyed, Evan ignores Hogue as he passes. Hogue glances at us and chuckles before following his roommates inside.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 I'm shocked I've lasted this long,  
 but the more I learn about  
 Princeton the more I realize  
 critical thinking isn't a criteria  
 for admission.

INT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - PROSPECT AVE. - CONTINUOUS

Hogue, David and Trevor jog shirtless past old brick mansions with well-dressed students coming in and out.

DAVID  
Neither of you have raced Van  
Cortlandt before, have you?

HOGUE  
No.

TREVOR  
Nope.

DAVID  
The course bottlenecks fast, so get  
out or you'll be jogging 2.5 miles.

TREVOR  
Look at these douchebags.

A pack of PREPPY BOYS clad in navy blazers, pastel polos,  
sockless boat shoes walk toward them.

DAVID  
Eating clubs...

TREVOR  
*These are the eating clubs?*

They pass the preps. Their LEADER -- tall, white, handsome  
in a cookie-cutter way -- makes eye contact with Hogue. The  
preps cackle at their tiny running shorts and naked bodies.

DAVID  
Alexi, this is Princeton's version  
of Greek life. If Princeton weren't  
insular enough, we have places  
where rich students can eat gourmet  
meals away from everyone else.

David points at one especially grand old stone home.

DAVID (cont'd)  
That's Ivy Club. The oldest and  
most snobbish. They're all snobs.  
When Woodrow Wilson was university  
president, he wanted to abolish  
eating clubs. And he was a  
segregationist.

Hogue eyes the mansion with a dose of caution and curiosity.

INT. MEN'S TRACK LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The boys get dressed in front of their rusted lockers.

DAVID  
You guys going to cane spree?

TREVOR  
Cane spree?

DAVID  
Princeton has too many absurd traditions to explain on one run. But you should go. Make friends.

HOGUE  
I'm perfectly content with you all. Running. Get a good education and eventually a job. If I'm lucky, buy my own ranch and live in peace.

TREVOR  
Yeah and besides: Our entire class wants to fuck Alexi anyhow.

DAVID  
Alexi, no one comes to Princeton for the education. Enjoy it while it lasts. Besides, you're a 19 year-old freshman. You ain't getting any younger.

EXT. PALMER STADIUM - DAY

STUDENT SUPERVISOR  
NEXT!!!

At the center of the field is a circle of students. TWO BOYS step into the center where lies a cane. They grab onto it. The SUPERVISOR blows her whistle and the two begin wrestling for control of the cane while everyone maniacally screams!

Hogue, Trevor and Harris watch, utterly confused.

TREVOR  
Harris, you know what's going on?

HARRIS  
Not a clue.

Hogue turns to a nearby FEMALE STUDENT.

HOGUE  
Excuse me: What is this?

FEMALE STUDENT  
It's cane spree!

HOGUE  
Right, but what is it?



## FEMALE STUDENT

The freshman and the sophomore have  
to wrestle for the cane!

Hogue just politely smiles before turning and leaving.

## HOGUE

(to us)

And I thought my antics were  
theatrical. Eating Clubs? Cane  
Spree? What 19th century huckster  
came up with this shit?

A DRUNK FAT BOY bumps into Hogue, spins around and screams:

## FAT BOY

WOOOOOO!!!!

The Fat Boy runs away.

## HOGUE

(back to us)

I'm starting to think my schtick  
will only get easier from here.

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL LECTURE HALL - DAY

Hogue and students take their seats. On the chalkboard is  
*Phil-175: Intro to Postmodernism & Semiotics*. DEB FISHEL, a  
mid-30s professor with tomboyish charm, enters.

## PROFESSOR FISHEL

Welcome back everyone! Hope we had  
a good summer. See some familiar  
faces. I'm Professor Deb Fishel. My  
T.A. Erica is passing out the  
syllabus. Introduce yourselves.

While the Professor continues, Hogue looks across the room  
at her T.A. ERICA GRAFF (21, black, thriftily stylish).

## HOGUE (V.O.)

*Oh no.*

Love at first sight. While Hogue watches Erica:

## PROFESSOR FISHEL (O.S.)

In this class, we'll be talking  
about signs -- things that stand-in  
for something. Words are a type of  
sign. They transfer information.  
Stories are signs! *Boy Who Cried  
Wolf* is synonymous with lying.

Hogue is stupefied by Erica, unable to stop staring...

PROFESSOR FISHEL (O.S.) (cont'd)

We'll discuss how signs express what we mean. But also how we use signs to obscure truth. How lying itself can be a sign for what we really mean. And what signs say about us as people and a society.

...Until Erica looks in Hogue's direction and he turns away.

INT. HOLDER HALL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Evan stumbles in, drunk from a night of partying. He goes to his room and turns the knob: It's locked.

EVAN

You've gotta be shitting me...  
(bangs the door)  
Alexi! Alexi, open up!

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The banging continues. Hogue and Felicia -- the pretty freshman -- sit on his bed, snickering.

FELICIA

Should we just let him in?

HOGUE

No, he can sleep in the lounge.

FELICIA

Don't get along with your roommate?

HOGUE

Do you get along with yours?

FELICIA

Oh god, not at all! I think the school does that intentionally -- pair you with people you hate as a character building exercise.

Laughter followed by beat of nervous silence.

HOGUE

You were talking about your folks.

FELICIA

Right. Yeah, no, I was just saying how the most outdoors-y thing I did was, ummm, skiing at my parents' mountain home. God, you probably think I'm ridiculous saying that!

HOGUE

Not at all. You don't have to be ashamed. Do you ski a lot?

FELICIA

Not often enough. Do you?

HOGUE

You're going to think *this* is ridiculous but when I was 11 and living in California, my parents used to take me skiing all the time. And my mom was good friends with this Hollywood producer who did *Happy Days*. You know that show?

FELICIA

Of course!

HOGUE

So there is this episode where The Fonz was in a downhill skiing competition against a 10 year old prodigy or something.

FELICIA

And you were the kid?

HOGUE

No, I can't remember lines. But they needed a skiing double for the kid and I was *that* kid.

FELICIA

No!

Another moment of silence. The knocking at the door has finally stopped. Hogue's hand is inches from her leg now.

FELICIA (cont'd)

Your life is so exciting. Why bother coming to college?

HOGUE

They don't have pretty girls where I'm from. There aren't any girls at all, in fact.

She laughs. Another silent beat. The edge of his hand rests on her thigh. She allows it.

FELICIA  
I actually took a ski trip with my  
parents out west.

HOGUE  
Really? Where?

FELICIA  
Provo, Utah.

HOGUE  
Really? That's where my ranch was!

As he inches closer for a kiss, she pauses.

FELICIA  
I thought your ranch was in Nevada.

HOGUE  
(*shit*)  
What?

FELICIA  
In your profile: It said your ranch  
was in Nevada.

HOGUE  
It did? It must've been confused.  
Provo and Nevada are fairly close.

He tries to go back in for a kiss but she turns her head.

FELICIA  
No they're not.

Felicia pulls her leg away from his hand, uncomfortable now.

FELICIA (cont'd)  
But maybe I misheard. I don't know.

HOGUE  
Yeah, you must have. *Because my  
ranch was near Provo.*

But the mood is ruined. She looks at the clock on the wall.

FELICIA  
It's late. I should get going.

She gets up. Readjusts her skirt. He says nothing. She walks toward the door. He's too embarrassed to watch her go. Then:

HOGUE

*Stop!*

She stops mid-stride. The second hand on the clock has stopped ticking. Hogue is the only thing moving, the rest of the room frozen still.

HOGUE (cont'd)

(beat -- to us)

What the *FUCK* was that!?

He storms over to his desk, opens a drawer and pulls out his newspaper profile folded away. He scans it --

His finger goes through until he finds the fact: "*Santana then moved to the Lazy T Ranch in Nevada.*"

HOGUE (cont'd)

Yavener, you dumb fuck!

Like a VHS, we 10X REWIND through the film we've seen thus far, bringing us back to --

EXT. WEAVER FIELD - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Back to his interview with the reporter, Harvey Yavener.

HARVEY

(consulting notes)

But you're from where exactly?  
Address I have is a PO Box.

PAST HOGUE

Yeah, that was my mailing address  
while I was working at --

HARVEY

The Lazy T Ranch?

HOGUE

In Utah, yes.

Freeze. A second Hogue (PRESENT-DAY HOGUE) enters frame.

PRESENT-DAY HOGUE

(to us)

See! When did I ever say Nevada!? I  
always said Utah! I kept a Utah  
mailing address for fuck's sake.

Present-Day Hogue takes Harvey's notepad and scribbles UTAH!

INT. FRIST CAMPUS CENTER - DAY (FLASHBACK)

CLOSE ON the Trenton Times Profile: "*Santana then moved to the Lazy T Ranch in Utah.*"

BACK TO FRESHMAN ORIENTATION: Kids crowd around Hogue, article in hand. Hogue sends us a knowing glance.

BACK TO:

INT. HOGUE'S DORM SUITE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Problem solved: Hogue and Felicia make out on his bed. He pulls his hand from her skirt and gives us a thumbs up.

INT. CAMPUS CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Where students can buy snacks and drinks. David, Trevor, Harris and Hogue scan the aisles.

TREVOR

75 cents for a Coke? What a ripoff!

The boys nonetheless fill their arms with soda, chips, candy. Everyone except Hogue, who looks around aimlessly.

DAVID

Not getting anything?

HOGUE

Don't have money to pay for snacks.

DAVID

I'll spot you.

HOGUE

No, David --

DAVID

Alexi. It's fine.

Appreciative, Hogue grabs a few things when he spots --

Erica filling up a cup of coffee. A benign sighting. But as Hogue contemplates whether to introduce himself, he sees Erica sneak a bottle of Advil into her purse. She sees that Hogue saw her shoplift. A beat: Is he going to tell someone?

But Hogue just shrugs: He doesn't care. She smiles and silently mouths *thank you* before taking off. Awestruck:

HOGUE (PRE-LAP)  
C'mon, James: Follow the program!

EXT. WEAVER FIELD - DAY

A row of leather spikes clack along the cinder track, kicking up a trail of dust. Runners fly past Coach --

COACH ELLIS  
4:44! No, faster!

Trevor vomits onto lane six. Harris collapses on the infield. The Jersey humidity squeezes Hogue like a wet rag. He struggles to stay with Burke and David for the lap rest.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
Mile intervals in shit-your-shorts heat are part of the program.

The last interval. Burke pushes the pace, Hogue in tow. They drop David. Hogue grits through lap after lap, Burke shifting sub-four mile gears Hogue isn't sure he has. But shit, he sticks with Princeton's best runner till the end.

COACH ELLIS  
4:29, great! Way to hang, Santana!

Proud, Hogue lies down in a pool of his own sweat.

INT. ATHLETIC TRAINING ROOM - DAY

Hogue sinks to his knees in an ice bath and shivers in pain.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
Ice baths are part of the program.

David dumps another bag of ice into Hogue's tank and makes Hogue leap out like a cat in a bath.

EXT. JERSEY TRAILHEAD - DAWN

Half-asleep and a few even hungover, the men's and women's teams nonetheless hit their watches and start their AM run.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
Church of the Sunday Long Run is part of the program.

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Hogue asleep with *The Postmodern Condition* on his chest.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
Studying is part of the program.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT

Hogue, David, Trevor and Harris shoot shit and split a pie.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
Team dinners are part of the  
program.

EXT. PROVINCE LINE ROAD - DAY

It's pissing rain but that doesn't stop Hogue & Burke from  
pounding up a steep hill while Coach drives alongside them.

COACH ELLIS  
Drive your knees, *let's go!*

HOGUE (V.O.)  
Hill repeats are part of the  
program.

EXT. WEAVER FIELD - DAY

Hogue crosses the line and collapses in the infield. Away  
from the team's view, he massages his knee in visible pain.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
More intervals...

INT. ATHLETIC TRAINING ROOM - DAY

Hogue submerges his legs in the same ice bath, searing in  
pain while his FEMALE TEAMMATES laugh at and mock him as  
they casually sit in their own tank of ice.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
More ice baths.

EXT. CARNEGIE LAKE - DUSK

As Hogue runs with his teammates along the water:



HOGUE (V.O.)

Test scores are a sham. Capitalism is fixed. The only honest competition in life is a race. The stopwatch cannot lie. And you only improve by following the program.

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL LECTURE HALL - DAY

Erica passes back papers. She doesn't acknowledge Hogue as she hands him his essay.

HOGUE (V.O.)

What isn't part of the program are beautiful, kleptomaniac ingenues.

It takes him a full beat to finally stop staring at Erica and looks down at his paper. He's shocked to see a fat **D**.

HOGUE

(to us & himself)  
Or bad grades -- *Shit!*

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S OFFICE - DAY

When Hogue gets to the door of Professor Fishel's office, he stops. A handwritten note is taped against the door: *Family Emergency. All Meetings Canceled. Prof. Fishel.*

EXT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOME - DAY

It's sweltering hot and Professor Fishel straddles a ladder above her home, fixing an A/C unit.

HOGUE (O.S.)

Some family emergency.

Fishel is surprised to find Hogue standing on her lawn.

PROFESSOR FISHEL

What if it actually was one?

HOGUE

I would've kept walking. You should be at your office right now.

PROFESSOR FISHEL

Can't say I'm shocked you're here, having read the strangest profile in years. All that true?

HOGUE

It's in the newspaper, isn't it?

PROFESSOR FISHEL

(chuckles, amused)

Alexi, what do you want?

HOGUE

I got a D on your last assignment.

PROFESSOR FISHEL

Your grievance is with my T.A. I'm just an overworked adjunct who wants tenure. You sure this can't wait? In fact, why am I even asking? *It can wait.*

Fishel goes back to struggling with the A/C unit.

HOGUE

You need help?

PROFESSOR FISHEL

I got it.

(thinks about it)

Got a broken pipe in the kitchen though. Think you can fix that?

HOGUE

Will you change my grade?

PROFESSOR FISHEL

C.

HOGUE

B minus.

PROFESSOR FISHEL

You could've worked me up to a B plus -- deal.

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOME - DAY

Her son EDDIE (10) is shirtless and sits too close to the TV, playing his Sega Genesis. Fishel enters with Hogue.

PROFESSOR FISHEL

Eddie, put a shirt on. Got guests.

EDDIE

(not looking up)

It's too hot!

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
This is Alexi, one of my students.

EDDIE  
(not looking up)  
Hi.

Fishel shrugs. Hogue laughs. They go to the KITCHEN.

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
It's the pipe beneath the sink.

She pulls out a tool box and hands it to Hogue. He climbs beneath the sink while Fishel snacks on an apple.

PROFESSOR FISHEL (cont'd)  
I can't figure it out and I'm too poor for a plumber.

HOGUE  
Are all your meetings like this?

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
Most students don't bother visiting me at my office, much less my home.

HOGUE  
Is it just you and your son?

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
Yep. Just me and the kiddo. His dad moved to California to teach.

HOGUE  
Didn't want to move with?

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
I teach at Princeton. He teaches at UC Davis. Why should I follow him?

Point taken.

PROFESSOR FISHEL (cont'd)  
Indris-Santana. Such a unique name. What is that?

HOGUE  
I'm not sure -- haven't given it much thought.

He scoots out from underneath the sink.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
OK, give that a try.

Fishel reaches over and turns on the sink: It works.

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
 Look at you! I've got chicken  
 that'll rot if I don't cook it  
 today. Want to stay for dinner?

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hogue sits on the couch, watching Eddie (now in a t-shirt)  
 play *Sonic the Hedgehog*.

HOGUE  
 And so you gotta get the rings with  
 the hedgehog?

EDDIE  
 Yeah.

HOGUE  
 And you like this game?

EDDIE  
 I love all video games. My mom  
 thinks it's bad for me, but I'm  
 gonna make games when I'm older.

HOGUE  
 How do you do th --

He's interrupted by a knock on the door. Fishel answers:  
Erica enters. Hogue sits upright and composes himself.

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
 Alexi you know Erica, my T.A.  
 Erica, this is Alexi from 175.

ERICA  
 (knows him already)  
 Nice to meet you. Hi Eddie!

EDDIE  
 (still playing)  
 Hi Erica.

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
 Erica tutors Eddie. She comes a  
 close second to video games. Me a  
 distant third.  
 (to Eddie)  
 All right, kid.

Begrudgingly, Eddie turns off the game.

PROFESSOR FISHEL (cont'd)  
We're about to eat. Hungry?

ERICA  
I already ate, but thanks.

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Hogue and Fishel sit in front of empty plates, mid-chat:

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
It's tough acclimating to Princeton  
if you're not from money.

HOGUE  
Yeah...

Hogue peers over Fishel's shoulder at Erica in the living room, helping Eddie with his homework.

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
I always remind myself that all the  
traditions are just branding, you  
know? Eating clubs and bonfire fund  
research of arcane philosophies.

HOGUE  
What's bonfire?

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
Oh, it's ridiculous. When the  
football team beats Harvard and  
Yale in a season, it's tradition to  
light a giant fire on the quad.

They laugh at how dumb it sounds. Erica and Eddie finish. She grabs her stuff and enters the kitchen.

PROFESSOR FISHEL (cont'd)  
How was he?

ERICA  
No bigger shithead than usual.

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
He gets that from his dad. I'll  
give you a check in class.

HOGUE  
It's late. I should get going too.

Hogue stands. So does Fishel. They hug goodbye.

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
Give me advance warning and we'll  
do this again?

HOGUE  
That sounds nice. Thank you,  
Professor.

EXT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOME - NIGHT

Hogue exits. Erica follows, walking to her car in the  
driveway. Hogue walks across the front lawn when:

ERICA  
You need a ride?

Hogue stops and turns, surprised she's talking to him.

HOGUE  
I was just going to jog back.

ERICA  
(beat)  
Don't be a weirdo. Get in the car.

INT. ERICA'S CAR - NIGHT

Erica drives Hogue toward campus. An awkward silence.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
Be smooth, James.

HOGUE  
Do you often work for the  
Professor?

HOGUE (V.O.)  
For fuck's sake.

Instead of answering, Erica makes an abrupt turn and slams  
the brakes, catching Hogue off-guard. She turns to him --

ERICA  
You gonna rat me out?

HOGUE  
*What?*

ERICA  
At the convenience store! I know  
you saw me! You gonna tell the  
professor? Huh? Get me fired?

HOGUE

No!

ERICA

T.A.'ing, my work study, tutoring  
Eddie: I lose any of those jobs, I  
can't afford to graduate. And I  
can't not graduate...

HOGUE

I'm not telling anyone!

ERICA

So why were you at the Professor's?

HOGUE

It was just a coincidence!

ERICA

*A coincidence?*

HOGUE

Yes! A coincidence!

Erica stares down Hogue. Who the fuck is this girl? A pregnant beat... Erica then cuts the tension with a laugh:

ERICA

I'm just fucking with you, Alexi.

She cackles as she starts the engine and drives again. It takes Hogue a moment to figure out what just hit him.

HOGUE

*Jesus Christ.*

ERICA

You actually believed that? Who the hell do you think I am?

HOGUE

I don't know! We just met!

ERICA

Deb would just think you're a square if you told her I shoplift.

Erica's prank seems to have loosened Hogue up, at least.

HOGUE

So why were you stealing a bottle of Advil? You a drug addict?

ERICA

You've never done drugs if that's what you think. Too much Advil will only give you a stomach ache. I'm just a broke college student with a migraine. But you're probably familiar with stealing, being from the Wild West.

Erica smiles: She read the Trenton Times profile too.

HOGUE

Has everyone read that thing?

ERICA

I may have skimmed it while looking up showtimes. You don't seem like a rancher.

HOGUE

Well if I were any good at it, I'd still be one. Though judging by the grade you gave me, you think I'm no good at school either.

ERICA

Did Deb throw me under the bus?

HOGUE

D is harsh.

ERICA

If I'm remembering yours correctly, it just had a whiff of bullshit.

HOGUE

Bullshit!?

ERICA

It's a hundred-level humanities class and you were quoting Lyotard.

HOGUE

It's a class about postmodernism. I cited *The Postmodern Condition*!

ERICA

You know Lyotard denounced that book, right?

HOGUE

What?



ERICA  
Said he made up stories. Cited  
works he hadn't read.

HOGUE  
(beat)  
Good thing I never read it then.

ERICA  
(laughs)  
People have to watch out for you,  
don't they?

EXT. ERICA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Campus is just a few blocks away. Erica parks out front.

HOGUE  
Thanks for the ride.

ERICA  
Of course. Am I going to be seeing  
you at Deb's more often?

HOGUE  
I don't know, how often are you  
there?

Flirtation innocently posited. But before she can reply --

TODD (O.C.)  
Hey sweetheart.

They turn to TODD, the leader of the eating club preps we  
saw earlier. He kisses Erica. It deflates Hogue.

ERICA  
Todd, this is Alexi. Alexi, my  
boyfriend Todd.

TODD  
What's up, man?

They shake hands. Todd recognizes Hogue but can't put his  
finger on it. Hogue gets tense and proper like Alexi.

HOGUE  
Pleasure.

ERICA  
You're good to walk?

HOGUE

Yes. Thank you again, Erica.

Hogue turns and leaves, mouthing *Fuck* to us on his way out.

EXT. SPRINGDALE GOLF COURSE - DAY

Princeton's golf course is for cross-country today. The lead pack roars past the 9th hole. Burke and Hogue are in the scrum, surrounded by four Harvard Crimson runners. Burke relaxes off the tail next to Hogue, straining early.

BURKE

It's mile one -- *Relax.*

Hogue stubbornly leers at him. They pass Professor Fishel and Eddie, decked out in Princeton gear --

EDDIE

Go Princeton!!!

CUT TO:

Hogue is still glued to Burke's shoulder as the two of them now battle for the lead with Harvard's #1 and #2. The lead pack is flanked by a large, cheering audience.

Burke is more concerned with Hogue than their competition. He sneers at Hogue. Hogue gives Burke a wink. Is Hogue going to usurp Burke as Princeton's #1 runner today?

Yet despite the cocksure display, Hogue struggles. He smacks his bad right knee, pleading it not to surrender.

The course winds through the screaming crowd toward a trailhead into the woods. The adrenaline makes Hogue surge into the lead right as they enter --

THE WOODS

No more cheering. Only the sounds of metal spikes against dirt and tree roots. It's a narrow and treacherous trail. There is only enough room to race in a single file or pass on the shoulder and risk hitting a tree.

Hogue holds the lead through winding dark & narrow. Burke grimaces in back, pissed his own teammate took his lead.

Running is more physical than you think. Elbows are exchanged. Spikes slice through calves. Burke shoves Harvard to surge into second, clipping the back of Hogue's heel --

Hogue trips and nearly falls but Burke catches his singlet.

BURKE

Speed up!

Burke then pushes Hogue, making him get to his desired speed. A ray of light peaks ahead, back onto the --

GOLF COURSE

Hogue and Burke escape the woods and are surrounded by a tunnel of noise again. They pass Mile 4. One more mile.

Burke immediately retakes the lead and aggressively starts his kick, separating himself from Hogue and the pack.

Hogue can either be left behind with Harvard or he can pick a fight with Burke. He picks the latter.

He pulls up on Burke's shoulder. Like boxers exchanging punches, each man trades the lead every five seconds, flying over rolling hills at max speed, the crowd rooting them on.

Burke manages to find an extra gear, pulling away from Hogue toward the finish. Hogue grits and follows: *Up, down, up, down*, Princeton leaving Harvard in its wake --

Until Hogue's foot hits a rough patch and his knee buckles.

HOGUE

*AGH!*

The scream even grabs Burke's attention. He gives Hogue a note of sympathy before ruthlessly dropping him for the win.

Nevermind winning. Hogue can barely run. Can he even get second place? He limps down the final stretch as the two Harvard boys quickly approach. One passes, then the other.

Before Hogue falls back any further, he comes through the chute and collapses, clutching his right knee --

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. COACH ELLIS'S OFFICE - NIGHT

And that right knee is now wrapped in ice and cellophane.

COACH ELLIS

Alexi, you know what I'm going to say: You're not racing at conference champs.

Hogue hangs his head, dejected.

COACH ELLIS (cont'd)

Don't get down. Just rest. Support your teammates. *You're young.* You still have plenty of time.

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Hogue lies on the floor, open beer bottle by his head. David, Trevor, Harris and Ari sit around with a beer. A persistent knock is at the door, Evan locked out again.

HARRIS

You guys wanna let him in?

ARI

Evan? Nah, he can wait.

DAVID

I'm only drinking to cheer Alexi up. It's two weeks till Heps.

TREVOR

Might as well have more than one then. Let's go to the eating clubs!

HARRIS

We're not getting in there.

TREVOR

Maybe you're not!

HARRIS

We're the cross country team!

Off Hogue, annoyed by the bickering in his room...

INT. CAMPUS CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Hogue is a mess. Dressed in team-issued hoodie and sweats, knee wrapped in ice, he limps around the store picking up junk food to ease his depression.

HOGUE

(to us)

Grade Two MCL sprain. Four weeks before I can run again. "You'll be back before you know it" you're probably saying. *Well don't say it.* Without running, I'm just a fat reprobate like my fath-

As he gets a can of Coke, he sees Erica smiling at him from the toiletries aisle. He musters a smile back. She sees his knee wrapped in plastic and frowns. He shrugs and nods: *It's OK. What are you stealing today?*

She shows a box of toothpaste. Cool. She puts in her purse.

A bottle of Advil. Of course. In the purse.

A tube of Preparation H. *They sell that here?* She laughs and throws it in her purse. *You never know*. Erica looks at Hogue now: *You getting anything?*

Hogue looks around conspiratorially. He then sneaks a can of Coke beneath his hoodie. Then two cans. Now four. Erica tries not to laugh, giddy and impressed.

Like partners in crime, they glide past the STORE CLERK (some poor college boy) toward the exit. Erica leaves first. No problem. But as Hogue is about to step out --

He drops four Coke cans onto the store floor, bursting open around his feet -- pst pst pst pst! Caught red-handed, Hogue looks sheepishly at the Store Clerk.

STORE CLERK

Dude...

HOGUE

75 cents is a ripoff -- sorry!

Hogue sprints out past Erica! In shock, she runs after --

EXT. CAMPUS CONVENIENCE STORE - CONTINUOUS

Laughing, they run into the night with their spoils...

EXT. CARNEGIE LAKE BRIDGE - NIGHT

Hogue & Erica sit on a bridge over the water, eating stolen snacks and enjoying the starry eyed view.

ERICA

How'd you find this place?

HOGUE

Running.

ERICA

That's right, you're a track star.

HOGUE

Yep...

ERICA

How fast can you run a mile?

HOGUE

4:10.

ERICA

Wow.

HOGUE

If my knee ever heals properly, I'd like to go sub four.

ERICA

You'll be back before you know it.

Hogue briefly glances at us before continuing:

HOGUE

What about you? What are you a star at?

ERICA

No stardom.

HOGUE

C'mon: You're a pretty good thief.

ERICA

That's just a side hustle.

HOGUE

Professor Fishel must think you're smart if she made you her T.A.

ERICA

I'm not even a philosophy major.

HOGUE

Really?

ERICA

Business. I just write a mean essay and it's a job that pays. I like Deb a lot but philosophy, academia? It's all bullshit to distract from the obvious.

HOGUE

And what's that?

ERICA

That people only come here to move up the social order. Full stop.

HOGUE

Is that necessarily a bad thing?

ERICA

Not at all! I grew up poor. There's no nobility in it. But social climbers get a bad wrap. For all the talk in America about be who you want, we still indulge in British aristocratic propaganda: Beware the conniving peasant.

HOGUE

Sounds like you should be a philosophy major.

Erica laughs. A quiet beat.

HOGUE (cont'd)

So is that why you're dating the eating club guy?

ERICA

*Wow!*

HOGUE

What!?

ERICA

Are you suggesting I'm fucking my way to the top!?

HOGUE

No. I'm just not sure I trust your judge of character.

ERICA

I'm sitting here with you.

HOGUE

Exactly.

ERICA

You're suspiciously confident for a freshman. Want to meet him?

HOGUE

Eating club guy?

ERICA

Todd. Ivy Club is having a recruiting event Saturday. I think you're more of a fit than you realize.

HOGUE

Is that a compliment?

ERICA

I don't know -- It's an old boy's club rife with sexism and racism. But they throw good parties.

INT. IVY CLUB - DAY

The male membership and their female guests pour into the 100 year old mansion. They wear seersucker blazers, argyle socks, knit ties. Dining tables are covered in white table cloths and porcelain. Servers greet guests with appetizers. This isn't a university dining hall, it's the Illuminati.

And Hogue can't believe he's invited. He stands out in his cowboy hat. He takes it off and hands it to a nearby BUTLER.

HOGUE

Thank you, Jeeves.

(to us)

I wish Erica had told me the dress code. What do they do at these things anyway? Blood oaths? Human sacrifice? Bestiality?

EXT. IVY CLUB - BACKYARD - DAY

Todd stands at the edge of the yard, addressing the party:

TODD

You all may not realize it, but you're witnessing a chapter of American history.

Hogue's denim blue cuts through a sea of boys in black wool.

TODD (cont'd)

The President of Morgan Stanley. Pulitzer Prize winners in journalism and fiction. The current Secretary of State. Two governors. The Head of the CIA. A Supreme Court Justice. An American President. All those men began *here*

(MORE)



TODD (cont'd)  
as members of Princeton's oldest  
student society: The Ivy Club.

HOGUE  
(to us)  
*Christ.* I wish I was watching  
someone fuck a goat right now.

TODD  
After one of our most competitive  
fall bickers, I'm proud to say that  
we found 10 young men who will be  
the future of America. Please give  
them a round of applause.

Everyone besides Hogue claps. He looks across the room --

Erica claps in support of Todd. Todd shakes the hands of the  
new members. But more bizarrely, he also pinches their asses  
in a brazen act of obscene humiliation.

Erica looks at Hogue. He makes a "blow my fucking brains  
out" motion. She quietly snickers.

INT. IVY CLUB - DINING ROOM - DAY

Hogue and the rest of the party is now inside, nibbling  
appetizers while mingling.

ERICA  
What did you think?

HOGUE  
You really think I belong here?

ERICA  
If I had a dick I'd be a member.

HOGUE  
Really?

ERICA  
I'd like to see their starting  
salaries compared to mine.

HOGUE  
Probably have to do some things you  
don't want to though.

ERICA  
You're as naive about women as you  
are drugs if you think I don't do  
that already...

Todd finishes glad-handing with some nearby people before approaching Erica and Hogue.

TODD  
Hey sweetheart.

He kisses Erica on the cheek, then smiles at Hogue.

TODD (cont'd)  
Alexi! Glad you could make it!

Todd shakes his hand -- a charming prick.

HOGUE  
Thank you for having me, Todd.  
Congratulations on the new members.

TODD  
Eh -- they suck.

HOGUE  
Oh.

TODD  
The bar is serving Sazeracs. You  
want a Sazerac, Alexi?

HOGUE  
Um, no thank you?

TODD  
I respect that. You're a runner,  
right? In season, no drinking. No  
excuse for these guys though:

Scan the room of 20 year olds wearing unfit blazers and sipping from beer cans, absolutely ecstatic to be here.

TODD (cont'd)  
Can get a nice cocktail and they go  
with Schlitz. For fuck's sake...  
(to Erica)  
Good thing we're graduating.

Erica just smirks and shakes her head -- she's used to this.

TODD (cont'd)  
(to Hogue)  
Not you, though! The prodigal  
freshman, here to save Princeton  
from its rapidly declining  
standards!

ERICA

He says he's just here to watch.

TODD

What!? Did you try to convince him?

ERICA

I told him I'd join if you let me.

TODD

Hey. I don't make the rules. I'd happily let you in over any of these morons! But until the board changes its mind --

ERICA

Or the University finds the club in violation of its discrimination policy.

TODD

Orrrrr until the University grows the balls to enforce its rules, I'd love to persuade Alexi to join.

HOGUE (V.O.)

Todd's charm is like the gravitational pull of the Sun. You can't fight it, even when you know you're gonna get burned.

INT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - DINING HALL - DAY

David, Trevor and Harris eat university slop under fluorescent lights, a fourth chair at their table empty.

DAVID

Where's Alexi?

INT. IVY CLUB - DINING ROOM - DAY

Hogue sets down a plate of steak and veggies and takes a seat with Todd & Erica at the end of an oakwood table, sunlight painting the room like a Rockwell painting.

HOGUE (V.O.)

Todd's been inviting me to the Ivy Club with him and Erica.

They look like they're having a grand old time, chatting and laughing. When an Ivy Club member tries to join, Todd shoos him away with a cold glare.

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 He's trying to recruit me. I still  
 haven't changed my mind, but when  
 you're in college you'll do  
 anything for a free meal.

INT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - PALMER STADIUM - DAY

Hogue sits with Erica and Todd, watching the Princeton Tigers football team beat the Harvard Crimson. The Princeton stands erupt, Todd the most enthusiastic of them all. He leaps all over Erica & Hogue, screaming and cheering. Hogue starts to warm: He might like this guy.

INT. LOCAL MEN'S SHOP - DAY

ERICA  
 Ditch the hat. Doesn't suit you.

Erica is giving Hogue a makeover he doesn't want. Todd brings over a linen blazer as an option:

TODD  
 How 'bout this?

HOGUE  
 I'm not going to wear any of this!

ERICA  
 Alexi, you're not meeting John  
 Wayne. It's Jimmy Stewart.

EXT. IVY CLUB - BACKYARD - DAY

A fundraiser, current and past Ivy Club members in attendance including the man of the hour. American everyman, star of classics like *Rear Window* and *It's a Wonderful Life*:

TODD  
 Mr. Stewart, I'd like you to meet a  
 prospective member: my friend,  
 Alexi Indris-Santana.

81 year-old JIMMY STEWART, still sharp and charming as ever, shakes Hogue's hand, Hogue in that linen blazer now.

JIMMY STEWART  
 Wow, that's quite the name!

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 I'm learning from Todd, too.

Hogue follows Todd as he chats with alum. They're here to offer Todd donations for Ivy Club (and perhaps a job for him too). Todd wears a bullshit smile, gives them bullshit praise, laughs at their bullshit jokes.

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)

You come to Princeton to learn from the best. Well here they are: a factory for America's future fraudsters.

Hogue watches Todd with a caution but also admiration. Then he turns from Todd and the well-heeled alum they're speaking to and sees Erica, alone. She's who Hogue truly admires.

INT. IVY CLUB - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Far less wholesome than a Rockwell now. Liquor sticks to the wood floors. Synth pop bounces off the walls. Guys shouting, girls wooing. Hogue in the middle, screaming over the chaos:

HOGUE

(to us)

Erica wasn't lying either!!! These assholes throw a mean party!!!

Todd shoves a keg valve into Hogue's chest and Erica shouts:

ERICA

You're up!

Before Hogue can protest, his legs go straight into the air. Hogue performs a keg stand while the party cheers him on.

EXT. IVY CLUB - BACKYARD - NIGHT

TODD

Use this hose and lasso Ron! Ron!  
You're a pig, Ron! Run like a pig!

Hammered, Todd is urging Hogue to turn a garden hose into a lasso and wrangle one of the Ivy Club members, who obligingly runs around on all fours and squeals like swine.

TODD (cont'd)

C'mon, Alexi!

People laugh and urge Hogue on. Hogue stares down at the hose, unsure what to do -- he has never wrangled shit. Todd watches closely. Erica also watches, interpreting his confusion for not wanting to participate in this nonsense.

HOGUE  
 (to Todd)  
 Not tonight, man. I'm too drunk...

TODD  
*What!?*

HOGUE  
 I'm too drunk! C'mon!

The crowd sighs but returns to drunken revelry. Hogue and Erica laugh, urging Todd to do the same. We briefly register Todd's disappointment: Is he upset with Hogue? Distrustful?

Todd shakes it off with a smirk though, putting an arm around Hogue and Erica. What follows is a DRUNKEN MONTAGE: The threesome dancing. Hogue high-fiving people. Hogue throwing back more beers. More shots. SMASH CUT TO --

INT. ATHLETIC TRAINING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON the ice bath: Still water broken by Hogue, rising like a hungover creature of the black lagoon. CUT TO --

A TRAINING TABLE. An ATHLETIC TRAINER inspects Hogue's knee.

ATHLETIC TRAINER  
 How's that feel?

HOGUE  
 Still hurts, but a little better.

ATHLETIC TRAINER  
 Gotta rehab for a few more weeks.

INT. ATHLETIC HALLWAY - DAY

Sopping wet and his injured right knee bandaged, Hogue walks from the training room to the locker room when he sees --

The Men's Varsity Cross Country Team. They're in their Princeton track suits, packed bags slung over their backs. They've just returned from conference championships. Judging by the somber body language, it didn't go well.

INT. MEN'S TRACK LOCKER ROOM - DAY

David, Trevor, Harris and the rest of the team sits silently in front of their lockers while Burke angrily changes out of his team sweats and puts on clean running clothes.

DAVID  
Burke, what're you doing man?

Burke ignores him and ties his running shoes. Harris watches Burke's theatrics and it makes him even more depressed.

HARRIS  
Guys, I'm sorry for falling so far back. I don't know what --

HOGUE  
No. I'm sorry. I should have --

Burke slams his locker. Pissed off, he turns to Hogue.

BURKE  
(long, angry beat)  
How's cross-country scored, Alexi?

Hogue is silent.

BURKE (cont'd)  
You don't know?

HOGUE  
Top five on a team add up their places. Lowest score wins.

BURKE  
Which means every runner has to be at his best in order to win. But you? You couldn't even show up.

DAVID  
*He's injured.*

BURKE  
He found time to party at Ivy while we were gone. You didn't know I knew that, did you Alexi?

Caught red-handed. Hogue is genuinely embarrassed.

BURKE (cont'd)  
I don't like you, not because you want to beat me. I don't like you because you're unreliable. You're an impediment to yourself and thereby to our team. So shut up and save us the excuses. It's most honest thing you can say.

Burke storms out.

DAVID  
 Nobody listen to that shit, he's  
 insane. Alexi... Alexi.

But Hogue is quiet, ashamed he let his teammates down.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY QUAD - DAY

Fall leaves arrive just in time to beautify the campus for Parents Week. Doting moms and dads shower their child with attention. Everyone walks toward a stage in the middle of the quad. Standing out are Hogue and Erica, parentless.

ERICA  
 I'm so excited for you.

HOGUE  
 You know what this is about?

ERICA  
 I was sworn to secrecy.

A speaker wraps up. Then Princeton's President HAROLD SHAPIRO walks to the microphone.

PRESIDENT SHAPIRO  
 Next, I'd like to invite up Todd Randolph, president of Princeton's oldest student society, the prestigious Ivy Club.

Claps as Todd comes onto stage and shakes the Dean's hand.

TODD  
 Thank you, President Shapiro. Hi everyone. I'm actually up here to speak about another student, Alexi Indris-Santana. Alexi, you here?

Not sure what is going on, Hogue waves from the crowd.

TODD (cont'd)  
 I've been fortunate to become friends with Alexi since he arrived. Now it's Parents Week but Alexi has no surviving parent. He actually had to defer enrollment to take care of his dying mother.

Parents and students direct sympathy toward Hogue. Hogue looks at us, though -- what is this?



TODD (cont'd)

That's not the only exceptional thing about Alexi. He never attended high school. Instead he worked on a ranch in Utah, where he educated himself after 14 hour days. And yet despite these limitations, he earned his way to an academic scholarship at Princeton, where he is also a star member of our cross-country team. As those who know him can attest, Alexi represents the grit and determination of our student body.

Todd reaches into his pocket and pulls out an envelope.

TODD (cont'd)

The Ivy Club wanted to do something special for Alexi on Parents Week. While Alexi's parents are no longer with us, he does have a father figure. That was the rancher who kindly took him in, Mr. Oswald -- A man who unselfishly raised a boy who wasn't his own. So...

Todd unveils what's inside: Airline boarding passes.

TODD (cont'd)

We've organized an all-expense paid trip for Mr. Oswald to come visit Alexi this weekend.

Oh. No. Hogue's jaw drops in horror. Erica and everyone else interprets that as shock from Todd's generosity.

TODD (cont'd)

Alexi, please tell Mr. Oswald to pack his bags. Because The Ivy Club and Princeton University are excited to meet him!

Todd grins at Hogue. Is this a genuine act of kindness or a power play? Unsure, Hogue feigns appreciation as he worries:

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - DAY

HOGUE

(to us)

*He's onto me.*

Panicked, Hogue opens a drawer and takes out a cigarette box. He dumps its contents: Credit cards, social security card, driver's license, all to *James A. Hogue*.

He cuts them into pieces, then throws the cards into a trash bin. He lights a match and sets the trash on fire. However, it sparks like a box of fireworks:

HOGUE (cont'd)  
Shit. *SHIT!*

He tries blowing out the massive flame: No go. He's about to stomp on it but thinks twice. He grabs a water bottle and pours it over until it steams out. He exhales relief.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
(to us)  
He wants me to say Oswald can't make it. That'll confirm his suspicions. But what else do I do? I can confess. I can leave town. Or Christ, I don't know -- I can hire a fucking actor to be Oswald!

He meant the last part sarcastically, but he stops: an idea.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY SKYLINE - DAY

The Big Apple. Broadway. New York's allure shines across the Hudson. But we're not going there. PAN AROUND TO --

A shanty warehouse with a janky sign: *Jersey City Playhouse*.

INT. JERSEY CITY PLAYHOUSE - DAY

CLOSE ON the newspaper ad where Hogue found this show: *American Buffalo, Starring Waldorf Ellicott*. It has no artwork, only a headshot of its aforementioned star.

Hogue looks up toward the stage at WALDORF ELLICOTT: star, director & producer of this sorry production. Hogue is only one of three people watching. Neither Waldorf nor his CO-STAR are any good, but at least Waldorf has an Orson Welles quality about him -- a rotund man with a baritone voice.

WALDORF  
"What's what?"

CO-STAR  
"That."

WALDORF  
"This gun?"

CO-STAR  
"Yes."

WALDORF  
"What does it look like...?"

CO-STAR  
"A, a, a gun."

WALDORF  
"Don...  
(unnecessary beat)  
IT IS A GUN!"

This is awful.

EXT. JERSEY CITY PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Waldorf locks up and walks toward the bus stop when:

HOGUE  
Good show tonight.

Waldorf turns around. Hogue is waiting post-show.

WALDORF  
(beat)  
Fuck you.

That catches Hogue by surprise.

WALDORF (cont'd)  
Where are you coming from?  
Roundabout? York? Atlantic?

HOGUE  
Come again?

WALDORF  
You Manhattan understudies love  
crossing the river to watch my  
shows, eat my concessions and take  
A GIANT SHIT ON MY WORK! But most  
pay, laugh to themselves, leave me  
be. Never has one had the audacity  
to insult me to my face afterwards.

HOGUE  
Hey man, I think --

WALDORF

I was an understudy once. Othello, Olivier, 1961, Broadway. True story. So is this: The producer asked me to suck his cock. I said why don't I do him one better and impregnate his wife instead? He blacklisted me. So I hope you lack self-respect, otherwise you'll be in my moccasins in no time.

HOGUE

There's been a misunderstanding:  
I'm not an actor.

INT. JERSEY CITY DINER - NIGHT

A tin wagon overlooking the Hudson. Hogue and Waldorf sit in a booth with a mug of coffee. Waldorf lights a cigarette.

WALDORF

Sorry about earlier. I can be a bit sensitive about my work.

HOGUE

Not at all. You work hard -- want to be properly appreciated.

WALDORF

Precisely.  
(re: cigarette)  
Would you like one?

HOGUE

No thanks. I'm a runner.

WALDORF

Runner from what? Mortality?  
Abusive household?

HOGUE

Long-distance runner. At Princeton.

WALDORF

You're a university student?

HOGUE

Yes.

WALDORF

Seem a bit old to be in school.  
What's a Princeton long-distance runner watching local theater for?

HOGUE  
Merely a fan.

WALDORF  
You mustn't lie to me. My nose  
takes to lies like a dog's to piss.

HOGUE  
(changing the topic)  
Waldorf Ellicott. Real name?

WALDORF  
It's the name I reply to.

HOGUE  
Not a stage name?

WALDORF  
When I worked with Cary Grant, I  
didn't call him Archibald Leach. He  
was Mr. Grant, or simply Cary.

HOGUE  
Did you really work with Cary Grant  
and Laurence Olivier?

WALDORF  
Yes and I don't appreciate you  
implying the contrary. I worked  
with a young Gene & Dustin too  
before they became Hackman and  
Hoffman. All before the  
aforementioned conspiracy to  
blacklist me sent me spiraling into  
addiction and robbed me of my  
prime. Is that enough fact-  
verification for you?

Hogue's touched a nerve. He backs off.

WALDORF (cont'd)  
How about you? What's your name?

HOGUE  
Alexi.

WALDORF  
That's a gay old name. Alexi what?

HOGUE  
Indris-Santana.

WALDORF  
 (bellows with laughter)  
 What kind of alphabet soup is that?  
 Was your mother high on ayahuasca?

HOGUE  
 It's Peruvian.

WALDORF  
 Are you going to tell me your pasty  
 complexion is Latin American too?  
 Princeton long-distance runner,  
 high-plains drifter, Moses of the  
 Peruvian Empire. Which one?

HOGUE  
 Which one what?

WALDORF  
 Are you?

Hogue's fraudulent backstory isn't holding water for  
 Waldorf. He's more clever than his bad acting suggests.

WALDORF (cont'd)  
 Alexi, I appreciate the joe and the  
 company. But while my latest  
 production is admittedly worthless,  
 don't let it convince you that I  
 don't value my time.

Hogue hesitates before spitting this out:

HOGUE  
 I wasn't watching your play as a  
 fan. I'm casting for a part. A  
 unique part. My name is Alexi and I  
 am a student at Princeton. I never  
 went to high school. Before I came  
 to Princeton, I worked on a ranch  
 in Utah for a man named Mr. Oswalt.  
 (beat)  
 But my name is also James from  
 Texas. I've never worked on a  
 ranch. People I go to school with  
 are expecting to meet Mr. Oswalt.  
 But I've never met Mr. Oswalt.

Is Waldorf following any of this? It's a lot.

WALDORF  
 (beat)  
 I take it that perhaps I can be  
 your Mr. Oswalt then?

Yeah, he gets it. And he admires the audacity.

HOGUE

Between academic scholarships and federal grants, my tuition is fully covered. I'd be willing to pay you five thousand to preserve that.

WALDORF

(beat)  
So what's the job?

As Hogue explains, we see his imagined heist laid out --

INT. JERSEY CITY PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Hogue directs Waldorf on how to be Mr. Oswalt: Speech. Mannerisms. Gait.

HOGUE (V.O.)

A parent week event. Basic meet & greet. You'll be meeting the Dean. Students. Faculty. Other parents.

INT. THRIFT SHOP - DAY

Hogue dresses Waldorf for the part, swapping his bohemian scarves and overcoats for denim and plaid.

HOGUE (V.O.)

The event is tomorrow.

WALDORF (V.O.)

*Tomorrow?* That's not a lot of time.

HOGUE

Well I don't much prefer it either. But do you want five grand or not?

INT. NEWARK AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CLAIM - DAY

Dressed normally, Waldorf carries a duffel bag and struts past security into the terminal (it's 1989, mind you).

HOGUE (V.O.)

You'll be picked up at Newark. The moment you're greeted, you must remain in character.

HOLD THE SHOT. A mere beat passes before Waldorf comes back out dressed as "Mr. Oswalt." He's greeted by Todd & Erica.

INT. ERICA'S CAR - DAY

I-95 toward Princeton. Erica drives, Todd shotgun, "Mr. Oswald" in back.

HOGUE (V.O.)

The guy picking you up is named  
Todd Randolph. He's going to ask a  
lot of questions.

TODD

(to Waldorf)

So Mr. Oswald, how did you meet  
Alexi?

As Waldorf answers:

HOGUE (V.O.)

It's crucial your answers line up  
with the backstory I've created.  
Any inconsistencies and I'm fucked.

EXT. HOLDER HALL - DAY

President Shapiro, Princeton's faculty and its student body  
wait with "Alexi" when Erica's car pulls up.

HOGUE (V.O.)

Once you arrive on campus, we need  
to act like long-lost family.

The car door opens and Waldorf steps out.

HOGUE

Papa!

Hogue & Waldorf embrace while the everyone awwws.

INT. IVY CLUB - DAY

People circle "Alexi" and "Mr. Oswald", eager to talk.

HOGUE (V.O.)

Then regale parents & faculty with  
tales of our days on the farm. Have  
a dinner. Give a toast.

Waldorf raises his glass to the crowd:



WALDORF  
 (country accent)  
 Everyone: I just want to say thank  
 y'all for your generosity.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 After, I pay you and we never see  
 each other again. Simple as that.

BACK TO:

INT. THRIFT SHOP - NIGHT

Reality. Hogue collects clothes for Waldorf walk to try on.

WALDORF  
 So what's Oswalt's backstory?

HOGUE  
 I've never given it any thought.  
 Until yesterday, he was just a  
 character in an admissions essay.

CUT TO:

THE DRESSING ROOMS

Hogue waits for Waldorf, changing behind a curtain.

WALDORF (O.S.)  
 Well let's start with basics: First  
 name? I like Gustav.

HOGUE  
 He's a rancher from Utah -- he's  
 not a Gustav.

WALDORF (O.S.)  
 You're an Alexi.

HOGUE  
 I made my name ethnically ambiguous  
 so I wasn't lumped with the other  
 white kids. Yours needs to be white  
 as snow. Like Hunter.

WALDORF (O.S.)  
 Fine. How about Dustin? After my  
 impish Broadway rival.

HOGUE  
 That works, I guess.

WALDORF (O.S.)  
 Dustin Oswalt of the Oswalt clan.  
 Great grandfather came from Vermont  
 to Utah with his three wives and  
 their fellow persecuted Mormons --

Waldorf opens the curtain: He looks like Randy Jones of the Village People, a pair of jeans tightly gripping his legs.

HOGUE  
*Jesus.*

WALDORF  
 What? No good?

HOGUE  
 You can't wear those while talking  
 about teen brides tag-teaming your  
 granddad.

WALDORF  
 I'm trying to root this in some  
 authenticity!

HOGUE  
 You're a recovering addict, right?  
 What if Mr. Oswalt was an addict  
 who found sobriety and purpose on  
 the plains of Utah?

WALDORF  
 (beat)  
 That's good.

HOGUE  
 I've done this before.

INT. JERSEY CITY PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Now alone on the stage of Waldorf's theater. Waldorf is looking a little more the part in a brown sheepskin coat.

WALDORF  
 Tell me what you think of this:

Waldorf walks with a stick up his ass and stops in front of Hogue, like a child seeking approval. Appalled:

HOGUE  
 What was that?

WALDORF  
 It's how Dusty walks!

HOGUE  
Who the fuck is Dusty?

WALDORF  
Dustin!!!

HOGUE  
God damn it, stop improvising!

WALDORF  
Jamesy Boy, with 24 hours notice  
you're going to have to let me  
color outside the lines a bit.

HOGUE  
Just follow my lead, if that's OK?

WALDORF  
(beat)  
Riding for the brand.

HOGUE  
What?

WALDORF  
It's the cowboy honor system. Means  
loyalty to the ranch.

HOGUE  
OK?

WALDORF  
Seeing that I'm Mr. Oswald, owner  
of the Lazy T Ranch, it makes you,  
Alexi Santana, my loyal ranch hand  
conditioned to follow *my* lead.

Hogue, caught off-guard by Waldorf's show of intelligence:

HOGUE  
Cowboys are more naive than they  
let on, I suppose.

INT./EXT. HOGUE'S CAR / WALDORF'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Hogue drops Waldorf off at his ramshackle Jersey apartment.

HOGUE  
I'll pick you up at 10 AM. Airport  
pick up is at 11.

WALDORF  
Sure thing, Jamesy Boy.

HOGUE  
And stop calling me that. Don't  
need you slipping up tomorrow.

WALDORF  
Relax, *Alexi*.

INT. WITHERSPOON GRILL - NIGHT

A local Princeton steakhouse. Hogue sits with David and his  
mother (MRS. LYNN) for dinner.

HOGUE  
Thank you so much for taking me  
out, Mrs. Lynn.

MRS. LYNN  
Of course! I remember when David  
was a freshman. He cried and cried  
until his momma finally visited.

She gives a wink to David.

DAVID  
She's kidding...

MRS. LYNN  
He's right. I only visited to see  
Sandra Day O'Connor speak. But a  
mother's touch is always nice.

DAVID  
You excited to see Mr. Oswald?

HOGUE  
(under breath)  
If you like watching trainwrecks...

DAVID  
What?

HOGUE  
Yes! Very excited.

EXT. WALDORF'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Hogue -- disguised in street clothes -- waits for Waldorf.  
He checks his running watch: *10:12 AM*.

HOGUE  
 (to us)  
*Fuck*: He's late. I should've just  
 hired a birthday clown.

INT. WALDORF'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Hogue looks at the directory board: *Ellicott, Steve - 3B*

HOGUE  
*Steve*. Pretentious prick.

CUT TO:

APARTMENT 3B. Hogue knocks on the door. No answer. Tries again. Nothing. He then tries the knob: It's unlocked.

INT. WALDORF'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

A dimly lit studio. The sounds of an alarm clock ring off the walls, yet Waldorf is still passed out in bed.

HOGUE  
*Waldorf*. Waldorf! STEVE!

Waldorf leaps awake, drowsily realizing Hogue is there.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
 God damn it, we're running late!

INT. HOGUE'S CAR - I-78 - DAY

Speeding across Newark Bay --

HOGUE  
 I should dock your pay, Steve!

WALDORF  
 I hate that name!

HOGUE  
 Then stop calling me Jamesy Boy!

INT. NEWARK AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CLAIM - DAY

Duffel bag of clothes in hand, Hogue briskly escorts Waldorf inside the airport. He looks across at the WAITING AREA --

And sees Todd & Erica already there. He sulks out of view.

INT. NEWARK AIRPORT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

They rush inside. Hogue tries to follow Waldorf into the handicap stall but Waldorf shoves him away --

WALDORF  
I'm not an invalid!

INT. NEWARK AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CLAIM - CONTINUOUS

So Hogue turns away from Erica & Todd as he leaves.

INT. NEWARK AIRPORT - TERMINAL - CONTINUOUS

Waldorf exits the bathroom, now dressed as Mr. Oswald: Sheepskin coat, corduroy pants, cowboy boots. He's visibly wracked with nerves as he walks toward baggage claim. His eyes jitter about until they land on something:

The DUTY-FREE STORE, its shelves stocked with alcohol.

INT. NEWARK AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CLAIM - DAY

Erica & Todd hold a sign that says, "Mr. Oswald."

ERICA  
Where do you think Alexi was? I thought he'd want to be here.

TODD  
Maybe he doesn't think Oswald will show up...

ERICA  
What makes you say that?

TODD  
I don't know -- a hunch.

ERICA  
Well your intuition is off --

DOWN THE TUNNEL:

Waldorf bounces off the walls like a pinball. He tries to compose himself when he reaches:

ERICA (cont'd)  
Mr. Oswald?

WALDORF  
 Yep. That's me.

Off Todd, shocked to find Mr. Oswalt in the flesh.

EXT. INTERSTATE-95 SOUTH - DAY

Hogue's car races past a sign: *Princeton - 40 miles*

INT. HOGUE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

HOGUE  
 (to us)  
 The 1500 begins with a 100 meter  
 sprint into the first turn. You  
 gotta get out fast or else you'll  
 get tangled with the pack. We did  
not get out fast. *But that's OK...*

Yet Hogue doesn't seem so sure.

INT. ERICA'S CAR - DAY

Erica drives, Todd shotgun, Waldorf passed out in back.

ERICA  
 He's drunk as hell.

TODD  
 He's a farmer. That's what they do.

ERICA  
*Todd.* He can't go onstage.

TODD  
*Erica.* Why do you think the  
 university flew this guy out? It's  
 a publicity stunt. The only thing  
 he has to do is go on stage.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - PARKING LOT - DAY

Hogue screeches to a stop and runs out of the car --

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He locks the door behind him and strips out of his street  
 attire, getting into Alexi's cowboy costume.

INT. IVY CLUB - BEDROOM - DAY

Waldorf slouches in a chair, drinking water and trying to sober up. OUTSIDE is a donor event for the university. Esteemed guests mingle. Photographers roam.

PRESIDENT SHAPIRO  
This is a disaster. He arrived like this!? And where's Alexi!?

TODD  
Nobody can find him.

PRESIDENT SHAPIRO  
Well we can't wait any longer!

Off Erica, silently protesting Waldorf's participation:

EXT. IVY CLUB - BACKYARD - DAY

Hogue finally arrives, his poncho and jeans a sharp contrast to the business casual dress code. He peers across the room:

Erica & Todd chat with President Shapiro and others. Todd makes eye contact with Hogue before Erica comes over:

ERICA  
Where were you this morning?

HOGUE  
Sorry -- was rehabbing my knee.

ERICA  
Mr. Oswald was really drunk when we picked him up. Is he an alcoholic?

*Fuck.* Hogue scans the room and sees Waldorf barely holding his own with a MOM & DAD. Hogue walks over.

PRINCETON MOM  
(to Waldorf)  
And this is him?

WALDORF  
Yup, it's him. It's Ja-

HOGUE  
*It's Alexi!*

Hogue gives Waldorf a cutting look: *Sober the fuck up.*



PRINCETON MOM

Now do you refer to each other as  
father & son? Or --

HOGUE

No, he would've made me sleep with  
the cows if I ever called him Dad.  
Ain't that right, Mr. Oswald?

WALDORF

Yeah... cows.

PRINCETON DAD

(to Waldorf)

You still must be proud though. Our  
son would've gone to state school  
if I didn't golf with the Dean.

Before Waldorf can answer:

TODD (O.S.)

Everyone:

All eyes turn to Todd at a nearby podium.

TODD

Thank you so much for accompanying  
your sons to our fundraiser. It's  
been an honor meeting you all. It's  
also an honor having two special  
guests with us this afternoon. If  
you haven't met Alexi, please do.  
He's a truly unique individual.

Hogue is uneasy. He doesn't know where this is going.

TODD (cont'd)

I'd invite him to speak but this is  
Parents Week. Along with the  
University, Ivy Club invited  
Hogue's surrogate father figure to  
join us today. So Alexi, Mr.  
Oswald, can you two come up please?

Waldorf turns to Hogue, horrified at the prospect of going  
on stage. He shakes his head mercifully, begging not to go.

TODD (cont'd)

Come on, guys! Don't be shy!

Hogue leads the way, Waldorf a few steps behind. Hogue goes  
up and tries to take the mic but Todd brushes him aside.

TODD (cont'd)  
 Mr. Oswalt, you're our guest of honor: We'd love to hear how you feel about Alexi coming to Princeton. *Please.*

In the audience, Erica doesn't understand why Todd wants Waldorf to speak: They all know how drunk the poor man is.

But Hogue isn't exasperated. He knows what this is: Checkmate. Game over. Todd's beat him, lean at the finish.

Waldorf wobbles to the mic, clumsily bumping it and sending a screeching noise across the room. Waldorf's look to Hogue says it all: *Sorry, Jamesy Boy.* Hogue shrugs: *Oh well.*

Waldorf takes a moment. A deep breath. Then:

WALDORF  
 (perfect Southern accent)  
 First, thanks so much to the Ivy Club, Dean Shapiro and the University for having me today.

Hogue looks at us: *What the fuck?* Utter disbelief as:

WALDORF (cont'd)  
 Umm, when Alexi told me he was leaving my ranch to come to Princeton, I thought he was joking. Seriously. This boy hadn't seen a classroom since he was 14. Alexi's dad and I go back. When his dad died, Alexi -- with nowhere to go -- ended up with me. He was devastated, so when he told me he didn't want to go to school, I didn't push him. I never graduated neither and besides, I could use the help. So we'd work all day and then at night, I never knew what the boy was doing. Figured he was doing what I was at his age: sneaking out and talking to girls.

That gets a laugh from the crowd, much to Todd's dismay.

WALDORF (cont'd)  
 I remember: We was tagging some new cows when he says, "Mr. Oswalt: I appreciate all you've done for me. But I've decided that in the fall, I'll be attending Princeton University." Just like that. And  
 (MORE)

WALDORF (cont'd)

God, I just said, "Boy, stop lying and take these sows to pasture!" But he reached into his pocket, pulled out the acceptance letter and handed it to me. I was *floored*.  
(emotional beat)

I don't know much about being a dad. Calling me Alexi's father figure is an overstatement. I was his boss. I'm his friend. But where I'm from, we do know a thing or two about pulling yourself up by the boot straps. And I can't think of a finer example of that than Alexi.

*The crowd applauds.* Hogue is hit in the gut by that speech. For a moment, he almost forgets it is make-believe. And it's Todd who lost. He claps, masking his disdain and skepticism.

INT. WALDORF'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hogue's car pulls up to the front of Waldorf's apartment. Waldorf is still in his Oswalt outfit, nursing a hangover.

WALDORF

Do you need the clothes back?

HOGUE

No. I'll mail you a check tomorrow.

WALDORF

Lovely. Well your secret's safe, Jamesy Boy.

With a tip of his hat, Waldorf gets out of the car.

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOME - NIGHT

Thanksgiving. Hogue & Erica join Professor Fishel & Eddie for a holiday meal. Fishel holds up her glass of wine.

PROFESSOR FISHEL

Erica -- my protege.

ERICA

Oh god, Deb --

PROFESSOR FISHEL

I have one last semester to convince you to abandon your pursuit of wealth & happiness and join me in academia.

ERICA  
You're selling me already...

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
But should I fail, just know: you  
are guaranteed success no matter  
what you choose.  
(to Hogue)  
Alexi: Our very own Horatio Alger.  
I'm happy to not only have you as a  
student, but a new friend. Thankful  
for you both.

ERICA  
Thanks Deb.

HOGUE  
Thank you, Professor.

INT. MEN'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Hogue ties his running shoes when David enters:

DAVID  
Wow! Are my eyes deceiving me!?

EXT. WEAVER FIELD - DUSK

Hogue and David do a light jog around the track.

CUT TO:

THE INFIELD. The two stretching while the sun sets.

DAVID  
Hey Alexi: I know it's been a rough  
start for you, but keep it up.  
We're lucky to have you.

As genuine as it gets. And Hogue genuinely appreciates it.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - PALMER STADIUM - DAY

Hogue & Erica walk quietly in the cold, their rapport now  
nonverbal. Hogue smirks at Erica. She catches it and smiles.

ERICA  
What?

HOGUE  
Nothing.

Before Erica can respond, they're swarmed by students  
heading toward the football stadium.

INT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - PALMER STADIUM - DAY

The clock hits 0:00. Princeton 35, Yale 27. The home crowd erupts, elated Princeton won. But something is different from the last time Hogue watched Princeton beat Harvard. While Hogue celebrates with Erica, he looks past her at Todd, malevolently staring at him...

INT. IVY CLUB - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A ruckus evening to celebrate Princeton's win. Hogue is drunk but he's not having as good a time as everyone else. Beer cup empty, he walks to THE KITCHEN when he hears:

ERICA (O.S.)  
Todd, you're not making sense!

She and Todd are mid-argument. Out of view, Hogue listens:

TODD  
Cowboy. Runner. Perfect SATs.

ERICA  
Is this why you made Oswalt talk?

TODD  
Who the fuck is this guy!?

ERICA  
He's Alexi!

TODD  
C'mon, you're not this stupid.

ERICA  
You're downright ugly when you're drunk...

Erica storms outside. Off Hogue, more suspicious than ever:

BACK TO THE PARTY

Hogue feels vulnerable -- drunk and half-heartedly chatting with people who don't notice his apprehension.

INT. IVY CLUB - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Hogue washes his hands and splashes his face, glancing at us through the mirror before exiting and running into Todd.

TODD  
Hey man: Can we talk?

INT. IVY CLUB - TODD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The master bedroom. A cross between frat and corporate boardroom. Hogue enters. Todd shuts the door. He's smashed.

HOGUE  
Everything all right?

TODD  
(beat)  
What's up with you and Erica?

HOGUE  
We're friends...

TODD  
Do you like her?

HOGUE  
What?

TODD  
You heard me.

HOGUE  
No, I don't like her. We're just friends through the Professor.

Todd stands tall against the smaller Hogue, blocking the exit. Uneasy, Hogue laughs to break the tension.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
I'm just a freshman, Todd. C'mon!

Hogue tries to walk out the room but Todd stops him.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
*What?*

TODD  
Don't fucking lie, Alexi...

That accusation makes Hogue defensive. Like he believes it:

HOGUE  
*I'm not a liar.*

Hogue tries to leave again but this time Todd shoves him. Hogue pushes back. Todd then grabs Hogue by the throat, his meaty paw wrapped around Hogue's skinny runner neck. Hogue knocks Todd's hand off his neck and throws him out of the way, sending Todd's drunk body crashing into a chair.

HOGUE (cont'd)

*Fuck.*

Hogue is upset with himself. Todd lies there, breathing heavily. Then through spittle, Todd quietly mutters:

TODD

...Hogue...

Hogue freezes and stares at us: What did Todd just call him?

Hogue turns and walks toward the drunken mess. He leans over Todd, wondering if he heard him correctly. But the only thing he hears are Todd's breaths. Hogue deliberates...

Then covers Todd's mouth. Todd struggles --

TODD (cont'd)

\*MMM\*

Hogue looks around and sees a nearby pillow. He grabs it and smothers Todd's face.

Todd's body starts to struggle, but Hogue is vigilant -- tightening his grasp atop Todd's face. The veins in Hogue's neck protrude as he holds on tight, all of his envy and disdain for rich punks like Todd pouring out.

Todd's feet kick against the wood floor. His fingers try to claw at Hogue's face. Hogue turns away.

Then Todd's limbs slowly go limp until they're lifeless.

Hogue lifts the pillow. Todd's eyes are an empty void. Hogue turns back to us, horrified. A long beat... then:

Hogue vomits all over the room and Todd's dead body. He's wiping his mouth when he hears footsteps outside. He sprints to the door as it starts to open. Hogue shuts it:

HOGUE

Sorry! Occupied!

FRAT BRO (O.C.)

Oh, right on bro!

Hogue looks at the destruction, unsure what to do. He looks at the window. Then he rips a sheet from off the bed.

EXT. IVY CLUB - NIGHT

Todd's mummified corpse falls out the second floor window onto the bushes below. Hogue then crashes and rolls after. He gets up, OK. He then pulls Todd's body out of the shrubs.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - TREES - NIGHT

Students sprint to the center of campus. In the nearby woods, Hogue struggles to drag Todd's body.

HOGUE

(to us)

It was either him or me. He left me no choice. And who's crying anyway? I just prevented a future of groped secretaries, drug-addled brats and your retirement fund getting pillaged by this pompous, thieving-

Hogue shuts up when a student passes. He then looks around: Coast is clear. He nervously glance at us before continuing.

EXT. CARNEGIE LAKE - NIGHT

A flickering bonfire can be seen on campus in the distance. Hogue steps out from the trees with Todd's corpse. He unwraps the body and rolls it into the lake. Hogue watches as Todd floats away before sinking beneath the surface.

Hogue looks at us, at a loss for words.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY QUAD - NIGHT

Bonfire is underway. It burns 30 feet high, apocalyptic in scale. Students savagely throw in arbitrary belongings. Hogue walks toward the fire, the dirty sheet crumpled in his hand. He stops and watches the flame, then looks around --

Students shout and laugh. They dance. They watch in awe. No one notices Hogue, the interloper.

He looks at the sheet. At its streaks of blood. He doesn't try to hide it -- everyone is too busy to notice anyway.

He then walks to the bonfire and chucks the sheet into the fire, watching it burn as the flames dance along his face.

DISSOLVE TO:



EXT. WEAVER FIELD - DAY

Snowfall on Hogue, Trevor and Harris wearing tights, beanies and gloves, about to start their run.

HARRIS

First snow? I think Nude Olympics might be happening tonight then.

EXT. PRINCETON TRAILS - DAY

Hogue, Trevor and Harris jogging:

TREVOR

What's your plan for winter break? Do you just, like, go to the ranch?

HOGUE

Shit -- I haven't thought about it.

EXT. CARNEGIE LAKE - CONTINUOUS

The three come off the trail and to a halt when they see --

Police at the edge of the lake. Spectators watch as divers swim beneath the water. Trevor & Harris try to get a closer look. Hogue stays back with us: We know what this is about.

A body is carefully pulled out and covered.

INT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY QUAD - NIGHT

His Princeton track hoodie up like he's trying to hide, Hogue passes a student vigil for Todd. Candles lit as Hogue looks through the crowd for Erica. But she isn't there.

EXT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Hogue approaches the front door. But before knocking, he takes a breath, a beat, then knocks --

Professor Fishel answers, appreciative that he came. Behind her is an upset Erica, Eddie doing his best to console her. She sees Hogue. Hogue crosses the room and they hug.

EXT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Hogue and Erica sit alone on Fishel's back patio.

HOGUE  
I'm so sorry, Erica.

ERICA  
Last conversation Todd & I had was  
an argument...

Hogue glances at us: We know about they were arguing about.  
But he can't tell her that.

HOGUE  
Last thing I said to my dad before  
he passed was that I wanted to move  
back in with my mom. You don't plan  
for these things.

Erica smiles, appreciative for the advice.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
What did the police say?

ERICA  
They found him in the lake. They're  
still determining cause of death...

She pauses. Hogue watches her closely. Do they suspect it  
was him? Does she suspect it was him? A tense beat...

ERICA (cont'd)  
But they think it was probably an  
accident. Got drunk and wandered  
off. Fell in the lake and drowned.

*Phew.* Hogue is relieved, but must contain it. He leans on  
his Alexi-isms like a crutch.

HOGUE  
That is, *gosh*. Gosh, that is awful.

ERICA  
It doesn't matter the cause. It  
won't bring Todd back.  
(emotional - then)  
Hey Alexi: Thanks for coming. I  
know I can always count on you.

Hogue can see Erica's anguish and truly feels for her. He  
goes in to hug her. But then it dawns on him: Is he, dare we  
say, free? A weight has been lifted as he looks at us...

INT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY QUAD - NIGHT

HOGUE

(to us)

JAMES HOGUE IS DEAD! LONG LIVE  
ALEXI INDRIS-SANTANA!

Hogue sprints full tilt across campus, happy as can be.

EXT. HOLDER COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Dozens of students stand in the snow in only their underwear, looking at each other in silent anticipation of the annual tradition. Finally, one HOLDER STUDENT shouts:

HOLDER STUDENT

Let the Nude Olympics BEGIN!!!!

HOLDER RESIDENTS

WOOOOO!!!

The students strip naked and streak through the snow.

Hogue sees them up ahead and mad dashes toward the courtyard. Mid-stride, he clumsily rips off his clothes until he too is running ass naked through the snow.

He joins the party as students run, laugh, throw snowballs. Some cover private parts from the cold and others' gazes. And Hogue gallops about like a weight has been lifted.

EXT. HOLDER HALL - DAY

Fall semester is over. Hogue watches kids lug suitcases out to waiting cars, ready to take them home for the holidays. He waves goodbye, the only student left -- no home to go to.

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A New Year's Eve party. Fishel and Eddie wear matching ugly sweaters, hamming it up for guests. Hogue sips a glass of champagne and talks with a Princeton ACADEMIC and his WIFE.

ACADEMIC

Now you're from where?

HOGUE

Utah. Just outside St. George.

ACADEMIC'S WIFE

And you worked on a ranch?

HOGUE

Yes, mam.

ACADEMIC

Now look at you: an Ivy League man.

Hogue is caught aback by the remark. It's the first time he's heard such a compliment. He smiles appreciatively.

Hogue then turns to us. The lights dim. The Milli Vanilli hit 'Girl You Know It's True' begins to play. He starts with some elbow swinging. A bite of the lower lip. A bob of the head. His hips start sway. His legs jangle. Soon he weaves through the party, the only person dancing.

No one else notices. The room's attention is on Dick Clark from Times Square, counting down:

PARTY

10...9...

The ball slowly drops as Hogue still dances.

PARTY (cont'd)

2...1... HAPPY NEW YEAR!

1990 flashes in neon atop One Time Square. The party hugs and kisses one another while Hogue keeps grooving...

FADE TO BLACK

RADIO DJ (PRE-LAP)

This next song is 'Love Buzz' off the debut album from Nirvana. And you're listening to 92.7 WLIR.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY QUAD - DAY

90s grunge plays from a boombox, contrast to the 80s synth beat from a moment ago. Students have traded their preppy blazers for ripped jeans and flannel to mark the new decade. Erica and Hogue walk across the quad.

ERICA

You have anymore classes today?

HOGUE

Nope.

ERICA

(beat)

Want to hangout at my place?

## INT. ERICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Hogue looks at her bookshelf: Eclectic taste ranging from Joan Didion books to the Nina Simone record playing. He sees a photo of Erica and an older woman wearing a birthday hat. Erica lounges on the couch with a glass of red wine.

HOGUE

Who's this?

ERICA

My meema on her birthday.

HOGUE

How old is she?

ERICA

92.

HOGUE

Wow -- good genes.

ERICA

I know! When's your birthday?

HOGUE

March 1st.

ERICA

That's coming up!

HOGUE

Guess I haven't thought about it.

He looks at Erica on her couch, beautiful in just a hoodie. He'd like to kiss her but can't work up the courage.

HOGUE (cont'd)

(to us)

I can kill your piece of shit boyfriend but can't go in for a lousy kiss. *Ugh*. Chicken shit.

## INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The Millrose Games, track & field's biggest indoor meet. Hogue is in the middle of a 3K race and it's not going well, still out of shape from the injury. While he heaves, Burke, David and the other runners lap him. They cross the finish while Hogue must complete another humiliating 200 meter lap.

Hogue finally finishes, hands on his hips. He stands alone -- crushed and at a loss.

INT. PRINCETON LOCKER ROOM - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Alone, Hogue stares into the mirror. At his sinewy body. His long, stringy hair. Still unable to shake the shame.

HOGUE

(to us)

This has always been an evolutionary process. I think it's time to take Alexi to that next step.

Hogue then takes a pair of scissors to his long hair.

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Sporting a new Ivy League haircut, he roams his room with a trash bag in hand.

Poncho? Trash.

Cowboy hat? Garbage.

Southwestern blanket? Gone.

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - DAY (LATER)

Hogue stares at himself in the mirror: New hair, clean-shaven, an Oxford blue suit. He is almost unrecognizable. He adjusts his tie. Dusts his shoes. A new man.

INT. COACH ELLIS'S OFFICE - DAY

Coach Ellis sits at his desk, not pleased to listen to:

HOGUE

I've thought about it and I don't think my heart is in it anymore. So I'm quitting, Coach. I'm sorry.

COACH ELLIS

(beat)

Even though you seem like you've made up your mind, I don't believe you. You love running too much.

Hogue knows he's right but he won't admit it.

INT. HOLDER HALL - DAY

Trevor & Harris walk to their dorm when they hear commotion behind them: A pack of preps rush through carrying someone -- loud, unbridled testosterone. The two look out toward

THE COURTYARD:

PREPS

I-vy! I-vy!

The mystery person is revealed: It's Hogue, far from us. One of the preps pops open a bottle of champagne, spraying it on Hogue and the rest. Hogue beams. He then sees his confused ex-teammates. Hogue gives them (and us) a coy shrug.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - PROSPECT AVE. - DAY

Hogue walks with two Ivy Club members. He's chatting and laughing with them until he's surprised to see --

David. Running right towards him. That awkward moment when you see a former friend or lover, unsure what to say or do. Hogue is about to take a leap of faith and say *Hi* when --

David says nothing. Won't even look at him. Just jogs past.

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

The big classroom is empty, Erica grading papers at the front while Hogue hangs out with her.

ERICA

Almost done. Dinner after this?

HOGUE

Sure, but can we not do the dining hall? It's amazing how my appetite has changed since joining Ivy.

The remark annoys Erica but she doesn't want to fight.

ERICA

I hope your stomach can handle store-bought birthday cake then.

Hogue looks at Erica, quizzical.

ERICA (cont'd)  
 Saturday's March 1st -- your  
 birthday! You forget, old man? Deb  
 wants to do something for you.

Hogue smiles, though he doesn't seem as enthusiastic.

INT. IVY CLUB - NIGHT

It's a rager tonight. Music blares. Kegs in every corner. People grind and make out. Unbridled hedonism. And Hogue is at the center of it: dancing, taking shots. He struts around like John Wayne, quick-drawing finger guns and shooting Ivy members as they dramatically collapse to the ground.

The new Ivy Club President (BRADLEY) brings two girls over.

BRADLEY  
 Alexi! Tell these girls how fast  
 you can run a mile!

HOGUE  
 3:59!

THE GIRLS  
 Wow!

BRADLEY  
 I bet I could beat him in a sprint.

HOGUE  
 Wanna bet? I'll race you right now!

BRADLEY  
 We're both wearing fucking suits!

EXT. WEAVER FIELD - NIGHT

Hogue and Bradley sprint barefoot in their briefs around the moonlit track while others watch, cracking up. Hogue crosses the finish, basking in the adulation of strangers.

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A birthday cake with a big 2-0 sits untouched while Fishel and Erica wait for Hogue, Eddie asleep on the couch.

PROFESSOR FISHEL  
 I'm going to put Eddie to bed.

Off Erica, embarrassed and outraged by Hogue's no-show.



INT. IVY CLUB - DINING ROOM - DAY

Hard boiled eggs and fresh lox for breakfast today. Hogue and Bradley walk to the dining table and take a seat:

BRADLEY

That chick was so hot. You should've let me win that race.

HOGUE

Can't close the race, can't close the girl.

ERICA (O.S.)

*Alexi.*

They're surprised to see another girl in their boy's club.

ERICA

Can I speak with you in private?

Some scattered chuckles, Hogue embarrassed. Bradley stands:

BRADLEY

Erica, I'm sorry but you can't storm in here uninvited --

ERICA

Fuck off, *Bradley.*

HOGUE

It's OK, Bradley. I got this.

INT. IVY CLUB - BEDROOM

They enter an empty room. The same one Hogue killed Todd in.

HOGUE

I'm sorry for miss--

ERICA

*Don't.* New semester, new look, new friends, new you? What's the deal?

HOGUE

It's not like that.

ERICA

So tell me what it is.

HOGUE

Like I was saying, I'm sorry.

ERICA  
I thought Deb and I were your  
friends.

HOGUE  
You are!

ERICA  
So why didn't you show up for your  
own birthday party?

Hogue has no excuse to respond with.

ERICA (cont'd)  
*This:* This isn't you. What happened  
to the sweet farm boy everyone fell  
in love with?

The remark pisses Hogue off: Is she also incapable at looking past his bullshit and seeing the real Hogue? They're at a standstill, neither willing to budge. Realizing she's not going to get an answer out of him, Erica storms out.

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Hogue storms in, rips off his tie and angrily chucks it at the wall. We hear a ringing telephone through the wall:

STUDENT (O.S.)  
Alexi Santana!

INT. HOLDER HALL - HALLWAY - DAY

A STUDENT waits by the phone as Hogue takes it over.

HOGUE  
Erica? I'm sorry about --

WALDORF (V.O.)  
*Jamesy Boy.*

Hogue freezes when he hears that nickname. He looks around to make sure no one is listening, then whispers --

HOGUE  
Waldorf?

WALDORF (V.O.)  
I need your help. Can you meet me  
in the city?

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE MOTEL - NIGHT

It's raining on 1990 Manhattan. The Lower East Side is a dump. The motel we're looking at is even shittier. Hogue, black coat and tie, crosses the street and goes inside.

INT. LOWER EAST SIDE MOTEL - NIGHT

Hogue refers to a piece of paper in hand: 310. He looks for the room: 306, 308, 310. The door is already propped open.

INT. LOWER EAST SIDE MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

HOGUE

Waldorf?

The room is dark except for a beam of light that juts from behind the bed. Hogue follows it and finds Waldorf on the floor beside a tipped-over lamp, in a drug-induced haze.

HOGUE (cont'd)

Waldorf? My god.

WALDORF

Jamesy. You look different.

Hogue sees two heroin syringes on the floor. He tries to pull up the heavysset man.

HOGUE

Waldorf, we gotta get you help.

WALDORF

The money... I blew it.

HOGUE

It doesn't matter.

WALDORF

Eight years sober. Never more than a thousand dollars in the bank. Five grand and five months later, find my way back to the yak.

Hogue is finally able to get Waldorf onto the bed.

HOGUE

Do you have any relatives? Or friends? Someone to call.

WALDORF

Why'd you change?

HOGUE

The cowboy act was getting old.

WALDORF

No. Why'd you become Alexi?

Hogue stops. No one has been able to ask him that before.

WALDORF (cont'd)

Everything I did wrong was because I worried what others thought. Did drugs because it was cool. Changed my name because it was too bland. Quit acting professionally because people said I wasn't good enough. Don't be me. Just do what you love.

That resonates with Hogue. He watches Waldorf sob.

WALDORF (cont'd)

Look at me. A strung-out mess. Calling you to ask for money.

It then dawns on Hogue why Waldorf has called him.

WALDORF (cont'd)

I need more junk, James. Please. I feel like I'm dying.

He *is* dying. It's as clear as day to Hogue.

WALDORF (cont'd)

James, *I need more money. Or else I'll tell everyone.*

Waldorf regrets threatening Hogue but he can't help it. And Hogue hates being extorted. He feels cornered. He's worried that money might be the death knell for Waldorf. But ultimately, he's cares more about maintaining his cover.

HOGUE

(beat)

I can send you a check for a thousand more.

WALDORF

I'm sorry... I'm sorry.

Unable to bear it, Hogue leaves Waldorf.

WALDORF (cont'd)

I'm sorry, Jamesy Boy. *I'm sorry!*

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE MOTEL - NIGHT

As Hogue races away, he suppresses his own swelling emotion.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY TERMINAL - NIGHT

Hogue sits alone at a cold, wet bus stop.

HOGUE

(to us)

My master plan had a flaw. I was  
alone for so long: I didn't plan on  
making friends. Falling in love.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - NIGHT

Hogue's suit & tie is the only thing that separates him from the scattered nobodies riding this red eye bus to nowhere.

HOGUE (V.O.)

I've been James Hogue my whole  
life. Now I have to spend the rest  
of it as Alexi Santana. Who is he?  
How does he feel? What does he  
want? What will make him happy?

INT. COACH ELLIS OFFICE - DAY

Coach is meeting with David when they're interrupted by a knock. They look up, surprised to see Hogue. It's clear why he's there and they're happy to have him back.

EXT. ERICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Erica walks to her car, where she is surprised to see Hogue sitting on her car's back bumper. He stands upright.

ERICA

You're an asshole.

HOGUE

I know. I haven't been myself. And  
it's not you. Growing up with  
animals, I'm not great with...

Her attention drifts, waiting for the excuse to be over.

HOGUE (cont'd)

*Erica.*

(sincerely)

I know I can be difficult to understand, but I'm working on it and I'm really lucky to have you.

He's not sure what else to say, but it's enough: her guard is broken down.

ERICA

OK.

EXT. PROFESSOR FISHEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Fishel pulls into her driveway when she's surprised to see Hogue on her roof, repairing her long-broken A/C unit. He's even wearing a cowboy hat again. He tips his cap. She gets out and smirks: Apology accepted.

EXT. UPENN'S FRANKLIN FIELD - NIGHT

Penn Relays, the biggest track meet in the country. The stadium is teeming with athletes, coaches and enthusiasts.

The collegiate elite 5000m is up next. Hogue -- looking born to wear a Princeton singlet -- ties his spikes and joins the start. He looks down the line:

Wearing #1 is Bill Burke. He should be focused on his competitors. Burke smolders at Hogue instead.

The STARTER makes sure everyone is behind the line.

STARTER

This is race is 12.5 laps...

Standard issue procedure. These runners have heard it dozens of times before. Yet starting lines are always nerve-racking. 30 guys shoulder to shoulder, jockeying for position before the race has even begun.

The starter takes his position. The line gets still.

STARTER (cont'd)

On your mark. Get set...

Bang! Racers bunch at the turn. Hogue hangs off the back to avoid the chaos while Burke jumps into second place.

800 METERS: The clock reads 2:28. Hogue relaxed in the chase pack while Burke sits pretty in second.

1600 METERS: 4:52. Snail's pace for such elite company. Burke and the leaders escalate the pace, dropping the 25 other racers. Hogue leads the chase pack, 10 meters back.

2800 METERS: The chase pack reconnects with the leaders but Hogue hurts, beginning to feel the rust from his time away.

But he looks three runners ahead: Burke sits on the leader like predator on prey. Hogue can see Burke pulling wide, ready to make his move. This race is about to split open.

Hogue hustles into fifth, then third. Burke roars wide off the turn and takes the lead. He doesn't notice Hogue peeling into second after him as they come through --

3200 METERS: 9:20. 4:28 last mile and only getting faster.

DAVID  
GO BURKE! GO ALEXI!

Burke looks over his shoulder, surprised to see Hogue. He pushes the pace through the backstretch. From the stands, it looks like a show of strength.

But from Hogue's POV, it looks like something else: Burke is in pain. He made his move too soon.

The pace stagnates. It's still early, but Hogue decides to be bold: He moves wide to pass Burke.

The crowd roars, showering the freshman's audacity with praise. Burke tries to fight him off but lacks the fuel.

Hogue takes the lead with less than a mile to go.

Time moves slow. Hogue looks around and smiles mid-race: Coach, David, Trevor all fly by, cheering him on. People he doesn't even know cheer for him. He glides under the bright lights, his lead growing and growing. The taste of glory Hogue has longed for is finally here...

Until something catches his eye.

His smile vanishes. For a split second, we see what he sees as it passes: In the infield, a GIRL stands on the rail.

Hogue is perplexed. But why?

He comes through 3600 METERS: Three more laps to go. He glances at this girl from the corner of his eye --

Her sweatshirt says *Palo Alto High Track*. She stares at him in disbelief. He also can't believe it. He runs faster and faster, like a hamster on a wheel unable to get away:

4000: 11:27

4400: 12:29

4800: 13:31

She passes one, two, three more times:

-Girl.

-Palo Alto.

-Recognition.

Hogue crosses the finish and the stands erupt: Indris-Santana, Alexi - 1st Place, 13:58.32.

David and Trevor sprint onto the infield to congratulate him. But Hogue frantically walks toward the exit of the stadium. We chase after him. Hogue mutters manically, unclear if he's speaking to us or himself:

HOGUE

You idiot.... You *idiot!* No no no no. What have you done? What the fuck have you done...?

And with that, he walks away from us and out the stadium...

INT. TEAM BUS - NIGHT

The bus idles in the empty stadium parking lot. The team looks out the windows for Hogue, concerned:

COACH ELLIS

He didn't say where he was going?

TREVOR

I just assumed he was cooling down.

DAVID

How long ago was that now?

TREVOR

What, like two hours?

HARRIS

Hey! Is that him?

A silhouetted jogger is illuminated by the bus's headlights: It's Hogue. He climbs onto the bus and avoids eye contact:



HOGUE  
 (to Coach)  
 Sorry.

He sits at the back by himself. Everyone is worried, but he's OK at least. So they take their seats.

EXT. WEAVER FIELD - DAY

The team gathers for practice. David looks around:

DAVID  
 Harris, Trevor: you guys seen  
 Alexi?

Harris shakes his head. Trevor shrugs.

DAVID (cont'd)  
 Everyone! Do we have any idea  
 what's going on with Alexi?

But the team is silent: Nobody knows shit.

INT. PRINCETON CLASSROOM - DAY

Erica leaves class, surprised to see Trevor waiting.

ERICA  
 Trevor? Everything all right?

INT. HOLDER HALL HALLWAY - DAY

Erica knocks on Hogue's dorm room door.

ERICA  
 Alexi?  
 (nothing -- knocks again)  
 Alexi! If you're in there, please  
 open. Everyone is worried.

A beat. Finally, the door cracks open. Erica enters.

INT. HOGUE'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The shades are drawn. A morose Hogue sits across the room.

ERICA  
 What's going on?

HOGUE

I'm fine...

ERICA

No you're not. What's wrong?

HOGUE

Erica, nothing's wrong. I promise.

But he's lying. To her and to us.

ERICA

You can say whatever you want.

HOGUE

I don't know what you want me to say...

ERICA

Alexi, what happened to just expressing yourself!?

Hogue looks up -- she struck a nerve. With no words, he walks over and kisses her. A spotlight shines down on them as our music crescendos. Their kiss finished, Hogue hugs Erica. She caresses the back of his head, concerned...

INT. PROFESSOR FISHEL LECTURE HALL - DAY

Erica sits at her desk in the corner of class when she's surprised to see Hogue show up. Despite their earlier embrace, Hogue avoids eye contact and takes a seat.

Before Erica can walk over, Professor Fishel begins her lecture. Erica watches Hogue. Something is off. Hogue stares past her at the door, like he's waiting for someone...

A SCHOOL OFFICIAL and CAMPUS POLICE OFFICER then enter. Class stops. They speak to Fishel, who listens, then:

PROFESSOR FISHEL

(confused)

Alexi?

Erica watches as Hogue stays glued to his seat, vacantly looking into nowhere. It takes a moment for them to find him in the sea of students. They then approach.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL

Alexi Indris-Santana? We need you to come with us.

Hogue is despondent until the Officer grabs his arm. Like a ragdoll, Hogue stands. Hogue avoids Erica's, Fishel's and our baffled stares as he is escorted away.

INT. ATHLETIC BOARD ROOM - DAY

The doors fly open and David enters, the team already there.

DAVID  
What the fuck is going on!?

TREVOR  
Alexi was arrested in class.

DAVID  
Alexi? Arrested for what?

TREVOR  
None of us know.

The doors open again, interrupting their pow wow. Princeton's ASSISTANT ATHLETIC DIRECTOR enters. Coach Ellis follows her. He is uncharacteristically quiet.

ASSISTANT ATHLETIC DIRECTOR  
Gentleman, sorry to pull you from your classes but we wanted to make sure you heard this first. It's about your teammate, Alexi.

DAVID  
Is he OK?

ASSISTANT ATHLETIC DIRECTOR  
He's fine. But we have someone who would like to speak to you over the phone. He'll explain more.

Everyone looks at Coach for clarity that he won't offer, distraught. The AD dials a phone and puts it on speaker.

JASON COLE (O.C.)  
Hello?

ASSISTANT ATHLETIC DIRECTOR  
Jason? It's Martina from Princeton Athletics again. I've got you on speaker with the boys.

JASON COLE (O.C.)  
OK, great. Hey guys, how's it going?

The team replies with weak *goods* and *fines*. Coach and the Assistant AD exit, leaving them alone.

JASON COLE (O.C.) (cont'd)  
 So my name is Jason Cole. I'm a sports writer for the Peninsula Times Tribune, a newspaper out in Palo Alto, California.

Everyone looks around -- *Palo Alto*. What the fuck is this?

JASON COLE (O.C.) (cont'd)  
 You guys are probably wondering why I'm talking to you about your teammate, Alexi. I, umm, recently received a call from a student at Yale named Renee Pacheco. She was at Penn Relays this weekend. When Renee was watching the races, she saw Alexi running the 5K and recognized him from her time at Palo Alto High. However, she didn't know him as Alexi Santana then. She knew him as Jay Huntsman.

Befuddled murmurs scatter across the room. Agitated:

DAVID  
 Hey Jason, this is David Lynn, one of the team captains. You're kind of losing us here. What are you saying? That Alexi's name is Jay and he's from California?

JASON COLE (O.C.)  
 No.

DAVID  
 OK. Then I'm confused. Why is some girl at Yale calling her local sports writer about Alexi?

JASON COLE (O.C.)  
 (beat)  
 Five years ago, Palo Alto High had a transfer student named Jay Huntsman. He was an orphan from Nevada entering his senior year. He was also a distance runner. He went from having never run high school cross to winning the Stanford Invite. Is this sounding familiar?

The team looks at each other: Yeah, it sounds familiar.

JASON COLE (O.C.) (cont'd)  
 I was at that race. The result was skeptical, so I did some digging. I discovered that Jay Huntsman wasn't a 17 year-old high school senior. He was James Arthur Hogue of Kansas City, Kansas. He was born October 22, 1959, making him 26 years old then. 31 years old today.

The weight of disbelief crashes over the team.

DAVID  
 Jason, I'm sorry but this is absurd.  
 (laughs)  
 Alexi is Alexi! How do you even know if this guy is the same? Do we have pictures? Has --

JASON COLE (O.C.)  
 It's already confirmed. He confessed an hour ago.

*Silence.* The team stunned and slack-jawed. Off David, frozen with shock and betrayal.

INT. PRESIDENT SHAPIRO'S OFFICE - DAY

Coach Ellis sits across from President Shapiro, both men embarrassed. "Alexi's" file is spread across the desk.

PRESIDENT SHAPIRO  
 What the hell is the protocol for dealing with...?  
 (exacerbated)  
 We've got a 31 year-old liar! An ex-con who fabricated an entire identity and got an Ivy League school to pay for it!

He looks at Alexi's grades -- straight A's.

DEAN SHAPIRO  
 And how do we know these grades are legitimate!? Or his test scores!?

COACH ELLIS  
 (beat -- matter of fact)  
 He could run.

INT. PRESIDENT'S OFFICE LOBBY - DAY

A TV plays outside President Shapiro's office, CBS Evening News on. The lower third reads *Man Fakes Way into Princeton*.

Footage from a COURT ROOM. A MAN in an ORANGE JUMPSUIT is escorted away. From this distance, we can barely make out that it is Hogue. We then CUT TO --

INT. STORAGE FACILITY - DAY

Our story is now told documentary style. Supporting characters address us directly. The first, a CBS REPORTER:

CBS REPORTER

(to us)

Before he was Alexi Indris-Santana of Princeton University, James Hogue was hiding from the law here at this Utah storage unit.

INSIDE THE UNIT:

Police have ransacked it but dusty belongings remain. A pile of books sit by a twin sized mattress. Scattered boxes with trophies and newspaper clippings: *Teen Orphan wins Turkey Trot*. Someone lived inside this storage locker.

CBS REPORTER (V.O.)

The 31 year-old was wanted for grand theft in California while working at a local running store as Alexi Indris-Santana, establishing his new identity. He also sent applications to several elite colleges before his arrest.

CLOSE ON an evidence bag: Copies of Hogue's application letter addressed to various colleges: *You will find that part one of the application for admission is incomplete...*

CBS REPORTER (V.O.) (cont'd)

As he awaited word, he was also awaiting sentencing. And when he was accepted to Princeton, he had to defer enrollment to serve 13 months in prison.

INT. UTAH PRISON HALLWAY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Though his back is turned to us, we know who it is. Hogue is in blue prison fatigues, the only person in the sterile hallway. We watch from afar as he speaks on a pay phone:

HOGUE

Coach Ellis? Hi, it's Alexi Santana.

(beat)

Yes, I did. I wanted you to hear this first but I have to defer my enrollment. I recently received word that my mother has fallen ill in Switzerland...

Same conversation we've heard before. Different context. Hogue wasn't waiting for his dad to die like he made us believe -- He was waiting to leave prison.

EXT. UTAH PRISON - COURTYARD - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Prisoners bask in the heat, puzzled to watch a shirtless, sinewy inmate run laps around the yard.

His back to us, Hogue's long hair bounces against soaked shoulders as he jogs in the shadow of a barbed wire fence.

INT. WYOMING HOME - DAY

The wood cabin's walls are crowded with accolades -- University of Wyoming this, NCAA that. CLOSE ON a framed team photo: *University of Wyoming XC - Class of 1977-78*. Eight skinny runners are flanked by their coaches. Seven are black. The lone white runner stands out:

COACH RICHARDSON (O.C.)

He was the only American-born runner I recruited that year...

COACH RON RICHARDSON (60s, white) sits, a curmudgeonly scowl beneath thick spectacles and a University of Wyoming cap.

COACH RICHARDSON

(to us)

I was the head cross-country coach at the University of Wyoming from '74 to '83. Back then, if your name wasn't University of Oregon, you weren't getting the best American runners. My strategy against that was simple: Recruit Africans.

EXT. WYOMING GOLF COURSE - DAY (ARCHIVAL)

Super 8 footage of the Wyoming cross-country squad. A TEENAGE HOGUE flickers past with six black teammates.

COACH RICHARDSON (V.O.)

I only recruited James because he was supposed to be Jim Ryun the Second: Kansas-bred miler with the moxie of Prefontaine. But he just never panned out...

CLOSE ON a precocious Younger Hogue. He waves to the camera. Then we go CLOSE ON an AFRICAN RUNNER -- the alpha of the pack. He stares into the camera with poise.

GEOFF (PRE-LAP)

Lot of Jim's teammates were older.

EXT. GEOFF BUTCHER'S TRAILER - DAY

A mobile home on the edge of the Kansas flatlands. GEOFF BUTCHER (30) sits: out of shape, poorly dressed, smoking.

GEOFF

(to us)

I ran with Jim in high school. And we exchanged letters during his freshman year at Wyoming. Because these guys were from Africa where documentation is scarce, their ages were up for debate. Many were just plain old. Joseph Nzau was their number one, even though he was 27. How do you compete with that? It drove Jim so mad he ran himself into the ground. Got injured. Lost his scholarship. Dropped out sophomore year. Five years later, Nzau ran at the LA Olympics.

EXT. LOS ANGELES ROUTE 90 - DAY (ARCHIVAL)

Broadcast footage of the 1984 Olympic Marathon. The lead pack runs down the middle of a shutdown freeway.

GEOFF (V.O.)

I didn't have to talk to Jim to know it killed him: Watching Nzau take the lead for the world to see.

At mile 15, Nzau makes a dramatic move into first.



COMMENTATOR (V.O.)  
Joseph Nzau of Kenya surges to the  
front, pushing a blistering pace!

RENEE (PRE-LAP)  
He arrived in '85...

INT. YALE LIBRARY - DAY

A section of the library is closed to interview RENEE  
PACHECO (20): The girl in the Palo Alto High sweater.

RENEE  
(to us)  
I didn't know him personally. He  
was a senior year transfer, which  
was odd. Said he was from an ashram  
in Nevada. That his parents died in  
Bolivia. We were young and didn't  
know any better: it was hook, line  
and sinker. But looking back, it's  
disturbing! A grown man sneaking  
into a high school? What did he  
want? What if something happened?  
Who would do such a thing?

EXT. HOGUE'S PARENTS' HOUSE - DAY

A news camera shot of a nondescript home. A COUPLE (60s)  
stands in front. The lower third identifies them as Eugene  
and Maria Hogue - Parents of Con Man.

Hogue's mother is alive & well. And his dad is not James  
Senior, it's Waldorf. Or at least the man we've known as  
Waldorf. He's not a junkie and she's not a bohemian artist.  
They're just an average, blue collar couple.

MARIA HOGUE  
(to us)  
We haven't heard from Jim in nearly  
10 years. There wasn't anyway we  
could've known he was doing this.

EUGENE HOGUE  
(to us)  
This ain't the boy we raised: He  
was a normal kid, just like  
everyone else.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. NEW JERSEY PRISON - DAY

*BUZZ.* Three steel fences roll back and Professor Fishel walks out of the prison. When she looks ahead, she recognizes someone. PAN TO --

Todd. Very much alive, like nothing ever happened. He speaks to someone familiar, her back turned to us:

TODD

You sure you want to do this?

She nods.

PROFESSOR FISHEL

*Erica.*

Erica turns. She and Fishel hug. Todd shakes her hand.

PROFESSOR FISHEL

How have you two been?

ERICA

I'm good. How is he?

PROFESSOR FISHEL

He's OK, I guess. He's done this before, right?

Hesitant laughter at the joke.

PROFESSOR FISHEL (cont'd)

He'll be on parole soon. I actually have a job lined up for when he's out. Friend at the Harvard Museum has a part-time opening.

ERICA

That's really kind, Deb.

PROFESSOR FISHEL

This your first time visiting?

Erica nods, apprehensive as all hell.

INT. NEW JERSEY PRISON - VISITATION - DAY

Erica is led by a GUARD past visitors speaking to inmates behind Plexiglass. She takes a seat in an empty booth, then waits. It feels like eternity before a buzzer sounds. Footsteps approach. A guard uncuffs the inmate and he sits.

Hogue looks very different. Tired. Ragged. He's gained weight. His buzzcut exposes his receding hairline. He and Erica stare at each other -- he indifferent, she shocked. Finally, Hogue picks up the phone. So does she.

ERICA

Hi...

(unsure what to call him)

...How, how are you?

But Hogue doesn't reply -- he just looks away.

ERICA (cont'd)

Deb told me--

HOGUE

Why are you here? Day 209 of a 270 day sentence. I'm meeting with the parole board in a week. So why come now?

ERICA

I was worried I wouldn't have another chance to speak with you.

HOGUE

What haven't you already read that you need to hear from me?

ERICA

Why you did it.

Hogue arrogantly laughs and shakes his head.

ERICA (cont'd)

After hearing everything, I still don't understand what drove you --

HOGUE

To start over?

ERICA

*To lie.*

HOGUE

You've gotta get past the lying if you want to know the why.

ERICA

But that's exactly it: You had no reason to create Alexi Santana.

HOGUE

*C'mon.* The reason's obvious.

ERICA

What, to get into Princeton? Then why Jay Huntsman?

Hogue doesn't have a response to that.

ERICA (cont'd)

It wasn't to outrun legal issues either. Those started after you created Huntsman. Maybe Alexi was created because Jay Huntsman was caught. But then I thought some more and it occurred to me: Making friends was never an issue for you. Confiding in them was. Was that why? So you can keep everyone at arm's length?

Hogue's smug guard is broken. Seems that X marks the spot.

ERICA (cont'd)

James: Before you were arrested, when I saw you at your dorm, you looked like you had something to say. Now that your secret is out, do you want to tell me what it was?

It's Hogue's moment. He can finally express himself. Speak freely. Confess his love. Tell Erica and us the truth. He takes his time to search for the right words...

HOGUE

You asked what happened to the farm boy everyone loves. Do you feel stupid, knowing what you know now?

He looks guilty saying that. It's clear it isn't what he wanted to say. But Erica is no less hurt. She stands.

ERICA

I only feel stupid thinking you were capable of anything great. You're a mediocre friend, a mediocre student, a mediocre runner and apparently, a mediocre con artist.

Hogue flinches -- the worst criticism he could hear. With that, she hangs up the phone and leaves his life forever.

INT. NEW JERSEY PRISON - PAROLE BOARD - DAY

The two-member PAROLE BOARD sits at a table, reviewing Hogue's file. A recorder rolls. Hogue faces them.

PAROLE BOARD 1

Stated for the record: This is last name Hogue, first name James. Department of Corrections ID 517. Mr. Hogue, you're serving a 270 day sentence for third-degree theft. Can you elaborate on your time at East Jersey?

HOGUE

It's, um, it's a hard place. Keep to myself -- stay out of trouble.

PAROLE BOARD 1

During your trial, allegations surfaced that you had posed under false aliases before, correct?

Hogue nods in confirmation.

PAROLE BOARD 1 (cont'd)

You clearly have an aptitude for success. But you've also shown a penchant for lying. Has your time here taught you the error of your ways?

HOGUE

(beat)

I used to think I made up these people because it would provide me a chance for a better life. But thinking on it here, I realize I lied because I didn't like myself. I've learned the cost of that...

(beat)

It's only been 214 days but I know I never want to spend another second here. I also know I can't lie anymore if I intend on staying out. That I'm James Hogue, for better and for worse.

Hogue hangs his head in shame.

EXT. NEW JERSEY PRISON - DAY

Those fences roll back and Hogue exits, modest bag in hand. He smiles, happy to see Fishel waiting to pick him up.

EXT. I-95 NORTH - BOSTON - DAY

Downtown Boston on the horizon. Hogue stares out the passenger side window at his new home for the time being.

INT. BOSTON APARTMENT - NIGHT

Fishel opens the door to an empty studio apartment. Hogue looks around. She hands him a key. Hogue gives her a hug.

INT. HARVARD MINERALOGICAL MUSEUM - DAY

A pristine marble museum. Hogue wears a security uniform -- his new job. He tries not to fall asleep as visitors peruse.

INT. BOSTON APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hogue reads a book to distract from his drab surroundings.

EXT. CHARLES RIVER - DAY

The sun rises while Hogue jogs along the icy river.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Hogue sits beside a few Boston miscreants. He looks at them with disdain before returning to his lonely beer.

The BARTENDER is about Hogue's age. Pretty. Lonely like him too. Red Sox game over, she changes channels: As Seen on TV, evening news, track & field, *Cheers* --

HOGUE

Hey, wait -- can you go back?

She flips back: God knows why, but the USA Track & Field Championships is on a local access channel. It's the last lap of the Men's 1500m Final and in the lead wearing the New York Athletic Club singlet is Bill Burke. Hogue simmers with jealousy as his ex-teammate sprints down the final stretch to seal the victory: An American Champion.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
I beat that guy in a race once.

She neither believes him nor cares, but she's willing to entertain him.

BARTENDER  
You were a runner?

Hogue nods.

BARTENDER (cont'd)  
What's your name?

Hogue looks up, still taciturn despite the female attention.

HOGUE  
Jim. You?

CINDY  
Cindy.

EXT. DOWNTOWN BOSTON - NIGHT

Hogue and Cindy are bundled in their winter coats, strolling the city post-date.

HOGUE (PRE-LAP)  
I've been to prison before.

INT. BOSTON APARTMENT - NIGHT

Cindy is taken aback by the confession. They sit on his musty old couch watching *Wheel of Fortune* on his antenna TV.

CINDY  
What'd you go in for?

HOGUE  
I lied. I stole.

CINDY  
But you don't do that no more?

He shakes his head.

CINDY (cont'd)  
It's OK. People makes mistakes.

Cindy leans over and kisses his guilt-ridden face.

INT. CINDY'S APARTMENT - DAY

A LITTLE BOY stands in the middle of a messy living room.

CINDY  
Sweetheart, this is mommy's friend  
Jim. Can you introduce yourself?

MARTIN  
M-my name's Martin.

HOGUE  
Martin! It's nice to meet you,  
Marty! Can I call you Marty?

Martin shakes his head no. Cindy & Hogue laugh.

EXT. BOSTON PUBLIC GARDEN - DAY

Hogue races Martin across the grass while Cindy lies on a picnic blanket, watching happily. Hogue lets Martin win, lifting the boy up and spinning him around triumphantly.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hogue now manages the back of an upscale restaurant, a wave of fire and steam as he hustles to get orders out.

EXT. HOGUE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Hogue and Cindy walk out to his beat-up MG.

CINDY  
Jimmy, where are you taking me!?

HOGUE  
It's a surprise!

EXT. MASSACHUSETTS FARM - DAY

Hogue parks at the edge of the ranch. They get out. There is nothing but cattle grazing in a lush green meadow.

CINDY  
What're we doing here?

She turns to Hogue, who sheepishly grins and shrugs.



CINDY (cont'd)  
 What does *that* mean? There's  
 nothing here.

HOGUE  
 I know. But it's ours.

She raises an eyebrow. Looks at the land, then back to him.

HOGUE (cont'd)  
 I put a down payment with some  
 savings. Two acres.

CINDY  
*What?*

HOGUE  
 We can still commute to Boston  
 but...  
 (beat)  
 I always wanted to live on a farm.  
 Thought the idea of being on my own  
 was romantic. Just me against the  
 land. But now we can be on our own  
 out here. You, Martin, me.

CINDY  
 (astonished)  
 I can't believe you. I...

At a loss for words, Cindy wraps her arms around Hogue. He looks over her shoulder at their new land in the distance.

CINDY (cont'd)  
*James Holly, you're the best thing  
 that's ever happened to me.*

Cindy kisses his cheek and holds him tight. Hogue looks at us, devastated.

HOGUE (V.O.)  
 Everyone aspires to be someone  
 they're not...

CUT TO BLACK:

HOGUE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 I'm no different.