

HUSTLE

by:

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Roth Films, Spring Hill Entertainment
CAA/Oasis

THERE ARE OVER 1.5 BILLION PEOPLE IN CHINA.

INSERT SHOTS of snarled traffic, overflowing trains, flooded sidewalks, endless urban skylines.

**MORE THAN 300 MILLION OF THEM PLAY BASKETBALL.
THAT'S ROUGHLY THE SIZE OF THE ENTIRE US
POPULATION.**

Music cue: Drake and Future's "Jumpman", the film's anthem.

Jumpman, jumpman, jumpman, them boys up to something...

RAPID FIRE SHOTS of uniformed CHINESE SCHOOL-CHILDREN dribbling two balls at once on a playground perfectly synch'd with the beat.

YET ONLY 6 HAVE MADE IT TO THE NBA.

GLIMPSES of forgettable pros who barely had a cup of coffee in the league and, of course, Yao Ming, who changed the culture.

MORE THAN A FEW PEOPLE BETTING THAT WILL CHANGE.

The BEAT SWELLS, a crescendo, as we intercut frenetic hand-held footage of NBA players traveling throughout China. Greeted like GODS. Pimping sneakers. Mobbed out clinics. Toying with LOCALS in one on ones.

SILENCE as the last card appears:

THIS IS THE STORY OF ONE.

BLACK

BILLY (PRE-LAP)
Harden's freshman year I'm
recruiting Cali. He's maybe six-
two. Mozzarella middle.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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BILLY (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)
 Sucking on an inhaler. Kid could snipe, not much else. Thing is, he had this edge. Could see it in his eyes. After the game I roll over to his coach, I say, 'start hitting him with the arm-pad. Man him up.'

FADE IN:

INT. BEIJING RESTAURANT

Opium den vibe. Through a haze of cigarette smoke the owner of the voice materializes. BILLY KENNEDY (44), pasty ex-pat, Beijing Ducks sweats, regales a half-dozen LOCALS with tales of his coaching days in the states. Hot-pot and tallboy Tsingtaos before them. Might as well be in a Harlem Barbershop.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 Couple years later I'm at the ABCD camp--talking best of the best--and there he is. Shredded. Catching bodies.

The locals look on, blank. Unclear if they speak English, but that doesn't matter. The speech isn't for them. It's therapy.

Billy raises his beer in toast. Glasses go up in unison.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 Sometimes you just know.

And just as quickly vanish.

Billy stands, eyes the toilet.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 Troll in the dungeon, fellas.

With the mincing gait of a hustler he slips out of sight. STAY ON one of the LOCALS, now rolling his eyes. He address his crew in *MANDARIN* (always in italics).

LOCAL
One day I saw Fan Bingbing on the metro. She was about nine or ten. I tell her, 'you're very beautiful.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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LOCAL (CONT'D)

You should be an actress.' Her mother screams 'pervert!' and hits me with her purse. Sometimes you just know.

He raises his glass. Mocking Billy. Everyone cracks up. Language clearly not a barrier. They think Billy's full of shit. ANGLE ON Billy looking on from the shadow of the hallway as he waits for the john. His is the hollow gaze of a proud man turned punch-line.

EXT. ALLEY. BEIJING RESTAURANT -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy shields his eyes from the pinpricks of dawn as he emerges from a back exit into a narrow, rubbish filled alley. That was breakfast. His grind is just beginning.

He beelines towards a rickety ruby cruiser, nodding to a shirtless MAN perched on a milk-crate getting a haircut. He dodges an overloaded scooter as it streaks past. None of it seems to faze Billy. Though he appears misplaced, it's clear that he's a fixture. A local.

He straddles his bike. Retrieves moisturizer from a fanny pack. He lathers his palms. Forearms. Routine. He places a smog mask over his face and sets off down the alley.

SERIES OF SHOTS OF BILLY'S GRIND:

-- Billy merges into a tide of impossibly congested traffic in central Beijing. A modern glass sky-scape looms in the chalk grey clouds, but on the ground it's a steady storm of horns and anarchy. As Billy hits a roundabout he passes a Kobe Bryant mural. **Forever 24.**

-- Billy glides past the FORBIDDEN CITY. Ornate pyramidal roofs adorned with dragons and phoenix's loom in the BG. He peers through a wrought-iron fence where SECURITY GUARDS run twos on a rusty hoop pre-shift. A wistful smile escapes. The game in its purest form.

-- Billy gazes through chain-links at a sprawling park. A high-school tournament has just tipped. This could easily be LA or NY. Nike sponsored unis and signage. Billy eyes PLAYERS as they dart to the rim, fire jumpers, talk shit. He furiously scribbles on a pad.

He pulls out his Android, dials. He speaks in stilted MANDARIN. More than capable.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

*Not much here. One kid who might
be able to catch on in the NBL.
I'll send over tape tonight.*

Billy pockets his phone, sighs. It's obvious this isn't the life he imagined for himself.

EXT. BILLY'S APARTMENT. BEIJING, CHINA -- LATER

INVERTED peering up at a ubiquitous forest of faded cement high-rises. AC units and a color wheel of dangling laundry checker the exterior. This is Billy's hood. A far cry from the gleaming city center.

Billy weaves through the housing estate on his cruiser. He slows as he passes a VENDOR. Snags an apple with a free hand, hollers over his shoulder.

BILLY

On the rebound, Feng.

Billy raises his fist, good-naturedly, moving on. The vendor shakes his head. Bemused. He's used to it. Billy's got that bridge and tunnel hustle about him.

He locks his bike in a seemingly infinite junkyard of others and starts towards his building. A ten-year old BOY pounding a basketball impedes his route. As the boy nears, Billy crouches. Crooked grin. One on one on the slender path. Clearly a routine. One that Billy adores.

The boy tries a cross. Billy easily taps the ball away.

INT. BATHROOM. BILLY'S APARTMENT. BEIJING -- EVENING

Billy studies his wrinkles in the mirror. Once again methodically applies lotion, but it's not vanity. More complicated. Billy's the type of guy that believes his best days are still ahead. His face has to match.

He swallows more than a handful of melatonin--his only chance at sleep--and slips into his sparse STUDIO. The lack of furnishings makes it apparent that Billy thought this was a temporary stop. Not so much.

He collapses onto a double mattress on the floor. A Beijing Ducks practice tape plays on mute on the flat-screen. Various tournament programs and rosters litter the counter-top. Each of them wrinkled and well-marked. In Billy's world hustle and grind go hand and hand.

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The walls are bald aside from a single family photo tacked by his bed. PUSH IN: Billy, a few years younger, his grinning bride, LAURIE, and their toddler, IAN. But it's the only sign of them.

CLOSE ON his left hand as he reaches for a Chinese birthday card on the floor. A glimpse of what appears to be the dark tracing of a CHILD'S HAND on his palm. Not a doodle. Permanent.

He opens the card... It reads: **Dear Ian, Happy Birthday!**

But that's as far as he's gotten.

INT. BILLY'S APARTMENT. BEIJING -- PRE-DAWN

The chime of his Android awakens Billy. He had dozed off with his son's birthday card on his chest. He sits up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, peers at his phone.

A text from LEON: **TWENTY MINUTES, CRACKA!**

EXT. BILLY'S APARTMENT -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy's at the curb in a wrinkled Willy Loman suit when he clocks a black and chrome Hongqi 6 pulling up. China's version of a plus-sized Bentley. Next level. Billy straightens his tie as the suicide doors open.

LEON

BK in effect!

Out steps an attractive black man in Tom Ford, LEON RICH (37). They embrace. History here. Leon's an agent in the Rich Paul mold: enough polish for the Forbes list, but reared on the block.

LEON

You good?

BILLY

All the way up.

Leon snorts as he studies Billy head to toe.

LEON

I can see that.

(eyeing the bleak
surroundings)

Shit makes Marcy look like the
Hamptons.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY
Go where the talent is.

LEON
So you're out here scouting?
(eyes his watch)
At four AM?

BILLY
Gotta catch the parents before
work.

Leon can tell he's bluffing, but let's it pass. He knows Billy's fragile ego all too well.

LEON
Get in. Long drive.

INT. HONGQI -- MOMENTS LATER

Rose wood, jade door-handles, flat-screen consoles, red carpets. Starting price? 800K. Billy's expression is practiced cool--NBD--as he slumps in his seat.

Leon nods to a dozing figure, face camo'd by a hoodie, across from them in the cabin seats.

LEON
Incog-negro.

BILLY
(snorts)
Didn't know he slept.

KOBE
One eye always open.

The figure straightens. REVEAL: KOBE BRYANT. Beats-By-Dre around his neck. Baritone.

LEON
You remember my guy, Billy
Kennedy? Schooled me back when.

Absent nod from Kobe. Not really.

BILLY
How's the mogul life, Bean?

KOBE
Expensive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

(off Leon)
Oughta have words with your ten-
percenter over here...

Billy paws at Leon's suit-jacket. *Nice.*

KOBE

Shit, he's moved on. Signed Byron
Wilts last week.

BILLY

Wilts got a little John Wall to
him. Top five?

LEON

Top three. Kid's a mon-star.
(off Kobe)
But he's no replacement. Mambas
don't die they just shed a layer.

Billy swipes at Leon's chin.

BILLY

Gotta little Mamba juice...

Leon slaps his hand away as Billy turns to Kobe.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You know if you ever need a guy on
the ground out here...

A grifter trying his best to not look needy.

KOBE

Let me marinate on that.

He won't. Kobe slips his headphones on. Closes his eyes.

Leon glares at Billy. Incredulous.

LEON

Slinging magazine scripts too?
Hard enough getting you this gig.

It's clear Leon did Billy a solid.

BILLY

Easy. I'm add value, L. American
face of a local franchise.

Also clear Billy doesn't see it that way.

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CONTINUED: (2)

LEON

You're here to translate, Billy.
That's it.

Billy puts his hands up. Surrenders.

BILLY

Team player.

A shared snort. They both know he's far from that.

HOURS LATER

The Beijing skyline has given way to a rural, barren landscape of farmland, villages, and melting snow-caps.

Leon leans over. Iphone pics on display for Billy.

LEON

Ian's birthday.

BILLY

Good party?

LEON

Married pilgrims in the South Bay talking charter schools. Chain remained... affixed.

BILLY

I'd known you were such a bigot I woulda never made you godfather.

LEON

Niggas can't be racist. Church.

BILLY

Do you even hear yourself?

GO CLOSE as Billy swipes through the images: Laser tag. Pinata. Standard eight-year old bday ish.

BILLY

What'd you get him?

LEON

Playstation 5. AR headset.

BILLY

Racist... and an asshole...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEON

Exactly what Laurie said.

Billy fixates on an image of his ex, LAURIE and his son, Ian, no longer a toddler, crouched over a *Star Wars* cake, candles blazing.

BILLY

Shit. He shot up.

LEON

Yep. Got that BK lip too, boy.

(beat)

You call him?

But Billy can't take his eyes off the picture. He's transfixed, haunted.

LEON (CONT'D)

Billy? BILLY?

Leon snatches the phone away. Billy snaps to...

BILLY

What?

LEON

Did you call him?

BILLY

He's my son. Course I called.

Billy glances out his window, jolted into reality. *What the fuck is he doing here?* CLOSE as he balls his tattooed hand.

EXT/INT. HONGQI. DONGLU VILLAGE -- HOURS LATER

Palms SLAP tinted windows, rattling the car as it parades through a village of narrow alleyways and single story concrete buildings. LOCALS jog alongside.

BILLY

So much for playing the villain...

Kobe's unmoved. Used to the outpouring.

KOBE

That's why they love me. Chinese are dogs, man. Me against the world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

Thought that was 'Pac?

KOBE

Sun Tzu with the dime.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT. DONGLU VILLAGE -- MORNING

A Nike banner featuring Kobe Bryant's AD sneaker is stripped from a recently erected wire fence. UNVEILING a dope full-court. Gleaming silver bleachers. Polished, Laker purple, pavement. Gold lines. 24 emblazoned at center court. The reason for their visit.

PULL BACK as LOCALS stream inside.

MOMENTS LATER

A HUSH in the crowd. Giddy nerves. Anticipation.

A wall of SECURITY parts in a corner of the court. Kobe jogs forward. Pure PANDEMONIUM!

Billy shadows him, in awe of the chaos: Overflowing bleachers. Four deep on the sideline. Children perched on their parent's shoulders. Those left out are pinned to the fence. Others scale trees, straddle branches or spy from adjacent rooftops. A Chinese Rucker circa '71.

Kobe and Billy are each handed mics. As Kobe addresses the crowd, Billy translates to Mandarin.

KOBE

What do you say, Donglu!

The crowd ERUPTS.

KOBE (CONT'D)

You know most people think it was the grace of "Emperor Jordan" or the humble brilliance of "Chairman Yao" that hooked you. But ball has always been here. Through the civil wars, the revolution. Just as you persevered so did the game. You overcame. You excelled. Together.

(beat)

Nike didn't build this court to sell you shoes.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KOBE (CONT'D)

They did it because basketball is the ultimate unifier. A classroom. A stage. A battlefield. A sanctuary.

Kobe nods at Leon who tosses him a ball.

KOBE (CONT'D)

For someone as competitive as myself, retirement's not easy. So before I leave you I just want to know one thing... who got next?

Sunday silent. No takers. Everyone peering around as if waiting for someone to emerge.

Kobe peers over at Billy, perplexed.

KOBE

You got the translation?

Billy nods, palms up.

KOBE (CONT'D)

One more time, Donglu... who got--

ALEX (O.S.)

I do.

All eyes turn to ALEX YANG (19) as he pushes through the crowd. That's who they were waiting on. Every town has one great baller. That's Alex. Innocent face, but steely eyed. Focused. A good kid with violent potential.

As Alex approaches, Kobe eyes his dated, perhaps recycled, Kobe 8 kicks and snorts.

KOBE

Always the geared up cats that can't hoop. What's your name, killer?

ALEX

Alex Yang.

KOBE

Aright then, A.Y. Let's hoop.

MOMENTS LATER

Billy watches from the sideline as Kobe checks to Alex at the key.

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CONTINUED:

KOBE

Seven by ones. Elders out.

Alex crouches, textbook. Kobe jabs left. Alex doesn't budge. Kobe swings the ball, head and shoulder fake. Alex bites. Slight lunge and he's snipping fumes. Kobe drives. Elevates for the one-handed flush.

Kobe's trademark grin curls out as he jogs back.

KOBE

That's one.

Billy notes the hint of frustration in Alex as he punches the ball back to Kobe.

Kobe backs into the post, but Alex is a wall. Billy fixates on his powerful lower body. Jumper calves, but sprinter thighs. Kid clearly doesn't skip leg day, but there's no Golds in his neighborhood.

Kobe drives his shoulder. Their bodies BATTERING. Billy spots the first trickle of sweat escape Kobe's forehead. Alex is making him work.

Kobe spins for a fade. Alex lunges. Up and under. Fingerroll with *English*.

Kobe winks at Leon and Billy.

KOBE

A.Y. just met K.Y. Jelly, baby.

Alex snatches the ball. Furious. He scans the jubilant crowd. Chants of: KOBE! KOBE!

Billy follows Alex's gaze to his girlfriend, YUE (18), dyed blond hair, sleeved tats, Nike Dunks with the lip hanging. Serious flavor for a village girl. Beside her sits an elderly man in a wheelchair, his GRANDFATHER, aka YE YE. Little more than trembling bones. A fitted Rockets hat, two sizes too big, threatening to devour his dome. They aren't laughing. Or showing pity.

Alex checks. Feral edge. His mild manner giving way to something else: savagery.

Billy's even more intrigued. This isn't just a friendly run with an idol. It's a fucking street brawl.

Kobe dances with the rock, flicking it between his legs. A tight one-two crossover. Alex doesn't bite. Then...

(CONTINUED)

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NUTMEG... Kobe puts it between Alex's legs. Crowd goes BERSERK! Kobe jogs to the cup. Alex retreats. Kobe rises. Alex with him. They COLLIDE in mid-air like story-book seamonsters. BOOM! Alex DRILLS Kobe with an elbow. Kobe CRUMBLES to the pavement. Alex hovers over him. Snarling.

ALEX

Shoulda stayed retired.

The crowd HUSHES. *Did that just happen?* Kobe wipes a trickle of blood from his knee. Peels himself up. Leon races over, but Kobe waves him off.

KOBE

I'm straight.

Kobe retakes his spot. WHIPS the ball at Alex. No flinch.

KOBE (CONT'D)

Charles Oakley out here, huh?

ON Leon as he sidles beside a transfixed Billy.

LEON

Kid needs to cool on the Four Locos.

BILLY

Fuck that. He's a predator.

Leon furrows his brow. *Whatever...*

QUICK SERIES OF CUTS: Alex strips Kobe on a hesitation. He's finally got the rock. Alex pulls the Shammgod. Hits a floater! He plays to the crowd, two fingers to his temple. He's coming.

Kobe gives Leon and Billy a sideways look. *Kid can hoop.*

Billy glances at Yue and the Grandfather, both subdued. They were waiting for this.

Billy eyes Alex's quick feet, low center of gravity, hands always moving. He's beneath Kobe on every shot. Violating him. Can't teach this kind of D. This heart.

Kobe hits a deep fade-away with Alex's hand in his face. Alex spins in the lane. Kisses a twisting bank.

The crowd switches allegiance. Backing the homie. ALEX! ALEX! ALEX! Alex bobs his head, bouncing. Too much sauce!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Billy gazes out. Galvanized. The crowd. Alex's people. Hairs on his neck standing up. Wheels turning. He sees something--an angle.

Then, just like that, Kobe wets a trey. Game. Alex's head drops. Kobe slaps him on the back. Competitor's embrace.

Kobe takes the mic. Sweat streams off his chin.

KOBE

Give it up for, A.Y. Telling you,
he is a problem. Wish all my
teammates had that fire.

Billy watches a dejected Alex vanish into the crowd trailed by Yue. He clearly has somewhere he needs to be.

Billy turns to Leon with an expression of found treasure.

BILLY

Meet you back in bit.

LEON

Where you going?

But Billy's already gone, squeezing through the crowd.

LEON (CONT'D)

Car leaves at eight and we're not
waiting on your ass, BK!

Billy pushes through the crowd and onto the...

STREET

He scans in both directions. Spots Alex hopping on the rear on wobbly spinach motorbike. A faded leather ball peaks out of his back-pack. His girl, Yue, sits behind the wheel. Helmets? Hell no...

As they peel out Billy frantically hails a flat-bed.

EXT. RURAL ROAD -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy's in the bed of the truck a few cars back from Alex and Yue as she swerves through traffic. Alex changes into a work uniform with one hand, the other loosely slung around Yue's waist. A precarious sight. Billy cringes as Yue off-roads to avoid a crossing buffalo.

EXT. STEEL MILL -- LATER

Grey smoke pours from a furnace. Dust and soot settle like fine ash overhead. Unlike the village, this place is drained of color.

Billy spies as Alex hops off the bike, kisses Yue, and ambles toward a looming gate. Billy marks Alex's empty gaze. Familiar expression of disillusion. Couple hours ago he was gunning with Kobe, but this is reality.

At the gate, Alex nods to a disgruntled SUPERVISOR (60), who eyes the clock overhead.

SUPERVISOR

Where've you been?

ALEX

Alarm didn't go off.

Alex passes, eyes low. He's in no mood for a lecture.

SUPERVISOR

Plan on working in those?

Alex glances back. The Supervisor eyes his faded Kobe's. He forgot to change into his boots. He's caught, but remains poker-faced.

ALEX

Yup.

Alex continues into the COURTYARD where fellow hard-hatted MINERS toil away.

A POCK-MARKED FRIEND sidles up, whispers eagerly...

FRIEND

How'd you do?

ALEX

I lost.

Then the thinnest of grins curls out as Alex peers up.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Got him with the Shammgod though.

His friend throws him a covert pound as the supervisor looks on.

WE PAN through a wire-fence where BILLY watches the exchange from the road.

EXT. STEEL MILL -- DUSK

Alex, cigarette dangling from his lip, red hard hat, drives a wheel-barrel loaded with steel. His Gold's.

A SHIFT BELL blares. Alex swipes at his shiny forehead. *Thank God.*

MOMENTS LATER

SUPERVISOR hands out pay-checks to the WORKERS lined up before a bus, but bypasses Alex. Alex furrows his brow, waits until the Supervisor has finished and approaches.

SUPERVISOR

Show up on time, I won't dock you.

Alex's cheeks slowly turn crimson.

ALEX

For three hours, not the whole day.

SUPERVISOR

We have a culture here. Adhere to it or find another line of work.

He struts towards the gate. Alex trails, slowly growing heated.

ALEX

Can you at least front me for next week? I'll pull doubles.

SUPERVISOR

No.

ALEX

Wei... Ye Ye needs his meds. Please.

SUPERVISOR

Should have considered that when setting your alarm...

The supervisor, once again, eyes Alex's shoes. He's being punished for the deceit, not the tardiness. As the supervisor turns to leave, Alex puts a hand to his chest.

ALEX

I need that money, Wei.

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CONTINUED:

The supervisor peers at the hand.

SUPERVISOR

You know I remember the day your father quit. Your Grandfather arrived twenty minutes early the next morning to cover his shift.

Alex is *boiling* as the supervisor removes his hand. Alex balls his fist. Kid's clearly got a hair-trigger.

The supervisor snorts at his aggression. They both know he's not *that* dumb. He needs this gig.

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)

Let him know he can come back and take your place any time.

With that, the supervisor moves on. Alex remains frozen. A honk from the bus jolts him back to life.

He marches onto the bus, deflated. As the bus pulls away we REVEAL Billy sitting on the back of a dented scooter in the shadows. A witness. He forks over a fist-full of crumpled yen to the DRIVER and follows.

EXT. BUS. DONGLU VILLAGE -- EVENING

Alex steps off the bus, ball in hand. Headphones bumping Kendrick. His soiled work uniform has been replaced by a Mavs Dennis Smith jersey.

As the bus peels out, Billy appears through a haze of dust on the rear of the scooter.

He watches from afar as Alex puts on a handling exhibition. LOCALS snort as he spins past, snapping the rock between his legs, their legs, under carts, around bikes. An Andl spot in real time. Eventually his wizardry leads him into the local PHARMACY.

But we STAY with Billy, looking on from the smoky shade of a food stall across the street, as Alex, clearly nervous, approaches the counter. Though Billy can't hear the exchange, it's obvious Alex is pleading his case to the PHARMACIST. There's no outburst, but judging by Alex's dejected expression and empty hands the conversation didn't go his way.

Alex steps outside, pauses to light a smoke, but the wick refuses to take. His fingers tremble just so as he desperately lashes his thumb over the flint wheel.

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CONTINUED:

Billy watches as the lighter slips from his hand, lands in the dirt. Alex glares at it for a beat and with one subtle high step STOMPS it to pieces.

Billy doesn't need to be a shrink to recognize that Alex is shouldering some serious demons.

A CHIME from Billy's phone disrupts his trance. He glances down, alarmed by a text.

BILLY

Shit!

INT. VILLAGE RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

ON TV: *CP3 crosses Fultz, dips to the tin with a Euro step. Drops a no-look to Capela who bangs it.*

HURRAH!! PULL OUT to find a packed house watching Houston vs Phoenix. A meaningless regular season game? Not here. If it wasn't already obvious from the restaurant's red and gold motif and the framed Yao Ming photos, the Rockets are China's adopted national team.

An ELDER raises his beer in toast. REVEAL: Leon sitting alone at the bar awkwardly raising his glass in kind.

Billy saunters in. Surveys the scene with a smirk.

BILLY

Fake sips. That's the key.

LEON

Motherfuckers toasting time-outs.

(beat)

Where the hell you been? We're out in ten.

BILLY

Grinding.

(beat)

Got a proposition for you.

Leon raises an eye-brow. He's heard that before.

BILLY (CONT'D)

The kid, A.Y... he can run.

LEON

You're the scout.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

You're not hearing me. I think he can play... in the league.

LEON

Fuck outta here...

BILLY

He just locked one of the greatest scorers in history giving up four inches.

LEON

We talking height, right?

Billy's not amused.

LEON (CONT'D)

Come on, BK. You act like Kobe was going full hog.

BILLY

When is he not?

Billy leans in. Wry grin of a mischievous child. He's intense. Committed. The full pitch.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Patrick Beverly. Marcus Smart. What do they have in common?

LEON

They're black and proud.

BILLY

Marcus Garvey over here...

(beat)

Being a lock-down defender gets you a contract. That's facts.

LEON

Those dudes were D1, Billy. What's this kid been doing?

BILLY

Wheeling steel.

LEON

Explains why he shifts like D Fox.

BILLY

Yep. Lives with his Grandparents. Never played organized ball.

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Billy squeezes Leon on the shoulder.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Know you see the header: Made. In. China. He's not some seven-foot stiff firing threes either. He's attractive. Already speaks English and you know that's half the fucking battle with these international kids. Look, every team in the league wants a piece of this market and we've got a homegrown 30 for 30.

(beat)

Gimme two weeks with him. What do you have to lose?

LEON

Dairy. Shit ain't free.

Leon wipes his mouth. He's heard enough.

LEON (CONT'D)

Billy, I love you and I know this little Chinese field trip ain't worked out like you hoped, but you on some Kanye shit with this.

BILLY

How many players did I send your way when you started out?

LEON

Billy--

BILLY

I built your whole business! Finding a gem in a murky sea of shit... that's what the fuck I do.

LEON

Kill that noise, Billy. You didn't come here to scout, you came to cut the line. Become a head coach at forty. You could have paid your dues at 'Cuse, worked your way up, but that's not you.

(snorts)

Funny part is that you made your rep recruiting ghetto ass brothers like me. The un-coachables. You broke us down, built us back up.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LEON (CONT'D)

Doctor Huxtable without the
'ludes.

(serious)

But at some point you forgot it
became about you, not them.
Started acting like you were the
damn prophet. And this place...
What'd you call it?

Leon opens his arms to the room, to China, snorts.

LEON

The 'goldrush of hoop'. You
weren't wrong. Lotta people
cashing in, and I'm sorry that you
ain't one of 'em.

(beat)

I know you're sick of hearing it,
but, Billy, if you're getting
antsy sitting in neutral say the
word. I'll find you something.
High school gig. Whatever.

BILLY

Gimme a fucking break...

LEON

Right. Shit's beneath you...

(off TV)

See that? He's the type of player
you cash out for.

Billy glances at the screen.

ON TV: The aforementioned *BYRON WILTS (20)*. *OBJ mohawk. A flurry of slick highlights follow. Kid's nice.*

LEON (CONT'D)

Look, you ready to come home--I'm
with it. Bout damn time. But not
like this.

Billy's arrogance is quickly replaced by something else:
a hint of desperation.

BILLY

Leon, this is legit. I can do
this. Please, man.

Leon shakes his head. Shrugs. *Fine.*

GRANDFATHER (PRE-LAP)

Think you could take him?

INT. ALEX'S HOME -- SAME

The Wilts highlights continue on a much smaller screen in Alex's living room. A dust-covered table and overflowing jade ashtray sit in stark contrast to the Samsung and NBA 2K18. Thank god for the internet.

Alex crouches behind his Grandfather, aligning a gauge onto an OXYGEN TANK. He glances up at the screen, smirks.

ALEX

Throw him a 'bow like Mamba...

GRANDFATHER

(snorts)

You did well. Can't stop a great scorer. You contain.

ALEX

(sits up)

Try now.

His Grandfather attaches the cannula to his nostrils. Deep breath. Nods.

A sliver of guilt on Alex's mug as he stares at him.

ALEX

*Swing by the pharmacy first thing.
Damn bus always running late.*

A white lie to conceal his shame.

EXT. ALEX'S HOME -- MOMENTS LATER

A gate opens into a modest courtyard. Three chickens flap beneath a mangled ten-foot rim drilled into concrete. Billy jumps back as an intricately tattooed PIG scurries up. He snorts to himself, petting it with one hand, a small paper bag in the other.

BILLY

What set you claiming, little guy?

He straightens up, lightly knocks.

A BEAT before the door cracks. Alex peeks out, confused by the gweilo in his courtyard. Billy bows, shifty grin.

BILLY

Alex? Billy Kennedy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alex is blank. Inscrutable.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Kobe's translator this morning--

ALEX

I know. You selling magazine subscriptions or something?

BILLY

No, but I'm clearly giving off a vibe.

(beat)

I'm here to talk about your future. In basketball.

Immediately suspicion on Alex's face.

GRANDFATHER (O.S.)

Who's there?

ALEX

Nobody, Ye Ye.

(to Billy)

Thanks, but my future's been written.

As Alex closes the door a hand wedges between the frame. His Grandfather swings it back open, glances up at Billy, immediate recognition.

GRANDFATHER

The translator?

BILLY

(bowing)

And scout. Here to talk about your grandson.

Billy hands the Grandfather his business card. C/U: cheap stock. Name stenciled in orange beneath the image of a net. Billy's title: Coach, scout, ambassador.

He then extends the paper bag to Alex.

BILLY

Pharmacist said you dropped this.

Alex peers inside the bag. His Grandfather's meds. Roses from a pimp...

INT. LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Alex snorts. A skeptical glare as he retrieves a smoke.

ALEX

*NBA? As in National Basketball
Association?*

BILLY

Know any other?

Alex and his Grandfather share a look. *This dude is batshit.*

Billy scans the room. Fixates on a faded oak table lined with family photos. Above, as if enshrined, sits a framed image of a man who bears a striking resemblance to Alex. His FATHER. He's passed on, which means Alex is the sole provider. Alex's heavy burden crystallizing.

BILLY

*Don't recall seeing you at any of
the academies?*

ALEX

*Started at the mill at twelve.
Academy of life.*

Alex abruptly switches to English. He's done tip-toeing.

ALEX

*Look, no disrespect, but what are
you doing here?*

BILLY

I told you. I'm here--

ALEX

*You watched me ball for twenty
minutes. Now you're sitting here
talking league... Come on...*

Alex won't let himself believe. It's not an option.

BILLY

*Fair enough. I can see how I might
sound a little cracked. Thing is
I'm paid to identify potential.
That's what teams draft on.*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY (CONT'D)

I've put dozens of kids in the CBA, but in the four years I've been scouting China you're the only one I've seen with the juice to make the leap. Lotta gunners here, not many assassins.

ALEX

So I'm the assassin? And you, with your magical powers of observation, are the only one that recognizes my genius?

Billy prides himself on reading people, but he can't figure this kid out.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I like this. This is good. What's the next chapter?

BILLY

Couple weeks of training. Then you'll work out for an agent. He makes the final call.

ALEX

And where's this fairy-tale taking place?

BILLY

City of stars, kid. Los Angeles.

Alex just shakes his head. Billy has no clue what he's asking.

GRANDFATHER

What did he say?

Alex translation is part mockery.

ALEX

Mr. Billy has asked that I join him in Los Angeles to train for the draft. I'd be gone a minimum of two weeks with no guarantee of anything. Leave my family, my job, my girl.

(to Billy)

That about cover it?

Billy frowns. Alex is fully fucking with him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BILLY

Not trying to waste anyone's--

GRANDMOTHER (O.S.)

It appears our visitor doesn't understand the value we Chinese place on family.

Record scratch as all eyes turn towards the door where Alex's GRANDMOTHER (70's), aka NAI NAI, shoots Billy a look that would make plant life wither.

Billy stands and bows.

BILLY

Billy Kennedy, ma'am. A pleasure.

No response.

BILLY (CONT'D)

As I was explaining--

GRANDMOTHER

I heard. We appreciate your interest, but Alex has obligations.

Billy, frazzled, turns to Alex, whose cocky demeanor has completely vanished in the presence of his Grandmother. It's more than obvious who runs shit.

BILLY

Ma'am, I'm not sure you--

GRANDMOTHER

(to Alex)
Please show our guest out.

With the candle flickering on his plan, Billy quotes a Chinese proverb in desperation.

BILLY

'though the tree may grow a thousand feet high, the leaves will fall back to the roots.'

But the Grandmother ain't moved. She eyes Alex, then the framed image of his father hanging on the wall.

GRANDMOTHER

We have another saying 'tiger in the father, tiger in the son'.
(to Alex)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

*History will not repeat itself.
Not in this house.*

With that, Billy simply bows goodbye. It's clear there are bigger issues at play.

As Alex escorts him out Billy catches a glimpse of Alex's room. It's a shrine to hoop. DVD's of McDonald's All American games. Every issue of SLAM. Walls littered with fold-outs of the greats: Mars Blackmon with MJ, Penny and Lil' Penny, Larry Johnson as Grandmama, Dr.J in scrubs. An autographed Steve Nash jersey prominently tacked over his bed. Beneath his bed sit rows of once-discarded Nikes. Recycled and repaired with love. Kid's a junkie.

EXT. COURTYARD. ALEX'S HOME -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy pauses at the front gate.

BILLY

You love it, don't you?

The game. Alex doesn't respond. He, instead, eyes Billy's tattooed palm.

ALEX

That hand poke?

Billy instinctively balls his hand. Rare glimpse of vulnerability.

ALEX (CONT'D)

My girl's an artist. I hate needles.

BILLY

Where'd you learn English?

ALEX

Marv Albert on the play-by-play.
Barkley, EJ and the Jet postgame.
Maad City on repeat.

BILLY

So you're only slightly
obsessed...

(snorts)

Honestly kid, I don't get it.

Alex furrows his brow. His aloof manner vanishing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

You're right.

(beat)

You came, did your white savior
bit, but it's not for me. That's
all you need to know.

Whatever's holding him back--it's cemented.

BILLY

Did you think you could beat Kobe?

ALEX

Just wanted to battle. See where I
stand.

BILLY

You're a shit liar. And I know
liars. Trust.

(beat)

Look, I don't know you or your
story, but there's no room on your
tombstone for regret. Feel me?

ALEX

I'm good. No regrets.

Billy sizes him up.

BILLY

Nah. You're still lying... just
not sure why.

(beat)

I can make you a player, Alex, but
I can't teach you to dream. That's
on you.

With that, Billy takes off.

EXT. FISH FARM -- LATER

Alex lies on the edge of a rickety dock flicking the rock
into the star-kissed black. Perfect backspin as it falls
in his hands. Yue's beside him, cigarette on her lip,
tatted pig on her lap. Billy's card in hand as she reads
from her phone. Their feet dangle over glassy water where
hundreds of metallic fish reflect like silver dollars in
the moonlight.

YUE

*Says he was the top recruiter at
Syracuse...*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

YUE (CONT'D)
whatever the hell that is.
(reading)
*'Sharp eye for undisciplined
promise'. Couldn't have said it
better.*

She shows him an image, but Alex ignores.

YUE (CONT'D)
Not even a little curious?

ALEX
Nope.

YUE
*Tell you one thing, if that white
man offered me a shot to go ink in
LA... call me Casper.*

ALEX
Dip on me that quick, huh?

She raises her naked right hand.

YUE
See any lights on this finger?

A shared snort before Yue snatches the ball away.

YUE (CONT'D)
Alex, what are you doing?

He sits up, snatches the smoke from her lip.

YUE (CONT'D)
*Seriously. You hate your job. I
mean, is this it? Forty years from
now I'm wheeling you around like
Ye Ye?*

ALEX
*They depend on me, Yue. It's not
just the money, it's everything.
I'm all they have.*

YUE
*Really? I've been your neighbor my
entire life. I was in diapers at
your Mom's funeral two days after
you were born.*

Alex's mother obviously died during childbirth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

YUE (CONT'D)

And when your father left who let you sleep on their floor for a month? And when he never came back, who did your Grandparents send out to find you?

(beat)

We may not be blood, but we're family, Alex. I've always been there and I will hold you down.

Alex abruptly pins her arms back, straddling her. The pig squirms out between them.

ALEX

How about I hold you down instead?

That mischievous grin re-emerges, Alex's default position. Anything to not have this conversation.

But Yue pushes him off.

YUE

I'm fucking serious, Alex.

ALEX

About what? If he's such a great scout what the fuck is he even doing here? You consider that? It's bullshit, Yue.

YUE

Maybe, but at least find out. Shit. Be selfish.

Alex, once again, snorts. That's not an option.

YUE (CONT'D)

What are you afraid of?

(off surroundings)

None of this is going anywhere. If you fail you come back, but if you don't even--

ALEX

If I fail I end up just like him.

Alex glares at her. For the first time we hear a hint of the emotional burden he's shouldering.

YUE

Yeah, well, at least he had some fucking balls...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Ouch. Yue quickly backtracks.

YUE (CONT'D)

Shit, I didn't...

(beat)

*Alex, you're not your father,
okay? No matter what she says.*

She stands, frustrated, flicks her smoke.

YUE (CONT'D)

*But this is your life. Go fucking
live it.*

As Yue departs, she drops Billy's card on his chest. He peers at it, squeezing the orange with both hands. He knows she's right.

INT. BEDROOM. ALEX'S HOME -- DAWN

Zipper closes on a hard-shell suitcase. Alex pauses at his door. A final gaze at his idol-filled wall.

LIVING ROOM

Alex tip-toes towards the door. A throat-clearing stops him cold. His Grandfather eyes him from the hallway.

A deep stare. A subtle nod of encouragement. *Go.*

Alex steps OUTSIDE. His Grandfather wheels himself to the doorway and watches as Alex rubs the pig's belly. Embraces Yue.

As Billy tosses Alex's bag in the rear of a rusty jeep he shares a loaded look with the Grandfather. Billy's being entrusted.

GRANDMOTHER (O.S.)

Who's out there?

Alex's Grandmother marches into the living room.

GRANDFATHER

Just welcoming a new day.

He closes the door just as the jeep pulls away.

BILLY (PRE-LAPSE)

It'll calm the nerves.

INT. AIRPLANE -- HOURS LATER

Billy offers Alex a handful of melatonin. He declines and Billy swallows the lot...

As the plane's engine comes alive, Alex grips the seat divider, but it's not the flying that scares him.

ALEX

You really think I can do this?

Billy considers.

BILLY

Betting my fucking life on it.

Billy turns away. Peers down at his phone: the pic from his son's birthday that triggered everything. The real reason he's so desperate to come home.

*CUE Drake and Future: *I just seen the jet take off they up to something...*

EXT/INT. AIRPLANE -- HOURS LATER

Alex gazes out as they descend over South LA. A powdery haze lingers over a maze of freeways. June gloom in April. This isn't palm trees and Bentley's. We're still colorless. Gutter. An ivory dome juts out among the single-story stuccos. Alex fixates on block letters painted on the pavement: **Crenshaw Christian Center. Home of the Faith Dome**. That's what this journey is all about.

EXT/INT. UBER -- LATER

Snarled traffic on the 405 looks painfully similar to the congestion in Beijing. Alex and Billy fixate on a pick-up game beneath the freeway: FATHERS and SONS running two's in a trash-strewn alley.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING. MID-CITY -- AFTERNOON

A pastel apartment complex on a faceless block. Wrought iron gate littered with tags. An ELDERLY COUPLE plucks cans from the dumpster.

A hip brunette, RACHEL (24, yoga pants, retro J's), greets them as they step out of the uber.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RACHEL
(extending her hand)
Billy Kennedy?

They shake as Billy cases the area, slightly disappointed. He had grander expectations.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Rachel Whitaker. Head of marketing
for Rich Sports. Leon asked me to
get you squared.
(off Alex)
This must be your prospect.

Rachel gives Alex a once-over.

BILLY
Alex Yang. You think John Starks
bagging groceries was hard-knock
wait 'til you hear his bio.

RACHEL
Got yourself a trainer and a
publicist. Pleasure, Alex.

ALEX
(frowning)
Guess so. Nice to meet you.

Rachel passes Billy an envelope.

RACHEL
You guys are in 218. Key's a bit
temperamental so don't be afraid
to give it a little hood stomp.
(off school)
Middle school across the street
has granted you access before
eight and after four.

BILLY
You shitting me? Thought we had
the practice facility at UCLA?

RACHEL
'fraid not. Any other questions my
cell's on the contact sheet.
(to Alex)
Best of luck to you, Alex.

Rachel beelines for her white Rover. Billy grabs his bag, clearly frustrated, and charges ahead.

INT. APARTMENT. MID-CITY -- MOMENTS LATER

Hand-me-down Ikea: oversized beige couch, 2012 plasma and X-Box, mismatched dining chairs.

Billy's clearly embarrassed as he tosses his bag and jacket on the couch. It's as if the sub-par digs are a reflection of him, but he does his best to play it off.

BILLY

Hot water, soft bed. I keep it strictly business.

Alex is indifferent. He had no expectations.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go pick up some basics.

Alex pulls out his wallet to chip in.

BILLY

Nope. You contribute in sweat. Stay put.

Billy dips, leaving Alex very much alone. He drifts through the room. Peers out the window. Eventually he collapses on the couch. As he reclines, he notes the Chinese birthday card peeking out from the inside pocket of Billy's coat. Timidly, he pulls it out. Alex isn't one to snoop, but it reminds him of home. He smirks looking at the image, opens the card. His expression turns serious. Clearly Billy finished.

Just then Billy comes charging back in...

BILLY

Forgot my phon-

He freezes when he spots Alex clutching the card.

ALEX

My bad. I just...

There's no excuse.

Billy struts over, snatches the card, grabs his phone.

BILLY

Do me a favor... mind your own fucking business.

And Billy's gone. Ouch.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT. APARTMENT COMPLEX -- LATER

Billy, obviously distressed, gallops down the stairwell, searching for Alex. He scans the complex courtyard: a patch of fake lawn, plastic picnic tables, rusty barbecue, a wheel-less Little Tike. Relief when he spots:

Alex, ball in hand, DEFENDER on skates, running twos on a plastic hoop with three LATINOS in Lonzo jerseys.

INT. APARTMENT. MID-CITY -- EVENING

Alex steps out of his room in sweats. Freshly showered. *Wechatting* with Yue.

ALEX

Living room. Got 2K at least.

Alex pans the phone around so Yue can inspect...

YUE (O.S.)

What's he doing?

STEADY on Billy, chopsticks in hand, sitting Indian-style over a hot pot in the middle of the floor. Spurs/Nuggets on NBA TV. Culture clash in reverse.

ALEX

Told you he was a nutter. I'll call you back.

Alex pockets his phone. Wanders over. Still slightly anxious about what happened earlier.

ALEX

Billy... this afternoon... I shouldn't have been--

Billy cuts him off. He's not the type to dwell.

BILLY

Just so you know, I'm not covering the cell bill.

ALEX

What?

BILLY

That was your lady again, right? Hometown dolls and lead weights... just saying.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

So say it.

Billy moves on instead.

BILLY

(off TV)

Patty Mills. Ten years in the league. Saw him at the Hoop Summit in '06. Straight conductor, no solos. NBA guys were saying he was undersized. Bullshit. Guy had a good inch on Ty Lawson.

(off the hot-pot)

Hungry?

ALEX

You don't have to do all this...

BILLY

What's that? Eat?

ALEX

The hot pot. It's not necessary.

Billy puts the chopsticks down. Sighs...

BILLY

I grew up in Bayonne, New Jersey, Alex. Thing about Bayonne... we keep it live and direct. No emo shit, alright?

ALEX

If I'm gonna run with the best I've got to adapt.

Alex pulls out a pack of smokes. Ali Baba lighter.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Yeah, well, our guys don't smoke bones. Facts.

ALEX

What about Bob Cousy?

Alex lights with a wry grin. Got 'im. Billy snorts, smart ass, and gestures outside.

BILLY

Kick rocks, Couz. If it's still 1962 put a couple stacks on the Celtics for me.

EXT/INT. METRO BUS -- MORNING

A half-empty orange bus zips past a billboard for the upcoming Kobe AD's. Same ones we saw in Alex's village.

Alex stares, ironically, at the ad before spotting a FRAIL MAN, his Grandfather's age, dozing against the window. He quickly he averts his gaze, guilt setting in.

Billy, meanwhile, is all business. First day of training.

BILLY

Most of guys play overseas. Few college. Should give us a sense of where you're at. Gonna be a lot of jaw so just do you.

An automated voice announces we've arrived at:

BUS PA

Willowbrook/Rosa Parks.

BILLY

Know where we're at?

Alex nods, steely-eyed. Any legit hooper would.

BILLY (CONT'D)

CPT, baby. Knuckle up.

EXT. STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy and Alex amble past the sea-green houses of IMPERIAL COURTS. Infamous Watts projects. Billy, nostalgic smile, takes note of a young BOY, rock in hand, spinning past his bemused MOM as she pins laundry.

EXT. KING DREW MAGNET HIGH. COMPTON -- MOMENTS LATER

A subsonic vibration echoes from within. A squad of LOCALS loiter at the entrance. A few mean-mug, others snicker, as Billy and Alex near. Billy grabs the door, whispers...

BILLY

Time to earn that hood pass...

Grimy scene outside, but...

INSIDE

... it's love. The GAME'S latest STOMPS our eardrums. A dozen PLAYERS casually stretch, shoot, talk shit. FANS cheer on two youngsters C-WALKING at center court.

Billy inhales with a melancholy smile. This is home.

BILLY

Welcome to The Drew.

An MC, GEORGE PRECIADO (40s, Latino) hollers over the loud-speaker, gaze locked on Alex.

PRECIADO

Which one of y'all order dim sum?

Crowd starts DYING. Alex shrinks in the spotlight. He's never really been an outsider. This just got very real.

MOMENTS LATER

Opening tip. Alex's eyes widen as BYRON WILTS lines up beside him. Same kid he saw playing on TV back home. Wilts, the Santa Claus of swag, grins at him.

WILTS

Let's do this thing, mini-Ming.

*INSERT DREW LEAGUE SCENES:

-- The game's a blur. Everything happening at hyper-speed. Alex can't focus. He spins on the break. Loses it off his leg. He tries to shake off the nerves as the heckles rain.

-- On D he's in Wilts' guts. BIG MAN sets a pick. Alex goes under. Wilts drills a three. Cocks the shotty.

WILTS

Where your cornrows, Linsanity?

-- Alex with a step back. BRICK. Wide open triple. Back rim. A pull-up barely catches iron. He swears under his breath. Quickly growing more frustrated, more doubtful.

ON Billy upright, concerned. Alex's J is BROKEN. From the hip. Could he have been wrong about this kid?

-- Fast break the other way. Alex sprints, but can't get in position. Wilts tosses the lob. Alex jumps. Mistake.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A trailing WING CRAMS it on his melon. Straddles him. Tea bags sprinkle the deck.

PRECIADO

(over PA)

OH SHIT! Got ourselves a spring performance of the Nutcracker!

Alex, emasculated, throws the WING off him. He eyes the crowd, dazed. Feels like the entire place is clowning him.

The wing slides past. Taunting.

WING

Dip 'em in fish sauce for you next time, nigga.

Just like that... Alex decides he's had enough.

ALEX

Figured hot sauce more your thing.

Alex shoulders the wing as they trot down court. The crowd HUSHES as they square up.

WING (CONT'D)

Push me again, motherfucker. See what time it is.

Alex glances at Billy motioning on the sideline. *Pump the brakes*. But that's not Alex. He's cool everywhere but on the court. Alex straightens up. SHOVES the wing back!

In a flash the wing balls his fist--BAM! Drills Alex with a hook. Alex's legs buckle, but he catches himself. He stands upright, spits his front tooth on the deck. But he's not shook, he's ready to pop off. Before he can retaliate the two are separated.

MOMENTS LATER

Alex slumps on the bench. Infuriated. Demoralized. *Fuck this place*. Billy calmly takes a seat beside him.

BILLY

Wanna know who doesn't get poster'd? Dudes that don't defend.

(beat)

There are artists and there are soldiers, Alex. Which are you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alex looks up. Savage. Hands Billy his tooth.

*INSERT GAME SCENES

-- Alex picks Wilts up full court. Stance low. *Bring it.*

PRECIADO

Mike Tyson goin' havoc out here.

-- Alex barrels through a screen. Wilts tries to post, but Alex doesn't bend. Forces a bad fade.

-- Alex pump-fakes. Darts in the lane. Lobs to a CUTTER. BANG! Crowd's starting to feel it.

-- Alex picks the bone. Streaks down-court. Lay-up? Fuck that. He rises. Heavy FLUSH! Slaps the backboard. Gap-tooth snarl. Hand to his ear, playing to the crowd.

PRECIADO

Okay! Okay! Ladies and gentleman,
the beast from the East!

Official Drew nickname. Hood pass.

POST GAME

Alex unties his dated Kobe's as Wilts rolls past.

WILTS

Hope you got dental.

A grin curls out. Sure he was in a fight, got tea-bagged, but Alex also just ran at the Drew. That's surreal.

BILLY (O.S.)

Feeling yourself? Cause most of
those dudes aren't ever cashing a
check.

Alex peers over at Billy standing by the door.

BILLY

One thing to hold your own,
another to shine.

Real talk. Alex's satisfied grin vanishes.

EXT. MLK HOSPITAL -- LATER

Alex exits through sliding glass doors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

Lemme see?

Alex cheeses. Full set.

ALEX

Can't feel my tongue.

BILLY

Good. Won't have to listen to you
whimper. You owe me six hundo
worth of sweat. Come on.

EXT. SAND DUNE. MANHATTAN BEACH -- AFTERNOON

Alex, shirtless, BURSTS up a steep sand hill, forty-pound
medicine ball overhead. Sweat pours down his chest as he
laps yoga MOMS, circuit BROS. He hits the peak, reverses.

PAN DOWN to Billy lotioning his neck on a bench. He gazes
across the park at a children's soccer practice. An eight-
year old boy streaks down the sideline. His son. IAN.

ALEX (O.S.)

Rip the band-aid off. Trust me...

Billy turns to find Alex, panting, beside him.

ALEX

That's your boy, right?

BILLY

I say stop? Get your ass up there!

Alex retreats. Billy isn't one for sharing.

EXT/INT. UBER. TORRANCE -- LATER

A quiet cul-de-sac of faded townhouses. Little boxes of
middle class LA. Billy and Alex hop out.

BILLY

Sit tight.

EXT. LAURIE'S TOWNHOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Light knock. Deep breath. Swallowing nerves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Door cracks. Billy's ex, LAURIE, who we recognize from the pictures, peeks out. She's got the SoCal transplant look: flops, Aviator hoodie.

BILLY
(trademark grin)
Ni hao.

Judging by her expression this is not a welcome surprise. She steps out. Quietly closes the door behind her.

BILLY (CONT'D)
My fault. Thought Ian had soccer
on Tuesdays.

He's sure of it.

LAURIE
You're up on his schedule. Good to
know...
(beat)
You don't have a phone, Billy?

BILLY
Know me. Always been partial to
live and direct.

LAURIE
Right. Right. Can't have
distractions. No calls. No skype.
Not even on his friggin' birthday.

Her resentment is obvious, but her tone is measured. She's not looking for a fight. She's past that.

BILLY
Creating off the dribble here.
Guess I been neglecting my skills.

Billy frowns, hoping his vulnerability might lighten things.

LAURIE
Not just your skills.

Not so much.

LAURIE (CONT'D)
Why are you here?

BILLY
Got this kid I'm training for the
draft. Could be real.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BILLY (CONT'D)
 GM's already reaching out about
 assistant gigs. Little behind
 schedule, but it's happening. I'm
 back, Laurie.

We can tell he actually believes his bullshit.

Laurie peers over his shoulder at Alex sitting on the
 curb across the...

EXT. STREET -- SAME

INTERCUT with Alex on his phone and his GRANDFATHER on an
 ancient cordless in his LIVING ROOM.

ALEX
'Beast from the East'...

GRANDFATHER
Sounds like a promising start.

There's pride in Alex's tone. He made the right call.

BACK TO:

EXT. LAURIE'S TOWNHOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

LAURIE
 I'm happy for you, Billy. But that
 stack of legal docs you signed
 last year should have been an
 indication that I wasn't waiting.

BILLY
 I know. I just want to see him.
 Let him know I'm home.

LAURIE
 This isn't your home.

BILLY
 You know what I'm saying. C'mon...
 I held up my end, Laurie. Never
 missed a check.

Laurie's capillaries are about to burst.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 Fuck. I didn't mean it like that.
 I'm just trying to make up for the
 lost tape years, alright?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURIE

You're not here for Ian.
 (off Alex)
 You're here for him. For you.
 That's opportunity, not effort.

Laurie calmly steps back inside. Shuts the door.

Billy, stung, stands frozen. He turns to leave, but pauses when he spots Alex. He's reminded of something-- Ian's birthday card.

He reaches into his jacket, pulls it out, and slips it through the mail slot. Worth a shot.

INT. STREET -- SAME

Alex is still on with his Grandfather.

ALEX

Yue drop off your pills?

But someone else takes hold of the phone--his Grandmother. Her tone is urgent, bitter.

GRANDMOTHER

Alex?

He freezes hearing her voice.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

*Do you realize what you're doing
 to this family?*

We can almost see the shadow fall over Alex's face. He's grown used to her tactics, the manipulation, but it hurts just the same.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

Do you?

ALEX

I'm not...

Alex trails off. He has no answer.

His hollow gaze locks on Billy who marches past. Still shaken from the encounter with Laurie.

BILLY

Coming or what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alex steels himself. It was one thing to disappear under the cover of night, another to actually say the words...

ALEX

I have to go, Nai Nai.

GRANDMOTHER (O.S.)

Alex? Alex...

Alex ends the call. Swallows his guilt. He's not ready to give up.

BACK TO Grandmother and Grandfather in the LIVING ROOM.

Alex's Grandmother places the cordless back in its dock. A beat as she hovers, more frightened than angry.

GRANDFATHER

You have to give him--

GRANDMOTHER

Don't.

She stomps to her bedroom without another word.

INT. BATHROOM. APARTMENT -- LATER

Billy downs a handful of melatonin.

As he steps into the HALL he spots Alex asleep on the couch. X-Box controller on his chest.

Billy drifts over. Removes the remote. Shuts the TV off. Drapes a blanket over him. A beat as he stares at Alex. Just a kid. One his future depends upon.

TRAINING MONTAGE OVER TEN DAYS

A. Ext/Int. Middle School

Billy, self-conscious, leads Alex into a stuffy gym.

BILLY

Rims are ten-feet. Stretch out.

Alex loosens up as Billy sets the agenda.

BILLY (CONT'D)

We've got less than two weeks to turn potential into performance.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY (CONT'D)

We're not going to be able to fix every hole. Our goal is simple: convince the biggest agent in the game that you're worth the investment. If he signs you... zero to a hundred just like that.

B. Alex sprints the length of the court pounding the rock ahead. Lay up. Billy looks on from the sideline.

BILLY

Three dribbles, kid. Don't overthink. Just play!

C. Alex squats on the end-line dribbling a tennis ball with one hand. Orange with the other.

BILLY

Overload the stimuli. Block out the fans, the smack, the voices in your head.

(taps Alex's chin)

Trust me. Trust yourself!

The ball catches Alex's toe. Rolls away.

D. Living Room

Alex washes down a dozen vitamins with a protein shake as Billy rewinds tape of a Clippers game. Film study.

BILLY

See how Beverly uses Westbrook's speed against him? Guy's a fucking gnat. That's you. You're a problem every time you step on the wood. Believe that.

Alex nods. Engaged. His phone chirps in his pocket. He peers at the caller: Yue. Alex heads to his bedroom for privacy. Billy calls as he goes...

BILLY

Know why horse trainers put blinders on thoroughbreds?

Alex glances back, unnerved.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Keeps their eyes glued to the finish line and off bullshit.

Billy gesticulates blinders with both hands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

E. Middle-School Gym

Alex slices to the rim. Elevates. Billy DRILLS him with a large arm pad. Alex crashes to the floor as the ball trickles off the iron.

BILLY

Absorb and finish. You're a soldier, right? RIGHT?

Billy puts a hand out to help Alex up. Pump fakes.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Fuck you need a hand for? You don't need anyone's help!

F. Alex's Bedroom

Alex collapses in bed. Exhausted. Ice-packs on both feet. He *wechats* in hushed tones with Yue.

ALEX

How are they?

YUE

Same. Nai-Nai would never admit it, but she's scared.

Alex nods absently. Yue's his only link to his family.

YUE (CONT'D)

She'll get past it.

But they both knows that's not likely. A beat as that hard truth hangs in the air...

YUE (CONT'D)

You gonna tell me about LA?

ALEX

Barely seen it. I'm on the court or in the gym ten hours a day. Hardly walk when I get out.

He removes an ice-pack. Exposes his blood-crusting toes..

YUE

Please. This is real pain...

She quickly removes her top to show off a new tat on her clavicle: An "A" and a "Y" on either side. She gives him a seductive look, uncrosses her arms.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

YUE (CONT'D)

You probably need your rest tho...

ALEX

Fuck that. I'm good. I'm up.

Alex is removing his shorts when Billy barges in.

BILLY

Kid, double socks tomorrow--

Billy catches a glimpse, quickly doubles back. He wants no part of the wechat smash.

ALEX

Billy, what the fuck?!

INT. HALLWAY. MIDDLE SCHOOL -- AFTERNOON

Billy's on his cell. Frustration evident as he gets VM.

BILLY

Laur, feelin' like Brad Pitt over here. I just want to see him, alright? Hit me back.

As Billy hangs up a flood of MIDDLE-SCHOOLERS in *Death of a Salesman* costumes come barreling out of the gym. The universe is trolling him.

GYM -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy fires the rock at Alex as he rotates through shooting drills, resistance bands around his ankles. Alex raises up. Flicks the ball off his wrist. Long.

BILLY

Swan, Alex! Hold your fucking follow-through. Plus seven and we're done.

Alex misfires again. Billy's growing agitated. A hint of that desperation we saw earlier bubbling over.

BILLY (CONT'D)

How the fuck do you expect to be drafted if you can't knock down a twenty-footer?

Alex darts left. Head down. When he looks up the ball is inches from his face. He's barely able to deflect.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY (CONT'D)

Head up!

Alex glares at Billy.

ALEX

You trying to hit me?!

BILLY

Eyes up or you're getting popped.

Alex grits his teeth. That violent Latrell potential.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You wanna throw hands? If my old ass has you bent, what's gonna happen on the court?

ALEX

You're a fucking mental patient.

BILLY

Yep... sure you and your girl will have a nice nut and cry about it later. Keep it movin' for now.

Alex raises up. Nylon.

BILLY

Look at that--a flying fucking fish! Try two in a row.

ALEX

(under his breath)
Try sucking my dick from the back.

ANGLE ON two slack-jawed, eavesdropping, MIDDLE-SCHOOLERS in the rear painting cardboards for the school play.

INT. APARTMENT. MID-CITY -- DAY 10

Billy has his ear to Alex's bedroom door. He can hear whispers from within. He knocks lightly.

ALEX (O.S.)

One second.

More whispers. A quick goodbye. Billy opens the door. Alex is lying on his bed, ice all over.

BILLY

Let's go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

Thought it was play day?

BILLY

Field trip.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD SIGN -- MORNING

Alex, weighted vest, hurdles a steep incline. Emerges on a platform just above the Hollywood sign. Billy waves him on. Alex slips over the security rail. Climbs down. He LEAPS up, clings to the H. Bangs out pull-ups.

MOMENTS LATER

They sit in the shadow of the Hollywood sign. City-scape in the foreground. Alex's first taste of sultry LA. A side Billy thinks he needs to see.

BILLY

I know you think I'm an asshole.

ALEX

Oh, I'm certain.

BILLY

Thing is, Alex, all this shit...

Billy opens up his arms.

BILLY (CONT'D)

It's right here for the taking, but you gotta own it. Can't have one foot across the ocean.

ALEX

Stop asking me to give up my people, Billy. I won't do that.

BILLY

We all got pasts, kid. At some point you're gonna have to decide how much you're willing to risk.

Billy hops up...

BILLY (CONT'D)

C'mon. 'bout time you see the LA I promised.

***SERIES OF SHOTS OF BILLY AND ALEX PLAYING TOURIST:**

-- Venice Beach. Day

Steady fog as Alex plays pick up. He flexes at Muscle Beach. Listens to every fake-ass rapper's CD. As they shuffle along the boardwalk the reality of broken dreams take hold. Tent-camps. Drunken homeless strumming guitars. All stars in their own head at one time.

-- Santa Monica Pier

Alex fires jumpers at a carnival basketball hoop. He can't miss. The ATTENDANT is blown away.

-- East LA. Al & Bea's Mexican Restaurant

Alex tears into a burrito at an outdoor table. A giant stuffed GORILLA beside him. His prize from the pier. The thump of a heavy base draws his attention. A candy-painted two-seater, 49er 24's, sits at a light. Two VATOS, starch white tanks, lean heavy behind the dash. They mean-mug Alex. He cheeses. Billy marks the exchange.

BILLY

(under his breath)

This isn't the fucking zoo.

Moments Later: Alex rides shotgun in the low-rider. The DRIVER hits switches. Car DROPS six inches.

Billy looks on, lips curling upward. He can't help it. This is the first time he's seen Alex laugh.

INT. UBER X -- EVENING

Alex slides into a tinted Denali. Billy, shotgun, glances back with a sly grin.

BILLY

Ready to go behind the curtain?

The seduction begins...

EXT. KEVIN GARNETT'S HOME. MALIBU -- EVENING

A sleek modern on the PCH. Billy leads Alex to a side entrance. Faint bass echoing behind a towering hedge. Billy peers up at a set of security cameras. A beat before a gate slides open.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They follow a stone path as the bass deepens. They finally turn the corner and walk into a BANGER.

BILLY

This is how you dream, kid.
Footsteps on the moon.

Alex's jaw DROPS: Infinity pool overlooking the Pacific. Pro-ballers, actors, models. This isn't just the good life. It's the fucking fantasy.

Just then a soccer ball rolls to Billy's ankles.

STEVE NASH (O.S.)

Little help?

STEVE NASH, shirtless, board-shorts, jogs over.

STEVE NASH

See they booted you before you
poisoned too many minds. Smart.

BILLY

So salty for a Canadian. Can't let
the haters get to you, Steve. It
wasn't the system. You earned
those MVP's. Facts.

Nash and Billy clown each other. Exchange hugs. Nash extends a hand to Alex.

STEVE NASH

Steve.

But Alex is frozen. He doesn't seem the type to be star-struck, but something about Nash has him rattled.

BILLY

(off Alex)
Don't mind him. Tongue fell in the
pool when we walked in.

Nash snorts, dribbles away.

BILLY

I'd ask if you were raised in a
barn, but I don't wanna be
culturally insensitive.

ALEX

How do you know him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BILLY

Nash? Met him at the World's in '94.

(snorts)

Told his coach he'd never make it.

A rare moment of humility as Billy pokes Alex's chest.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Never underestimate the valentine.

But Alex isn't home. His gaze remains locked on Nash across the party. A haunted glare.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You alright?

INT. BAR. GARNETT'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Alex slams a fruity cocktail, nods to the BARTENDER for another. He scans the room--a haze of herb smoke, laughter, milly-rocking. This night should be *everything*, but he's still clearly shaken by the Nash encounter.

The bartender hands Alex a fresh one. Down in one. Drowning the anxiety.

MOMENTS LATER

Alex's nerves are in the rearview, clearly lit, as he wanders the party.

Out of nowhere Billy grabs his elbow, pulls him over. Leon's holding court. Suited up. Extra crispy.

BILLY

Alex, Leon Rich.

Alex straightens. Sober face. Judge and jury.

ALEX

Appreciate the opportunity, sir.

Leon eyes the drink in Alex's hand.

LEON

Hope it's been... *fruitful*.

Alex chuckles a little too hard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

Don't empower the cornballs, son.

Leon spies someone passing over Alex's shoulder.

LEON

Jeremy.

REVEAL: JEREMY LIN, Asian American pro.

LEON (CONT'D)

Meet Alex Yang. Potential client.

Lin and Alex study one another. Awkward nods. Both keenly aware of why they were introduced.

JEREMY LIN

What's good?

ALEX

Hey.

Brutal.

LEON

That's it? Shit, I meet a nigga in Beijing I'm hugging him like he's my pops.

LIN

That's cause he might be.

BILLY

Linsanity with the wig-split!

Owned. Lin peaces.

The spark of a lighter turns Leon's attention. Reveal: Alex lighting a smoke. Leon's straight stumped.

LEON

(to Billy)

He smokes?

BILLY

Not trees.

LEON

Thank god for that shit.

As a cloud of herb smoke wafts over them.

INT. UBER -- MOMENTS LATER

They arrived in the X, but depart in the standard. That kinda night. Billy and Alex sit in the rear, stuffed gorilla between them so their eyes never meet.

BILLY

I don't fucking get you, kid. I really don't. I mean--what was that?! You don't get lit in front of the guy staking us.

(raises his voice)

You're supposed to be my red soldier. Perception matters!

ALEX

You took me to a party, but you don't want me to party? Got it.

But Alex knows he fucked up. It's written on his face.

BILLY

I was trying to get you hyped, not introduce you to a Kardashian.

ALEX

Three weeks ago I was sleeping in a factory dorm. I don't need hype.

A beat as Billy digests. It's rare to find someone who's love for the game is still pure.

Then Alex asks the question he's been wondering ever since they met...

ALEX

Why'd you go to China?

Billy gazes out the window as they pass the Santa Monica pier. The neon-lit ferris wheel suspended in darkness.

BILLY

To become a head coach.

ALEX

Thought you were a scout?

Billy doesn't need to respond. It dawns on Alex. Billy's still pursuing his own dream.

Off the ferris wheel as it churns...

INT. PRACTICE FACILITY -- NEXT MORNING

Alex crouches at the free throw line. Jump stop. Floater. Billy slaps at his wrist. Knocks the ball away.

BILLY

Too low. Shoulder level when you take off.

LEON (O.S.)

BK...

Leon's at the doorway. Waves him over.

BILLY

Floaters with your left.

Billy instructs Alex before joining Leon.

LEON

(off Alex)
Sweating out that gravy?

BILLY

Kid's got Odom's tolerance.

LEON

Too soon, my nigga. Too soon.

Leon watches as Alex drops floaters. Kid looks the part.

LEON

Legit with no D. Course I was K-slay Thompson in practice too.

BILLY

Clay fucking Aiken maybe. Only point I've ever seen who couldn't hit sixty percent from the stripe.

LEON

Cold, bruh.
(beat)
Heard you rolled by Laurie's. She says you're interviewing for assistant jobs? Funny cause I'd have heard of any openings.

Leon eyes him, suspicious. Billy's real agenda unveiled.

BILLY

You tell her that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEON

My name ain't Fitty... But you
better pray your boy's for real.

WILTS (O.S.)

On my grind, Richy Rich.

Billy and Leon are interrupted by none other than Leon's
prized client, Byron Wilts.

Leon spots Rachel, head of marketing, at the entrance.

LEON

You drove him?

RACHEL

(eye-roll)
Couldn't find his keys...

WILTS

(amused shrug)
My jeans all along.

Clearly Wilts just wanted to spit.

LEON

Know she got a double bachelors in
business and psychology, right?

RACHEL

And a Dad who voted for Trump.

AYYYY. No shot. Rachel waves. Ciao.

Wilts eyes Alex cross-court.

WILTS

Oh shit! Mini-Ming. That's my
sparring partner?
(snorts)
Shit, soup ain't a whole meal.

Billy stiffens, concerned.

BILLY

Thought we talked about running
him through drills?

LEON

Show and prove, BK.

*INSERT ONE on ONE SCENES:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

-- Alex jabs left. Step back J. SPLASH.

Wilts smirks. *Okay*. Leon hollers, not amused.

LEON

Won't be so funny when you're the
last guy in the green room,
chicken-noodle.

-- Alex pump-fakes. Wilts lunges. Alex goes strong to the rack. Elevates. Wilts soars from behind. Pins the rock on the backboard. Ouch. Nap-time is over.

WILTS

Bitch, gimme that money.

-- Alex forces Wilts into a difficult fade. He hits it with ease. Alex drops his head.

-- Alex bricks a floater. A three. A step back. Wilts is all over him.

WILTS

This little piggy building a two-
story brick house.

Leon raises an eyebrow at Billy. Not good. Alex swears under his breath, frustration bubbling.

BILLY

Alex.

They lock eyes. Billy raises his hands on either side.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Blinders.

-- Wilts crosses Alex left to right.

WILTS

Breaks on the lambo...

Then quickly behind his back. Alex trips. FALLS.

Wilts snorts. Glares at Alex. Lingerie on the deck.

WILTS (CONT'D)

Filayyy...

He raises up. Net.

Alex watches as Leon and Billy turn away. They can't even look. He shrinks. Absolutely humiliated.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WILTS

(to Leon)

Think his visa just expired.

Alex stares daggers at Wilts. Pure rage.

WILTS (CONT'D)

Draft starts at seven. I'll be home and tucking my lil' girl in at eight. Bank that shit, Leon.

As Wilts turns, Alex WHIPS the ball at his face. CRUNCH as it impales his nose! Blood spatters the hardwood!

WILTS

What the fuck?!

Blood cobwebs his face, pools in his fingers.

ALEX

Always see the ball.

Alex grabs the ricochet, races to the tin. Angry two-hand flush. When he lands he looks to the bench. Billy and Leon tend to Wilts. Towel pinned to his nose.

Leon grills Alex. Turns to Billy.

LEON

That's a wrap.

MOMENTS LATER

Billy waits on Alex as he packs up. There's nothing to say. Leon emerges from the hallway.

BILLY

How's he doing?

LEON

Jay Z snout, but it's not broke.

BILLY

Good. Good.

(to Alex)

Give us a minute, kid.

Alex dips. He knows it's over.

LEON

Your boy got Rubio's J and Boogie's fuse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

You want the flower shop or the garden? Shit takes time.

Leon takes no joy in killing his boy's fantasy.

LEON (CONT'D)

Billy, you know I am loyal to the soil, but he ain't the ticket.

Just like that, the candle's out.

INT. APARTMENT. MID-CITY -- EVENING

Alex lies on the couch devouring In N Out. Beer in hand. He snorts at something on TV as Billy enters.

ON TV: *White Man Can't Jump*. Woody Harrelson flips his hat backwards and imitates Wesley Snipes.

ALEX

(off Snipes)

Oughta cast Byron in the sequel.

Billy's taken aback by the fast-food, the beer, the mess.

BILLY

What is this shit?

ALEX

Animal style. I get it now. Fire.

Consolation in a burger...

BILLY

You're in training.

ALEX

He said we're done.

(beat)

I'm going home, Billy.

BILLY

Fuck that. You wanna quit?

ALEX

What other choice is there?

A KNOCK on the door.

Alex grabs it. Can't see who's there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

Just a minute.
(to Billy)
It's your past...

Alex slips into his bedroom. Billy wanders over, stunned to find Laurie waiting in the breezeway in her work uniform. HEAD PASTRY CHEF stenciled on her shirt.

Billy, slightly awkward, welcomes her inside...

BILLY

Hey? Come... Come on in.

Laurie scopes the room. Place is a shit box.

LAURIE

See Leon spared no expense.

BILLY

Trying to keep the kid humble.

LAURIE

You too, no doubt.

She spots the gorilla lurking in the corner. Brow raise.

LAURIE

Least it's not inflatable.

BILLY

Look, Laurie, I didn't mean to stalk--

Laurie reaches into her jacket pocket. Produces the birthday card that Billy left.

LAURIE

Could've just sent it. Know how much that would have meant to him?

BILLY

I don't... it just felt hollow.

LAURIE

Not as hollow as dead air.
(beat)
We read it.

Billy's eyes flicker. Hope.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

He wants to see you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BILLY

Good. Shit. That's great. Thank you, Laurie.

LAURIE

Don't thank me. He asked.

(fiery beat)

If you pull another fucking David Blaine, Billy... I swear to--

Billy grabs her wrist. Calm, but earnest.

BILLY

I'm here. I promise.

And instead of coming clean Billy doubles down.

LAURIE

Next week then. I'll call you.

Laurie shows herself out. Billy slumps to the floor. Mind-fucked. He needs a new angle. He can't leave now...

HOURS LATER

Billy unconsciously traces the tat on his hand. Pacing. He hasn't slept. The only light is the glare from ESPN muted in the BG. Alex's giant gorilla stares at him. Creepy. Billy turns away. Glances at the screen.

ON TV: *journalist SCOOP JACKSON (53, grey goatee) grades the latest NBA draft entrants.*

Billy's adopts that same look we saw in China. Wheels turning. Scheming. An epiphany...

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Alex is packing when Billy barges in. Exhausted, but electric.

BILLY

After Kobe lost in the finals he showed up at the gym the next morning at four-thirty. AM. People said he was an asshole too. Teammates didn't like him. Maybe wasn't such a great husband or father. But that's what it takes.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY (CONT'D)

The great ones separate themselves
with sacrifice. Risk it for the
motherfucking biscuit.

Alex's phone buzzes in his pocket. Billy grabs his hand
as he reaches for it.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Whatever it is you think you owe
them, bury it.

Alex stares at his buzzing phone. Conflicted.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Goddamn it, kid! Let that shit go.

Alex peers up. He can hear the desperation in Billy's
tone. A beat before he silences it. The two eye each
other intensely.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Closed mouth don't get fed.

ALEX

Leon said it was over. I'll do
whatever it takes, but--

Billy's head bobs. Plan *fermenting*.

BILLY

I still believe in you, Alex.
(beat)
You believe in me?

ALEX

Starting to.

BILLY

Then stop packing. I got this.

EXT. PRESS ENTRY. STAPLES CENTER -- EVENING

Neon lights of LA Live. A game has just let out. FANS in
Blake jerseys hurry to their cars in the BG.

The press entrance bursts open. MEN and WOMEN,
credentials roped around their necks, exit.

Scoop Jackson saunters out, face in his phone.

BILLY (O.S.)

Gotta scoop for Scoop.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Scoop freezes. He knows that voice. Peers over.

REVEAL: Billy lurking in the shadows. Sheepish grin.

SCOOP

Thought it felt a little greasy
out here...

(beat)

No time for your bullshit, Billy.

BILLY

All star weekend '09.

Now he's got time. Billy drifts over.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You imagine if they had camera-
phones when MJ was in his prime?

SCOOP

Told me you erased those.

BILLY

Thought I did, but... (peering
upwards) fucking cloud, right? I
can make sure they're dust long as
I get my back scratched too.

Billy antes up with a little bit of blackmail.

INT. FED EX OFFICE -- MIDDLE OF NIGHT

Billy hovers over a fax machine. The familiar blue NBA
logo on the page below. A headline in bold reads:

2017 NBA DRAFT EARLY ENTRY APPLICATION

*Cue Future and Drake: *them boyz up to something...*

INT. RICH SPORTS. BEVERLY HILLS -- NEXT MORNING

A modern glass office building on Wilshire.

LEON'S OFFICE

White leather couches, signed jerseys, framed photo with
Obama. Plasma with ESPN on mute. Sound proof glass all
that separates the boss from his minions.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Leon peers out his window cradling a signed Olympic ball: the manicured lawns of LACC. A sliver of the Pacific barely visible through a marine layer. The other side of LA slowly taking over the complexion of our film.

LEON

We've known each other a long time, Billy. Yet you still astound me.

Billy's a foot inside the door. Chest up. Bayonne steez.

Leon grabs a doc from his desk. Waves it. The NBA draft contract. C/U: Leon's name is listed as contact along with his signature. A forge. Billy's all the way in now.

LEON (CONT'D)

This shit though... I mean you got some fucking all-fours, primordial onions on you, boy.

BILLY

He can do this, Leon.

LEON

Stop bullshitting me! This ain't about Alex. Never was. You're gambling with this kid's life, Billy. And for what? So you can be relevant again?

BILLY

You think I don't know I fucked up? That it doesn't sliver up my spine every time I close my eyes? I ghosted on my family and I have jack to show for it. So yeah, I'm hoping if Alex shows out I get a little shine. Why shouldn't I?

LEON

Billy, this can't be about your blood and your fucking ego.

Leon paces over to him.

LEON (CONT'D)

You know how this ends, right? We exploit him, anoint him, but, eventually he's exposed. Half-way across the world with his dick in hand. You goin' ride for him then?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BILLY

Look children, the agent high on his saddle...

LEON

Summer before my senior year you were overseeing team lift. We're all waxing 'bout the draft. The paper. You pulled me in the locker-room. Told me I was damn too smart for welfare-dreams.

(beat)

That was a fuckin' slug to the chest, but you were right. I wasn't good enough. I had to Let. It. Go.

(beat)

One thing I've learned, perched on this saddle, is that it doesn't matter if you're a young nigga from the bricks or a buzz-cut saltine from the cornfield or even a little homicidal steel worker from the Middle Kingdom. There ain't enough pennies in the well for everybody. So as much as the truth may hurt, I don't pimp these kids. You taught me that... back when you gave a fuck about someone other than yourself.

BILLY

So you're out?

LEON

(nodding to TV)

Train already left. You saw to that.

ON TV: an ESPN ANCHOR introduces a segment entitled "MADE IN CHINA". Just as Billy envisioned.

ANCHOR (O.S.)

Scoop Jackson joins us with the unlikely story of the NBA's latest early entrant...

LEON

I'll do what the fuck I do because it's my rep and because I don't want to see your family hurt again by exposing your ratchet ass. But if this shit goes bad, Billy...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LEON (CONT'D)

That ghost you mentioned? He's permanent.

MATCH TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM. APARTMENT -- LATER

Alex sits in stunned silence watching the segment on TV.

SCOOP

Alex Yang, point guard by way of China, has signed with super-agent Leon Rich. This dude appeared, literally, out of nowhere. Plucked from obscurity in a country of one point five billion. With a B!

Alex glances over as Billy walks through the door. No words necessary.

SCOOP (CONT'D)

Kid was hauling steel in a factory town when fate intervened. Chinese call it yuanfen. Destiny. In this case it came in the form of none other than the Mamba. Kobe Bryant.

ON SCREEN: various camera-phone footage of Alex and Kobe squaring off in his village. Rapid-fire edited shots of Alex pulling the Shammgod. Hitting a floater. A final shot of Alex DRILLING Kobe to the pavement. That snarl.

SCOOP (CONT'D)

It's no secret that teams are hungry to exploit the Chinese market. So whether this kid they're calling "A.Y." is a sideshow or an unearthed phenom may not matter. If he can play at all it could be worth the gamble.

Alex kills the TV. A mix of confusion and vulnerability.

ALEX

If I wasn't Chinese would we be here?

BILLY

Nope.

(beat)

But you don't waste time questioning opportunity, Alex.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY (CONT'D)

You snatch it by the fucking neck
and you don't ever let go.

Alex casts a loaded glare. He's stepping off the ledge.
An uncertain path ahead. One he swore he'd never take.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Alex lays horizontal on the bed. *Wechatting* with Yue.

YUE

Six more weeks?

Her face is a mix of elation and just a little
heartbreak.

YUE

This is what you want, right?

Alex is somber. Conflicted.

ALEX

*Yeah. I just... I'd been fighting
it for so long, you know? I never
realized how bad.*

Alex summons his courage. Time to fly.

ALEX (CONT'D)

*Thing is, if I'm really going to
do this its gotta be nothing but
ball.*

Yue knows exactly where this is headed.

YUE

*Shit. All this time I thought I
helped inspire you. Turns out I
was just a distraction.*

ALEX

*You're not. It's just... when I'm
talking to you I'm thinking about
my Grandparents... it's a cycle.*

YUE

*Don't put that on me. You're the
one asking.*

ALEX

*That's the problem. I can't help
it. I just need a time out...*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (CONT'D)

*from all of it.**(shakes his head)**You're the one who said to be selfish, remember?*

YUE

How long you been waiting to throw that at me?

ALEX

Yue--

YUE

No. Take your fucking time out, Alex. But just so you know, pretending we don't exist won't set you free.

ALEX

It's just until the combine.

YUE

Not for me. I'm done.

She disappears from his screen. Alex is torn, pained, but righteous. He's got to do this Billy's way.

INT. BATHROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Alex shuffles out of the bathroom just as Billy's about to walk in. A subtle head nod between roommates.

Billy steps in. Notices the medicine cabinet's been left ajar. He reaches for his bottle of melatonin. The cap slips off. Someone didn't close it fully. Alex. Billy's first inkling that he's feeling the heat.

INT. LEON'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Leon outlines the game-plan for Billy and Rachel. This isn't just hoop anymore. It's corporate strategy. Alex looks on. Blank. He might as well not be there.

LEON

GM's been blowing me up all day. He measures well at the combine there will be interest. But we need to keep him under the hood. They're drawn to the mystery.

*(to Billy)**So no team workouts.**(MORE)*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEON (CONT'D)

No one on ones. No Drew. I'm serious, Billy. He hits up a 'pop-a-shot' and I'll decimate your pancake ass.

(beat)

I got you access to The Lab. GM's like numbers so I want to see everything: from his vertical to his detox to his bleached fucking anus. And make sure he gets a psych eval. Matter fact, you too.

*INSERT NIKE LAB MONTAGE:

-- Alex goes through rigorous physical and psychological evaluations. This is where science, technology and sport converge. He's handed a pair of Kobe AD's, same ones advertised back home. The irony's not lost on him. Force-plates are latched all over his body. As he SPRINTS and FIRES SHOTS, TECHNICIANS monitor his stride and form on motion capture computers.

-- Alex, breathing apparatus over his face, darts through lateral cones, rope ladders. Tests his vert. His bench.

-- STROBE POV: A flash SHUDDERS like lightening. PULL OUT and REVEAL Alex wearing stroboscopic glasses. Dribbling two balls the length of the court. Billy looks on from the sideline beside a TECHNICIAN.

TECHNICIAN

Strobes will help him focus on feel. He'll be less effected by outside influences like lights or camera flashes.

-- Alex and Billy eat in a cafeteria surrounded by Nike ATHLETES. Alex squints at something across the room. A bald head. About 6'6. Can't see the face, but the gait leaves no doubt. He nudges Billy. Even the most cynical are star-struck sometimes.

*CUE Drake and Future: *Chi-town, chi-town Michael Jordan just said text me...*

BACK TO:

LEON'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Leon turns to Rachel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEON

We control the narrative. Provide all footage for the media. His journey's the story, not his game. Talkin' *60 Minutes* poverty porn.

(beat)

And make sure he's prepped. Dude's not merely a virgin... he just discovered his dick.

Alex furrows his brow. *Seems unnecessary.*

JUMP TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- LATER

Rachel and Billy prep Alex for interviews. Images of his family, his village, displayed on the table. Alex is more than just a little uneasy.

RACHEL

Dropped out at twelve to help support your Grandparents. What about your parents? Were they in the picture?

ALEX

(turning to Billy)

What is this shit? You tell me to let go and now you're putting it out for public consumption?

RACHEL

Alex, I get that it's not in your nature to share, but I've got to sell you. Think about it like this: there's Alex and there's A.Y. Alex is humble, determined, quiet. A.Y. is those things as well, but he's also an inspiration, a survivor, a savage. He's got a story people need to hear. You follow?

ALEX

I'm not comfortable with that.

Rachel glances at Billy. He gives her a calming gesture. He'll handle it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RACHEL

Let's move on.

BACK TO:

LEON'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Leon addresses Alex for the first time.

LEON

You now represent something much bigger than yourself. Bigger than even your own country. You represent every overlooked kid in every corner of the globe. Kids who had beef with their coach or didn't make grades. Kids escaping war or just trying to eat. They're out there putting in work right now. And when they hear about you they're going to believe that maybe, someday, a Chobani looking motherfucker like Billy might come along for them.

(beat)

I'm gonna keep it a dollar with you, Alex... I don't think you deserve this, but for all their sakes, I hope you prove me wrong.

ALEX

I will.

But Alex's eyes betray his stoic veneer. As if the stakes weren't already great enough.

INT. APARTMENT. MID-CITY -- AFTERNOON

Billy's tidying up when Alex saunters in with Rachel. Billy glances at his watch, alarmed by their presence.

BILLY

Done already? Wasn't expecting you 'til after dinner.

RACHEL

It's SLAM not the New Yorker.

Alex slumps on the couch. Exhausted. Kicks off his new Kobe's. Grabs the X-Box controller. 2K18.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

How'd he do?

RACHEL

He spent the first hour recounting every single back-issue cover.

They were cake after that.

BILLY

Gassing 'em. Good work, kid.

Alex doesn't acknowledge. Deep in the game. Rachel snaps a pic on her phone. Alex glances up hearing the click.

RACHEL

For your instagram. AY at leisure.

(winks)

Jalen & Jacoby first thing tomorrow.

Billy salutes as Rachel leaves.

ALEX

You don't think it's odd that she's online pretending to be me? I should go KD with the fake account, clap back at the haters.

BILLY

Win a chip then you can go all bird ass.

Billy drifts over, nerves fully apparent.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Kid, hate to put you out, but I got someone coming by.

ALEX

Are you for real? I haven't sat down all day.

BILLY

Heartbreaking. Go hug your pillow.

Alex, annoyed, pauses the game. Rises.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Do me a favor and take your cousin with you.

ANGLE ON Alex's giant gorilla lurking in the corner.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

A KNOCK.

Billy waits as Alex, gorilla under his arm, disappears to his bedroom. He centers himself. Moment of truth.

He opens the door. Laurie, in her uniform, and IAN, his precocious son, stare back.

Billy squats down to Ian's level.

BILLY
How you doing, kid?

Ian leans into his mother. Not out of fear. Timidity. To be expected. Billy twists his arm around his back...

BILLY (CONT'D)
Behind the back?

Nothing.

BILLY (CONT'D)
We'll get there.

He rises. Laurie flashes a comforting smile.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Thought I'd make us some grub.
Authentic Chinese.

LAURIE
You cooking now?

BILLY
Salt pinching's not on your level,
but I got some Vince Staples.

LAURIE
You still think it's cute that you
talk like a fourteen year-old,
don't you?

BILLY
Lil' bit.

Billy winks, turns to Ian.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Rent a movie? Your choice.

Still nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LAURIE

Just keep it PG, boys.

(beat)

I gotta run. Off around midnight.

Laurie hugs Ian. She glares at Billy over his shoulder. The same look as Alex's Grandfather. Trust.

LAURIE

Have fun, okay?

Laurie slips out. Sunday quiet.

BILLY

Help me marinate?

But Ian's only got eyes for the 2K paused on the TV.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Go ahead.

Ian takes Alex's spot. Restarts the game.

As Billy preps dinner, Alex tip-toes out to snag his kicks. He pauses to watch Ian play.

ON TV: *an animated Karl Anthony Towns pumpfakes. Inside out to create space. Hits a 3.*

ALEX

Nice. What's that code?

Ian doesn't look up. Too engrossed.

IAN

ISO normal 1 with an inside out.

Billy spots Alex. *What the fuck is he doing?*

ALEX

You a Wolves fan?

IAN

Just Kat. He's from Jersey.

Billy sidles beside Alex, hiding his annoyance.

BILLY

Ian did Mom mention that I'm training Alex for the draft?

Ian pauses the game. Finally peers up at Alex.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

IAN

So you're like a new Jeremy Lin?

Alex smiles. Kid's too innocent to offend.

ALEX

He's Panda Express. I'm authentic.

IAN

Like Yao?

ALEX

A mini-Ming.

Billy snorts at the Wilts reference. Elated that his son is actually speaking.

IAN

Thought Mom said you were interviewing for coaching jobs?

Alex eyes Billy. A trace of suspicion. First he's heard of it.

LATER

The three of them sit on the floor. Hot-pot simmering. Ian and Alex battle on 2K. Mood's light: laughter, smiles. For a moment the pressure's subsided. Just two kids, video games and a proud father.

BILLY

God Shammgod. Hands down. Best handle I've ever seen.

ALEX

I'm with Ian. Kyrie. Shammgod does it on concrete, not in the Finals.

IAN

Church.

Billy gives Ian a sideways glance.

BILLY

Jesus. We gotta limit your Uncle Leon time.

Billy sees Ian fumbling with his chopsticks...

BILLY

Here, let me help you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IAN

I got it.

Ian tries again. A piece of meat slips to the floor.

BILLY

Just let me show you--

Billy leans down, grabs his hand.

IAN

Get OFF ME!

Ian rips his arm away in a tantrum, knocking the Hot-Pot over in the process. Boiling water floods the floor.

Billy rushes forward. Sets the pot back upright.

BILLY

What the hell was that?! You could have hurt somebody!

Ian's turned his back on him.

IAN

Told you I didn't want your help.

Billy's startled, somewhat horrified. No idea how to react.

ALEX

Billy...

Alex makes a calming gesture. He recognizes Ian's anger.

Alex crouches down beside Ian, chopsticks in hand.

ALEX

I was trash with the sticks til I was like ten... and I'm Chinese.

Ian snorts just so.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Key is holding the top one the same way you grip a pencil.

Alex positions the sticks in Ian's fingers.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Perfect. You watch Shark Week?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Ian nods. Alex guides his hand over the pot as Billy wipes up the mess on the floor.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Bull shark's lower jaw stays
pretty still, right? All the power
comes from the top.

Ian snaps down on a piece of chicken, fishes it out, and chomps down with pride. Success.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Nice! Soon you'll be riding a
scooter in the sunshine with the
umbrella popped. Straight local.

Alex glances at Billy. A loaded glare in return. A hint of jealousy. Alex relates to Ian better than he does.

LATER

Alex opens the front door to Laurie.

LAURIE
Hi there. I didn't get the
official intro last time. Laurie.

ALEX
Alex. Good to meet you.

Laurie strolls in, spots Ian inches from the TV mesmerized by *SPIDERMAN*. She glances over at Billy in the kitchen washing dishes. He knows she's there, but refuses to look up. Shattered pride.

EXT. LAURIE'S VOLVO -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy waves as Ian closes the rear door. Nothing in return. Laurie clocks the exchange. Tough night.

LAURIE
Whose idea was Spidey?

Billy shakes his head, shrugs.

BILLY
Woulda traded my small fucking
intestine for a smile.

LAURIE
Not easy being ignored, is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

That hurt.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

He's not a puppy, Billy. He needs to see some effort. K?

Billy nods as she hops in the driver-side and pulls out.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Alex is finishing the dishes when Billy re-enters. Billy beelines, still stung, and nudges Alex out of the way.

BILLY

Didn't ask for help.

ALEX

You're welcome anyway.

This definitely ain't about dishes.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You know, I was around four when my Dad quit the mill. He took our savings, enrolled in this school in Beijing. Basically disappeared. He'd come home for New Year. Once a year. He knew from the get that I was pissed. Hated listening to his bullshit rah-rah about the future while we were eating scraps from our neighbors. Over time, we essentially became strangers. Then one year, I was about Ian's age, he brought me a signed Steve Nash jersey. Said he saw him play in a charity game.

Billy finally understands why Alex cracked that night. It wasn't Nash, it was the memory of his father.

ALEX (CONT'D)

My family didn't know jack about ball, but my father had become obsessed.

(snorts)

He's the one that taught me that Shawn Marion sling you hate so much.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (CONT'D)

The game became our language and, for a few days, I stopped hating him. Then we got a call.

(shakes his head)

I'd never seen my Grandmother cry. They found him at this little flophouse. He'd been diagnosed with TB, but didn't say anything. My Grandfather said he didn't want to burden us.

(snorts)

Like that shit ever bothered him.

BILLY

Ever consider that he wanted something more for you? Something better?

ALEX

Every day, but then I'd get up and go to my miserable fucking job.

Billy doesn't have answer for that one.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Ian's a good kid. You've got a second chance. Don't waste it.

BILLY

I don't need you to tell me that.

ALEX

I did it anyway.

Alex slips into the hallway.

INT. ALEX'S HOME -- DAWN

Alex's GRANDFATHER watches the playoffs on the flat-screen. Cannula clipped to his nostrils. The ancient cordless phone beside him CHIRPS. He grabs it, confused as to who would call at this hour.

GRANDFATHER

Hello?

INTERCUT with Alex on the couch watching the same game. He needed to hear his Grandfather's voice.

ALEX

Ye Ye. It's me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

His Grandfather sits up, eyes glowing. He clears his throat, a guttural succession of HACKS, before he spews crimson into a napkin. His health has taken a dark turn.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Doing alright?

Grandfather peers at the screen. Rockets down ten.

GRANDFATHER

Can't expect to win when James shoots six for twenty-three.

Alex nods. They both know what he was asking, but this is how they relate.

ALEX

Steve Nash, the sequel.

(beat)

I met him, you know.

GRANDFATHER

He shook your father's hand.

Which means everything in their world.

A BEAT as the two let the silence linger. Alex can hear the labored breathing through the phone. It pains him.

GRANDFATHER (O.S.)

Alex, I want you to know... what you're doing... I'm very--

Just then a hand snatches the phone from Alex's Grandfather. Reveal: His Grandmother, phone to her ear.

GRANDMOTHER

Do not call here again.

The line abruptly goes dead. Alex's face drops. A sickening feeling of isolation.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Alex powers his phone down. For good. Shoves it in his suitcase.

INT. BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy's moisturizing when Alex walks in. Alex opens the medicine cabinet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Helps himself to a handful Billy's melatonin. Retreats to his room without a word. Billy looks on, incredulous.

BILLY
(calling out)
Help yourself...

INT. ESPN RADIO -- AFTERNOON

Alex is being interviewed by DAVID JACOBY and JALEN ROSE, but his mind is elsewhere. He's distant. Disengaged.

JACOBY
How many hours a day?

ALEX
Fifteen. Something like that.

JALEN
Pushing steel? Hey Draymond, kick this dude in the jam. I dare you!

JACOBY
So everybody has something that fuels the dream. Alex, you lost your father at nine, right? Grandparents raised you?

Alex sits up in his chair. His eyes go dead.

JACOBY (CONT'D)
How important was overcoming those hurdles in order to get here?

Alex looks directly at us as we JUMP TO:

MOMENTS LATER

Alex steps out of the BOOTH and gets right in Billy's face. Rachel looks on, confused and concerned.

ALEX
(off Rachel)
You told her?

BILLY
Charge it to the game, kid.

Alex balls his fist, but holds back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

You know instead of gossiping about my family, maybe you should focus on unfucking your own.

Alex storms off. Rachel eyes Billy. Defiance cloaking his shame.

RACHEL

Thought you said he was okay with it?

BILLY

He will be. Eventually.

RACHEL

Jesus. Stick to drill-work, alright?

Rachel chases after Alex. As she exits, Byron Wilts waltzes in. Swollen nose and all.

WILTS

Tiffani Trump. Where you skipping?

Rachel ignores him. Wilts, annoyed by the snub, saunters up to Billy.

WILTS (CONT'D)

You tell Leon he oughta spend more time on his lottery pick than his fortune cookie.

Billy watches as Wilts steps into the booth. Wilts pounds Jalen. A superstar who knows how to navigate the other side of the game.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Billy pokes his head in, protein shake in hand. Alex is already up. Dressed. Stretching out on a foam roller.

BILLY

Sleep is the cousin of death. Rise and grind.

Billy tries to hand Alex the drink, a peace offering, but is ignored. He places it on the dresser.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Guess I should have brought you a red velvet instead, eh cupcake?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Billy's jab only intensifies the tension.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Look, past few days... we both said some things.

ALEX

You apologize about as well as you parent.

Billy let's it go.

BILLY

Look, let's keep it clean. Focus on that biscuit. Alright?

ALEX

I don't recall putting your family's shit on the street.

BILLY

Again with the slow jams.

(beat)

Alex, you only get one shot at this. One. We got five more days so, like it or not, I'm emptying the clip every time we step out... Either go for broke or go the fuck home.

Billy departs. Alex sits up, fuming. He SWATS the protein shake, splattering the wall with rosy sludge.

EXT. PARK -- AFTERNOON

Laurie's watching Ian's youth soccer game when her expression abruptly morphs to annoyance.

REVEAL: Billy approaching with a bag of Capri Suns and Rice Krispies treats. Laurie quickly moves to intervene.

LAURIE

What are you doing?

BILLY

Supporting the under-eight Lions on their quest for five-hundred.

Billy waves to Ian as he races past. Ian pauses seeing him. Confused, but a little intrigued.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY (CONT'D)

Look at him go. Little pasty Pele.

LAURIE

You should have asked.

BILLY

Said show some effort. Here I am.

Laurie nods her head. He's right.

INT. NIKE HANGAR -- MORNING

STROBE POV: SHUDDERS like light from a flash come at various speeds and intervals.

PULL OUT as Alex catches a tennis ball with his right while dribbling the rock with his left. It's effortless. Hyper-focused. Determined.

He tosses the tennis ball back. Maintains his dribble. Pulls up. Jumper hits back rim.

BILLY

Look at your feet. Land square!

In the BG, WE HEAR Billy's phone ring on the bench. He ignores it.

BILLY

Switch it up.

Billy throws another tennis ball. Alex fumbles it.

ALEX

Shit!

BILLY

If it were breezy league minimum wouldn't be one point three.

Alex kicks the ball. Frustration bubbling over.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Still loving it?

ALEX

The game. Not your fucking lip.

Animosity at one-hundred.

Again, Billy's phone rings. Breaking the tension.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

Hit the stripe and wipe the sand
off your dick. I'm not the enemy.

Billy heads to the bench. A confused expression falls over his face as he notices that the missed calls are all from the same number--one with a Chinese calling code.

Billy puts his ear to his phone. We can barely make out the familiar, but somber, voice on the other end struggling in broken English...

YUE (O.S.)

Mr. Billy, this is Yue... Alex's
ex. Please tell Alex to call me.
It's an urgent matter...

Billy's face turns serious as Yue's voice trails off. Billy continues to listen. His expression turning severe.

He stares at Alex, haunted.

Finally he pockets his phone. Returns with a straight face. Whatever Yue's message, he's internalizing it.

BILLY

Let's call it.

ALEX

Who was that?

Billy breaks eye-contact. A chink in the armor that doesn't go unnoticed.

BILLY

Leon's office. Wanted to confirm
The Drew this afternoon.

INT. BATHROOM. NIKE HANGAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy moisturizes his forehead. Stares in the mirror then quickly turns away. Rebuffed by his own image. That voicemail still has him seriously rattled.

EXT. ECHO PARK LAKE -- DUSK

The whine of a fishing line unspooling. The soft glug of a lure going under. Fading sunlight cloaks the water in a tie-dye of purple and pink. Downtown city-scape looming.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PULL BACK and reveal Leon sitting at the edge of the lake. Rod in hand. Sleeves rolled. His sanctuary. He slowly reels his line in. Pauses, sensing company. He glances over his shoulder. Billy. Lurking with the lost bearing of a university professor.

LEON

Got an extra rod.

BILLY

Need to talk to you.

There's an urgency to Billy's tone that we haven't heard since he first pitched Leon.

LEON

Go ahead. Anything you can say to me you can say to the mud cats.

Leon continues reeling. Eyes never straying from the lake.

BILLY

Hypothetically... what happens if we pull Alex from the draft?

LEON

This got something to do with the Jalen & Jacoby interview?

BILLY

More of a contagion effect.

But he's not offering more than that. Whatever Billy's concealing, it's heavy enough that he's considering icing his whole damn vision!

The tip of Leon's rod dips just so. He coaxes the fish.

LEON

There we go. Come get a taste.

(to Billy)

Hypothetically... maybe he signs with a CBA team. Realistically... the momentum we built--the buzz--that's gone. Definitely... he becomes another kid with serious flaws in his game that won't ever sniff the league.

Leon jerks his line. Hooked.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LEON

Gotcha.

As Leon plays tug of war he casts an eye at Billy.

LEON

Lucky for you I prefer operating in a world of assurances and after the kid's little orphan Annie memoir leaked I got the Lakers word that they'll snag him in the second. Assuming he measures out at the combine.

BILLY

You're serious?

LEON

Since when you know me to be a witty nigga, BK?

BILLY

What about the scrimmage? Kid shits the bed, they're walking.

LEON

Told 'em Alex wouldn't workout with anyone else, but that he wasn't competing.

BILLY

Fuck me.

Billy paces. Conflicted. Leon can see it on his face.

LEON

Wanna know the best part? Luke Walton called. He wants to parlay. With you. Turns out they lost a scout.

Billy's eyes go wide. He should be thanking the gods. This is his shot, but his conscious weighs heavy.

LEON (CONT'D)

You and I both know you've done a lotta grimy shit, but you deserve your shine. Soak it in.

Leon abruptly drops the rod. Lifts a brackish catfish from the water. Studies her, snorts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LEON
 Girl got lips like Kerry
 Washington, don't she?

On Billy peering up at the purple sky. That shine? Not as good as he'd imagined.

INT. KING DREW MAGNET HIGH. COMPTON -- AFTERNOON

Alex's return to the famed summer league is a lot different than his debut. The moment he steps into the cramped gym GEORGE PRECIADO, the MC, announces his presence with love.

PRECIADO
 Big up to our guy, Beast, in the
 building!

Photographers click shots as the crowd, nearly half-Chinese, HURRAHS! He's become a cult figure. Alex shrinks as KIDS elbow in for his autograph.

RACHEL
 (under her breath)
 Smile wouldn't hurt.

Alex forces it as he signs copies of SLAM.

As the crowd parts, Alex comes face to face with Wilts standing on the edge of the court.

WILTS
 Leon actually letting you lace-up?

RACHEL
 Just fans, By.

WILTS
 Of course--mustn't expose the
 Golden Child.

Alex doesn't appreciate the insinuation that he's ducking and steps to Wilts, ogling his swollen nose.

ALEX
 Doing the humpty dance at
 halftime?

Now they're chest to chest. Fans taking notice. iPhones recording.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILTS

Think pushing steel makes you
hard, fluff and fold? Motherfucker
I grew up playing dodgeball with
hot rox.

Rachel squeezes between them...

RACHEL

This isn't a good look...for
either of you.

WILTS

What's it feel like, mini-Ming,
knowing that everyone in this gym
deserve it more than you?

A horn sounds. Game time. Wilts glides past as Alex
stews. A part of him knows Wilts is right.

EXT/INT. NAIL SALON. DOWNTOWN -- AFTERNOON

An unassuming nail salon in the shadow of Staples.

Lakers coach LUKE WALTON and Billy sit side by side
getting pedicures.

WALTON

Pre-game ritual.
(beat)
So... how was China?

BILLY

Humbling.

WALTON

Leon told you we're considering
your kid in the second?

BILLY

He may have...

WALTON

Big market when Kobe was here.
We're not expecting an all-star,
but I need to know he can compete.

BILLY

Measurables are leg--

Billy stops himself. No more BS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY (CONT'D)

Straight up, Luke-- kid's green.
Never run a set. Skills are there,
but it'll take a minute.

LUKE

Asked around about you. Slippery
rep. That's not the spin I was
anticipating.

Billy leans in. Locks eyes with Walton.

BILLY

His whole life no one ever told
him this was even possible. That's
exactly why he could be great.

Genuine Billy is a new look, but just as effective.

WALTON

Not sure Lonzo ever ran a set
either. Swear to god we'd be
drafting fifth graders if they'd
let us.

(beat)

Leon mention the scout position?

Billy nods. Veils his desperation.

WALTON (CONT'D)

Figure if you can find a player in
the mountains of China you still
got your eye. Alex's numbers check
out, the job's yours.

Walton, cotton-balls between his toes, waddles to the
manicure station.

ON Billy. Relief and shame trading blows in the pit of
his stomach.

LEON (PRE-LAPSE)

We're outside the crib. Come on.

INT. SUV -- DUSK

Leon pockets his phone, eyes Billy across from him in the
backseat of an SUV.

LEON

Sure he's ready for this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

He's got it.

Billy veils his guilt with confidence.

Just then the passenger door opens. Leon slides over as Alex slips in.

LEON

There's our boy.

Alex is slightly unnerved by Leon's friendly demeanor.

ALEX

Where we going?

LEON

To celebrate.

ALEX

Celebrate what?

LEON

The fact that in a few weeks you'll be running alongside *showtime*, baby.

ALEX

I'm not following...

LEON

The Lakers gave us a second round guarantee.

(off Billy)

In fact, they like your ass so much they even offered this bum a job.

Alex sits back, trying to process. He glances over Leon's shoulder at Billy who's avoided his gaze ever since he stepped in the car. Billy finally peers over.

ALEX

This for real?

BILLY

(nodding)

Measure out and you're good. Congratulations, kid.

They've been at each other's throats for weeks, but in this *Post Malone* moment Alex realizes it was worth it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Alex exhales deeply, emitting a bewildered chortle. He leans his head back against the seat, eyes jutting upward. Overwhelmed would be an understatement.

ALEX
Holy fucking shit.

Leon smiles. This is the part of his gig he truly loves. He elbows Billy...

LEON
It's like that. It's like THAT!

EXT/INT. CHEESECAKE FACTORY -- MOMENTS LATER

Some do it big at Nobu, but the realest head to *The Factory*. Billy, Alex, Rachel and Leon sit around a table.

LEON
What time's the flight?

RACHEL
Two-thirty.

LEON
(to Alex)
We'll grab you about noon. Early dinner, good night sleep, then you go kill that combine.

Alex nods, confident. For the first time he appears unburdened. At ease.

Leon smiles at something OS.

LEON (CONT'D)
Rest of the crew's here.

Billy peers over his shoulder. Ian and Laurie stroll in. Billy, thrown, eyes Leon.

LEON
(shrugs)
I may have leaked.

Greetings exchanged, hugs. Laurie squeezes Billy, whispers in his ear. Genuine affection.

LAURIE
You said it would happen. I'm glad it did.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

Thanks Laurie.

She peers down at Ian standing at her side.

LAURIE

You tell your father
congratulations?

Ian peers up, a trace of pride in his eyes.

IAN

Congrats, Dad.

Dad. Damn that felt good. Billy ropes him in for a hug.

BILLY

Never too old to hug your pops,
alright?

Billy smiles warmly at Laurie as father and son separate. She knew it would take time, but he earned it.

Ian, meanwhile, turns his attention to Alex.

IAN

Think you'll start over Lonzo?

LEON

Don't go there. Lavar will put a
fatwa on all our asses!

CHUCKLES all around...

LATER

Entrees out. Small talk. Laughter. Ian and Billy sit side by side. Laurie watches them with a flicker of warmth.

Leon clinks his glass with his fork, rises for a toast.

LEON

To my ace, Billy Kennedy...
Forever devoted to the religion of
self.

Snickers and cackles. That truth, of course, more loaded for Laurie and Ian.

LEON (CONT'D)

There've been doubters--me.
There've been haters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Laurie and Alex raises their hands, quasi-joking.

LEON (CONT'D)

But you never wavered.

(off Alex)

You laid it all on red here and you were right. I guess sometimes we all need the fruitloops to keep us inspired. I love you, Billy. We all do.

Glasses raised. Hurrahs.

LEON (CONT'D)

Your turn.

Billy stands, calming gesture.

BILLY

Such thoughtful words... First of all, it's just a scout job so let's not overdue it.

Then he turns to Laurie and Ian.

BILLY (CONT'D)

But it keeps me close, and that's what matters.

Billy turns to Alex.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Kid, I know I'm not easy...

Alex can only snort at that...

BILLY (CONT'D)

I asked a lot of you. Maybe too much, but--

Just then Billy notices his cell phone, lying on the table, flashing. Incoming call. That familiar Chinese calling code. He freezes, loses his train of thought. He knows exactly who it is.

LEON

It ain't that important, Billy.

Leon reaches across the table, snatches Billy's phone, moves it beside his plate and out of Billy's purview. Just so happens that Alex is sitting right beside Leon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Billy watches as Alex catches a glimpse of the blinking digits. Suddenly Billy adopts the queasy look of a man nearing the drop of a roller-coaster.

LAURIE

Billy? You okay?

BILLY

Sorry. I... I was saying that--

Alex peers up at Billy. Confusion morphing to distrust. Alex grabs Billy's phone, answers it.

ALEX

Yue?

Alex glares at Billy as he listens to the voice on the other end. Billy slowly turns flush. His world, seconds ago full of promise, now imploding.

Alex, phone pinned to his ear, hurries outside.

LAURIE

What's going on? Who's that?

Billy does his best to play it off.

BILLY

His girl, I guess. I don't...
gimme a few minutes.

Billy follows Alex outside.

EXT. STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Alex ducks into an ALLEY. His expression a blend disbelief and terror.

ALEX

I don't understand. When?

INTERCUT with YUE at ALEX'S HOME.

YUE

*Ten days ago. I've been calling
your cell non-stop.*

ALEX

It wasn't on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

YUE

*No shit. That's why I left
messages with Billy. I tried,
Alex. I'm sorry. I didn't know
what else to do.*

Alex can barely contain his rage.

ALEX

Put Nai Nai on.

YUE

Alex, she's upset.

ALEX

Put her on, Yue.

Yue walks into the COURTYARD where Alex's Grandmother is being comforted by LOCALS. Beside her sits a modest wooden coffin. His Grandfather. It all comes full circle. That's the secret that was tearing at Billy.

Yue hands Alex's Grandmother her cell. She knows exactly who it is.

Alex can hear her breathing on the other end.

ALEX

*I didn't know, Nai Nai. He didn't
tell me. I'm sorry...*

Though he can't see her icy glare, he can sense it.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'll catch a flight out tomorrow.

GRANDMOTHER

No.

She snaps. Stoic. Hardened.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

*You return when you've succeeded.
That's the choice you made.*

With that, his Grandmother hands the phone back to Yue.

YUE

Alex?

But he's paralyzed. His soul torn out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

YUE (CONT'D)

Alex, I'm sorry.

Alex buckles on the ground. Phone slipping from his fingers.

BILLY (O.S.)

Alex?

Alex glances up. Billy stands at the mouth of the alley, approaching with caution.

Alex jumps up, visceral anger. A caged animal--unleashed.

ALEX

You motherfucker...

Without warning, he charges Billy, fist balled. He SWINGS wildly. Billy can see it coming and deflects the frantic blows. The two men CLING to one another.

BILLY

Calm the fuck down!

Alex tears the sleeve of Billy's coat as Billy manages to get him into a headlock.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You piece of fucking shit!

Billy bear-hugs him into submission. Eventually Alex tires. Emotional exhaustion.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You lied to me. You fucking lied to me.

Billy tightens his hold, consoling.

BILLY

I know I did. I know.

A tear streaks down Alex's face. The first we've glimpsed.

Then, abruptly, Alex shoves Billy back.

ALEX

Get the fuck OFF ME!

Alex wipes his face. He's wild-eyed, irrational, broken.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ALEX

I should have been there... I left him to fucking die.

BILLY

Jesus, kid... This isn't on you.

ALEX

Sure it is and it's all because I followed you. 'Trust me, trust me'. How many times did I hear that shit?

(beat)

Were you ever going to tell me?

BILLY

Course I was.

ALEX

After you got what you wanted, right?

(snorts)

You and your fucking blinders.

Billy knows he's hurting, but he's defiant.

BILLY

Look, I'm sorry he passed, kid--I truly am--but I don't regret keeping it from you for one fucking second. We're two days away from changing your whole life. Your family's lives.

ALEX

Oh fuck that, Billy! You think I don't see you? You're two days away from getting your old life back. The one you threw away chasing bullshit.

BILLY

That's not true. I'm the one goddamn person who actually believes in you. If it weren't for me you'd still be hauling fucking rocks right now.

ALEX

So what?! So fucking what?! At least I wouldn't be alone.

Alex is beside himself as the revelation hits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ALEX (CONT'D)

You know my whole life I've been afraid of my father's shadow and here I am... Tiger in the father, tiger in the fucking son!

Alex echoes the warning of his Grandmother.

ALEX (CONT'D)

And I let it happen. Lost my girl, my people. For what? What was the point?

BILLY

You're a player, Alex. You can't fight that.

ALEX

(snorts)

I didn't realize it at first, but you're just like him. You don't give a fuck who you hurt.

BILLY

Maybe I'm just old enough to know that you can't please everybody.

ALEX

Do you please anyone, Billy? Do you make anyone's life better?

Billy, for once, is speechless.

ALEX (CONT'D)

There it is.

Alex abruptly turns around and starts down the alley.

EXT/INT. CHEESECAKE FACTORY -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy wanders back to the restaurant. Dazed. A wolf crawling through the wreckage. He pauses at the front window, studies his reflection. He straightens his coat, runs a hand through his hair. Gotta look the part. He peers inside and fixates on his family--Ian and Laurie--sitting at the table. A beat before he swallows his shame and enters.

He slowly makes his over, vulnerability masked by that familiar shifty grin.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY

Sorry about that.

LAURIE

Everything alright?

Billy takes a seat beside Ian. Pats him on the knee.

BILLY

Yeah. Alex just had to deal with a little family drama.

IAN

What happened to your coat?

Ian nods to the rip along Billy's elbow... Leon and Laurie glare at him. Something's up.

INT. IAN'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Billy reads *The Awesome Book* to Ian in bed.

BILLY

'Please dream for those who've given up... for those who've never tried... please use your dreams to make new dreams... for all the dreams that died...'

Billy closes the book.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Used to read you that every night. Guess you're a little old for it now, huh?

IAN

Kinda.

Ian peers at Billy's tattooed palm.

IAN (CONT'D)

What's that from?

Billy opens his hand. No longer self-conscious.

BILLY

One afternoon you came home from pre-school with tracings of your hands.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY (CONT'D)

I got this before I went away to remind myself that, no matter the distance, we were always in it together.

The mounting desperation, the guilt of failing Alex, is scrawled on Billy's mug.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Thing is... that wasn't true. Sometimes we make choices that, in the moment, seem like the right thing, but later we discover that those decisions, they have a ripple effect.

ANGLE ON Laurie spying through a crack in the doorway...

BILLY (CONT'D)

Your Uncle Leon... he said I was selfish tonight. He was right. I'm sorry, Ian. I should have done right by you.

It's clear his apology isn't just meant for Ian.

INT. KITCHEN. LAURIE'S HOME -- MOMENTS LATER

Billy tip-toes out of Ian's room. Closes the door. Laurie's at the counter sipping red wine.

LAURIE

He down?

Billy nods.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

So... you gonna tell me what happened with Alex?

Billy just closes his eyes. Where to begin?

LATER

We can hear the agony in Billy's voice as he unloads. It's not easy admitting what a fuck-up you are.

BILLY

I saw that picture of you and Ian at his birthday. It was like this impenetrable barrier, you know?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY (CONT'D)

I felt... forgotten.

(beat)

Before I knew it I was here and
I'd gotten in so ass deep,
Laurie... We're so damn close. I
just didn't want to throw
everything away. For me or him.

LAURIE

That wasn't your choice, Billy.
Alex put his faith in you.

BILLY

I know he did.

Laurie refuses to pity him, but she's not overly harsh
either. Fact is, she's not surprised by any of it.

LAURIE

I swear for a moment you had me...
but some people are just wired for
one.

BILLY

I wish that weren't the case.

LAURIE

I believe you.

(beat)

But being good... that's never
been enough for you, Billy. Shit,
that's part of what made you so
sexy--that swagger, that
arrogance. You had your
Springfield speech written at
nineteen. Unfortunately, it also
made you a shitty husband and
father.

(beat)

Billy, I want you in Ian's life.
He does too. But you've got a
choice to make. His dreams or
yours?

A loaded look.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

I'm asking you to be better,
Billy. Can you do that?

BILLY

I can try.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Laurie wipes away an unexpected tear.

LAURIE

Fuck your effort. Prove it. Show us.

(beat)

Ian and I--we're used to it. We've got each other. But Alex... he needs you. Fix it, Billy.

Billy, eyes glassy, nods his head.

EXT. APARTMENT. MID-CITY -- MORNING

Alex, Nike bag over his shoulder, waits at the corner as a tinted SUV pulls up.

A DRIVER steps out, throws his bag in the trunk. Alex slips into the rear where Leon, Rachel, and Wilts await.

LEON

There he is. Heard you had some llama llama back home. You good?

Alex nods. He's straight.

LEON (CONT'D)

Good. Boys ready to put on a show?

Alex and Wilts grill each other, straight heat.

EXT. QUEST MULTISPORT COMPLEX. CHICAGO -- NEXT DAY

SUPER: THE COMBINE

A nondescript grey building on Chicago's West Side. Media vans, idling SUV's, hotel buses.

A steady stream of hopefuls head to the entrance: four-year STARTERS hungry for shine, wide-eyed OVERSEAS players flanked by TRANSLATORS, and the ANOINTED, next wave of superstars. They're used to the spotlight. Headphones on, eyes low, expressionless.

INT. LOCKER ROOM. COMPLEX -- MOMENTS LATER

Alex sits on a bench in a dank locker room. A fresh pair of custom Kobe AD's beside him. Crispy clean with the Chinese flag embroidered on the heel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A stream of sunlight from an open window warms his face. His eyes are closed, headphones on. Zoning in.

A shadow breaks the ray and Alex opens his eyes. He peers up to find Billy hovering by the door, mesh gym bag in hand. The last person he wants to see. Alex drops his head, once again refusing to acknowledge him.

Billy steps forward, abashed expression.

BILLY

I wasn't gonna show, but... guess I just like having the last word.

(beat)

Look you were right about me... I hurt people. People I care about. And I don't just mean by keeping secrets or lying. I use them. I take advantage. I didn't always. Guys used to call me a player's coach.

(snorts)

But somewhere along the way, I lost the plot. That's my shit. I hope I can change, but honestly I don't fucking know.

(beat)

Started thinking about what you said... about your father and I being alike. I know we both failed you. And I know you're pissed and you've every right to be. Thing is, if he's really anything like me, then I know his intentions were decent, Alex. Doesn't mean he didn't over-reach or that he wasn't a blind, egotistical fool, but every decision he made--right or wrong--he made with you in his heart. I've got no fucking doubt.

Alex bobs his head, eyes closed. Billy isn't even sure he can hear him, but it doesn't matter.

BILLY (CONT'D)

From jump I've been telling you to bury your past when all along I should have been asking you to embrace it. You got soldier in your DNA. Embrace that part of your father that dreamt so fucking big. That part of you that's afraid to fail.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BILLY (CONT'D)

That predator dropping bows.
That's who you are. That's how you
honor your people.

Still nothing from Alex.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Don't do it for me. Or you. Do it
for the culture, kid.

With that, Billy drops the bag and walks out. Alex
finally raises his head. He heard every word.

Alex stands, ambles over to the gym bag lying on the
floor, a sticky note clinging to the strings.

It reads: **STICK WITH WHAT MADE YOU...** Alex opens the bag,
his expression remains blank as he peers inside...

INT. COURT. COMPLEX -- MOMENTS LATER

A darkened hallway. Alex emerges from the shadows. He
hesitates ever so slightly when he sees the hive of
coaches, scouts and media, including a legion of CHINESE
JOURNALISTS. The pressure of the moment, his journey, his
sacrifice all down to this one event.

PAN DOWN to Alex's feet--he's got the reclaimed Kobe 8's
laced high. The same pair he battled Kobe in. The bag
from Billy... Stick with what made you.

*INSERT SERIES OF FRENETIC COMBINE SHOTS as every inch of
Alex is measured and catalogued: Height, weight,
wingspan, reach, body fat.

-- Vertical Leap: Billy looks on from the top of the
bleachers as Alex steps up. It's clear he's too hyped. He
can feel the eyes on him. He takes a deep breath. Alex
bends down. LEAPS. Slaps at the rungs. An official yells
out his score.

OFFICIAL

Thirty-four.

Billy watches as Alex mumbles to himself. He peers down
at Luke Walton sitting on the first row of the bleachers
with the other COACHES and GM's. Clearly underwhelmed.

-- Speed Assessment: Alex steps on the end-line. Takes
his position. Click. He darts down the court. Click.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OFFICIAL

Four point two.

Alex, hands over his head, swears at himself.

ALEX

Come on.

-- Lane Agility and Shuttle Run: Alex slides laterally in and out of the lane. Around the key. When the official calls out his number he punches the padding on the wall.

Leon ambles over to Billy, nerves apparent, as he eyes the various EXECS.

LEON

Goddamn, BK... kid sure as shit
not starting a bidding war.

Billy's gaze remains locked on Alex as he scans the sidelines. They lock eyes for an instant. Billy puts the blinders up, but Alex quickly turns away. Not interested in Billy's support.

LATER

Alex watches from the bleachers as other PROSPECTS, Wilts among them, warm up for a five on five scrimmage. Wilts saunters over, effortlessly flicking the rock between his legs.

WILTS

Leon told me to sit out too, but I
ain't buck. Guess that's the
difference between you and me.

Wilts leans down, whispers. Right in his face.

WILTS (CONT'D)

I know I'm that dude.

ALEX

Oughta invest in a toothbrush with
that signing bonus.

WILTS

You got jokes, but we all see
you... A.Y. You know that, right?

ALEX

What the fuck do you want from
me?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILTS

I want you to you earn it, half-steppin' motherfucker. Right here. Right now. Be a body or catch one.

Alex glares up at him. He's done hiding.

ALEX

Then let's go.

ANGLE ON BILLY and LEON by the bleachers. Leon peers across the court, a look of grave concern.

LEON

Fuck is he doing?

Billy follows his gaze. Alex tosses on a combine jersey.

LEON (CONT'D)

We said no runs, BK. Kid's gonna get exposed.

BILLY

Then he doesn't belong.

*INSERT FIRST HALF SCRIMMAGE:

-- Alex and Wilts guard one another. They're final battle. Wilts grabs the tip and he's off. Streaking down the court, flying past Alex for the easy deuce.

-- The scenes feel eerily similar to the Drew League. The pace is frenetic. Alex is overwhelmed. A step behind on every play. He travels, misses an open ten-footer, gets lost on defense.

INT. BLEACHERS. GYM -- MOMENTS LATER

A horn sounds for half-time. Luke Walton stands in the front row of the bleachers. He glances back at Leon and Billy, eyebrows raised. It's looking bleak.

LEON

So much for that fucking guarantee. He better channel his inner-fucking Waiters or this shit's a wrap, Billy.

Billy stands, unshaken.

BILLY

He'll be alright. Trust.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

An optimist on the verge of the apocalypse.

LEON

Awfully zen considering your
future's on the line too.

BILLY

Nah, I passed on that.

LEON

Say what now?

Billy slides off the bleachers.

LEON (CONT'D)

Where the hell you going?

BILLY

Wherever they'll take me, I guess.

With that, Billy heads the door.

ANGLE ON Alex on the bench. He watches Billy disappear through the exit. Typical Billy. Bailing on him.

The horn sounds. Second half. As Alex trots on the court he spots a lone figure standing in the shadow of the ESPN announcers table on the far end of the court.

His Grandmother. Her novocaine glare piercing him like a fucking ice-pick.

TEAMMATE (O.S.)

Ball out, man. Wake up.

Alex snaps to as his teammate prepares to inbound the rock.

As Alex dribbles up court he casts a furtive glance in her direction. She gives the world's most subtle nod, but that's all it takes.

*INSERT SECOND HALF SCRIMMAGE:

-- The pace has suddenly calmed. Alex darts in the lane and drops a filthy dime for the slam.

-- On defense, his focus is singular. It's just him and Wilts. He's back in that low, taunting stance. He fights through picks, forces a bad jumper.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

-- On the other end he steps into a pull up J--net. Next time down court he crosses Wilts for the step back 3-- good! Our guy is *cookin'*.

ANGLE ON Leon sitting on the bleachers, absolutely floored, mumbling to himself.

LEON

Fuck me with a brick, Michelle
Obama...

Just then Walton stands, glances back. Leon adopts a straight face like *told you*. Walton gives him the "I'll call you" signal and heads out.

-- The rivalry between Wilts and Alex continues. Neither one is backing down. Wilts drills a trey. Alex hits a floater. No shit talking, game recognize game.

-- Wilts catches the ball on the break. No one back. Alex sprints from behind as Wilts rises. Alex takes off. Meets him at the rim. Return to sender! A clean swat. Wilts crumbles to the floor. The ball careens out of bounds. Instead of snarling or pounding his chest, Alex offers Wilts a hand and helps him off the floor.

MOMENTS LATER

The moment the final horn sounds Alex beelines for his Grandmother, but Wilts steps right in his path. A beat as they eye one another.

Wilts finally grins, leans in for a bro-hug.

WILTS

Thought I was gonna put you on a
fold-out, mini-Ming. Then you come
through like LeBron. Hurt my
feelings, boy.

They pound it out.

WILTS (CONT'D)

Ball'd out, man. That's real shit.

As Wilts jogs off Alex stands, completely frozen. He finally knows Billy's known all along--he belongs.

Alex continues towards his Grandmother. She hasn't moved, her expression still vacant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

How did you--

GRANDMOTHER

Your coach. Said I needed to be here for you to be at your best.

A beat as Alex digests. First it was the speech, then the original kicks, and finally his Grandmother. After all this time Billy finally figured out how to liberate Alex.

ALEX

We'll see if that's enough.

GRANDMOTHER

*Better to know...**(beat)**You know your father was always a pain too. As a child there was never enough food, never enough books. But when your mother passed... I should have understood that he was never going to accept a simple life.**(beat)**When I lost my son... I lost my faith. I put that on you and that was unfair. It was wrong.*

Alex abruptly swallows his emotion. The shadow that's been lingering over him for so long has finally vanished. He doesn't know whether to scream, yell, or bawl.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

What happens now?

Alex shrugs. Does it even matter?

INT. BEIJING RESTAURANT -- EVENING

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

A haze of cigarette smoke. Hot-pot and tallboy Tsingtaos. Billy, black sweat-suit, front and center before a half-dozen dubious LOCALS. He's back spitting tales with that familiar swag, but this time there's a hint of melancholy in his tone.

BILLY

*Kid had those fast-twitch muscles. Can't teach that. Stance lower than a Rihanna twerk.**(MORE)*

(CONTINUED)

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BILLY (CONT'D)

I fucking saw it though, I did. He
had menace written all over him.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL SPACE -- MORNING

TIGHT on Alex, headphones on, back-pack over his shoulder with the rock poking out. Vacant glare. Focus or disillusion? Can't be sure.

BILLY (O.S.)

Not saying he wasn't a little
rough... But that edge, boy.
That's what tipped me.

We STAY CLOSE as Alex trudges along. Fleeting glimpses of concrete, a wire fence, overcast skyline in the BG. Please tell us he's not back at the fucking *mill*! Can't go out like that.

BILLY (O.S.)

Everybody's got a trigger. My
job... my obligation... was to
harness that flame.

(snorts)

Like breaking a fucking gorilla...

Alex rips open a heavy, graffiti-scrawled door...

TRACK behind Alex as he ambles down an empty HALL.

BILLY (O.S.)

Shit, first time he hit The Drew
kid he walked out minus a tooth.

We can almost hear the wistful smile curling out of Billy.

BILLY (O.S.)

Best six bills I ever dropped.

A BEAT as we remain behind Alex in the darkness. A deepening sense of isolation.

BILLY (O.S.)

I used to think I could get to
anyone... But that kid...

Alex pushes open a swinging door as the buzz of a vibrating cell phone takes us...

BACK TO:

INT. BEIJING RESTAURANT -- SAME

Billy glances down at his phone on the table. Ian's blinking face stares back. Skype. Billy hesitates just so... he hasn't finished his story.

He peers up at his table-mates, shrugs...

BILLY

Thing is, I needed him a lot more than he needed me.

(snatches his phone)

'Scuse me.

Clearly a change in priorities.

As Billy rises, one of the LOCALS glances at his friends with a heavy eye-roll.

LOCAL

(in Mandarin)

On next week's episode we'll find out he discovered Porzingas at a unicorn farm in Latvia.

Billy clocks the comment as he answers his skype.

BILLY

(into phone)

Hey pal... can you give me one minute?

Billy lowers his phone, turns back to the table, addresses them in crisp Mandarin.

BILLY

Nah, we're on the road next week.

The locals peer at one another, slightly awkward. *Caught.* Billy's understood them all along.

Billy reaches into his pocket, tosses a handful of tickets on the table.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Season opener. Courtesy of the Beijing Ducks' newest assistant coach.

The shit-talking local peers up, a look of disbelief.

Billy unzips his sweatshirt to chest level. A white polo peeks out.

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TIGHT on the Beijing Ducks logo over his chest. Beneath it: ASSISTANT COACH BILLY KENNEDY. A promotion.

Boom. Redemption in a noodle-shop.

With that he returns to his phone and heads for the exit...

BILLY
(into phone)
Sorry, bud. Just stepping
outside...

BACK TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- SAME

Alex, shirtless, sits solo in a pimped-out purple and gold locker room. Flat-screens, soaking tubs, leather recliners. LAKERS logo on the carpet.

Just when we're starting to assume that he's made and paid, Alex slides a jersey over his head. YANG stenciled on the back. But then he turns around--SOUTH BAY LAKERS emblazoned across his chest. The G League. The farm team for the real LA Lakers.

Don't fret. It may not be *the show*, but it damn sure beats the mill. Besides, Alex is just getting started...

BLACK

*Cue Drake and Future: *them boys up to something they just not just bluffing...*

*OVER CREDITS:

FLASH to MEN and WOMEN, SOLDIERS and MONKS, CHILDREN of every shade, even the former PRESIDENT, HOOPING throughout the world: the barns of Indiana, playgrounds of Beijing, milk-crates on trees in the Philippines, snowpacks of Finland, in the shadows of the Eifel Tower, on aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean, the Oval office. This game, this dream, truly is... universal.

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