

CONCUSSION

by

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BASED ON A TRUE STORY

OPEN ON EXTENDED TITLES, A CUT ASSEMBLY OF HOME MOVIE AND TV FOOTAGE:

- 1) Rhinelander High, Wisconsin. 1970. Rockwellian Americana: football cheerleaders, full stands in tribal green & white, convoys of yellow buses. Then--
- 2) A teenage MIKE WEBSTER playing for the Hodags. Biggest thing on the field, an unstoppable machine. Now--
- 3) Mike has broken his arm, holds up his cast, big smile, proud warrior. Then--
- 4) Mike is 22, wearing Pittsburgh Steelers practice uni, first day in camp. Alone against the mountainous men, a hazing. Infamous "nutcracker" drill - percussive hits like car head-ons, gun-shots. Coaches screaming: "Who's a man?! Who's tough?! Who's gonna hit somebody!?"
- 5) Webster - now 27, thicker, less joyful - wins ABC Wide World of Sports' "Strongest Man in Football" contest. Then--
- 6) Footage of the interior game. Steelers vs. Somebody. Webster vs. The World. Men as big as walls, and when Webster hits his, shovel-sized hands clap his ear-holes. Lightning bolts through his body, face in paralytic shock, and now--
- 7) Webster showers in post-game confetti winning his fourth Super Bowl ring. Shoulder-presses the Vince Lombardi championship trophy. His countenance primal. Now--
- 8) Back to that hit: Webster's helmet knocked off, left arm briefly hangs numb. Somebody's screaming, "That's it! Now that's how you gotta hit him!" And now--
- 9) A suddenly old-looking Webster roughing it through the "nutcracker". This time steamrolled by a new young Steelers' bad-ass, bearded, mountain-sized. Then--
- 10) The hit again. Webster getting up slow. Through his haze, hears: "That's it! Kill the head the body will die! KILL THE HEAD THE BODY WILL DIE! Now run it again!" Now we find--
- 11) Webster after a game, older, wandering off the field. Now--

WEBSTER (OVER)

(intoning)

This Hall of Fame class of players
is a tremendous group. Tremendous
people. Not perfect people--

- 12) Webster is 45 but looks 60. Delivering his Hall of Fame speech in Canton, OH--

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

Not people who are pretentious or whatever. Real people. And that's what the game of football is about.

And more manic, rambling scree. The game he loved. The owners and coaches. CUTS to crowd - family, players - embarrassed, wanting this to end.

Then it does. Titles end. Music ends. We cut to black, and--

MAN SINGING (PRE-LAP)

(Debarge's 'I like it')

I've been thinkin'/'bout you for quite a while/You're on my mind everyday and every night/My every thought is you, the things you do/Seems so satisfying to me/I must confess it, girl--

(voice big, melodic if not great, continuing as we come up to--)

13

EXT. PITTSBURGH - ESTABLISHING - DAYBREAK

The rust-belt wakes. Iron bridges like spokes of a wheel. Wrecked fallow mills, reclaimed by nature. The massive brand-new grounded UFO that is Heinz Field, where the Steelers play. The converging three rivers aflame all the way to the picket fence of Allegheny Mountains beyond.

TITLE: SEPTEMBER, 2002

MAN SINGING (OVER)

Ooh...and I like it/You send chills up my spine every time/I take a look at you/Ooh...and I like it--

(now we go into--)

14

INT./EXT. BENNET'S CAR (MOVING)/PITTSBURGH

A blue Mercedes E320 sedan and find BENNET OMALU, 35, shamelessly and sweetly singing.

BENNET

I like the way you comb your hair/And I like those stylish clothes you wear/It's just the little things you do/That show how much you really care--

(singing his way through-)

The Hill (ramshackle ghetto). Then Shadyside (leafy wealth).
Then the Strip (industrial hipsterville)--

BENNET (CONT'D)

*Like when I'm all alone with you
You know exactly what to do--*

Over a span of iron into a downtown of metal and glass--

BENNET (CONT'D)

*Ooh... and I like it/You send
chills up my spine every time/I
take a look at you/Ooh... and I
like it/Ooh... and I like it--
(and--)*

15

EXT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH

Bennet pulls up beside his car's silver twin. Same make and model. In the shadow of a Victorian stone monolith chalked by steel-mill soot. Itself in the shadow of a cloverleaf of humming freeway. And Bennet gets out. And we see--

He's incongruously - exquisitely - dressed. Tailored suit. Crisp shirt. Expensive tie (Presidential knot). Down a ramp into a gaping basement, receding down a dark tunnel, we--

HEAR - IN PRE-LAP - PEOPLE SINGING (badly) "HAPPY BIRTHDAY,
Happy birthday to you--"

16

INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - MORNING

Four TECHNICIANS celebrating a heavysset man's 50th. Cupcake scrawled, "*Happy Birthday Joe!*" Balloon bouquet, a candle. The break room. With a window letting out on the slabs. Where a shitbox TV plays *Wheel of Fortune*.

We're in the POV of someone watching. The figure coming into focus in f.g., quarantined, isolated--

It's Bennet. Standing - in scrubs now. Watching the others' lips moving, laughing. Now grabbing portable CD player, and back to--

BENNET

(pausing at the party)
Gracie, may we begin, please?
(and turns into--)

17

INT. AUTOPSY CHAMBER - MORNING

Soaring tiled chapel-like chamber, floors sloped toward drains. Three steel slabs with fresh corpses in various states of disrepair, four more in bags against the walls.

While in the b.g., DR. CYRIL WECHT, 60's, in scrubs, steps back from a slab to let a TECH finish up. Bennet and Wecht meet in the middle of the room--

BENNET

Good morning, Cyril--

As Wecht pats Bennet on the shoulder, moves to table to fill out forms. Bennet checks the clipboard--

BENNET (CONT'D)

(checking the clipboard)

Rachel Green first, please.

GRACIE - early 20's, blue ribbon (matching her uniform) twisted through her hair - goes to what was a pretty WOMAN, like her, early 20's. Still dressed for last night's party.

GRACIE

Full or partial, Dr. Omalu?

Bennet reviewing the girl's file. Police report. Holding up her driver's license. Roots around in her purse.

In b.g., prepping his own table, is DANIEL SULLIVAN, 50. Chief Pathology Supervisor. Bald, dark pouches under his eyes. Steelers stuff under lab gear. Countenance of an ill-humored butcher.

SULLIVAN

Open-shut O.D.--suicide. Full room today. We need to cycle them through.

Bennet, moving slow, ignoring him, over the girl's face, as if listening.

BENNET

I need your help, Rachel. We're in this together. Tell me what happened to you.

And a hand on the body's forehead, another over the heart. He opens her eyes. Stares into them. Connection.

SULLIVAN

Oh here we go.

WECHT

Danny, c'mon. Let him do this
thing. I hired him for a reason.

(to Bennet)

I need to talk to you. Come see me
in my office when you're done--

BENNET

Full autopsy. We'll need the tissue
dissection station.

Sullivan stops. Glares from his table. As a TRAINEE TECH, 25,
rolls a trolley over.

BENNET (CONT'D)

That's not mine--

Gracie fetches a different trolley. Brand new knives still in plastic. Scalpels. The instruments longer, more delicate.

GRACIE

(sidebars the trainee)

Dr. Omalu uses different stuff. He makes less of a mess--

As Bennet sets the volume on his CD player--

BENNET

Let's undress her, please.

And feels the fabric of her shirt. The quality. The pattern.

TECH #1

(measuring head to heel)

Sixty-six-and-a-three-eighths.

BENNET

Let's please wash the body.

And as the Trainee reaches for a *Brillo pad*, Gracie hands Bennet a sponge. And he starts carefully swabbing the body himself. Pats it dry. Lovingly. As if dabbing a baby.

GRACIE

(to the trainee)

He likes to do it himself.

(as--)

Bennet puts on head phones. Through his ears, and ours, come the opening strains to Teddy Pendergrass' "Love TKO".

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)

Lookin' back over my years/I guessed, I've shedded some tears/ Told myself time and time again/ This time I'm gonna win--

BENNET

Bone saw, please--

JUMP TO: Bennet hands Gracie an organ. We're FRAMING high on him, shoulders, elbows. We know but don't need to see--

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)

Think I'd better let it go/Looks like another love T.K.O.--

GRACIE

Liver nine-hundred fifty-two grams.

*

JUMP TO: he hands her another.

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)
*Takin' the bumps and the
bruises/Of all the things of
a two-time loser--*

BENNET
Small tissue container.
Freeze me a liver sample,
please, Gracie.

*

And lifts for the bone saw.

JUMP TO: Bennet reaches toward the head. Cradles an orb off to Gracie as if a fresh loaf of bread.

BENNET (CONT'D)
(Gracie takes dictation--)
Possible causal relationship
between early head trauma and self-
medication leading to narcotics
abuse and overdose--

SULLIVAN
(from across room)
You're not her shrink, Bennet--

BENNET
If I know how she lived, I'll know
why she died.

ANGLE on a window letting out on the chamber. Wecht standing there watching, shirt and tie, cinching the knot, turning for the stairs, as--

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)
*Just tryin' to hold on, faith is
gone/It's just another sad song--*

JUMP TO: Gracie's smock splashed with fluids and blood. (So is everyone else's). Bennet's pristine. Until some small fleck spray lands, and--

He immediately slips off his plastic smock. Gracie - knows him - slips a fresh one on.

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER) (CONT'D)
*Takin' the bumps and the bruises/Of
all the things of a two-time
loser/See I try to hold on, my
faith--*

Now silence. Body reassembled. Bennet's fingers resting on the girl's hand. Feeling for spiritual pulse. On Bennet's face, peace. As Gracie zips up the body bag. And Sullivan glares--

BENNET
Careful, Daniel. One day I might be
rushing through your autopsy.
(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)
 (and throwing the used
 knife into 'hazardous
 waste'--)

18 **OMIT**

19 **INT. WECHT'S OFFICE - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - DAY**

Sits across from CYRIL WECHT, Chief Medical Examiner. 60's, celebrity pathologist: array of pictures with Elvis' body; JonBenet Ramsey's files; at the JFK assassination hearings.

Both in suit and tie. Wecht's eating a bagel. Pulls a bottle of Johnny Walker from his drawer and pours a couple.

WECHT
 You know the reason you're not back
 in Nigeria?

BENNET
 I remind you of you.

WECHT (CONT'D)
 Only less handsome.

*

Wecht motions to Bennet's collar. Something there. Bennet brushes it off. And we realize: *they are in identical suits.* Except - Wecht points - to Bennet's chest pocket--

WECHT (CONT'D)
 I don't have any. What the hell are
 they for, anyway? Just fill up with
 schmutz--
 (nods at autopsy chamber)
 What the hell's going on in there?

BENNET
 I'm doing my work. I'm fine.

WECHT
 You're not fine. Danny hates your
 guts. I've never seen anything like
 it.
 (pause)
 You take too much time, Bennet.

BENNET
 The dead are my patients. I treat
 them with respect.

WECHT
 Treat them however you want, but do
 you have to talk to them? Maybe
 just talk to them in your head
 while you're - you know - working--
 (MORE)

WECHT (CONT'D)

(Bennet's giving nothing)
And we talked about the knives.
You're still throwing them away.
They're expensive. This is
Pittsburgh. We're a public agency.

BENNET

Would you want me to cut open your
mother with the knife I used on a
serial killer?

WECHT

Don't tempt me. I'd probably
request it.

Wecht sighs. Bennet's not wrong. But still--

WECHT (CONT'D)

Danny may look like a butcher,
smokes three packs a day, but he's
one of life's unpleasant
necessities. You'll probably do his
goddamn autopsy soon--

BENNET

That's what I told him.

WECHT

I know you did. He told me. Why are
you antagonizing him?

(and looks at him)

You need a girlfriend. You have to
touch someone alive once in a
while. Living women are a pain in
the ass. But occasionally they're
amazing.

(--)

So maybe just a little less of an
artist? Be yourself, just play the
game a little, okay?

(as he slides across a
thick file--)

BENNET

(can't do it--)

I have exams next week.

WECHT

Death row case. The guy's being
railroaded. A thousand dollars for
you.

Bennet looks at him.

BENNET

How do you become a professional expert witness?

WECHT

It's not a profession, it's a hobby. You and I have jobs, right? So instead of watching baseball - or playing bridge with my wife - I do this. Besides, by the time your balls are hanging as low as mine, you better be expert in something.

BENNET

You're the best, Cyril.

WECHT

Well, if you don't piss everyone off, you're going to be better.

And Bennet leans into crime scene photos, police and forensics reports. Young woman ripped and bloodied.

20

INT. BENNET'S OFFICE - COUNTY CORONER - NIGHT

Bennet in his shitbox storage closet re-fitted as an office.

(We clock the high-school quality microscope he's been given. The crappy ancient computer. All his framed degrees stacked on the floor; no room to hang even one)

He roots in his pocket for a small rusty crucifix, sets it on his desk, and settles in amidst boxes of files. Crime scene photos. Bearing down into the paper with his machine-like focus.

Then stops. Closes the file. Gets up, reaching for his coat--

Now, OVER this, in PRE-LAP, we start to HEAR the infinity thud of contempo-dance, and we cut to--

21

INT. STATIC (DANCE CLUB) - PITTSBURGH, PA - NIGHT

8,000 sq. ft. of throbbing university jocks, yuppies, model wannabes. Celo lights strobing to Kylie Minogue.

CAMERA FINDS BENNET flush to a speaker, gripping a Heineken. Fastidiously dressed even here, pressed jeans, buttoned polo. Good with rhythm, willing the bass and music to wash through.

But a man apart in every way: he's black, but no one else here is. Doesn't notice, doesn't care. Just grooves solo to the mathematics of the music. His eyes close, and--

We MUTE and go in there. His head. Where there's nothing but limbic throb. And disconnect. And so peace. His face placid. Happy. HOLD a long beat, then--

22 **IT'S 3AM**

And we've gone ravey electronica. Bennet's moves liquid. More of that peace. HOLD on him in his solo bliss, then cut to--

23 **INT. BENNET'S CONDO - NIGHT/PRE-DAWN**

EYES FOCUSED like cameras on the crime scene photos from the death row case. Spread across a kitchen table.

BACK TO REVEAL Bennet, there, still in club clothes. The notes he takes calligraphy-neat.

Bachelor pad sparse. Microscope on the table. Forest of text books. Squared and aligned, like his--

Closet. Shirts and suits precision-hangered by color. A row of ties pre-knotted. Shoes lined up like soldiers. Now--

Back to Bennet. At his computer. Which we see has a Pope John Paul II screen-saver. Pope's watching him. Watching over--

Bennet's searing focus. And then--

And Bennet is finally asleep atop his bed. Then--

24 **INT. RECEPTION - LAW FIRM - DAY**

Pale marble. White leather appointments. A sprawling view of Pittsburgh. The antiseptis of influence and success.

WE FIND BENNET alone amidst the furniture. Briefcase on his lap.

JUMP TO SAME AN HOUR LATER. Bennet hasn't moved. One of the PARTNERS - MR. CROCKETT - sticks his head in.

CROCKETT
(ignores Bennet)
You sure Dr. Bennet hasn't come
through? He was supposed to be here
an hour ago.

BENNET
I am Dr. Bennet Omalu.

CROCKETT
Doctor Bennet? Omalu?
(Bennet stands, and--)

RECEPTIONIST
I'm so sorry, Mr. Crockett. I
thought he was here for the clerk
job.

25

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LAW FIRM - DAY

Partner leads Bennet to a conference room. Huge table covered
in files and laptops. A half-dozen ATTORNEYS huddle waiting.

SCARBOROUGH
(looking up, confused)
Where's Cyril?

CROCKETT
This is Dr. Bennet *Omalu*.

BENNET
I work for Dr. Wecht.
(after a pause, you gotta
be kidding me--)

SCARBOROUGH
Our guy's gonna be put to death in
thirty days, and we were supposed
to get the Hail Mary expert
witness, and Cyril sends us this?
No offense.

BENNET
(a smile, none taken)
Your client didn't do it.

SCARBOROUGH
We know that.

BENNET
You may know. But I can prove it.
(and we cut, and--)

26 **EXT. INDUSTRIAL RIVER BANK - DAY**

WIDE of a weed-strewn empty lot. A king-cab Chevy pick-up in the lee of abandoned construction. Side windows blown, replaced with garbage bags.

As a Harley bike ENTERS FRAME crossing to the pick-up, cut to-

27 **A REAR-VIEW MIRROR.**

In them, eyes, slightly mad, trying to recognize their own reflection. They fill the screen, then we WIDEN TO--

28 **INT. CHEVY PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY**

MIKE WEBSTER, 50 but looks 70. Unwashed. Hair stringy. Granular thickness everywhere, forehead barnacled with scars. Fingers mangled in a permanent curl, as if gripping a ball.

Surrounded by soiled clothes and Ding-Dong wrappers. Crucifix dangles from the mirror.

Piles of lined yellow paper. Covered edge to edge in scrawl.

An equally massive MAN dismounts the bike: 6'8", 320 lbs: JUSTIN STRZELCZYK (*Strel-zik*), 36. Heavy-bearded, plaid shirt, overalls. A giant hippie.

STRZELCZYK

Webby, hey man, love your digs!

(no response)

Webby, it's Jugger!

(then)

Mike. It's Justin.

(Webster turning his big head, no recognition)

I'll just sit with you a minute?

And slips behind the wheel. Smells like ass. On the passenger seat: container of ammonia; super-glue.

WEBSTER

(awakening to where he is)

Where is this?

STRZELCZYK

This is Ohio. Off some freeway.

WEBSTER

Ohio's got the best truck stops.

STRZELCZYK

But this ain't even that. This is --
I don't know what this is.

Strzelczyk picks at the yellow paper. Starts to read. Then.
Reaches for Webster's knee.

STRZELCZYK (CONT'D)

My brother. Been looking for you.
Pam said I might find you here.
(which taps Webster into
momentary focus)

WEBSTER

Juggers.

STRZELCZYK

We're all worried about you.

And takes a wad of toilet tissue dipped in ammonia, puts it
to his face. Eyes flare -- "Don't do that" -- "Keeps me
awake! Don't want to fall asleep!" -- Strzelczyk grabs for
the wad -- "What the -- Mike!" -- two tree-trunk arms shovel-
hands slap at it--

WEBSTER

Don't wanna fall asleep don't wanna
fall asleep can't fall asleep--

A glimpse of the mess of Webster's mouth: teeth glued back
in, gums bloody.

STRZELCZYK

You gotta let me take you back.
(Webster can't remember)
You called an audible, Mike. You
took off.
(pause; then)
I heard you sold your Super Bowl
rings. Your *rings*, man.

Webster non-responsive. Then gets out of the truck. Agitated.
Can't get the words out. Strzelczyk gets out his side, comes
around. Right up into Webster--

STRZELCZYK (CONT'D)

Pam is your wife. Garrett, your boy-

WEBSTER

(announcer voice)
--was so ugly when he was born his
momma carried him around upside
down for a week, thought he only
had one eye!

Laugh line. But no one laughs.

STRZELCZYK

(squeezes Webster's hands)
Mike. My knees are shot. I retired.
I'm done. I just wanted you to
know.

(then; afraid)

What happens when Mike Webster
falls asleep?

WEBSTER

He remembers.

STRZELCZYK

I'm starting to forget things,
Webby. I'm hearing myself say this
stupid crap to my kids. I almost
pushed Keana into a wall, man. I
never touched a girl like that.

Webster looks at him. Then getting back into the truck--

WEBSTER

Don't give up, son!
(Strzelczyk leaves a roll
of hundreds, walks)
Finish the game and we'll all be
winners!
(Strzelczyk gets on his
bike and--)

A28

EXT. STRZELCZYK HOME - PITTSBURGH SUBURBS - DUSK

Big rangy house of a pro athlete. Strzelczyk playing guitar
on his porch, some mournful melody. Soft voice incongruous
with his giantness. Flanked by his SON, 9, DAUGHTER, 6.

Car pulls up. Wife, KEANA -- 30, thin, angular face, the
opposite of Strzelczyk -- crosses to him with groceries.

KEANA STRZELCZYK

He really sell his rings?
(he stops playing--)

STRZELCZYK

That wasn't Webby. Webby's gone. I
don't know who that was.
(and back to--)

29 **INT. CHEVY PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY**

The plastic bags taped to the windows breathing in and out like a bellows.

Webster failing at sleep. Stretches across the trash. Then fetal. Now sits up. Everything hurts. The mosquitoes rage. Can't find stillness. He grips his head. Searing hot pain.

He reaches for a Taser. Charges it. The prongs jack up. A loud crack, like a gunshot. Primed and ready.

He's sweaty. Desperate for sleep now. Pushes down his pants. Thigh flesh already burnt. Charred in places.

Brings the Taser to his own meat -- doesn't even flinch -- triggers -- CRACK! -- blue flash. And Webster's bulk is rag-dolled onto the floor of the truck, and we cut to black--

OVER BLACK, in PRE-LAP -- RAP RAP RAP -- the crack of metal on window glass, then--

30 **INT./EXT. CHEVY PICK-UP/PARKING LOT - HOSPITAL - MORNING**

Webster - hideously unclean, mouth a cesspool - wakes in an entirely different location. Forehead-down into the steering wheel. Security Guard, 60, knocking at his window. He opens--

SECURITY GUARD

Mike Webster, right? Iron Mike?

Webster isn't entirely sure. Of that, or how he got here. Looks up to see he's parked in front of medical offices.

The guard thrusts his electric bill at him.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

Can you sign this? My wife's gonna.
Freak. Out.

Some part of Webster remembers what to do. He scribbles something. Then--

31 **INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY**

TIGHT ON A SURGEON peering through magnifiers into the sheeted window into an open skull. Fingers probe, snip, suture with the precision of a watch repair. The brain a living breathing seeping organism. Now surgeon's done. And slips down his mask, and we've met DR. JULIAN BAILES, 46.

A NURSE - "Dr. Bailes" - whispers in his ear, and--

32

INT. OFFICE OF CHAIRMAN, DEPT OF NEUROSURGERY - CONTINUOUS

Bailes - still in scrubs - following his ASSISTANT to his door. Louisiana Methodist. Wrapped tight. Big gold watch. Steelers Superbowl ring on his hand.

Office draped in family, God and football: bible; framed photos of southern-belle WIFE, five KIDS; Bailes as college linebacker; shelf full of helmets: Steelers, Cardinals.

Everything else is Steelers: framed photo of LYNN SWANN mid-air. Others of Bailes on game-time sidelines. With the Lombardi Trophy. Under the same post-game confetti as Webster.

To find Webster pacing in his manic shambles--

WEBSTER

What do I do I am freakin
overwhelmed--

BAILES

We're going to get you some
help. What are you taking?

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

Ritalin.

*

BAILES

What about Dexedrine? The
Prozac? Klonopin? Still
taking all that?

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

Superglue.

BAILES

Call Pam. Tell her we found him.
Tell her he's worse.

WEBSTER

You -- you were my doctor--

BAILES (CONT'D)

Team doctor, Mike. I was
everybody's doctor.

Webster punching the side of his head. Bangs his fists
against his prodigious chest.

WEBSTER

Fix it! In here! In here! I'm dying
in here!

Bailes' Assistant is in with a loaded syringe -- "Haldol 50
cc's" -- Webster sweaty -- waving his arms. Bailes injects.
As the giant body pours into a chair--

BAILES

What am I missing?

ASSISTANT

Tumor?

*

*

BAILES

His scans are normal--
(and as he stares at
Webster, stumped--)

33

INT. COURT ROOM - PITTSBURGH - DAY

The gallery standing room only. The accused, THOMAS KIMBLE
40, hulky in his orange jumpsuit.

CROCKETT

(to the court)

The state has asked, after a
lengthy trial, a death sentence,
and two appeals, why would we learn
something new about this case from
you?

(then)

Dr. Omalu. Do you have a medical
degree?

BENNET

Yes. From the University of
Nigeria, in Enugu, Nigeria.

(and then)

I did my residency at the Columbia
University Medical School in New
York. I have masters degrees in
Public Health and Epidemiology. In
addition, I am a certified
physician executive, and a
specialist in Emergency medicine.
And I am of course board certified
in Forensic Pathology, Clinical
Pathology and Anatomic Pathology.
My specialty is Neuro-pathology,
the examination of the brain--

Crockett about to move in--

BENNET (CONT'D)

So sorry--

(not done)

And I am completing my MBA at
Carnegie Mellon University.

CROCKETT

While working as a Medical Examiner
at the Allegheny County Coroner?

BENNET

Yes.

(and)

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)

And, oh yes, before I arrived in America, a masters in Theory of Music from the Royal School of Music in London.

(big easy smile incongruous to where he sits, then)

To answer your question, my specialty is the science of death. I think more about why people die than I do about the way people live.

(room quiet, awestruck)

I very carefully re-studied the interviews with the defendant, Mr. Kimble. And of course the autopsy reports on the victim, who was killed quite brutally with bare hands.

Reaches for a stack of blown-up photos. Top photo: hands shredded, bone-crushed. Grey with death.

BENNET (CONT'D)

Hands of the deceased. Broken nails. Blood under the nails. Bite marks. Contusions. The hands of a woman who fought wildly for her life - and lost.

Now a set of male hands. Splashed in blood.

CROCKETT

Are these hands not Mr. Kimble's?

BENNET

They are indeed Mr. Kimble's.

CROCKETT

Doesn't that suggest that the state has the right man?

BENNET

I thought so. Until I heard hour two-hundred seventeen of Mr. Kimble's police interview. He was speaking quietly, and off-mic, but I clearly heard him say-

(reads from notes)

"I don't like blood. When I was a kid I had a tooth pulled and I wouldn't stop bleeding. My parents wouldn't let me play outside sometimes--"

And we REVERSE on the Prosecutor. On the cusp of realization--

BENNET (CONT'D)

I saw no reference to this in any trial transcript. I got curious.

CROCKETT

What about?

BENNET

Hands.

Bennet holds up the victim's hands alongside Kimble's hands.

BENNET (CONT'D)

Mr. Kimble's hands had the victim's blood on them. But no bruising, or bites, or scratches.

(--)

I started to wonder if these two pairs of hands could have been in the same fight.

(--)

So my mind went somewhere new.

(--)

If Mr. Kimble's family had a history of hemophilia. His father said no, and medical records support that. But there is a strain of hemophilia -- hemophilia A -- that is not hereditary, and almost unheard of, so never tested for. I couldn't think of any other explanation. I ordered the test.

(and)

Mr. Kimble tested positive for hemophilia A.

Prosecutor again. The humiliation upon him.

BENNET (CONT'D)

If his hands were the murder weapon, he would have bled profusely for a long period of time. He might have even bled to death.

(and now)

Mr. Kimble's hands may have touched the victim, to aid her, as he claims, but there is no scenario in which they killed her.

(--)

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)

There is no question in my mind
that if the state of Pennsylvania
executes Thomas Kimble, it will
kill an innocent man.

34

INT. BENNET'S CONDO - NIGHT

Bennet on the phone. After a long pause--

BENNET

Did you hear what I told you?
(a silence, then-)

BENNET'S FATHER/PHONE (OVER)

(simply)

Have you finished your schooling?

Heavy Nigerian. Weary, perhaps with the time difference.

BENNET

I will have the MBA completed soon.

BENNET'S FATHER/PHONE (OVER)

And what are you going to do with
all your degrees?

BENNET

Collect knowledge. I need
knowledge. To run my clinic.

BENNET'S FATHER/PHONE (OVER)

Your clinic again (?)
(tired of this already)
A clinic requires a physician.

BENNET

I am a physician, papa.

BENNET'S FATHER/PHONE

You bury the dead.

BENNET

I help families understand why
people die. I help the living and
the dead.

(a long silence)

I am very good at what I do, Papa.
There is an art to what I do.
(even to himself he sounds
plaintive, and hates it)

And now a long pause. Bennet can hear his father's breathing.

BENNET'S FATHER/PHONE (OVER)

It is time to leave the classroom,
leave the books. Join the world of
the living. With a wife, children.
Bennet Onyemalukwube Omalu: it is
time to grow up and do something--
(and the SOUND of a phone
being banged down--)

And our eyes follow Bennet's to the wall. Where portraits of
his parents hang. His father imposing; a chieftain's kaftan.
His mother wrapped in loud blazing colors.

Bennet carefully folds a clipping from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*: "*Saved From Execution*", and a photo of himself.

Slips it into an envelope: "*Chief John Donatus Omalu, 90
Secondary School Road, Enugwu-Ukwu, Nigeria*". Seals it.

MR. SCOTT (PRE-LAP)

--and you have dominion over all.
In your hand are power and might--

35 **EXT. ST. BENEDICT'S - PITTSBURGH - DAY - ESTABLISHING**

Sturdy brick cathedral. Massive crucified black saint
broadcasting from the belltower.

MR. SCOTT (PRE-LAP)

--it is yours to give greatness and
strength to all--

36 **INT. ST. BENEDICT'S - PITTSBURGH - DAY**

Saturday Mass. Black and immigrant congregation of 200. One
by one standing in pews, offering prayers of gratitude.

MR. SCOTT

--Our God, we give you thanks and
we praise the majesty of your name.

FEMALE CONGREGANT

I thank you, Lord, with all my
heart; in the presence of the
angels to you I sing. I praise your
name for your mercy and
faithfulness--

Bennet STOPS. Turns toward that clarion female voice. African
lilt. Beautiful girl. Delicate profile. Bennet stares, then--

His turn. He doesn't speak his prayer, he *sings* it in that big melodic heartbreaking voice--

BENNET

On the day I cried out, you answered; you strengthened my spirit. All the kings of earth will praise you, Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth. Though I walk in the midst of dangers, you guard my life when my enemies rage.
(as the congregation claps,
feeding off his energy--)

37

EXT. ST. BENEDICT'S - PITTSBURGH - DAY

Services letting out. CONGREGANTS approach Bennet, shake his hand, want to be near. PASTOR and CHURCH SECRETARY hunting for--

FATHER D'AMICO

Bennet! A moment?

We notice - but Bennet wouldn't - two *Steelers* lapel pins on his frock: "10 - Stewart" & "92 - Harrison".

MRS. SCOTT

We have a new member, a young lady from Kenya. She came to us a few weeks ago. She needs our help.

BENNET

Of course. How much do you need?

FATHER D'AMICO

She needs shelter, Bennet, until we find her something permanent.

BENNET

Father. I'm studying, I work long hours. My books are everywhere--

MRS. SCOTT

What about that studio you sub-let? Isn't that open now--?

Points out the girl with the clarion voice. PREMA MUTISO, 24.

BENNET

Who is she?

FATHER D'AMICO

She's a nice girl, from Nairobi,
went to a British school. And she
wants to work. We're letting her
tidy up around the church.

(Bennet silent, so--)

We're asking you, because we know
she'll be safe and cared for. I
feel God in you, Bennet--

MRS. SCOTT

You know how this congregation
looks up to you.

(as Bennet takes her in--)

Lovely, isn't she?

(yes she is, and we find
them--)

A37 **EXT. ST. BENEDICT'S/EXT. BENNET'S CONDO**

Walking from the church to Bennet's - separated by a parking
lot. A strip of generic faux-American row-houses. Bennet,
striding fast, slightly in front--

38 **INT. BENNET'S CONDO - DAY**

Bennet shows Prema in. All she has in that small bag. They
stand together in his little kitchen.

Her nearness like an electrical pulse. He is awkward. She is
less so. Her first act is to unpack her bible. We take her
in: no makeup, she is simple, clear, gorgeous.

BENNET

What kind of music do you like?

PREMA

I don't know.

BENNET

How are you for money?

(no reply)

Need is not weak. Need is need. I
know where you are--

(and hands her some money -
which she at first
refuses)

For anything you might need.
Clothes.

(she gives him a look)

You are here now. You have to be a
better version of yourself.

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)

If you don't know what that is,
pick something and fake it.

She takes the money. He shows her to an autonomous efficiency within, "Usually sublet this out--". shows her a door. Hands her a key--

BENNET (CONT'D)

There's a lock on your door. No one can get in. You have your own bathroom--
(and hands her a key)

She's not moving. She's looking at his crisp suit, shoes. With a look of bemusement.

PREMA

What did you pick - to fake?

BENNET

An older bald white man.

PREMA

(bemused--)
Why an older bald white man?

BENNET

(and gets the joke. But still-)
He is the best at what he does. He is brilliant at what he does. That is why.
(she's turns, starts to go, stops, then--)

PREMA

I was a registered nurse. At the Aga Khan Hospital, in Nairobi.
(now Prema takes the keys and leaves, and--)

39

INT. FURNACE/INDUSTRIAL RUINS - DAY

Webster barefoot, shirtless, awash in sweat.

Manic pull-ups off the piping of a fallowed iron blaster. Aircraft-carrier size mountain of steel. His biceps and shoulders jacked.

Now cradling a cracked pipe. Lifting and snatching it overhead, ropy muscles taught, palms it chest level. Clean-and-jerk.

Then crashes the log down. And stares. Paralytic. And now--

40 **INT. CHEVY PICK-UP TRUCK - LATER**

Webster sweating in a haze of pain. Piles of notes to self have grown. Enough of whatever this is and reaches for the Taser. Pants already off. Eyeing the crucifix dangling--

The heads charge -- CRACK! -- he cooks his thigh. Blasted against the window. Rag-dolls to the floor. Spasming.

Then all slows. All of him. Every molecule of him exhales.

And we cut to black. And hear a light switch click on, and we're--

41 **OMIT**42 **INT. BENNET'S CONDO - SAME**

Bennet finds Prema in his kitchen, "Oh, you're in here", and a decluttered home. Chaos of books systemized by subject.

He moves around her awkwardly. She more comfortable than he.

Breakfast awaits. Local fare from "back there". Chapati. Ugali. He stops. Because--

The microscope has been moved. From table to counter.

And the TV on.

Unclear to him how much he likes any of this.

He eats reading a business school text. Stealing glances at Prema as she moves around the table, tidying. He is about to stop her, or suggest, stops himself, as--

We PUSH PAST him to TV NEWS FOOTAGE: Webster's truck.

TV BROADCAST (OVER)

In recent years the dauntless
Webster had abandoned his family,
slipped into financial chaos and
homelessness,--

Then the TV cuts to a HIGHLIGHT REEL of Webster in his football prime, guarding the quarterback like a Secret Service agent. And Bennet grabs the remote, shuts it off--

BENNET

Look, I don't really watch TV.

PREMA

Then why do you have one?

BENNET

One has a TV in this country.

(then)

I don't usually eat breakfast.

PREMA

One eats breakfast in this country.

(and clasps her hands in
prayer)

*Dear God thank you for the gifts
you have so graciously bestowed
upon me--*

Bennet, stunned, watching this, then closes his hands in prayer, as--

PREMA (CONT'D)

*Please help us to continue to be
deservant of our blessings.*

43

EXT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - MORNING

The lot jammed with trucks and vans, satellite dishes. Dozen REPORTERS and CAMERAMEN.

Bennet's Mercedes finds a spot on the edges of the media circus. Clueless, he heads down the ramp to the basement off-loading area.

Where he finds Sullivan and Annie arriving. Sullivan wearing his "Webster/52" Steelers jersey. Gracie's wearing Steelers gold&black strung ribbon through her hair today. In Webster's honor. As they converge--

BENNET

Who's Mike Webster?

(Sullivan pauses,
disbelief, then--)

SULLIVAN

Greatest center to ever play the game. A true warrior.

BENNET

What's a center?

GRACIE

The big guy in the middle.

They tumble inside--

SULLIVAN

My kid plays because of that guy.
He wears Webster's number.

Bennet's eyes go to Sullivan's jersey. To the red-white-blue-stars-stripes logo of the NFL. Sullivan follows his gaze.

BENNET

I'm very sorry. I just don't know
who he was.

SULLIVAN

(realizing)
You don't know football. At all.

BENNET

I don't need to know football.

Now clocks Gracie's ribbons.

SULLIVAN

I freakin can't believe it's you.

Now Wecht arrives, joins them.

BENNET

I was put on the schedule for
today. I'm on the schedule every
weekend.

WECHT

(dad breaking up the kids)
C'mon, c'mon--
(and then they're--)

44

INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER

Bennet, Wecht, Sullivan, Gracie and the others huddled, grim,
around the slab.

WECHT

I'm going to have to give a
statement.

SULLIVAN

Let's just do the external.

We're TIGHT ON BENNET. He's in his bubble, reading through
the EMT report, medical records. Quick probe. General
appearance. Fingernails. Scorched thighs-

BENNET

He was Tasing himself.

SULLIVAN

The whole town was out of work. He gave us hope when there was no hope, ya know?

Bennet can see inside the mess of his mouth from here.

BENNET

Full autopsy, please.

SULLIVAN

Hey c'mon there's no need. To cut this man's body.

BENNET

I can't figure out what went wrong.

SULLIVAN

He died. Is what went wrong.

BENNET

Look at his teeth. He was pulling them out AND SUPERGLUING THEM BACK IN. Why does an apparently wealthy favorite son of this city become self-mutilating and homeless at 50? Cardiac arrest may be *how* he died, but not *why*.

A beat. They're all thinking. Wecht pulls Bennet aside.

WECHT

What he's saying is there are times when life asks you to leave things alone, and times when you can't.

BENNET

Do you think he'd want me to leave things alone?
(meaning Webster)

For a moment maybe even Wecht isn't sure.

WECHT

No, I don't. I never leave anything alone. That's why people hate me.

(--)

Just don't screw it up.
(and leaves, and as Bennet turns to the room--)

BENNET

Let's prepare the body, please.

45

INT. AUTOPSY CHAMBER - DAY

Bennet - Teddy in his/our ears - at the dissection table.

JUMP CUTS - the unpeeling. The washing. The crevasses, the face. Ritual beyond respectful. Almost tender. Then--

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)

*("If You Don't Know Me By
Now")*

*All the things that we've been
through/You should understand me
like I understand you--*

Now STOP. Music stops. Bennet staring down at Webster.

BENNET

(quiet, intimate)

Mike, you need to help me. I know there's something wrong. Help me tell the world what happened to you. I can't do it alone.

SULLIVAN

(from his desk, over paperwork)

Heart. Attack.

Bennet performs the Y-incision.

BENNET

Bone saw please.

BENNET (CONT'D)

Heart weight 327g. Mitral valve 10.4 cm; Aortic Valve 7.1 cm; Pulmonary-

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)

I ain't gonna do nothing to break up our happy home/Don't get so excited--

Handing organs to Gracie one by one--

TECH #1

Right kidney 143g ... left kidney 158g--

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (CONT'D)

If you don't know me by now/You will never never never know me--

*

JUMP TO: Bennet at the dissection table. Peering down, *confused*. Turning what he's holding upside down and on its side then over again. Holds it to the light. Dictating--

BENNET

Regular folds of gray matter. No mush. No obvious contusions. No shrinkage or erosion from Alzheimer's--

GRACIE

What's wrong?

BENNET

Hold up the CT again for me, please.

He's comparing what's in his hands with the pictures. Gracie holds up the MRI beside the CT.

BENNET (CONT'D)

How old are these?

GRACIE
Six months.

Bennet sets the brain down. Stares at it.

BENNET

This should be a mess. It looks completely normal.

GRACIE

(paging into the records)
Records say severe head aches,
double vision. Voices.

(Bennet looks at her)

In his head.

(--)

Not seeing any documented
concussions.

(--)

He did complain of dizziness.

BENNET

How often?

GRACIE

Once.

(--)

In eighteen years of professional
football.

Bennet takes the file himself. Scans to the signature, team
doctor: "*Dr. Joseph P. Maroon.*"

SULLIVAN

Sign the certificate. Sew him up.

BENNET

Let's fix the brain.

SULLIVAN

You know we don't have the budget
for that.

Gracie glances at Sullivan. He's standing up. 10 staff have
accumulated. Wecht reappears, but stays in b.g..

BENNET

People do not go mad for no reason.
I'm going to keep looking.

SULLIVAN

NO!

(and Bennet looks at him a
moment, and--)

BENNET
Danny, you are out of line--

SULLIVAN (CONT'D)
You don't speak to me like
that.

*
*

<p>BENNET <i>And I am the pathologist on duty! The pathologist of <u>record!</u></i></p>	<p>SULLIVAN (CONT'D) This is not your laboratory!</p>	<p>* * * *</p>
---	--	----------------------------

<p>BENNET <i><u>My</u> hands on this body. If I am wrong <u>I</u> am wrong.</i></p>	<p>SULLIVAN (CONT'D) And you're wrong.</p>	<p>* *</p>
--	---	----------------

BENNET
 Not you. Me--
 (loud; big; no one's heard his voice raised before)
Fix! that! brain!

SULLIVAN
 I'll make sure they're not going to pay for it.

BENNET
 I will write my orders for the tests I want.

A long tense beat. Bennet looks for Wecht. Wecht is gone. He's alone with Sullivan. Then--

SULLIVAN
 You're going to pay for them yourself.

BENNET
 Please proceed, Gracie, thank you.
 (and as he exits, slipping off his smock)

And proceeds up the stairs--

BENNET (CONT'D)
 (to himself; prayerful; he does that)
 He is a child of God, like you. You are here because other people fought your battles for you. And you are still here.
 (and enters--)

INT. WECHT'S OFFICE - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER

Bennet stands in front of Wecht's desk. Wecht, in a suit now, doing up a tie, reading Bennet's test orders. (We get a glimpse at the list: *Tau -- Beta-Amyloid -- TDP-43 protein -- Ubiquitin -- Alpha-synuclein -- silver staining -*)

WECHT

In forty years, I've never
requested a panel of tests like
this. What are you looking for?

BENNET

There isn't a case, in a book or in
life, where a man that healthy,
went that crazy that young, with no
visible abnormalities of the brain.

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)

(then)

I don't know. What I'm looking for.

WECHT

I can tell. It's going to cost you a fortune.

(then, relenting)

If you have to play hero, just make sure we both come out okay.

And there it is. Bennet's on his own. And--

47

INT. BENNET'S CONDO - DAY

Prema at the TV. She has new clothes. Jeans, t-shirt. American. She's watching a special on Webster's career. Narration of hand-to-hand combats UNDER an elegiac score.

Studying all this. Webster. Football. America.

(Domestic touches have appeared. Pillows on the couch. Flowers for the table.)

Prema crosses to the refrigerator. Actual food in there now. Reaches for a Tupperware. Peels the lid, and--

Inside, a bisected half brain. Gray, sinewy. Floating in a pool of formalin. Label says "Michael Lewis Webster".

She glances to the TV, to A TIGHT of Webster's face. Black helmet. "52". Fierce eyes behind the cage.

DAUGHTER (PRE-LAP)

Mom, dad's sitting outside again.

48

INT./EXT. STRZELCZYK HOME - PITTSBURGH SUBURBS - DAY

Keana tidying her daughter's bathroom. Pauses by a window. Sees Strzelczyk sitting in the rain, in the yard.

KEANA STRZELCZYK

Justin you weirdo. You keep doing that--

She heads down. Stops by the front door. Post-its on the wall: "The people are Evil. God speaks to me. He says we have to get to higher ground--"

SON

(coming up behind her)

Daddy made these pictures for me--

And hands Keana a stack of crayon drawings. Dark forest. Chaotic sky. Inspired, but apocalyptic. What the fuck? And--

She heads out there. We STAY LONG, from the doorway, as Keana heads toward her husband. RECEDING IN FRAME until she gets to him. Their daughter steps into view, watching, as--

She reaches him, and we don't hear what she says, it can't have been much. Then his massive arm lifts toward her. Stops. He turns his head toward her. The look on his face. What he screams.

She stumbles back, what she's seen, slipping drops like she's been shot, and as she scrambles away from him, we cut to--

49 **INT. AUTOPSY CHAMBER - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - NIGHT**

Bennet at a dissection table, meticulous, measuring. Alone with a half dozen bodies waiting to be dissembled and solved.

Clock says 1 AM. In his ear phones--

DONNIE MCCLURKIN/CD (OVER)
 ("We Fall Down")
*For a saint is just a sinner who
 fell down/But we couldn't stay
 there/And got up--*

Suddenly, Bennet shuts off the music. Turns to listen, as if to someone speaking--

The bodies are dermal shells. Open eyes vacant.

BENNET
 I apologize.

And slips the cover over the microscope. Graveyard shift Tech waves him down.

GRAVEYARD TECH
 You got something today. Left it on
 your desk.

50 **OMIT**

A51 **INT. CITY BUS (MOVING) - NIGHT**

Prema sits bundled in hat and scarf. One of three passengers left (one of them asleep). Near the end of the line.

51 **EXT. STREETS AROUND BENNET'S CONDO - NIGHT**

Bennet's car turns a corner as his POV sees Prema step off the bus across the street.

He pulls over, opens the passenger side door. (A lab/slide tray in the seat; he picks it up, makes room.)

BENNET
(calls out to her)
Hi. It's very late--

PREMA
I have a shift now. At a home.
Changing old people. Feeding them.
(and as she shrugs, it's
her work-)

BENNET
Let me take you home.
(and she spots the tray of
slides on his lap--)

PREMA
What's that?

BENNET
Mike Webster.
(and now we find--)

52 **INT. BENNET'S CONDO - 30 MIN LATER**

Bennet standing over the kitchen table. Over the microscope. The Webster tray before him. Amidst his medical journals and books. He's still in his coat. Tapping the books back into place. Looks back to-- *

Prema. Sitting on the floor, who has turned on the TV and is watching football clips on ESPN. Bennet, moderately annoyed, still not used to another live body in his space. *

BENNET
Do you need me to get you a TV for
your room? *

PREMA
No, this one will be fine. *

The books and journals-- *

BENNET
You were reading these? *

She nods, Uh huh. Nonplussed. She has one of them on her lap. *
Occasionally glancing at football. This confuses him. *

BENNET (CONT'D) *
Prema. What are you doing? *

PREMA *
I am studying. *

But what she's really doing is waiting. And giving him space. *
She feels his anxiety. (She feels everything about him.) His *
anxiety is her anxiety. *

Now Bennet opens the sleeve o slides. Stares at the them. *
 Focused. *

PREMA (CONT'D) *
 (nervous herself) *
 What does Iron Mike say?

BENNET
 I don't know.

PREMA *
 I can't tell what you are more *
 afraid of. What you will find, or *
 what you won't.

Bennet looks at her. Understands. *

He turns to the microscope. Wipes a slide on his sleeve. *
 Loads it. Peers. Goes still-- *

His fingers calibrating the foci like pianist's fingers, like
 delicate multi-jointed spider legs.

But he's not seeing much. Wipes another. Loads it. Not
 getting anything he gets up. Stands, thinking. Sits, wipes,
 loads another. This one particular slide.

We find Prema studying Bennet now. She's turned off the TV. *
 She's waiting, as-- *

We're TIGHT ON BENNET'S HANDS. They are now gripping the *
 dissection table. He has seen something. *

Another slide. Another. Back to the first. He stands. Sits. *

BENNET
 Oh my god.
 (half standing now)
 Oh my god what is this? *What the
 hell is this?*
 (then)
 This is the brain of an 85-year
 old.

PREMA
 Iron Mike was 50. Please, can I
 see?

BENNET
 (loads a different slide
 and steps aside--)
 This is what your brain looks like--
 (she puts her face to the
 microscope and sees--)

A white snowy field. PUSH IN CLOSER: shapes appear. Cells, neurons. Faint, clean, pristine. Like snowflakes.

BENNET (CONT'D)

This is Mike Webster.
(loads the other, and--)

We see ugly reddish-brown splotches bleeding across the pristine snow-field, drowning the snowflakes alive.

BENNET (CONT'D)

That brown stuff is tau. It's a protein that moves in clumps called neurofibrillary tangles. The tangles strangle the neurons from inside out.

(how to explain)

Think of it like pouring wet concrete down kitchen pipes. That's what it does in the brain. Chokes it.

PREMA

What does that do?

BENNET

It turns you into someone else. Someone you don't know.

(--)

I've never seen a brain like this in a man this young. I've never heard of a brain this damaged in any man.

Bennet goes to the fridge. Pulls the container of brain. A half loaf left. As he cuts a thin slice--

*

PREMA

What are you doing?

*

*

BENNET

Testing it again. I have to be sure. I have to be completely sure--

*

*

*

AND NOW START AN EXTENDED FAST-MOVING SEQUENCE OF CUTS AND DISSOLVES, starting in--

*

53

BENNET'S CONDO - ACCELERATED TIME

With Bennet bent over books and journals which grow and change. Bennet doesn't move, as "Bennet" returns with another box. Then two more. Books and journals multiplying.

*"Multiple traumatic cerebral hemorrhages, 1924" --
"Observations on the pathology of insidious dementia following head injury, 1959"--*

The sun sinks. The moon moves across the sky. The sun rises.
Bennet still doesn't move, staring at pages.

Now looks up to--

CHRIS BERMAN'S VOICE (OVER)
(play-by-play growl)
Okay, your turn, Tom Jackson!
(MORE)

CHRIS BERMAN'S VOICE (OVER) (CONT'D)
 Who's gonna get JACKED UP tonight?!
 (and now WE'RE WATCHING--)

54 **ESPN MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL PRE-GAME**

Bennet before his TV: HOST CHRIS BERMAN and his chorus of three retired PLAYERS. Berman points to former Bronco linebacker TOM JACKSON.

TOM JACKSON
 Well, *somebody's* going to get
 jacked up tonight!
 (and now we PUSH THROUGH TV
 and we're 4-walling--)

The animated intro to the segment: "*ESPN'S JACKED UP! ... brought to you by Texas Instruments*". Now we're--

INSIDE QUALCOMM STADIUM, SAN DIEGO

TOM JACKSON (OVER)
 Rams - Chargers. Quarterback Mark
 Bulger is going to deliver the ball
 to Tony Fisher--

Rams' RECEIVER looks back for the ball, is *totally decimated* by a forearm shiver to the head. The crowd goes nuts--

TOM JACKSON (OVER) (CONT'D)
 Donnie Edwards just *LEVELS* him--!

And the head in SLO-MO seems to break off at the neck.

TOM JACKSON (OVER) (CONT'D)	ALL THE ANNOUNCERS (OVER)
(call--)	(--response)
Tony Fisher got--	JACKED! UP!
(and--)	(now BACK TO--)

*

55 **BENNET'S CONDO. PREMA'S POV OF BENNET AT THE MICROSCOPE**

Slides stacked in groupings: *Beta-A4 amyloid peptide; CD-68; GFAP; Luxol-Fast Blue; Tau*. Bennet loads slide after slide--

COACH'S VOICE (PRE-LAP)
 (screaming!)
 Only way to get that player's hands
off you is grab him by the throat
 and squeeze - choke him til shit
 runs down his leg!
 (and now cut to a--)

56 **COLLEGE-LEVEL PRACTICE FOOTBALL FIELD**

TIGHT on a pair of players. The bigger of the two *stabbing* jabbing *RAMMING* his palm into the throat of the other, gripping, release, grip, release, over and over until the other goes down and lies broken. Now we--

Bennet slips into our extreme f.g., taking this in, then turning, and the field morphs and we--

57 **FIND BENNET ON THE PERIPHERY OF A LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL FIELD**

Watching fifty 14-year olds doing wind-sprints. Joyful. They're ribbing each other. Boys. Then. Whistle blows. And every player unleashes on someone *anyone* to hit/spear with the crowns of their helmets. CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! Like gunshots echoing from all corners. Now--

58 **BACK IN BENNET'S LIVING ROOM - TIGHTER ON THE TV**

Bennet watching tape of a pro training camp. Lumbering lineman running laterally to stretch a play. Linebacker spears helmet into face, to crack jaw and neck. And back to--

59 **BENNET AT THE LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL FIELD**

It's been 60 seconds. The kids still randomly head-ramming. A few of them here and there staggering off. Now back to--

60 **THE LIBRARY THAT IS NOW BENNET'S CONDO**

Every surface stacked with books, journals. "*Traumatic cerebral hemorrhage. Neurology and Psychiatry, 1929.*"

Bennet's midnight-to-dawn sessions INTERCUT with Prema watching NFL games. Steelers, Raiders, Dolphins. CRACK! Bennet glancing only at the SOUND of helmets crashing.

Prema studying the game, the strategy. The quarterbacks scrambling for their lives, slipping from the clutches of pursuers, launching passes that float impossibly into the hands of full-sprint receivers 50 yards away.

PREMA

(to Bennet somewhere else
in the condo)

Oh wow--

(new fan; as she's clearing
the table)

(MORE)

PREMA (CONT'D)

You should watch this, Bennet.
(as he lifts his head to-)

BIG POWER RUNNING BACK (ND college) spins sliding to daylight outrunning an entire defense as if they are standing still.

PREMA (CONT'D)

It's actually really beautiful!
Bennet!

Of crisp sunny days and long shadows and end-zone glory.
Victory dances. Cheerleaders. Spectacle.

Of big men wrestling in the mud, reaching down to pull up comrades. Of stands boiling with ecstasy.

There's all that too. And we're back in love with the game--

PREMA (CONT'D)

Tommy Maddox is the most underrated
quarterback in the League!
(because she's watching)

The TV, where the Steelers are winning a Wild Card Playoff game against the Browns 36 - 33. *"No time outs, they have no time outs left!"* And Prema is hooked. While Bennet, *inside his head*, goes--

61

BENNET'S POV/WHAT HE'S SEEING

An ANIMATION OF the deceleration of a football head. Helmet colliding with a knee. Head halted abruptly. But the brain, floating in fluid, keeps going, smashing into the inner skull, as a rubber ball might when smashed by a racquet.

And our animated head - 4-walled - morphs in Bennet's POV into the armored and caged head of Mike Webster. He's bent over. The other 20 players vanish, and it's just him and Bradshaw. Endless repetitions. Hut-snap. Hut-snap. It's a kind of clinic. This is how it's done. The two of them a single organism, and BAM! And now--

It's game time, and the field is full, the stands are full, and Webster is nut-cracked between two defensive linemen. And there's Webster's rubber-ball brain boing-boinging off the skull, skull off helmet, helmet off other helmet. And we REVERSE and we're looking at--

Bennet. Studying the TV. Where there's now--

BENNET

It's a terrible disease.

PREMA

So what do you do? (So what does one do in this country when one discovers a terrible disease.)

BENNET

I have to be sure.
(but then--)

O.S., the SOUND of a door opening. Footsteps approach. The fluorescent lights bounce on in the autopsy chamber. REVEALING the row of dead faces, and--

SULLIVAN

Who's back there?
(Bennet comes out)
What are you doing?

BENNET

Working.

SULLIVAN

You're not on the schedule.

BENNET

I'm using personal time. I needed the microscope.

SULLIVAN

In here is county time.

Prema appears. Sullivan leers. Her clothes. Her unkempt hair. He spots the blanket on the chair.

SULLIVAN (CONT'D)

You banging prostitutes in here, Omalu?

Bennet takes three big steps toward Sullivan. Fists clenched. Prema - "Don't" - slides between them, shoves Bennet back. As Sullivan walks away--

SULLIVAN (CONT'D)

They deport you weirdos for sick shit like that.

And now we rise up to--

66 **OMIT**

67 **SOARING GIANT BLACK ST. BENEDICT**

Atop St. Benedict's. Arms spread out over Pittsburgh. Now across the river to--

68 **EXT. PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - UNIV OF PITTSBURGH - DAY - ESTABLISHING - AERIAL**

BIRD'S-EYE POV of the sprawling 10-story complex. Abutting Pitt's Coliseum-like football stadium. The dual-chambered heart of the sprawling city of higher learning.

69 **INT. ELEVATOR - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY**

Bennet cradles the box.

70 **INT. HALLWAY - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL**

Bennet walks an endless hallway with a hundred doors, where--

DR. RON HAMILTON - 49, academic, cropped beard - is watching him approach from his office doorway - "*Chairman, Neuropathology Program, Univ. of Pittsburgh Medical School*" -

HAMILTON

What did you bring me?

BENNET

I need you to look at this cold.
(as they go into--)

71 **INT. NEUROPATHOLOGY LAB - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL**

And leads Bennet into his office, digging out the slides. Bennet steps to the window, looks down on massive Heinz Field.

HAMILTON

Bennet. *Relax*. I can hear you breathing.
(another look, then--)

Hamilton slowly lifts his head. Pause.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

This is a really really terrible brain.

And we SLAM to--

72 **INT. HALLWAY - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL**

Office of "Dr. Steven DeKosky, Chairman, Dept of Neurology".
Out strides DEKOSKY, a fit 55. Pissed-off to be interrupted.
And back to--

73 **INT. HAMILTON'S OFFICE - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL -
PITTSBURGH - DAY**

HAMILTON

Ever met the great man before?

(Bennet shakes, No)

Tough. One of the top brain guys in
the world. Expect two minutes tops.

DeKosky blows in. Gives Hamilton a "this better be good"
look.

DEKOSKY

That him?

(Hamilton nods)

So you're our prize graduate.

And crosses straight to the microscope. Great focus, long
moment of this. Then--

It's very obvious. And he faces them. In the presence of
something monumental and knows it.

HAMILTON

Tell him.

BENNET

That is Mike Webster. The
Pittsburgh Steeler--

DEKOSKY

(get to the point)

I know who Mike Webster is.

HAMILTON

Steve. He was *fifty*.

(and that's the point and-)

DeKosky looks to the window, mentally shuffling through his
decades of study, toil, research. The tens of thousands of
hours. Then reaches for the phone--

DEKOSKY
 (into phone)
 Cancel the rest of my morning--
 (hangs up; then)
 You have my attention.

Hamilton nods, Go.

BENNET
 Diving birds hit the sea at 200
 MPH, generating 1,000 g-force at
 impact. Each peck of a woodpecker
 produces a g-force of a thousand.
 12,000 pecks a day, 85-million
 times over their lifetimes. Big-
 horned sheep--
 (DeKosky gives Hamilton an
 impatient look)

HAMILTON
 Bennet--

BENNET
 All these animals have shock
 absorbers built into their bodies.
 The woodpecker's tongue comes out
 the back of the mouth through the
 nostril and goes around the top of
 its head. Basically, it's one big
 safety belt for the brain.
 (then)
 Humans? Not one piece of our
 anatomy protects us from those
 kinds of collisions. A human being
 will get concussed at 80 g's. The
 average head-to-head contact on a
 football field? 120 g's. God did
 not intend for us to play football.

HAMILTON
 Let's keep God out of this.

And Bennet goes to a white board and draws the S's/O's coach's diagram of football squads. Offense. Defense. The backs. The quarterback. And circles the center--

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
 What's the 'S'?

BENNET
 The Steelers.

*
*

HAMILTON
 The 'O's--?

DEKOSKY
 The 'others'. Obviously.

*
*

BENNET
 The others, yes.

DEKOSKY

Do you even watch football?

BENNET

Not at all--

(back to the board)

But I studied Mike Webster's position. The one in the middle. The most violent on the field. The slaps and the choking, the head as a weapon on every play of every game, of every practice. From the time he was a boy, then a college man, through a professional career. The thousands and thousands of hits that weren't concussions.

Now circles the wide-outs, running backs and safeties--

BENNET (CONT'D)

But these? They are the fastest.

BENNET (CONT'D)

Their speed multiplied by the speed of the men who hit them, and the trajectories at which they hit them, the g-force created - the same as getting hit on the head with a sledgehammer --

HAMILTON

Slow down. The brain. Get to the brain part--

BENNET

(distinctly not slowing)

Mike Webster played eighteen years of professional football. 90-thousand blows to the head during just his professional career, by my calculation.

(and now--)

All this triggered a cascading series of neurological events that unleashed killer protein upon Mike Webster's brain. The tangles invading and then strangling his mind from the inside out. Leaving him unrecognizable, even to himself.

(--)

And before you ask me why it's not the same as boxers--

DEKOSKY
Dementia pugilistica--

BENNET (CONT'D)
Why it is not the same is
that when a boxer receives
this kind of blow, it is once
in a very long while. Because
he goes down and he often
does not get up, and the
fight is over. It is not over
and over and over every day
of every week, week in week
out, practice or game.

*
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BENNET (CONT'D)
I don't know the game. I have never
played the game. But I am convinced
playing football killed him.
(and)
And there have to be others.

DEKOSKY
How can you know that?

BENNET
Common sense. But they're dead. Or
lost. Like Mike Webster was lost.

DEKOSKY
I'm not interested in common sense.
The only thing that interests me is
science, and science is knowing.

BENNET
I know from these men's records
their doctors think they have early
Alzheimer's. Which is statistically
impossible. Because it isn't
Alzheimer's. It's this.

Dekosky sits.

DEKOSKY
Holy Christ.

HAMILTON
Steve. It's a billion-dollar
finding.

DEKOSKY
I don't like it. Actually, I hate
it. But as a scientist I can't deny
it.

BENNET
We need to tell them. Now.

HAMILTON
The NFL? What, like call them?

BENNET
Yes.

DEKOSKY
This is one case.

BENNET
Men are dying. Right now. Someone
is getting divorced. Right now.
Someone is arguing. Right now.

DEKOSKY
Bennet. The only way people are
taking you seriously is if you
publish. Peer review. Respected
medical journal.

HAMILTON
We'll coauthor, our names with
yours.

BENNET
With all due respect, under normal
circumstances, I understand there
is a correct way, but--

DEKOSKY
Slow. Down. Bennet.
(then)
I will back you up, but we do this
the right way.

Okay, a breath, gets it--

HAMILTON
And name this. You're going to have
to give this a name.

74 **OMIT**

75 **INT. BENNET'S CONDO - THAT NIGHT**

As Bennet slips past Prema's little efficiency, the door
opens. Prema steps out. New dress. Flower in her hair.

BENNET
(awkward)
I thought you were asleep.

PREMA

How could I sleep? Did they agree?
What it is?

He's overwhelmed. Can only nod, Yes, they understood.

BENNET
They are going to publish
with me.

PREMA (CONT'D)
They? With you?

*

BENNET
A medical journal--

PREMA (CONT'D)
With you?

*

*

And touches his arm. So happy for him she can cry. (And maybe she does, a little.)

PREMA (CONT'D)
That's so great. Congratulations--

BENNET
You are going somewhere?

PREMA
Yes, with you. To celebrate.

And under a PRE-LAP throb of dance music, taking in the full breadth of this woman, perhaps for the first time, then--

76

INT. STATIC (DANCE CLUB) - NIGHT

Crowded, loud, sexy. Bennet and Prema awkward by the speaker in the strobing light. Bennet can't connect to the music. Doesn't really know what to do with her there.

PREMA
You don't dance, do you?
(he shakes, No, then--)

She's dragging him onto the floor. Circles him, gorgeous fluid dancer and is all about bringing him to life. She is so contagious Bennet slowly forgets all the things that keep him from doing more than listen. Until it's the other way around, and he's putting it out, and moving. Then they're back in-

77

INT. HALLWAY - BENNET'S CONDO - NIGHT

They're passing her door on the way to his. They stop. He's unsure. She's not. He says, "Goodnight". She reaches, gets his hand, pulls him in. And on her toes, kisses his cheek. And that lingers. And then he's taking her face in his hands and bringing it to his. And she's pushing him into his room. Then it's--

A77

EXT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - MORNING

Bennet parks his Mercedes. A second one slides next to his. Identical except in color. This one silver. Wecht gets out. Like the suits, the cars are the same.

Wecht carrying two coffees, two brown bags.

WECHT

(hands Bennet a coffee, a bag, and as they walk around to the front--)
It's weird to bring women into a morgue at night.

BENNET

She's a friend.

WECHT

You don't have friends.

BENNET

I have a friend now.

Then--

WECHT

Sullivan made a formal complaint against you with the county.

BENNET

I was working on Webster.

WECHT

I know. I took care of it.
(--)
What's Webster cost you, anyway?

BENNET

Twenty-thousand dollars.
(then)
I save. Everything.

WECHT

How unAmerican.
(then, after a beat) Apparently it's been worth it. Ron Hamilton called. Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy. Has a nice ring to it. Why didn't you tell me?

BENNET

I wasn't going around you. I need someone with fresh eyes.

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D) Someone
who didn't want it to be true or
not true.

WECHT

I don't like it. But it was the right thing to do.

(--)

This may come as a surprise, but I'll never be the one you have to worry about.

(--)

So what's next?

BENNET

Publish. DeKosky wants to coauthor.

WECHT

DeKosky, and--?

BENNET

Cyril Wecht.

WECHT

I'm proud of you, kid.

(compares the two cars)

Should've gotten the silver. Blue shows the dirt.

(and heads in)

78

INT. SPORTS BAR - PITTSBURGH - DAY

The faces are looking AT CAMERA. Watching the TV behind us. Nowhere to move. Nothing else to see or hear.

WE FIND BENNET & PREMA in that crowd. Hot wings and nachos. (Prema has brought along two or three FRIENDS from church.)

And we're watching them watching, and boarding the ride. And it's loud and really fucking joyful. The game is a drug, a good healthy one, and we're rollercoasting triumph and defeat and individual acts of heroism. What is absolutely and undeniably GREAT about this game. And--

Bennet - this moment - is just one of them. Riding the ride. But ONE OF THEM. An AMERICAN. He's touching and being touched. High-fiving and being high-fived.

And then CAMERA TWEAKS past them--

To a face deep in the crowd: Mike Webster, leaning against the bar, watching his old team. And Bennet is reminded. Of everything. Now cut to another screen showing the Steelers game--

79

INT. STRZELCZYK HOME - PITTSBURGH SUBURBS - DAY

Where, in a SINGLE TRACKING SHOT, we pass Keana and the kids watching in Their Man's "#73" Steelers jersey. CAMERA PULLING out of the living room, game and kids receding, as we PUSH--

Into the bedroom. Where we FIND Strzelczyk. Heavier, disheveled. Lips moving in mute dialog. Eyes clock his guitar. Grabs it, wields it like a baseball bat. CAMERA FOLLOWS BEHIND him downstairs, back into the living room--

KEANA STRZELCZYK

Justin, what the hell are you doing? Are you serious? Justin STOP! what is wrong with you WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU! -- DO -- NOT -- TOUCH -- THEM!

STRZELCZYK

I'm getting messages. Evil Ones. Talking talking talking!

KEANA STRZELCZYK

Are you FREAKIN SERIOUS RIGHT NOW?!

Now explosion of wood and glass as he *smashes* the guitar into the wall.

KEANA STRZELCZYK (CONT'D)

(weeping now; terrified)

Oh my god baby what are they saying, baby, please tell me what the voices are saying--

STRZELCZYK

Kill you!
(and now--)

KEANA STRZELCZYK

GET OUT GET OUT GET THE HELL OUT!!!

STRZELCZYK

I don't know what I'm doing! I don't know what's happening to me!?

Strzelczyk's looking straight into his little boy's stricken face. Terrified by the terror in his kid. The part of him that knows drags the other part of him out.

KEANA STRZELCZYK

(cuddling the kids)

Baby shh I need you to call 911 right now for me baby and tell them that daddy is in pain and to come here right away baby, shh, it's going to be okay--

And bolting out the door after Strzelczyk--

SON (O.S.)
 (into phone)
 My daddy's Justin Strzelczyk the
 football player, WHAT IS HAPPENING
 PLEASE HURRY UP!

And now PRE-LAPPING sirens -- engines gunning -- police
 scanners toning, urgent ... now we're--

80 **INT. STRZELCZYK'S TRUCK**

Eyes in the rear-view. In conversation with someone inside
 his face. "Webby, what did we do?"

Hanging from the mirror: two pairs of baby shoes. His eyes
 see those, calm. Now. A moment of repose. Searches the
 mirror. There you are. He's crying. He knows what he needs to
 do. Hands gripping the wheel *sure as ever*. CUT TO BLACK.
 Horns wailing--

BROADCAST/TV (PRE-LAP)
 - *this is live footage of the
 aftermath of a horrific head-on
 collision on the New York Thruway -
 (and up to--)*

81 **PIXILATED TV FOOTAGE OF THE NY STATE THRUWAY SPRAYED WITH A
 VAST SMOLDERING DEBRIS FIELD**

The two trucks mere piles of powder. Body bag in the grass.

BROADCAST/TV (OVER)
 - *KDKA has learned that one of the
 drivers was retired Pittsburgh
 Steeler offensive star Justin
 Strzelczyk, who led police on a
 forty-mile high-speed pursuit -
 (fades out as--)*

PULL BACK TO REVEAL Julian Bailes watching this on his
 kitchen TV, and we cut to and find--

A81 **EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD (UNIV OF LOUISVILLE) - DAY**

Bennet standing in the rain/snow, watching the university
 team finish up practice. A mud bowl. Burpies. Windsprints.
 Everyone's filthy. Pigs in shit. Looks fun. End whistle, one
 player breaks away. Stampeding at us. Bennet starts to laugh.
 This is AMOBI OKOYE, 19 and enormous: 6'2"/300.

OKOYE

Bennet!? *Nwokem kedu?*

BENNET

(big laughter)

You giant American baby! You look
like a giant American dirty baby!
Kedu ka mma-mma gi meah?

BENNET (CONT'D)

O noh na nke Ifeoma?

OKOYE

*Eeah. Maalu na oge obuna icho
ibia, anom mia, oge obuna.*

And big laughter. In his native tongue, and with his cousin,
he is more the man of where he comes from. *Bigger.*

BENNET

(me and the giant--)

They sent us both to America. To
see which one survives. The David
and the Goliath!

(and his hands say who is
who, and then--)

OKOYE

You are just a professional
student! Do you have time for any
other thing?

BENNET

Superman!

Now Amobi realizes how far Bennet's come. Confused.

OKOYE

What are you doing here, my cousin?
Did somebody die?

B81 **INT. DINER - LOUISVILLE - NIGHT**

Bennet and Amobi. Coffee. Untouched. The glee has gone.
Bennet has told him.

OKOYE

What are the chances?

BENNET

For your position? They're good.

OKOYE

You're not even sure of this thing.

BENNET

You'll forget your own name. Amobi Okoye. Can you imagine not knowing that?

OKOYE

Who imagines that?

BENNET

You are part of me. I watched you be born. I am asking you. Stop.

OKOYE

I step on the field I always know I can be hurt. More than hurt--

(and snaps his fingers.

Like that.)

Maybe I play two years then I'm out. You know what's next? Most of them get fat, bankrupt. They sell cars, insurance (sneakers), I don't know what they do.

(--)

This is my time before that time.

(then the crux of it, the arrogance returns)

They are saying I will be drafted first. The youngest player ever drafted into the NFL. I will cash a check for millions of dollars. *Millions* just for saying yes.

BENNET

God didn't put anyone on earth to cash a check.

OKOYE

Look where I am, Cousin. Look what I am. I'm not going to let anyone take this from me now. *Daalu nwanem, agam akpo gi mgbe nmaah abia.*

And as we HOLD on Bennet, we cut to--

82

INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - MORNING

Bennet WALKING STRAIGHT INTO CAMERA, up the hallway. Peeling gloves, lab coat. (In b.g., the slabs, a pair of upturned feet.)

The Techs - Sullivan - no one's saying a thing. And into--

His shitbox office. Where a warm bottle of cheap champagne sits on his desk, with a copy of *Neurosurgery Journal*. A post-it stuck to the neck says: "Enjoy with your new friend. Best, Cyril."

83

INT. BENNET'S CONDO - AFTERNOON

Bennet enters with the bottle, to find Prema studying Bennet's article. With a dictionary. He watches her until she feels him and looks up. Tears in his eyes.

PREMA

This is very amazing. Now what happens?

BENNET

(nervous to say it)
I called them.

PREMA

Who did you call?

BENNET

The National Football League.

PREMA

What did you say?

BENNET

I said I'd be happy to come in and discuss it.

PREMA

(on alert)
What did they say?

BENNET

They said they'd get back to me.
(and a hard cut to--)

(SC.84 MOVED TO AFTER SC.87)

85

EXT. 280 PARK AVE - MANHATTAN - MORNING

A MAN carrying a stack of magazines enters a 60-story glass office tower, in the heart of midtown, between two logos: Credit Suisse, and the NFL's shield. And into--

86 **INT. NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE MAIN OFFICE - MANHATTAN**

Tracking the man - CHRISTOPHER JONES, 43, African American - through a massive office, through the quiet confidence of a major multinational corporation. To his executive suite. (There are Harvard undergraduate and law diplomas.)

Jones picks *Neurosurgery* off the top, opens it to the CTE article, and, into the intercom--

JONES

Get me Elliot Pellman.

87 **INT. DOCTOR'S PRIVATE OFFICE - LONG ISLAND - DAY**

DR. ELLIOT PELLMAN is absorbed in *Neurosurgery*. He's 48, shabby, a bad comb-over. Surrounded by memorabilia for the NFL's New York Jets and the NY Islanders hockey team.

PELLMAN

(picks up the phone)
I'm just looking at it.

JONES/PHONE (OVER)

Anything to be concerned about?

PELLMAN

This Omalu looks like a nobody. But let me get into it.
(and a hard cut to--)

84 **INT. KITCHEN - BAILES' HOME - MORNING/SIMULTANEOUS**

Bailes at the kitchen table in sweatpants. Breakfast. Bailes's wife, COLLEEN, 40, slips her arms around him.

Bailes reading a copy of *Neurosurgery Journal* (open to "Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) in a National Football League player" ... Omalu, DeKosky, Hamilton, Wecht.)

COLLEEN BAILES

What are you reading?

BAILES

It's about Mike.

COLLEEN BAILES

I miss Mike.
(brain scans)
Oh god I can't look at that.
(Bailes rubbing his face;
(MORE)

COLLEEN BAILES (CONT'D)
looking into the middle
distance, doing the math)
Julian, what is it?

BAILES
How could I have missed this?

COLLEEN BAILES
What are you talking about?

BAILES
If this is really true, it's the
end of football.
(and cut to--)

88

INT. AUTOPSY CHAMBER - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - DAY

Bennet, Sullivan, Gracie stand over 300-lbs. of heavily
muscled death. Black. No wounds, no blood.

SULLIVAN
(looking at the face; grief-
stricken)
Well now, Terry. Ya wonder where
are they now. Now we know.
(for Bennet)
Terry Long. Pittsburgh Steelers.

GRACIE
(reading hospital report)
Who drank a gallon of antifreeze.
That's not how I'd do it.

SULLIVAN
I guess these guys only die when
you're working--

BENNET
What other problems did he have?

SULLIVAN
Who cares?

GRACIE
Arrested a few times.
(looking at the report)
Fraud. Federal theft. And wow.
Arrested a lot.

SULLIVAN
I know what you're doing.

BENNET

Drinking antifreeze is the work of a lunatic mind.

(then)

What position? What position did he play?

SULLIVAN

Offensive line.

BENNET

Same as Mike Webster.

SULLIVAN (CONT'D)

Webby was a center. Terry played right guard.

*

BENNET

(the records)

No recorded concussions. Nine years of professional football. As an offensive guard.

(then)

I need a full autopsy. Same tests as Webster.

SULLIVAN

You're paying for that, too.

BENNET

Yes, Daniel. I'm paying for that, too.

(Bennet doesn't even hear it, his eyes already focused on--)

Joseph Maroon--

The signature on Long's records: Joseph Maroon. And now cut to--

89

JOE MAROON'S COMPUTER IMAGE SMILING AT US, TRIM, TAN, MUSCULAR, HIS TOOTHY GRIN FILLING OUR SCREEN

Pull back to REVEAL we're in Bennet's little shitbox office at the Coroner's. He's at his computer. Before him, the website *www.josephmaroon.com*, the personal site for the Steelers' team doctor. *Chief neuro-surgeon of the NFL. The country's premiere specialist in neurosurgery and sports medicine.*" Bright pastel design, mentorships on longevity and healthy living. The whole thing like an ad for toothpaste & Viagra. All white, now--

PULL BACK again. And our view has become a cottony field. The faint outline of snowflake-like brain cells. Then, from the corner, the seepage of angry rust-brown blood.

Tau protein tangles. Seeping and strangling everything in their path. PULL BACK FULL TO REVEAL--

90 **INT. BASEMENT LAB - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - NIGHT**

Bennet. It's late. The only other living thing in the building is Prema. In a chair now, by the door, reading with a flashlight.

Bennet's seen enough. Clicks off the table lamp. Just sits slumped in the glow of the instruments and exit signs.

Then, in PRE-LAP, a phone rings, and we cut to--

91 **OMIT**

92 **INT. BENNET'S CONDO - MORNING**

Prema picks up the phone, "Hello?". Hands to Bennet. And we--

MAN/PHONE (OVER)

Bennet Omalu?

BENNET

This is Dr. Bennet Omalu.

MAN/PHONE (OVER)

Listen to me. Football has the best doctors money can buy, and they're saying pro football players do not get brain damage. At all. And people who care about this stuff are supposed to take your word for it? Mike Webster was a pill-popping drunk. And you're an under-educated hack. And you're done, game over.

And looks up at Prema. The line is already dead. He hangs up.

BENNET

(sarcastic)

I think they called back.

WECHT (PRE-LAP)

Did he really say you're under-educated? Have they seen your resume?

93

INT. WECHT'S OFFICE - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - DAY

Bennet, Wecht, Hamilton.

WECHT

Well, I got calls, too. The National Football League owns neuroscience. Who knew?

HAMILTON

(reading from a letter)
"Serious misinterpretation".
"Failure to find". "Absence of clinical information".
(looks to Wecht, 'help?')

Bennet's at the window. In his hand, an envelope. Wecht and Hamilton have one too.

BENNET

What do they want?

WECHT

Your head on a spike.

HAMILTON

They want you to retract your findings.

BENNET

I don't know what that means.

WECHT

It means saying you made it all up.

BENNET

(confused)
Made it up??

WECHT

They're accusing you of fraud--

BENNET

(and now totally fucking confused)
Fraud?? What are they talking about?? I'm so careful. I slaved over this--

HAMILTON

Your reputation will be destroyed. You won't be able to work. Anywhere.

Good. WECHT Good!?

*
*

WECHT
They're terrified of you.

BENNET
I have to work! My visa depends on it.

WECHT
Well, what the hell did you think they were going to say, 'Thank you'?

BENNET
Yes! I thought they'd be grateful!

WECHT
What the hell for?

BENNET
For being told. For knowing.

Bennet paces to the window, confused.

WECHT
I get it. You think you're being a good American.
(and looks at him; pride and sadness)
Listen to me. The city of Pittsburgh shelled out 233-million dollars to help build its beloved Steelers a glorious new stadium while it was closing schools and raising taxes.
(and snatches the envelope out of Bennet's hand and waves it in his face)
These are not people who want to change the world.
(now waves Bennet's article)
And this isn't some quaint academic discovery stuck in the back of an obscure medical journal. Bennet Omalu is going to war with the manufacturer of a product that twenty-million Americans crave every Sunday the way they crave water! The NFL owns a day of the week! They're very big!

Pause. A long pause.

Bennet turns back to the window, staring out over the carpet of lights. And the bridges. And the river.

And Heinz Field.

HAMILTON

A pathologist determines cause of death, not discover disease. They'll say Bennet's in over his head, and they'll be right.

WECHT

Yeah well the world only gets changed by people who are over their heads ignoring people who say they're in over their heads.
(but then--)

Bennet turns back from the window. Face set.

BENNET

Terry Long.
(beat; what?)
The tests came back today. Terry Long is positive. Football gave him CTE. CTE told his brain to drink a gallon of antifreeze. And then he died.
(then)
I told you. There were going to be more.
(after a pause--)

HAMILTON

You've done great work. No one's going to blame you if you stopped here. But I'd be lying to you if I didn't tell you how important your next move is.

Pause. Wecht is taking in Bennet, waiting. Bennet and Wecht HOLD a look, then Wecht sees it in Bennet's face--

WECHT

No one's stopping anything.

INT./EXT. BENNET'S CONDO - DAY

Prema grabs her coat and purse to go out. Pauses by the window. Where she sees Bennet sitting in his car in the parking lot, deep in thought. And we cut to--

Her outside, bundling up, crossing to him. She gets in--

A94

INT. BENNET'S CAR - DAY

Prema waits for Bennet to say something. He doesn't. She lays a hand on his arm, Do you want to talk. He doesn't move. She pulls away--

PREMA

Then do you mind just taking me to Western Union? I need to wire money to my mother.

BENNET

(still in his reverie)
Do you send her everything?

PREMA

Not everything.

BENNET

What you make is also for you.

PREMA

So is this.

And that gets his attention. He turns to look at her. Takes her in, this selfless woman. And now they're--

95

EXT. PITTSBURGH/MONONGAHELA RIVER BANK - DAY

Bennet and Prema stand by the river, looking north and south past the bridge.

BENNET

When I was a boy, in Nigeria,
heaven was here.

(and holds his hand over
his head)

And America was here--

(just below)

It was the place where God sent all
his favorite people.

(--)

I came to America because I thought
here you could do anything, be
anything. Americans were the
manifestation of what God wanted
all of us to be.

(then)

But Mike Webster goes mad and
nobody asks why.

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)

They make fun of him. And now they want to pretend this disease doesn't exist? They want to bury me? It's offensive. I'm offended. I'm the wrong person to have discovered this.

A quiet. Then. A clarity and confidence bigger than she is--

PREMA

There is no coincidence in this world. Tell me. What is the statistical probability that you, not just a doctor, but Bennet Omalu, came to America, end up here, this rusty place, for you alone to be the one to see this?

(long pause)

When I arrived, in New York, I was attacked--

(and stops)

BENNET

What happened?

PREMA

Something that is better left unsaid. But that man almost broke me. I wanted to give up, and go back. But I knew God, I decided to trust his wisdom.

(and--)

And now I am looking at this man, an Omalu Onyemalukube. Your name. It means, if you know, you must come forth and speak.

Pause. Bennet metabolizing what she'd just told him. Then--

BENNET

How did you know that?

PREMA

I called your father.

(Bennet surprised)

He was pleased to hear from me.

BENNET

Cyril said if I speak it could be dangerous.

PREMA

If you don't speak for the dead, who will?

(MORE)

PREMA (CONT'D)

You are of the Igbo tribe, Bennet.
Igbo man is bold and cannot be
silenced. When you have the truth,
the thing you are told you cannot
do is the thing you must do.
Embrace that, and nothing created
by God can bring you down.

(long beat; then)

I would do anything to support that
kind of man.

On Bennet's face now: not love but conviction. And he
surprises himself, by spontaneously embracing her. Holds onto
her. As if to keep her from floating away from him now. (And
maybe clinging to keep himself from sinking.)

And now off his face, we cut to--

96 **OMIT**

97 **ENTRY SIGN "WELCOME TO MOON TOWNSHIP"**

PULL BACK TO REVEAL a Rockwellian Americana. Partially-
birthed spread of faux McMansions. Foundations waiting for
homes.

Light mottled through the trees reflects off the windows of
Bennet's car. As his Mercedes pulls past the sign. Their
faces in and out of light and shadow. Winding to--

98 **EXT. EMPTY LOT - MOON TOWNSHIP - CONTINUOUS**

Bennet pulls over at a virgin half-acre. Houses around it up
to the studs. Some are done. A handful occupied. O.S. WHINE
of aircraft - jet-wash - floating in. Slow parade of planes.
We're near the airport, under the flight path.

Bennet walks Prema onto the ground. She spins, wondering
where she's supposed to look.

PREMA

What is this?

BENNET

This is my dream. The schools are
good.

(then)

And you are good, Prema. You are
the only thing in my life that is
not my work that I can understand.

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)

(then)

I am sure you see good in me.

PREMA

I see good in you, Bennet. I see all that you are.

BENNET

I want to marry you.

(then)

We can fall in love.

PREMA

If you want to marry me, I will marry you.

BENNET

That's good. Because I already put down the payment. I've saved all my money. And now bought this for you.

What happens next is not quite a hug. And not quite a handshake. An awkward transactional embrace. Now cut to--

99

NEWS CAMERA MONITOR: BENNET AT A LECTERN, SPEAKING INTO MICS

BENNET/CAMERA MONITOR

By the time he committed suicide, Terry Long's brain was ruined. People with CTE suffer from depression, which can lead to suicide attempts. Terry Long committed suicide due to CTE, which was a result of his long-term play. The NFL is in denial--
(now we go to the live version--)

100

EXT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - DAY

Bennet giving a news conference. Wecht and Hamilton flank him. The cameras are mostly local news. We see Prema in the b.g. under an awning, because--

It's raining. But the crowd is still healthy.

BENNET

It is probable that a big percentage of professional football players have or will develop CTE, and will die of it. Maybe even most of them.

And on these words, we're FINDING faces in the crowd. Most are distracted by the rain to take it all in. But one - a YOUNG REPORTER in his 30's, leaning practically falling forward to hear everything--

BENNET (CONT'D)

I suspect we will also start finding it in and out of sports, in all activities where head impact happens--

YOUNG REPORTER

(stunned)

Holy shit.

Rain picking up. Cameramen are packing.

BENNET

This might explain all kinds of dysfunctional behavior. Why good people go bad--

WECHT

Any questions?
(not one, because--)

The news guys can't get back to their trucks fast enough. All kind of anti-climactic, as Bennet & Wecht make their way back to Prema--

WECHT (CONT'D)

No ignoring that. You're going to be an American hero.

BENNET

But I am not an American.

WECHT

Even better. That's so fucking American.

As Wecht keeps moving Bennet stops before Prema. On his face a light, a look of mission.

And now, in PRE-LAP, we HEAR--

PREMA (PRE-LAP)

(above the others)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed--!

101 **OMIT**

102 **OMIT**

103 **INT. ST. BENEDICT'S - PITTSBURGH - DAY**

The Congregation flooding the aisles. Heading out. Prema holds Bennet's hand as they exit. Prema brings Bennet's hand to her forehead, like a sacrament. We clock an engagement ring.

Bennet's big easy smile around them. But he can't get traction - no one suddenly seems to be acknowledging them.

As the congregation pours out, Father D'Amico with a word for everyone. Different Steelers lapel pins: "36-Bettis" & "51-Farrior". As Bennet and Prema head past--

FATHER D'AMICO

Football and Dr. Bennet Omalu. Who knew?

(his smile - what is its quality?)

We saw you on the news. Quite a splash.

BENNET

It isn't about football, Father.

Mrs. Scott has discreetly come up alongside, with her HUSBAND, 50.)

MR. SCOTT

Well, then it's a question, on the one hand, of the reputation of certain men, and something that brings our community - your community - together. That gives this city, and other cities, a thing to face us all in the same direction. And, on the other hand, I suppose, if it's really true, this so-called disease.

(a quiet falls, then--)

FATHER D'AMICO

Well, bless you both.

And they stand there alone and untouched. And as they turn to leave--

AUTHORITATIVE VOICE/TV (PRE-LAP)
 There is no so-called concussion
 "problem" in the NFL--
 (and cut to)

104

INT. BREAK ROOM - ALLEGHENY COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER - DAY

Third-hand furniture. Three Techs lounging around the TV. Chyron says: "*NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and Dr. Elliot Pellman, Director of the NFL Medical Committee*". On his face, mild amusement. Across from them, SPORTS WRITER/PERSONALITY.

PELLMAN/TV
 NFL football players are less
 vulnerable to concussions and post-
 concussion syndrome any more than
 the general population.

(--)

In fact, professional football
 players knocked unconscious can be
 returned to play on the same day of
 their injury without significant
 risk.

(--)

Look, there's no magic number for
 how many concussions is too many
 concussions. Concussions are just
 an occupational risk.

TAGLIABUE/TV
 Concussions, I think, is one of
 these pack journalism issues,
 frankly. The problem is it's a
 journalist issue.

A104

INT. CHINATOWN INN - DAY

And we find Bennet eating alone in a crappy little Chinese joint. Next to under-oxygenated fish drifting in a foggy tank. The TV behind the bar is on, sounds low, midday news. As Bennet looks up and sees a clip of a 60-Minutes-style interview on TV--

SPORTS PERSONALITY/TV
 So where's the science coming from?
 (and now INTERCUTTING from
 yet another interview-)

PELLMAN/TV

From nowhere. Let's be honest. Whatever this Omalu wants his science to say, NFL players are the biggest, strongest, toughest men in the world. They have evolved to a state where their brains are actually less susceptible to injury. I actually send veterans back in more quickly than rookies. They know how to unscramble their brains a little faster. A rookie won't know what's happened to him and will be a little panicky. The veterans expect the hits. They want the hits.

Bennet can't believe what he just heard, maybe smiles a little, notes LUNCHERS paying attention to all that. On their faces: pensive appreciation, agreement. Bennet sobers. Pushes away his untouched meal. Then--

As we start to HEAR a phone RINGING in PRE-LAP, we're--

105

INT. BENNET'S CONDO - THAT DAY

And Bennet - just home - coat still on, leaning against the kitchen table. The home phone ringing as--

PREMA

(reading from the

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

--Dr. Maroon, who is also vice chairman of the neurosurgery department at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, said, of Omalu's CTE diagnoses, that it was "fallacious reasoning."

(and looks to the phone, keeps going)

"To go back and say Long was depressed from playing in the NFL and that led to his death 14 years later I think is purely speculative."

(and looks up from the paper, at her man--)

It's not easy to get what you want.

Bennet finally picks up the phone--

VOICE/PHONE (OVER)
(local, messy, possibly
drunk)
This Omalu?

BENNET

This is Dr. Bennet Omalu--

VOICE/PHONE (OVER)

I just want to tell you that this is none of your goddamn business. You want to pussify this country? You want to vaginize football? Get the hell out, or they'll be doing your autopsy.

And Bennet, shaken, holding now a silent phone, and we cut to--

BLACK SCREEN

Two rings, three. SNAP. Light comes on. We're--

106

INT. BEDROOM - BENNET'S CONDO - NIGHT

Bennet's alone. Alarm clock reads 4AM.

BENNET

(picks up)

Hello? Hello?

Now a pattern of *clicks* and *hisses*. Then silence. Now--

Tap Tap. Bennet whirls, jumpy. Branch scraping the window.

Bennet stops. Feels - what? Who? Goes to the window to look outside. Car parked where cars park. One street lamp is out. One car starts up, lights come on. And as it simply drives away--

Something makes him turn. Fast. *Prema*. She's right there. She's always been right there.

She holds the blanket open for him. REVEALING her full self. Let me protect you.

He slips in beside her. She wraps him in her arms.

107

INT. BENNET'S CONDO - 7AM

New rhythm to their morning. They're shaken. She fixes breakfast. He dresses. A humming fear. He's tight.

Prema keeps the shade drawn. A bunker in here.

Bennet on his way out. She hands him his lunch. Then--

Phone rings. Again. They both look at it as at a ticking bomb. Bennet picks up but says nothing. A voice we know--

BAILES/PHONE (OVER)

Dr. Omalu?

(yes--)

I took you to be an early riser. I didn't want to call you at work.

(and we INTERCUT--)

108

INT. KITCHEN - BAILES' HOME - SIMULTANEOUS

Bailes in running shorts, shoes. Run-sweat. Pittsburgh and New York papers on the table in front of him.

BAILES

(into phone)

My name is Julian Bailes. Do you know who I am? I was team doctor for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

BENNET

I know who you are.

BAILES

Mike Webster was a personal friend.

BENNET

Was he.

BAILES

You're in trouble, Dr. Omalu. But you're not wrong.

(then)

I'd like to talk to you.

109

OMIT

110

OMIT

111

EXT. BAILES' HOME - DAY

Traditional plantation home. Veranda and gables. Oak-lined drive bisects a fairway-sized lawn. Yukon SUV and Porsche at the end of it.

As Bennet comes up the long drive toward the massive home, he takes it all in. So this is how they live.

Bailes comes out on the porch, waiting for him. Coming from a distance, we sense in him a hostility held in reserve.

As Bennet stops, reaches for the sleeve of medical slides--

BENNET
Is this a good idea?

BAILES
You tell me.

112

INT. HOME OFFICE - BAILES' HOME - DAY

Bennet with Bailes sitting around a work table. Coffee and sandwiches. Bailes at his microscope. The sleeve of slides open. Then backs away.

Then goes to his desk. Pulls out a folder of lab reports. Photos. Illustrations. Graphs.

BAILES
The NFL has known about the
concussion issue for years--

CLOSE ON THE REPORTS.

BAILES (CONT'D)
What you're looking at is the
research that formed the basis for
the League's concussion guidelines.
In this study, some academics put
helmets on monkeys and shook them
real hard. Threw dogs and pigs and
human cadavers down elevator
shafts.
(picks up another one)
Helmets on crash test dummies and
bashed them together. Conclusion?
(reading--)
"No striking player experienced
neck injury or concussion."
Concussions are as dangerous as a
hang-nail.

Bennet waits for more, then, disbelief--

BENNET
And that was it?

BAILES
No. Then the NFL did what every big
organization does.
(MORE)

BAILES (CONT'D)

They put together a commission to study the studies. Dr. Elliot Pellman's Mild Traumatic Brain Injury committee.

BENNET

Mild - before they knew. Conclusion first.

(then)

It's the opposite of science.

(and Bailes looks at him,
Exactly)

BAILES

Know who else is on that committee?

BENNET

Dr. Maroon?

BAILES

Joe, yeah, he's on there. Plus other team doctors. An equipment manager.

(and)

And two trainers - guys who tape knees for a living.

(then)

I was more interested in studying actual human football players, who could talk about their pain.

After a moment.

BENNET

Why did you really want to see me, Dr. Bailes?

BAILES

Do you have any idea how many Pittsburgh Steelers - just Steelers - died in the last few years? I'm not talking about older guys. I'm talking about players I knew. And just the ones I know about.

(then)

Twelve.

(--)

I don't want to see any more of these guys vanishing in the backs of pick-up trucks.

(and we JUMP TO--)

A112 **EXT. BACKYARD - BAILES' HOME - CONTINUOUS**

Overlooking a wide expanse of yard, lawn, pool, designer garden. Bailes taking it all in.

Bennet studies Bailes. This is a man in pain. Bennet relaxes--

BAILES

I know them. I was them. You're doing this wrong.

BENNET

As long as the NFL denies the truth, nothing changes.

BAILES

(that's right--)
If they say it's not true, it's not true. They have to say it out loud.

BENNET

I need to look the Commissioner in the eyes. Get me a meeting. Face-to-face, man-to-man. I cannot lose.

Pause. Bailes looks to Bennet. At his innocence. Then--

BAILES

He doesn't want to talk to you. Football doesn't want to talk to you.
(because--)
Like my daddy - a Louisiana judge - always said--
(holds up two fingers; and, in an exaggerated aristocratic southern drawl)
'Son, God is number one'-
(now just one finger)
'And football is number two'.
(then)
You're not even American. You're not even African-American. You're--

BENNET

A doctor.

Bailes smiles, a little embarrassed at himself. Then--

BAILES

The NFL has kept everyone in the dark.

(MORE)

BAILES (CONT'D)

You have turned on the lights and given its biggest bogeyman a name.

(leaning in)

And if they don't get this reined-in, everything they have, everything they are, is vulnerable.

(then)

What's happening now, what you think they're doing to you? Is nothing. You have no idea how bad this could get for you.

A long pause.

BENNET

I did my own research on the NFL's brain injury committee. You know what Dr. Elliot Pellman is? He's a rheumatologist. He's a specialist in arthritis and joint pain. Can you tell me what a rheumatologist knows about the brain and brain disease?

(and)

Corporate men like this, in this country, come from Harvard and Yale. But Pellman went to medical school in Guadalajara.

BAILES

Mexico? I didn't know that. That's beautiful.

And looks at him - "I like you" -

BAILES (CONT'D)

It's unlikely I could get you in front of them. But two cases aren't going to be enough. You have to keep going.

BENNET

Just so you understand. This doesn't show up on a CT scan. There is no diagnosis before death. For me to keep going more have to die.

BAILES

Unfortunately, I no longer see a scenario in which that isn't already happening.

(and we cut to--)

113 **EXT. GATED COMMUNITY - MOON TOWNSHIP - LATER THAT DAY**

A plane lands behind Bennet and Prema stand before the Dream House. Framing begun. Basement poured, waiting like an empty pool.

Bennet checks the fence. Good strong fence. Good fences make good neighbors.

PREMA
He's one of them.

BENNET
He's in pain.

PREMA
Can we trust him?

BENNET
I don't think we have a choice.

114 **OMIT**115 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE - MANHATTAN**

Big bright glass room. Working committee of five bunkered around a table covered in paperwork. Gathering up--

One breaks away: DAVE DUERSON. Handsome, muscular 48-year old ex-defensive back, all-star warrior.

Hurries past us in the hall. Jones coming the other way--

JONES
(on the run)
Did I hear right? We're losing you?
Tapping you for Mayor of Chicago?!

DUERSON
Still a long long road, my friend-
(as Jones turns a corner-)

JONES
All-World killer athlete to
civilian to King, all in one
lifetime! Ladies and gentlemen, I
give you Mayor Dave Duerson! Who
has. Figured. It. Out!

And as Jones disappears we follow Duerson into the elevator--

116

EXT. 280 PARK AVE - MANHATTAN - AFTERNOON RUSH

Duerson spins out of the NFL building.

A VOICE (O.S.)

Dave! It's me, man. Andre Waters.
(jaw tightening, because-)

His way blocked by former d-back (like him), ANDRE WATERS. 44
but looks 60. Rough road. Bloated. Sweaty.

DUERSON

How you doin man?
(knows all too well)

WATERS

Let me walk with you.
(Duerson grits this out)
I'm not good. It was all in the
paperwork.
(so desperate can't do the
small talk)
But why's the committee doing this?

DUERSON

There are five other trustees. You
talk to them?

WATERS

You're the only one who played. Who
knows. What it is to be us--
(can't deny that either;
tries to keep going)
You and me were the same. Bangers.
Hitmen.

DUERSON

File the appeal.

WATERS

You denied the appeal.
(manic, sweaty, hands
can't stop moving)
Something's wrong with me,
man.

DUERSON (CONT'D)

You look alright--

*
*
*
*

WATERS

Can't sleep. Eyes get crossed, it's
freaky, my right eye's pinned left
and my left's pinned right. Weirds
me out sometimes.
(Duerson's aching for
daylight)
Dave, look at me, man.
(MORE)

WATERS (CONT'D)
(and gets in front of
Duerson)

DUERSON
Jesus.

WATERS
I paid dues twelve years! Made
millions for those assholes. It's
not even your money. I'm just
asking back what I gave--

DUERSON
(exploding now right there
on Park Ave)
Fat? Stop eating like a pig. Gotta
headache? See a doctor--

WATERS
Been to twenty doctors! Just need
rent money--

DUERSON
Get your shit together! You were a
warrior! Get your hands off me!
(Waters is palming him)

WATERS
'Deny, deny, hope they die.' That's
what we say about you. Your goddamn
motto.
(--)
Dave, I'm sorry. Remember? When we
were kids, playin is what we lived,
for, man!
(talking to Duerson's back
because--)

Duerson performing that move they teach d-backs Day 1 in
camp, swim past the block at line of scrimmage to destroy the
QB. And Duerson swims past Waters down Park--

WATERS (CONT'D)
I don't got another play left!
Dave!
(then)
Somebody help me!

--now leaving Waters to watch Duerson vanish until he's
alone, holding his head because the migraine has come, in a
sea of strangers who have no fucking clue who he ever was,
nor will they ever care. And we cut to--

117 **PIXILATED NEWSPAPER PORTRAIT OF ANDRE WATERS**

--in Philadelphia Eagles jersey. Playing days: chiseled;
direct gaze of a carnivore. PULL BACK TO REVEAL--

"Eagles Defensive Back Andre Waters, 44, commits suicide"--

The paper in Wecht's hands. Wecht standing outside Bennet's
little office, as Bennet walks up in his scrubs--

WECHT

(reading to Bennet)

*"--known as 'Dirty Waters',
notorious for his aggressive style
of play--*

(and FLASH TO--)

FOOTAGE OF A HORIZONTAL WATERS LIKE A FLYING SPEAR IMPALING A RECEIVER WITH THE CROWN OF HIS HELMET

Otherwise MUTE, under--

WECHT

*Devastating hits that filled
highlight reels ... died of a self-
inflicted gunshot wound to the
head."*

Wecht looks up at Bennet. And as he hands him the paper and
leaves him standing there--

118 **EXT. CEMETERY - RURAL FLORIDA - DAY**

The poor Cracker South. Crabgrass pushing through sandy
scrub. Eagles balloons rise from the coffin. A propped photo
of Waters from playing days.

CAMERA FINDS BENNET at the edge of the crowd. He's clocked by
a league REPRESENTATIVE in a suit. Now an ex-PLAYER or three.

First time Bennet's been face-to-face with the live humans
involved. And it feels like a mistake. Flop-sweaty, he turns
to go. While--

O.S. someone starts coming at him through the tombstones. Big
MAN, AFRICAN-AMERICAN. Big strides. Extreme emotion on his
face. Fury? Fear? Bennet spots him, spots *that*, picks up his
pace. Big guy closing in. Running for the car now--

MAN

Hey! Get over here--!
 (on top of Bennet now,
 breathing labored)
 Why'd you do that, man?

Bennet terrified, braces to be hit. Or something. But the man doubles over, trying to catch breath.

MAN (CONT'D)

Christ--
 (out of breath)
 You were leaving. But Andre's
 mother. You wanted to talk to
 Andre's mother, right?
 (INTERCUTTING with--)

120 **INT. BAILES' HOME - EVENING**

Bailes at his desk, bathed in computer light, solitary contemplation. Mindlessly stirring his drink with his finger. And we PULL AROUND Bailes' head and over his shoulder on WHAT HE'S SEEING: a picture of Strzelczyk. Now--

119* **INT. WATERS FAMILY HOME - SUNNY ISLE, FL - DAY**

Neat. Devout. Family pictures. Legions of grandchildren. Bennet sitting adjacent to WATERS' MOTHER, 70.

They're watching a DVD of an Eagles game ON THE TV:

Waters getting hit so hard he lays on the ground, unconscious. Then is helped up. Then wanders toward the opposing sideline. Then is led back straight to the huddle, staggering through the next play.

Waters' mother watches Bennet watch. She's seen it a hundred times. She wants to watch Bennet's reaction. Alternatively volcanic with grief, and letting rays of light burn through--

WATERS' MOTHER

He said he was alright. He said he
 was dazed for a minute then he was
 alright--
 (--)

A121 **EXT. COFFEE SHOP - PITTSBURGH - DAY**

Bailes pulls up in his Porsche, parks. Crosses the street. Gritty industrial Pittsburgh.

A woman in the window feels him, turns: a changed Keana Strzelczyk. Thinner. Tired. As Bailes hesitates, then goes in, we go back to--

121

INT. WATERS FAMILY HOME - SUNNY ISLE, FL

Bennet and Mrs. Waters.

WATERS' MOTHER

Let me tell you about my son. We used to call him Spanky. His daddy gave him that name--

And reaches in her bag

WATERS' MOTHER (CONT'D)

I'm going to read you something. The last thing he wrote me.
(reading from a letter)
"...There isn't a day that goes by that I don't thank God for blessing me with you as my mom. Happy Mother's Day. Your son, Andre M. Waters."

(then)

His signing bonus, he bought me this house. He bought all his brothers cars. He was the sun and we were planets.

Bennet's eyes closed, nodding, feeling Andre's presence.

WATERS' MOTHER (CONT'D)

After he gave me this card, he said, "Ma, I'm ready to go." He knew people started thinking he was crazy.

BENNET

Not crazy. He'd already become someone else--

And she looks at him. Her eyes welling up. Anger.

WATERS' MOTHER

Suicide. He took it out of God's hands.

BENNET (CONT'D)

He was sick.

*
*

WATERS' MOTHER

He definitely had this disease? Because I want to believe that. Because you're not supposed to put your own child in the ground.

(MORE)

WATERS' MOTHER (CONT'D)

Nature's not supposed to work that way.

(--)

Now. You want what's left of my son? Because Dr. Omalu, I don't want to feel another thing I have to survive. Don't let me feel hope, then not have this come out right.

(and takes his hand)

BENNET

I understand, yes--

And Bennet slides next to her. Takes a knee. Bows, prays. She prays. She's crying. Now he's crying. Then--

WATERS' MOTHER

Heavenly Father, you know every heart. Please mend our souls.

BENNET (CONT'D)

And please lead us to the truth. Soothe this family with your grace.

WATERS' MOTHER

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Then she abruptly stands. Drying her eyes.

WATERS' MOTHER (CONT'D)

I'm going to get us some coffee.
(and exits, and back to--)

122

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - PITTSBURGH

We find Bailes & Keana at a table outside, under the awning. It's cool. Neither feel it. Their breath ballooning in front of their faces--

BAILES

You look good. How are the kids?

KEANA STRZELCZYK

The kids are fine. I am fine. What do you want?

BAILES

I'm sorry I couldn't make the funeral.

KEANA STRZELCZYK

No one made it to the funeral.

Then.

BAILES

You heard about Mike Webster.

And she just looks at him. She heard.

KEANA STRZELCZYK

And Terry Long. And and and. And who else?

(--)

What do you really want to ask me, Julian?

(and now a hard cut to--)

A122 **OMIT**

(123 & 124 ARE NOW A81 & B81)

125 **BENNET WALKING IN DARKNESS**

Following him through a lightless basement passage. All we HEAR, his footsteps, the thrum of a boiler, hum of fans.

Then - BANG! - he shoves at a door. Bailes is standing out there in the night in the rain. Bennet lets Bailes enter, and-

126 **INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - NIGHT**

Bennet leads Bailes through the underground tunnel, through a warren of basement labs, to--

127 **INT. BASEMENT LAB - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER**

--where Wecht is waiting in the half-dark. Around them, the silhouettes of fresh bodies for tomorrow.

BENNET

(introducing)

This is Dr. Wecht.

Bailes shakes his hand. We're TIGHT ON WECHT. He's not so sure about Bailes - friend of enemy, fish or fowl?

Bennet hands Bailes a short stack of slides.

Hands Bailes a short stack of slides.

BENNET (CONT'D)

Andre Waters.

Bailes goes to the microscope. Bows, peers in.

Now Bennet hands him--

BENNET (CONT'D)
Justin Strzelczyk.

Long pause as Bailes looks and looks at the one slide.

Bennet stirs. Glances worriedly into the dark. Where the bodies are waiting. As if he's heard something. He mumbles, "I'm sorry," moves closer to the others, gives the angry corpses room. (We see all this. And Wecht does. Bailes doesn't. Because he doesn't know to.)

BAILES
(in his own world)
I just kept sending him back out there.

WECHT
What were you thinking?

BAILES
You have to be part of all that. Down there on the sidelines with them. Whatever it takes to keep them in the game. To keep it all going. Tape, needles, Vicodin, Toradol, Lidocaine, Percocet. (and) Lexapro. Zoloft. (they're looking at him, then--)
Tires. Oil. You're a mechanic keeping the race cars on the track.

Pause there. Then, hearing himself, how that sounded. Bailes looks at Bennet. But--

WECHT
That's not medicine. I don't know what that is.

BENNET
It's business. (they look at him)
It's just business.

And there it is. And then what he's been waiting for:

BENNET (CONT'D)
Three cases is the scientific burden of evidence. We have four.
(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)

(and now)

We are past what the NFL can and cannot deny. It's bigger than they are. Now they have to listen to us.

Bailes. Conflicted. Resigned. Defeated.

128 **OMIT (129 MOVED TO AFTER 130)**

130* **INT. ALTIUS RESTAURANT - PITTSBURGH - NIGHT**

Atop Mt. Washington, perched high over the wishbone confluence of the Ohio, Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers. The massive stadium where the Steelers play. And the Pittsburgh skyline.

We find Bennet and Bailes at a four-top by the picture window. Each has a drink. It's 11pm. Bennet looking through the reflections of staff cleaning up. Bailes off into space.

They've been sitting for a couple hours. Bailes looks to his watch, Goddammit--

BENNET

He wanted to do this two hours ago.

And now a reflection in the window turns Bennet. Joe Maroon is crossing toward them. Hesitates at the table, takes a chair on Bailes' side.

A beat of them all together, silent. Maroon doesn't apologize.

BENNET (CONT'D)

Would you like a drink?

MAROON

I said five minutes.

BAILES

He doesn't want a drink.
(and Maroon goes right into it--)

MAROON

Your conclusions are a total misinterpretation of facts. To say Webster and Long and Waters were killed by football is--

BENNET

Fallacious reasoning. Yes, I know.
And maybe you haven't heard, Dr.
Maroon. But the world is not flat.

Maroon vibrates with rage.

MAROON

(to Bailes)
Where's he going with this?

BAILES

Just hear him out--

BENNET

I want to propose a formal
controlled study. Bring together
the best minds in America. We
should be working together.

MAROON

Who do you think you're talking to?

BENNET

Excuse me?

MAROON

I was President of the Congress of
Neurological Surgeons.

BENNET

Yes. And I was the doctor who
performed the autopsies of Mike
Webster and Terry Long. Your men.
Your men under your care.

(he has Maroon's attention)

Do you know what Mike Webster's
wife said? If she knew he was sick,
if she knew what he'd become was
this disease, she would have been
nicer to him.

(--)

But he died. Everything broken.
Their lives ruined.

(then)

You took an oath. Tell the truth!

MAROON

The truth? The truth is the
National Football League is a
salvation! It employs hundreds of
thousands of people. We've sent
thousands of kids to school.

(MORE)

MAROON (CONT'D)

We ship players to war zones to entertain the troops--

(nods down at Heinz Field, and crescendoing--)

The ownership of this football club has given millions to charity. The NFL runs clinics on child obesity. You want me to go on?

BENNET

It's not necessary--

MAROON

It is necessary. Some of our players would be what without the NFL? Where would their kids be? Do you know where most of these guys would be?

BENNET

Alive.

Maroon looks at him, exasperated.

MAROON

The NFL is the most popular sport in America because it is goddamn fantastic. You think they make people play? People want to play.

(point outside, down there, at Heinz Field, glowing)

Right there is the beating heart of this city. Not the symphony. Not the ballet. Every city the Steelers play in, it's the same.

(--)

What do you want us to do, end it? Fold the National Football League?

BENNET

(he's not even answering that question--)

Solve the problem. Solve. The Problem.

MAROON

Who are you?

(to Bailes)

He performs autopsies. He's a pathologist--

BENNET

Yes, a mere pathologist. That is so.

Long heavy silence. Then--

BAILES

And what if he's right? What if
it's true?

Maroon HOLDS Bailes in place with a glare. Then, back to
Bennet--

MAROON

Do you understand the impact of
what you're doing?

BENNET

Yes--

MAROON (CONT'D)

(forceful; angry again) *
Do you understand the impact.
Of what you are doing?
(because obviously *
Bennet could not *
possibly)

BENNET

I said I did--

MAROON

Let me tell you. Because you
clearly do not.

(now)

If just 10-percent of mothers in
America--

(and stops, gathers
himself)

Did you ever play football?

BENNET

No.

MAROON

It taught me everything I know
about loyalty, teamwork, endurance,
sacrifice.

(then, leaning in)

If 10-percent of mothers in America
decide football is too dangerous
for their sons to play, that's it.
It is the end of football. Kids.
Colleges. Eventually, it's just a
matter of time, the professional
game.

Pause, then--

BAILES

Joe. He's not in the outcome
business.

MAROON

He has no business--

BENNET

And do you know what history does
to people - trained physicians -
who ignore science-- ?

Maroon tries to interject.

BENNET (CONT'D)

SIR, I AM NOT DONE--!

Maroon shocked to silence.

BENNET (CONT'D)

History laughs!

(then)

Deny my work, the world will deny
it. But men will continue to die.
And families will go on being
destroyed.

Maroon looks hard to Bailes, then Bennet. And his proposal--

MAROON

Are you sure you want to do this?

BENNET

I could ask you the same question.
(a pause, then--)

MAROON

I'll get back to you.
(and fast he's out of his
seat and heading out--)

Leaving Bennet and Bailes alone. A long moment of silence.

BAILES

Well, that went well.

And the two of them are left staring down at Heinz Field
rising massive like the Roman Coliseum out of the city's
beating heart. Now we START TO HEAR IN PRE-LAP--

JONES (PRE-LAP)
 (reading)
 --After examining the remains of former National Football League player Andre Waters, a neuropathologist in Pittsburgh, Dr. Bennet Omalu, is claiming that Mr. Waters had sustained brain damage from playing football and he says that led to his depression and ultimate death--
 (continuing over--)

129 **INT. COMMISSIONER'S SUITE - NFL OFFICES - DAY**

Jones stands before Tagliabue, reading the paper aloud.

JONES
 It gets worse.
 (then)
Dr. Julian Bailes, medical director for the Center for the Study of Retired Athletes and the chairman of the department of neurosurgery at West Virginia University, said, "Unfortunately, I'm not shocked."
 (looks up--)
 There's more Omalu. More Bailes.

TAGLIABUE
 Bailes. Why do I know that name?

JONES
 Steelers team doctor. Neurologist for the Players Association.

TAGLIABUE
 Oh wow.

JONES
 Yeah. Wow.
 (then)
 The Times is calling it a potential epidemic. Paul. It's not the Sports section. Not Science. A-1. Front page. New York Times. Above the fold.

131 **OMIT**

132 **OMIT**

133 **INT. BOARD ROOM - NFL HEADQUARTERS - DAY**

TRACK Tagliabue and Jones crossing from their suite to a set of heavy oak doors. The doors open, and as they enter, we GLIMPSE over their shoulder a long luxurious table encircled by a dozen WHITE MEN waiting in grim silence. You can smell the privilege, the power. *Ownership*. And as the doors close us out--

134 **JONES AT A LECTERN**

JONES

--his 17 years as Commissioner of the National Football League comprised the most lucrative and stabilizing reign perhaps in the history of pro sports--
(and we PULL BACK to reveal we're--)

135 **INT. BREAK ROOM - ALLEGHENY COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER - DAY**

Wecht, Sullivan and the Techs, all watching the TV, and a hastily arranged "press conference".

Bennet enters.

SULLIVAN

Nice going, Bennet. You killed off the commish.

Bennet confused, elated. As, to Jones' left we now see Tagliabue. To his right is incoming Commissioner ROGER GOODELL, 47 and sandy-haired.

TAGLIABUE/TV

Roger has worked for the NFL since he was 21.

(--)

He lives football, breathes football, but he's younger, more handsome--

(laughter, then, serious--)

(MORE)

TAGLIABUE/TV (CONT'D)

And understands how to take
'America's Game' into the future.
There is a new sheriff in town--

Upon which Wecht walks in.

As Goodell takes the lectern. Folksy, telegenic in that
Clintonesque way.

Sullivan & Wecht exchange a look.

GOODELL/TV

The NFL isn't just a sports league.
It's an entertainment product. What
I'm here to do now, my main
responsibility, is to protect the
shield, America's Game.

(the NFL logo)

--I want us to go on enjoying our
great game knowing our kids love
it, respect it, never stop having
fun--

BENNET

They heard. They're listening.

WECHT

Sure. Morning in America. A new day
in the NFL.

(TIGHT on Goodell;
sarcastic)

He looks like your drinking buddy.

While, on TV, Pellman appears, glum, beside Goodell.

WECHT (CONT'D)

And there's your buddy, Pellman,
again. The knee man from
Guadalajara.

(and leaves, as)

BROADCAST/TV (OVER)

Roger Goodell's been at the
forefront of every major decision
the NFL has made over the past
dozen years. His biggest challenge
now? Keeping the good times rolling
for a \$6-billion a year business.

SULLIVAN

You're screwed now.
(and walks out)

GRACIE

Julian Bailes is on the phone--

And Bennet crosses to the phone, picks up--

BAILES/PHONE (OVER)

Turn on the TV.

BENNET

(into phone)

I'm watching it right now.

BAILES/PHONE (OVER)

He's shaking up Pellman's brain injury committee. They're asking for a concussion summit, a full presentation. In Chicago. Next week.

On Bennet's face--

BAILES/PHONE (OVER) (CONT'D)

We have our chance, Bennet.

136 **OMIT**

137 **EXT. WESTIN HOTEL - O'HARE AIRPORT - CHICAGO - NIGHT/ESTABLISHING**

One of the big ones out by the airport. Constant whine of jet-wash. It's snowing. Really starting to come down.

138 **INT. LOBBY/BAR - WESTIN HOTEL - O'HARE AIRPORT - LATE NIGHT**

Generic franchise room. Muzak, formica tabletops and mid-layover SALESMEN.

We find Bennet and Bailes in a corner booth doing a presentation run-through. Laptop open on Power Point. Bennet on his second drink. Bailes into maybe his third. Looking at it all as if at blueprints for D-Day. Bennet jacked. Bailes knows half his men are going to perish.

BENNET

(reciting)

"The facts speak for themselves.

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)

These brains, strangled by protein
unleashed by repetitive head trauma
related to football, tell an
irrefutable story--"
(and looks up, Good?)

BAILES

Maybe throw in some football stuff.
Not medical terms. Things we say--

BENNET

Why do I need to say what they say?
I thought that's why we're here.

BAILES

You have, what, seven degrees?
Eight? You're one of the smartest
people they'll ever meet.
(--)
You know what? You'll be fine.

Bennet takes Bailes in.

BENNET

How about you? What will you be?

Bailes fumbling with an INSERT picture of MIKE WEBSTER, bent, half-squatting, eyes tethered to the eyes of the nose-guard in his face, furiously focused. And now a TIGHT on Bailes. As we PUSH IN, his face growing in frame--

BAILES

It can be a boring, violent, stupid
game. And it can be Shakespeare.
The game looks like life. I know
you can't see how beautiful that
all is - I don't blame you.
(then, reverie done)
But this isn't fun for me. Everyone
we're going to see tomorrow I know
personally. That feeling you get
when someone you love and respect
screws you over? They will have it.
And there's not a damn thing I can
do about it.

We're in on his eyes now. Maybe what he's seeing. And out of
his reverie--

BENNET

You already did that yourself.
(Bailes looks up, What?)
When you picked up the phone.
(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)
And you called me.
(now--)

BAILES

Christ. They're here.

Bennet confused, follows Bailes' gaze to the bar. Where a cluster of NFL officials have arrived. Pellman, Maroon, Jones, couple others. Pellman the schlubby one.

Goodell crosses and joins them for a word with Jones. Jones whispers in Goodell's ear. Maroon pivots, turns his back, waving for the bartender. Says something to Pellman. Pellman laughs.

BAILES (CONT'D)

(under his breath)

He's such an ass.

But opaque, tight, Bailes shuts the laptop. On his face, the violent collision of choice and consequences.

BENNET

We better get some sleep.

139

INT. HOTEL ROOM - WESTIN O'HARE - NIGHT

Bennet's sitting on the bed against the wall in his clothes. We're TIGHT on his face. A kind of nervous excitement and dread. He will not sleep tonight.

And we HEAR a firm RAP on the door, and Bennet's head turns, and we cut to--

140

HIS HOTEL ROOM DOOR - MORNING

It opens. Bailes is standing in the hall in a suit. And we SWING AROUND and find Bennet in the same. Cinching his tie.

It's the next morning. Bennet's suit is immaculate. Pocket square. There's an ironing board out. He's freshly ironed everything. He's nervous as shit.

BAILES

We need to talk.

Bailes steps in. His expression like he just bit down on something rancid.

BENNET

What's wrong?

BAILES

There's no easy way to say this so
I'm just going to say it.

(MORE)

BAILES (CONT'D)

They aren't going to let you speak.
They don't even want you in the
room.

(--)

I told you. They will not accept
you as the face of this issue.

(--)

They want me to do it.

Pause. Bennet shocked. Rocked.

BENNET

One of their own.

BAILES

Yes.

BENNET

They want to pretend--

BAILES (CONT'D)

You don't exist.

BENNET

You said Goodell is good--

BAILES

They still have to sit there and
listen.

BENNET

To you.

BAILES

Yes, me. You blew up their world.

BENNET

And yours.

BAILES (CONT'D)

Yes. Mine.

*

BENNET

And how can an African know this
subject better than them?

Bennet looks at him a long moment. Fish or fowl? Us/them?

BENNET (CONT'D)

Or better than you?

Bailes stunned. Confused. Now livid, explodes--

BAILES

(that power/hostility held
in reserve surfacing--)

Wait a second ... You think this is
about Bennet Omalu? I'm not here
for you. I'm here because people
are dying--

BENNET

You're here for redemption! You're here to use me to cleanse your sins!

BAILES

You self-righteous bastard! Do you have any idea what I could have, how much I could have, if I went back to my side of the ball? Just kept quiet? Everything in my world is telling me not to agree with you. Except one thing - science. So I'm here. Not down there in that audience. Up here, beside you. What do you want from me? How much more can I do?

And HOLD on them a long beat. And Bailes is right. And Bennet knows it, is ashamed. And is going to take it in the ass because it's the only thing to do--

BENNET

You're right, I'm sorry. Go. Take it. All of it. And you convince them, Julian--

BAILES

I'm sorry-

BENNET

Convince them, Julian--
(and as Bailes turns and
marches down the hall)
Convince them!
(now cut to--)

141

INT. HOTEL FOYER - DAY

The huge, weird hub of three different enormous conference rooms. Empty. A MAINTENANCE PERSON is pushing a vacuum.

Bennet stands against one of those removable accordion walls. Trying not to look at his reflection in the wall of mirrors. Trying not to stare at the double doors to the conference room. Where it's all happening.

Pacing now.

As a BEEFY PLAINCLOTHES SECURITY GUARD (NFL? Hotel?) crosses the expanse, approaching--

SECURITY

Sir, this is a private function.
You're not supposed to be in this
area.

BENNET

You're right, I'm supposed to be in
there--
(in THERE, past the big
dude)

SECURITY

I'm going to have to ask you step
away and return to the lobby with
the other guests.
(and he's in Bennet's face
now)

BENNET

Don't put your hands on me! Get
your hands off me!

Now the double doors push open at us. Football officialdom is
on its feet in there and starts to pour out. Bennet's POV
locks on the one black man.

Duerson, vibrating with rage. Right up in Bennet's face--

DUERSON

My father can't remember a goddamn
thing. And he never played a day of
football. He was too busy working.
In a factory. You quack. You think
I'm some boy you can control? Take
your bullshit science, go back to
Africa, and get away from our game--
(and moves on, and--)

Bennet, stunned, can see Pellman back in the conference room
with Goodell and Jones--

And Jones looks up, and they HOLD a look. And we're in SLO-
MO, and Jones slowly blinks, turns away, and--

The doors swing close, leaving Bennet looking at Bailes.
Bailes is sweaty. Stunned. Like he'd been punched in the
face.

BAILES

Roger Goodell just said Justin
Strzelczyk may have gotten his
concussions swimming. In a swimming
pool.
(then)

(MORE)

BAILES (CONT'D)

It was a set-up. They needed to say they heard us. So they can goddamn bury us.

Bennet HEARS nothing but a low-grade hum. Bailes slips out of frame as Bennet floats past Bailes into--

142 OMIT

143 OMIT

144 INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM

And stops. Because Goodell, Pellman, Maroon and Jones are setting up for a summing-up. News conference. National cameras. Background with NFL logo hung dropped behind the lectern. As Goodell takes his place, adjusts his mic--

GODELL

This is an important day in the National Football League. We've had some very good dialogue, which will help us improve the care for our players.

REPORTER 1

What do you think when you hear about former NFL players who are suffering from symptoms that have only been seen in boxers or people over 80-years old? What does that say about the effect of concussions on players?

GODELL

I'm not a doctor here. But you have to look at their entire medical history. From my standpoint, not being a doctor, that just makes logical sense. You're seeing some great scientists and doctors, who have done terrific work in this area, sharing information. They don't all agree. The NFL has had a committee of expert doctors and scientists going on this for 14 years. This is an evolving science and that's okay.

We're pushing in on Bennet, listening to all this, watching it all evaporate. Pellman jumping in--

PELLMAN

While I agree with the Commissioner, as I was discussing with other NFL medical personal, no empirically determined proof was presented today. Because there simply isn't any. The truth is - and we will be delivering this directive to our players - that current research with professional athletes has not shown that having more than one or two concussions leads to permanent problems, if each injury is managed properly.

Bennet starts to back away, as--

REPORTER 2	GOODELL	*
Are you comfortable with the level of care for former players?	I don't know about comfortable. I'm not sure I understand what you mean.	*
		*
		*

Bennet turning now, exiting as the news conference drones on--

REPORTER 1 (O.S.)

Do you think the league is currently doing enough for players, or do you think you can do more--?

And as the pile-on grows and crescendoes, and now FADES, FADING IN, in PRE-LAP--

NFL FILMS NARRATOR (PRE-LAP)
(operatic baritone)

From whistle to gun, there are enough major collisions in pro football to stock a junkyard for a century--

Bennet has left the room, gone, the doors flapping behind him--

145 **NFL FILMS PROMO REEL (4-WALLED)**

Two BALTIMORE RAVENS ready for a play by BUTTING HELMETS repeatedly. This SLO-MO, under a swelling elegaic score, as if two mythic rams. Now--

NFL FILMS NARRATOR (OVER)

Hitting is what separates player from player. One team from another. Pretender from contender.

(MORE)

NFL FILMS NARRATOR (OVER) (CONT'D)
And chumps from champions--
(cuts to--)

A montage, MUTE - cuts of BIG HITS. Only the sound of helmets/pads crashing, men grunting, gnashing--

NFL FILMS NARRATOR (OVER) (CONT'D)
And it is this, of course, that has
always been part of football's
appeal. Cinematic, like a war movie-

Now churning arms and legs. Punctuated by frames of receivers and others taking devastating hits. The hit frames synched to the rhythm of the music.

NFL FILMS NARRATOR (OVER) (CONT'D)
A league where the meek do NOT
inherit the turf. A game of
thunder! and destruction!
(now cut to--)

*

BERNIE GOLDBERG/NARRATING (PRELAP)
According to the NFL's own numbers,
half of all players with
concussions, were being sent back
into the same game. Including some
who were actually knocked out cold.
We asked the head of the NFL's
committee on concussions at the
time, if that was a good idea.
(now to--)

*

146 OMIT

*

147 TV 4-WALLED - HBO'S 'REAL SPORTS' WITH BRYANT GUMBEL (ACTUAL FOOTAGE)

And CORRESPONDENT BERNIE GOLDBERG.

BERNIE GOLDBERG
That could lead to medical
problems, no?

IRA CASSON
Returning to play when you
shouldn't return to play? There's
no clear evidence that has led to
medical problems, if that's what
you're asking me.

And a cut over to his interview: 60ish, tweedy dresser, shaggy ring of white hair. "Dr. Ira Casson, newly-appointed NFL Medical Director".

BERNIE GOLDBERG/NARRATING

Back in 2007, Ira Casson, was head of a team of NFL doctors who had looked into the issue, and determined that the concern over head injuries, was over blown.

PREMA (O.S.)

(muttering in Swahili)

Wao wana kichaa! Kuma nina. Fala!

(and REVERSE to find)

148

BENNET AND PREMA IN FRONT OF THE TV WATCHING--

BERNIE GOLDBERG

(addressing Casson)

Is there any evidence, as far as you're concerned, that links multiple head injuries among pro football players with depression?

CASSON

No.

BERNIE GOLDBERG

With dementia?

CASSON

No.

BERNIE GOLDBERG

With early onset of Alzheimer's?

CASSON

No.

BERNIE GOLDBERG

(disbelief creeping in)

Is there any evidence as of today that links multiple head injuries with any long-term problem like that?

CASSON

In NFL players?

BERNIE GOLDBERG

Yeah.

CASSON

No.

(and HOLDING Goldberg's
near-smirk, we go to--)

Bennet. Head in hands. And just when we think this cannot get worse, we start HEARING in PRE-LAP:

GOODELL/TV (PRE-LAP)

The first pick of the Houston
Texans--!
(and cut hard to--)

149

FOOTAGE - NFL COLLEGE DRAFT - RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL, NYC

GOODELL

Amobi Okoye! Defensive lineman from
the University of Louisville--

As Goodell shakes hands with Bennet's cousin, Amobi, sweet-smiled mountain of a man. We watch a TIGHT of Amobi, huge grin, holding up his new jersey, "OKOYE - 91" - as he's being drafted.

Then PULL BACK TO REVEAL we're--

A149

INT. BENNET'S CONDO

Bennet watching the circus-like spectacle on his TV. Now head in hands. Now shuts it off.

It's late. Quiet. Bennet stops at the kitchen table. Dream House material - floor plans, paint color charts, brochures for brick face - spread before him.

Weary, as he taps it all into a neat pile, and in a single TRACKING SHOT we follow him to the window. Where we take in the back of St. Benedict illuminated high atop the church, above us all. Now into the bedroom, where he stands watching Prema sleep.

Then gets to his knees, his face by Prema's belly--

BENNET

Hi. This is your father.
(what to say? so insecure)
I am in deep shit. I haven't done
anything wrong, but I am being
punished. Your mother and I are
being tested. It might be not so
good out here when you arrive. You
are still with God.

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)
 Your face is still the face of God.
 Please tell God to help me.
 (and closes his eyes, and-)

We slide to Prema's face. Eyes open. Awake. Listening. Then--

B149 **INT./EXT. PREMA'S CAR (MOVING)/MOON TOWNSHIP - DAY**

Prema driving herself there for first time alone. More pregnant. Humming to a pop song on the radio. Clarion voice.

Her eyes tick up to the rear-view. A sedan. Nondescript. Windshield opaque with sky. Keeping pace.

And it's still keeping pace. She stops singing. She turns. It turns. She turns again. It keeps going.

She keeps going.

It reappears.

Now she's there. In the neighborhood. Grass. Shrubbery is in. She looks over at their home. Then the rear-view. Car's gone.

150 **OMIT**

151 **OMIT (152-155 MOVED TO AFTER 161)**

156 **OMIT**

157 **INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - DAY**

Sullivan leading Bennet upstairs. Before the top he stops them in the stairwell.

BENNET
 Why does Cyril want to see me?

SULLIVAN
 Hopefully to fire you.
 (and they head into--)

158 **INT. WECHT'S OFFICE - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - DAY**

Where Wecht is waiting with two FBI AGENTS.

BENNET
 What is this?

Bennet now looking from Wecht to the Agents. Goes still, as an animal will at the scent of danger. Then--

WECHT

I am being relieved of my duties.

BENNET

I don't understand.

AGENT

Dr. Wecht is being indicted on eighty-four Federal counts, including--

WECHT

Eighty-four Federal counts. Mail fraud, wire fraud, and related offenses arising from his use of government resources to benefit his private practice. Sending personal faxes, mileage vouchers, misusing office stationary--

*
*
*
*

BENNET

Faxes?

WECHT (CONT'D)

Faxes.

*
*

BENNET

They couldn't come up with something that stupid in Nigeria.

AGENT

Using public property for private gain.

BENNET

You do know the man has been a public servant for decades--

AGENT 2

Have you ever performed any private services on county time?

A pause as Bennet does the math. Then realizes--

BENNET

Do you mean the death row case? I was on my time! I saved an innocent man's life.

WECHT

Apparently we've both hurt the government's feelings.

(then)

This has nothing to do with him.

(meaning Bennet)

AGENT

We don't want you, Dr. Omalu. But we can have you.

BENNET

What does that mean?

Everything all at once. Bennet's walls crashing around him.

WECHT

They are going to want your testimony.

(and some sort of gesture tells him--)

BENNET

Against you?

(the silence says yes; turning to the agent)

Is this because his name was on my research?

AGENT 1

(dead-pan)

What research is that, Dr. Omalu?

Bennet HOLDS his look. A stare-down. A long beat, then--

BENNET

(this is bullshit--)

I'll resign first.

AGENT 2

In which case your immigration status will be revised. Since your status requires full-time employment.

BENNET

(so absurd he actually laughs)

I'll get another job in some other city.

(and very - too - quickly)

AGENT

That would be fine.

159

INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - DAY

OVER BENNET'S SHOULDER as he walks slowly through the autopsy chamber. Past Sullivan. Gracie. His hands shake. Knees soft.

Sound and light as if from the bottom of a pool. Muffled.
Slow. Prised. Up the stairs into his--

160

INT. BENNET'S OFFICE - COUNTY CORONER - DAY

Bennet enters. Wecht trails in after him.

WECHT

I said make us both come out okay,
not professional ruination.

And takes in, maybe for the first time, Bennet's little
shitbox of an office. The shitty high-school microscope.

WECHT (CONT'D)

This is a terrible goddamn chair.
(looks around; the
computer)
You had to buy that, too?

BENNET

Everything.

WECHT

I didn't do good enough by you.

BENNET

They won't make me say one word
against you.

WECHT

What's there to say? Cyril Wecht's
a loud-mouth asshole? Yeah, well. I
don't care. I'm tired. My balls are
low--

Then. Why he's really here--

WECHT (CONT'D)

Look. Whoever - whatever - takes my
place - everything is up for grabs
now.

(Bennet isn't reading him)

The CTE material - Webster, Long,
Strzelczyk, Waters--

BENNET

And?

WECHT

And maybe the Allegheny County
Medical Examiner suddenly develops
a storage problem. And certain
brain matter is suddenly taking up
too much space. I won't be able to
protect it. Or you.

(then)

(MORE)

WECHT (CONT'D)

So I asked Sullivan where it all
was. He had no idea.

BENNET

Because it's in my coat closet.

Wecht stares at him a beat.

WECHT

You're a goddamn renegade, you know that?

(then)

What if they get a warrant?

BENNET

On suspicion of what, science?

Wecht laughs. Then, the bottom line--

WECHT

We got screwed. You don't deserve it.

(--)

Know what the worst part is? How easy it was.

BENNET

(look at me--)

I can't go back to Nigeria. All I am is here. My child is going to be born American.

WECHT

(don't worry so much--)

I'll get you a job. You can work in the prison laundry with me.

(starts to leave, then, fuck it)

Call the surgeon. We need a goddamn drink.

161

INT. CHINATOWN INN - PITTSBURGH - A LITTLE LATER

We're following Bennet wobbling slightly through the narrow passage from men's room to the bar.

It's lunch-time. Bailes and Wecht lean waiting for him. Our guys are drunk. Bennet stares at the fish--

BAILES

I'm telling you there's only one thing they're thinking about now: how many more years of clean profit they can squeeze out of professional football.

WECHT
Before they have to put a
warning label on the sport.

BENNET
(and mimics)
*"The Surgeon General Has
Determined that Playing
Football is Dangerous to Your
Health."*
(his glass)
Johnny Walker--

BAILES
Before people stop buying team
jerseys. The NFL's already gaming
this out, the merchandise, the
cable deals, endorsement deals,
advertising, when all that will
start to skid sideways, then slide.
(then)
Did you know Tagliabue was law
partner at Covington & Burling, the
firm that represented the seven Big
Tobacco companies?

WECHT
Of course he was.

BAILES
The law firm that now represents
the National Football League.

WECHT
Of course it does.

BAILES
In my last year with the Steelers,
the League moved a game from a
Sunday to a Tuesday because of a
blizzard. The League said it wasn't
worried about TV ratings because
the NFL is immune even from acts of
God.

Wecht is starting to give Bailes a dark look.

BENNET
(drinking)
And now here comes this Omalu, mere
pathologist and foreigner of
questionable background.

WECHT
Now highly deportable pathologist
and foreigner.

BAILES

And then there is the National
Football League--

BENNET

Immune from acts of god -

BAILES

--And its 25 years of expert brain
research. Bennet Omalu vs.
football. Bennet Omalu vs. America.
That's their playbook.

Pause. They're actually quite drunk. Wecht up-ends his
bourbon. After a beat--

WECHT

Know how many people cigarettes
killed since the warning label went
on? 200-million. 5-million a year.
But there are more smokers now than
ever. People want what they want.

Pause.

BENNET

(dawning even on him)

Maybe this all makes football
bigger. Maybe all this somehow
means more, more money, more of
everything.

Pause. Sobering--

WECHT

Because it's the goddamn Roman
Coliseum, right? And the people
can't get enough of the car crash
of it all.

They drink. Contemplating that.

Wecht is staring at Bailes, as if at a traitor. Bailes can't
hold his look, turns away, as Bennet, under his breath--

BENNET

Until someone dies people give a
damn about.
(then cut to--)

152 **EXT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - DAY**

Bennet at the cross-walk waiting for the light to change, returning from the bar.

A Police cruiser - sirens piercing - smashes by. Bennet turns to stare at it. Suddenly nervous. And instinctively turns. A pick-up truck has stopped alongside. The DRIVER - no one special - looks at him. Eyes meet. Bennet looks away. As the signal changes. And the car moves off--

Gracie's broken away from the building, running to him, waving, as in a bad fucking dream--

GRACIE

Bennet!!

(now *smash* to--)

153 **INT. EMERGENCY - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY**

Bennet in a scrum of EMTs and NURSES running Prema in. DOCTORS converging. Prema pale, weeping, as, on the run--

PARAMEDIC

30-year old female, G-1, P-zero, 18
weeks EGA pregnancy, heavy
bleeding, suspected miscarriage--

154 **INT. O.R. - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY**

Bennet's hands on Prema's face. DOCTOR searching with the ultrasound wand. As all eyes on the image. The space where the heart is - dark. A NURSE places a hand on Prema's arm. A doctor says, Sorry. We SEE his mouth moving, but we're in Bennet's POV and he's hearing nothing. He moves to Prema's face, and holds it. Both of them crying.

BENNET

(to the room)

Will you please excuse us?

(and when they are alone)

I'm sorry I'm sorry. I made a
mistake. This is my fault I'm sorry-

PREMA

This isn't your fault--

(and then we--)

155

INT. RECOVERY ROOM - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

Bennet enters amidst the bouquets. *"Your friends at the Coroner's office"*. He bends over Prema. Presses his forehead to hers. Sits. Takes in where they are. (All the places they are.)

BENNET

I wish I never met Mike Webster.

PREMA

Your work was beautiful. You are beautiful.

BENNET

But they destroyed us. I don't understand why this is happening this way. What else do I have to do?

PREMA

Bennet. Look at me--
(and he does)
Do you know what I chose to fake?
(--)
You.

By now he is crying.

BENNET

We will have this family.

PREMA

Yes, we will.
(--)
Just not here.
(--)
(It's time to let go. And let God.)

162

OMIT

163

INT. HOME - MOON TOWNSHIP - DAY

Bennet walking through his nearly-finished home. Airy, light. Built-ins. Faux-grand but grand nonetheless.

Walks through his kids' rooms. (There are two.) One already painted into a nursery.

His master bath. Dragging his finger along his marble.

Stops at the window. Transfixed by the McMansion across the street. Fresh shrubbery unwrapped, sod fresh. American Family in. KIDS, 7 & 11, bikes, DAD assembles a bbq, MOM's unpacking the garage.

Now down the stairs into his lab. The space carved for his dissection table. His freezers. His.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hello? Mr. Omalu?

BENNET
(he's so weary--)
Dr. Omalu
(and climbs to meet--)

The CONTRACTOR. Standing in his new living room.

CONTRACTOR
I just need the measurements for
the flat screens.

BENNET
That isn't going to be necessary.
(and now--)

164

BENNET STANDING IN HIS FOYER

And closes the new raw-wood door. Grabs a 2x4. Turns looking at his walls. We don't know what he will do. And - volcanic - he swings and--

BURIES it in sheetrock. BAM! Again. And Again. BAM! Dust. Splinters. And as he swings--

We PULL outside the house, TRACKING IN REVERSE, house RECEDING IN FRAME, the perfect windows, the perfect yard, the baby foliage. GLIMPSES of Bennet in the window, swinging at the guts of the house. Then stopping. Slipping to his knees, weeping seething with rage--

As we keep going back. Rising, PULLING high and far from the cul-de-sac, the subdivision. Everything in front of us - the lots, the streets - so well designed. Such a good story. Now this.

And as we keep we--

DISSOLVE TO BLACK

And OVER BLACK SCREEN, we HEAR Bennet singing:

BENNET (PRE-LAP)

*If ever you're in my arms again
This time I'll love you much better
If ever you're in my arms again
This time I'll hold you forever--*

AND UP TO--

165 **OMIT**

166 **OMIT**

167 **OMIT**

168 **INT./EXT. BENNET'S CAR/CENTRAL VALLEY - CALIFORNIA - DAY**

Bennet - in a 2010 Mercedes sedan - crossing an ocean of Kansas-flat farmland. Dry and desolate. Tract after tract of arid farmland, ranch homes sticking up out of the landscape like tombstones. Mexican DAY-LABORERS and tractors.

And pulls up to--

169 **EXT. SUBDIVISION - LODI, CALIFORNIA - DAY**

Dropped amid the fields. Treeless. Single-story brick ranches. Sun-bleached.

The sun is high. The air is 105.

Bennet gets out with groceries and into--

A169 **INT. BENNET'S NEW HOME - LODI, CALIFORNIA - DAY**

Bennet playing with a TODDLER in the gravelly back yard. Blow-up pool. Kneeling in the dirt, putting in tomato trellises.

TIME HAS PASSED.

And Bennet looks up. He's happy. Prema - pregnant with #2 - waves behind glass--

Then cut to--

B169 **OMIT**

170 OMIT

A170 INT. MORGUE - LODI, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Humble pre-fab trailer. Blue-light fly zapper spilling dead bugs. The refrigerated room is bumper-cars with dead migrant laborers wrapped loosely in sheets. One poorly-trained ASSISTANT.

A single slab. Bennet rolls out his special instruments. Every death always is sacred: "Tell me how this happened, Jose."

No one to tell him otherwise.

And begins his work. A fleck on his sleeve, and off comes his smock, and as he reaches for a fresh one--

171 OMIT

172 INT. BEDROOM - BENNET'S NEW HOUSE - NIGHT

Bennet asleep next to Prema. His arm draped over her pregnant belly protectively. Their kid's bed against the wall. Toddler calmly asleep.

DUERSON (PRE-LAP)
(manic, into phone)
My mind's slipping, man. I can't
find the goddamn words--

The SOUNDS of footsteps shuffling on carpet. Heavy breathing. Pants. Grunts. And now UP TO--

173 OMIT

174 OMIT

175 OMIT

176 INT. CONDO - SUNNY ISLES BEACH, FLORIDA - DAY

We find *Dave Duerson* pacing. On his cell. Into a mirror. Who is that? Where are you?

DUERSON
(manic, into phone)
Something seriously wrong with my
head--

We SEE laid out on his kitchen table, an issue of *Sports Illustrated*. The cover piece says "CONCUSSIONS" (the word superimposed over Steelers linebacker JAMES HARRISON mercilessly spearing a receiver).

And photos of an ex-wife. Children. Parents.

A portrait of himself in a Chicago Bears uniform.

DUERSON (CONT'D)
What? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Gotta do
it. Give it to them. I'm sorry. I
gotta I just can't do this--

And drops the phone.

Now we see the gun in his other hand. .38 Special.

Duerson heads to his bed. Lays on top of it. Slips a clean white sheet over himself to the neck. We're right over him. As he puts the gun muzzle to his chest. Eyes wide. Right to us: Goodbye. And--

CUT TO BLACK

Pause, then--

BANG!

OVER BLACK SCREEN

WE HEAR A PHONE RINGING. Two rings, three.

SNAP. Light comes on. Revealing--

177

**INT. BENNET'S NEW HOME - LODI, CALIFORNIA -
SIMULTANEOUS/NIGHT**

Clock reads midnight.

BENNET
(picking up)
Hello?

BAILES/PHONE (OVER)

It's Julian.

(and we INTERCUT Bailes in
his robe in his kitchen-)

Dave Duerson killed himself today.

Bennet slips out of bed away from a sleeping Prema. Takes the phone into the hall.

BAILES

He shot himself in the chest,
Bennet. In the heart.

BENNET

Oh my god--

BAILES

He left a note. He said he was
thinking about all NFL players. He
wanted his brain donated. To be
examined. He said we were right.

BENNET

He said that?

Bennet has gone to stand at a window looking out on his humble little street.

BAILES

Bennet? You there?

BENNET

For the brain's last act to not
just die, but preserve itself in
the act of killing, to give an
instruction to shoot into the chest
- Julian, human beings don't do
that.

PUSH IN on Bennet. His grief and anger.

BAILES

Bennet. Dave Duerson killing
himself - the way he killed himself
- they can't explain this one. It's
undeniable now. It's all going to
unravel.

And on Bennet blinking, trying to comprehend what Bailes is saying to him, we SMASH TO--

178 **INT. BENNET'S NEW HOME - LODI, CALIFORNIA - DAY/EARLIER**

Bennet in their modest bedroom. Before his cramped open closet. Flustered and overthinking the suits. O.S. the kid plays and laughs.

Prema enters. She's pregnant.

Bennet pulls out a conservative gray suit.

PREMA

That is what they wear.
(and takes it from him and
puts it back)

BENNET

What do I say to them?

PREMA

Who do you speak for? When you know
who you speak for you know what to
say and what to mean.

(pulls out a bold pin-
striped suit)

Go and give them what belongs to
them. Tell them what's really
happening.

(--)

Wear what you are.
(and we SMASH TO--)

*

*

*

*

179 **BENNET'S FACE. HUGE IN FRAME. GAME FACE. SET.**

WE PULL BACK TO REVEAL--

180 **INT./EXT. LIMOUSINE (MOVING)/PALM BEACH - FLORIDA - DAY**

Bennet in back. The DRIVER glancing at him in the rear-view.
The phone STILL RINGING as we ADD and INTERCUT--

OUTSIDE THE LIMO, wide tree-lined streets. Expensive lawns.
Golf courses. Who can Bennet be that he's going where he's
going?--

181 **THE LIMO PULLING UP TO THE BREAKERS HOTEL - PALM BEACH**

And its turreted Versailles-like grounds. The only other non-
whites move mowers and bags. If a plantation were a castle.

Sign board at entrance: *"Welcome National Football League
Players Association Special Concussion Summit."*

182 **INT. PRESIDENTIAL SUITE - BREAKERS HOTEL**

With a terrace letting out on the Atlantic. A Louis XVI bed. Murals. A fountain. Bennet left alone to dust off. Standing in the center of the obscene room--

Chooses to iron his suit in his underwear. And shave.

Scraping his face, a tension surfaces. Eyes to hands. PUSH IN CLOSE on his hands. Blade bowing against his cheek. Until *slicing* himself.

He watches in the mirror the blood zag down his face. Then drop, and as it falls, as it splatters the sink, cut away to--

183 **INT. GRAND BALLROOM FOYER**

Bennet outside waiting against another mirrored wall. This one leafed in gold. Turns to the glass to cinch his tie.

TIGHT ON HIS COLLAR: smudge of blood. He touches it. Decides to leave it there. And turns to--

184 **INT. GRAND BALLROOM - BREAKERS HOTEL**

Bennet approaches the podium. And turns to 500 faces. Mostly players, former players, their families. But there is Jones and Pellman. NFL lawyers. Team doctors, player reps.

And the wives. We know who they are. Because they're in their 40's and 50's. And because they are alone, no men beside them. Among them, Keana Strzelczyk. And her kids.

We find Bailes. He nods at Bennet, smallest nod of accomplishment.

Behind all that, toward the back: Mike Webster. Waiting, listening with intent.

Bennet takes out his speech. Glances at the pages. Then up at the audience. At Webster. In the suffocating silence.

He grips and leans into the podium. STARES out there, weighing the costs of what he'd like to say against what he might say. Capable now of anything--

BENNET

I don't hate football. My wife has started watching it. I see the grace, the drama.

(a long pause)

(MORE)

BENNET (CONT'D)

I once said I wished I never met Mike Webster. I was wrong. He was committed, a captain, a warrior, quiet in his pain. He's given us a gift. The gift of knowing.

(--)

In the place I come from, we take care of our warriors. And give respect to those with the power to heal them.

(his eyes stop on Mike Webster)

These men--

And stops. Looks away. Elsewhere. Finds Keana Strz, her kids. His eyes go back to Webster. And stay there.

BENNET (CONT'D)

--are not machines. Not commodity. Not video game figure. We loved them when they were heroes.

(--)

By dying they speak for the living. And I speak for them. That is all I do.

(--)

Forgive them. Forgive yourselves. Be at peace--

(and to Webster--)

I thank you.

And now Bennet simply stops and walks off. Every face in the room turned his way. Here and there people have stood up. Players. Wives. As he exits.

Not Webster. As Bennet turns for the exit, he spots him sitting where he sat. We're SLO-MO. Pulling away but hanging onto Webster. His hands on knees. Head down. Alone.

As Keana Strzelczyk, behind him, is weeping in silence. Her children, teenagers, cocooning her in their arms. They're letting it go. Letting it all go. Bennet leaves all of them. And now--

185

INT. LIMOUSINE (MOVING)/PALM BEACH - FLORIDA - DAY

In the back, with the Breakers receding IN FRAME behind him.

As we HEAR, in PRE-LAP--

SENATOR JOHN CONYERS (PRE-LAP)

But what's the answer? Is there a link between playing professional football and the likelihood of contracting a brain-related injury, dementia, CTE?

(and we cut to--)

186

ROGER GOODELL, PIXILATED, ON TV, HALF-HIDDEN BEHIND A WITNESS TABLE MIC

We're in the Rayburn Building, U.S. Capitol. Behind Goodell, a packed gallery. Before him, an *angry* Congressional panel. And Conyers is visibly frustrated--

GOODELL

(bumbling)

We're doing everything we possibly can for our players now.

SENATOR JOHN CONYERS

But what's the answer?

GOODELL

The medical experts would know better than I with respect to that. But we are reinforcing our commitment--

(now ADDING--)

BENNET, IN LODI, WATCHING THIS ON HIS TV

Sitting like a pupil before the screen. Prema standing behind him like a sentry. The phone starts to RING. HOLD, then--

REP. LINDA SANCHEZ

(livid)

It reminds me of the tobacco companies sitting in this same chamber saying, 'There is no link between smoking and damage to your health.'

A fucking Congressional warhead. Goodell flop-sweaty. And now we INTERCUT--

BAILES, watching this at his office.

WECHT, at the Chinatown Inn.

SULLIVAN and GRACIE, in the break room.

JONES, from his office.

AMOBI, on his iPhone in a football locker room.

The phone RINGING over all this, as--

REP. MAXINE WATERS

We have heard from the NFL time and time again. You are always studying. You are always trying. You are always hopeful--

And as we PUSH IN on Goodell, wearing a look of constipation. Then--

BACK TO Bennet's home. His kid.

PREMA

This is all because of you.
(--)
You did this.

*
*
*

And as he turns now and looks out the window, at the sun-bleached street, the empty blue sky. As he looks around them at their humble digs. No dream house, this--

*
*
*

A186*

INT. RESTAURANT - HAY ADAMS HOTEL - WASHINGTON DC - DAY

Lunch crowd gone. Bennet sitting opposite DEPUTY MAYOR ALLAN HIRSCHORN, 50. Washingtonian conservative. A WAITER sets down a tray of coffee.

DEPUTY MAYOR

First time in Washington?

BENNET

Never had the time.

DEPUTY MAYOR

Well, we're thrilled you accepted our invitation--

BENNET

Washington D.C. is the capital of this nation. Lodi, California is the capital of lettuce. I was curious.

(he smiles, and he does,
he's infectious--)

DEPUTY MAYOR
(he pours herself coffee)
Chief Medical Examiner of
Washington, D.C.
(MORE)

DEPUTY MAYOR (CONT'D)
means you'd also consult with the
CIA and FBI, and any foreign
government requesting the
assistance of the United States
government.

(then)

Essentially, you're America's
forensic pathologist. You wouldn't
have to put on scrubs, or perform
an autopsy. You're beyond all that
now--

(as if that's good news)

Bennet is looking out the window. To the Department of
Justice. The White House. Sidewalks hurrying with people in
suits who strap into the cockpits that fly the nation.

DEPUTY MAYOR (CONT'D)
Would you like to know about the
benefits package?

BENNET

I'm sure it's fine.

The Deputy Mayor ponders him. Feels his dilemma.

DEPUTY MAYOR
We know what you did, Dr. Omalu.
You exemplify what it is to be an
American. You belong in the
nation's capital.

And it starts to well in him, the whole road here--

DEPUTY MAYOR (CONT'D)
We'd like to offer you the job.

He is barely containing his emotions. She sees it in him,
looks away, giving him privacy, understanding--

DEPUTY MAYOR (CONT'D)
Why don't you take a couple days
and think about it--?

B186* **INT. BENNET'S NEW HOME - LODI, CALIFORNIA - NIGHT**

Bennet's overnight bag by the front door.

Bennet and Prema in the kitchen. She's washing. He's drying.
Their daughter at work at her doll house. Prema stops. Looks
at him. Bennet deep in thought. Until, finally--

PREMA

Are you going to tell me what you
said?

*

BENNET

I didn't say anything. They gave me
a week to decide.

*

*

*

He wipes his hands. Takes in this humble house. His kids, her
toys. His pregnant wife.

PREMA

It's everything you wanted.

*

She's not even sure about that. And neither is he now. And he
turns. They HOLD a long look. Then--

*

*

187

INT. MORGUE - LODI, CALIFORNIA - DAY

*

Bennet at his work. Pauses by a body on the slab. Left hand
alights on the forehead. Right on the cold gray hand.

Deep in thought. Then--

Bennet's attention turns. Pulled from the humble autopsy
chamber, we FOLLOW HIM into the hall. And REFOCUS on a TV
playing on the CLERK's desk. FADING IN--

REPORTER/TV (OVER)

--sports fans and, frankly, all
Americans across the nation are
stunned today by the suicide of 42-
year old football Hall of Famer
Junior Seau, one of football's most
beloved, revered, and feared,
players, who this morning committed
suicide. Seau shot himself in the
heart--

(now we SEE)

FOOTAGE of bedlam. Handsome, Samoan face. Neck ropey with
muscle. Toothy smile. To a crime scene. Yellow tape wrapping
a beautiful seaside bungalow. Police. Ambulance. Now--

Bennet. As his expression moves from shocked. To upset.
To calm. Confirmed. Now we follow him into--

188 **INT. BENNET'S OFFICE - LODI MORGUE - CONTINUOUS**

Bennet passes his medical degrees on the wall. All of them up there now. Framed and pretty. Plenty of room.

And changes into his shirt, and crosses through frame in extreme f.g., and recrosses, dressing, working, busy -- as we BEGIN A SLOW PUSH past him to the wall, where we find--

Brain cases stacked floor to ceiling.

And files, maybe a hundred: *Tom McHale, 45, Tampa Bay Buccaneers...Nathan Stiles, 17, Spring Hill High School... Christopher Henry, 26, Cincinnati Bengals...Damien Nash, 25, Denver Broncos...Curtis Whitley, 39, San Diego Chargers... Greg Page, 50, boxer...Justin Levens, 28, boxer...Norman Hand, 37, New York Giants...*

Bennet returns, changed into a suit, then--

189 **INT./EXT. BENNET'S CAR/CENTRAL VALLEY, CA - DAY**

His Mercedes cutting fast through the oceans of crops. Factories, ranches. Schools. A high school. Now - suddenly slowing--

Pulling alongside a junior varsity football practice. The kids - mostly Mexican - strapping on helmets. That nutcracker drill.

As other kids are winding down. Tossing the ball. Tossing water bottles. The adolescent knucklehead hazing of rangy leggy puppies. The game as rite of passage.

And we REVERSE ON BENNET. He forgets himself. It's a little funny. Kids. Then--

Two players line up 15 yards apart, turn to face each other like bulls. And *run*. Bennet takes a step toward them as the kids hurtle forward erasing the space between them. *Faster*. INTERCUTTING Bennet and the blur. 5-yards and closing. 2-yards. And now--

FREEZE. A single frame before helmets collide in a devastating crow-to-crown blow. HOLD there, and over that--

CRAWL

* Bennet Omalu turned down the Washington job offer. He remains in Lodi, California, with Prema and his two children.

* Shortly after Hall of Fame linebacker, Junior Seau, shot himself in the heart, more than 4,500 retired NFL players sued the NFL for concealing the dangers of concussions.

* The NFL proposed a settlement in which former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and Dr. Elliot Pellman would never be questioned under oath, and the League would never have to disclose what it knew about concussion-related brain problems, or when it knew it. *

* Last September, actuaries hired by the NFL concluded that 33% of all retired professional football players will suffer "serious cognitive impairment", including CTE, in their lifetime.

* All Federal charges against Dr. Cyril Wecht were eventually dropped. *

TO BLACK.