

FINDING FORESTER

**FOR EDUCATIONAL
PURPOSES ONLY**

FADE IN

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

FULL SCREEN on a flickering COMPUTER SCREEN; the person, even the hands, at the KEYBOARD unseen. All that can be seen are the WORDS of the writer appearing on the MONITOR, occasionally halting for a second as the thoughts come and go.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The WORDS COME INTO VIEW; the SOUND of fingers TYPING is accompanied by a dense background of URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD SOUNDS: impatient traffic, horns loudly HONKING, garbage trucks and the like...while on the SCREEN, the words flow...

...in the darkness of one's room, at night, in the darkness of one's mind, drifting (BACKSPACES TO ERASE THE WORD AND THEN REPLACES IT WITH...) slipping into sleep...the moment comes; the trace (BACKSPACES AGAIN) the flicker of dread when we realize, we know, for only a passing second, that this, our own existence, may be all there is...(PAUSE, THE CURSOR BLINKS). We close our eyes, knowing one day they won't reopen, and the feeling settles, a rush of fear as the darkness closes, and there is only...(LONG PAUSE...the fingers DRUM on the KEYBOARD impatiently, waiting for the word to come as the SOUNDS OUTSIDE continue seamlessly, and then finally)...despair.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The "SAVE" command comes up on the screen and the letters "NIGHT TH...", are hammered in before the COMPUTER LOCKS UP. A WOMAN'S VOICE CALLS OUT from downstairs...

JANICE (OC)

Geoffrey?

The SOUND of fingers on the keyboard comes back, but there is nothing showing up on the screen.

JANICE (OC)

Geoffrey? Finish your homework yet?

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

We finally see the WRITER; not an adult, but instead a 14-YEAR-OLD BLACK TEENAGER, showing all the frustrations of his age as the computer refuses to save his work. The ROOM looks like any other, MICHAEL JORDAN POSTERS and such, all except for the BOOKS, dozens upon dozens of books, STACKED all over the place.

GEOFFREY (SOFTLY)

C'mon...

JANICE (OC)

Geoffrey...you up there?

GEOFFREY (CALLS)

Just a second.

He tries one more time, fails, and MUTTERS...

GEOFFREY

Piece of....(WE HEAR HIM RHYTHMICALLY CLICK OUT FOUR LETTERS ON THE KEYBOARD. THE COMPUTER IS NOW TOTALLY FROZEN AND HE REACHES TO THE SIDE TO TURN IT OFF). Damn.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

GEOFFREY BOUNDS down the stairs, still upset with the computer. His mother JANICE --- who looks to be only 40ish --- is fixing breakfast in a kitchen that, while sparse, is spotless. He PICKS UP a BASKETBALL at the bottom of the stairs and DRIBBLES it a couple of times.

GEOFFREY

Mrs. Stark still tryin' to get rid of her computer?

JANICE

Did it happen again?

GEOFFREY

Mhmm.

JANICE

I thought you said it was workin' better?

GEOFFREY (SHRUGS)

We need a new one.

JANICE

Geoffrey, we need a lot of things. Like for you to stop bouncin' that thing in my kitchen.

GEOFFREY ignores her and playfully DRIBBLES the BALL close to her.

GEOFFREY

This is not bouncin', bouncin's what kids do...

JANICE

...yeah well...all I know is I got Michael Jordan's name in dirt all over my floor.

GEOFFREY

I'll clean it up.

JANICE

I got a better chance of Michael Jordan cleanin' it up.

GEOFFREY

I will.

JANICE

Don't forget, I've got your teacher conference this afternoon and they've got me working late tonight. So you're gonna have to take care of yourself for dinner, okay?

GEOFFREY

Okay.

He GRABS a COUPLE APPLES, STUFFS them in his pocket, and KISSES his MOM on the cheek.

GEOFFREY

I gotta go.

JANICE

Hey...I got breakfast goin'...

GEOFFREY

Put it in the fridge, I can have that for dinner.

He's OUT the door. JANICE LOOKS at the skillet...

JANICE

Warmed up eggs for dinner.

EXT. NEW YORK NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

GEOFFREY HEADS DOWN the stairs, MUNCHING one of the APPLES and BOUNCING the BASKETBALL. He JOGS on to the street, NODDING at some of the kids and neighbors. An OLDER, MUCH MORE MATURE VOICE, still that of GEOFFREY though, NARRATES...

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

Looking back on it, my mother says the most remarkable thing to her is that I was only 14 when it all happened. I never gave it much thought, at least not then, but Mom said I was still a typical teenager in a lot of ways, one of which was to cut short my conversations with her whenever I could. My Mom says I started talking when I was only ten months old. Not just words, but real sentences and stuff. Almost like conversations. I never found out how much of that was true and how much of it was Mom, I mean...most kids start talkin' when they get to be about two. But she had these tapes, these old cassettes, and she would swear up and down that that was me talkin' with my father. (A SHORT PAUSE). My mother kept those cassettes like most people keep photo albums...we could always find one somewhere around the house...which is more than I could say about Dad.

EXT. NEW YORK SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

GEOFFREY turns the corner and RUNS for an OUTDOOR BASKETBALL COURT, packed with kids about his own age. ONE of the YOUNG BOYS YELLS OUT to him...

MARTIN

Hey Geoffrey! C'mon man!

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

And this? This was my other home.

One of the BOYS on the other team STEPS IN just as GEOFFREY PULLS OFF his JACKET.

OPPONENT

Hey man...you already got your team.

MARTIN

We got it now man.

EXT. NEW YORK SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

The GAME resumes and GEOFFREY takes the ball, and takes over the game; GLIDING and SLASHING through the other players to the hoop.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

I guess I started writing just about the time Dad left. Harvey, he's my brother, was already out on his own and I was spendin' a lot of time at home while Mom was gettin' through it all. She would talk and I would listen. And when I got tired of listening, I would write.

GEOFFREY SCORES...and a teammate TOSSES him the BALL. GEOFFREY casually DRIBBLES the ball from one hand to the other, tempting his OPPONENT to try and take it. Another of GEOFFREY'S TEAMMATES SAYS...

ERIC

Bust him up Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY SLASHES to the RIM, his OPPONENT left stumbling.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

I had let a couple of people read my stuff. They told me it was good, which was nice and all, but most of the people I confided in weren't exactly the best people to know. I wasn't even sure if I knew. (PAUSE AS HE HITS ANOTHER SHOT). I mean let's be honest...how far can a black kid from Brooklyn get with a couple of good paragraphs?...

He CUTS to the BASKET again,...and again the BOY GUARDING HIM STUMBLES, unable to keep up.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)
 ...not as far as he could with a good
 first step.

The YOUNG BOY who stumbled GETS BACK UP and DUSTS
 OFF his pants. MARTIN PICKS UP the BALL.

MARTIN
 He broke your ankles good man.

OPPONENT
 Fuck you.

MARTIN
 S'game, baby.

EXT. NEW YORK SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

It's now LATE AFTERNOON, DUSK. The SILHOUETTE of
 GEOFFREY can be seen, PRACTICING all alone.

INT. NEW YORK CLASSROOM - DAY

JANICE WALLACE LOOKS OUT a classroom window at
 her SON, still SHOOTING HOOPS below. GEOFFREY'S
 TEACHER, JOYCE, is shuffling through some papers
 in a nearby FILE CABINET.

JOYCE
 Is he still out there?

JANICE
 Mhmm.

JOYCE PULLS a STACK OF PAPERS from the CABINET
 and WALKS OVER to the window.

JOYCE
 He's out there every afternoon, soon
 as school's out. He'll be out there
 another hour or two. (JANICE SIGHS).
 Don't worry...he'll be fine.

JANICE NODS as JOYCE HANDS HER the FILE.

JOYCE
 Has he shown you any of these?

JANICE OPENS the FILE, but says nothing at first.

JOYCE
 It's some of his writing. He made me
 promise that I'd only read it myself.

More silence from JANICE, as she gingerly LIFTS a
 couple of pages.

JOYCE (SMILES)
 He didn't tell you we got his test
 scores back either, did he?

JANICE
 No.

JOYCE

Mrs. Wallace, kids his age with a score between 115 and 130 are described as "extremely intelligent." We get a couple of 'em through here every year. Those with scores between 130 and 180 are put in the "gifted" category. Geoffrey scored 212.

JANICE (EXHALES)

He doesn't tell me anything. All he talks about is that...(POINTS TO THE COURT BELOW).

JOYCE

Because he's a teenager and that's where he gets acceptance. His friends could care less if he's the next Shaw or Steinbeck.

JANICE

I can't keep up with him...

JOYCE

No one's asking you to. Listen, most parents of gifted children think they're failing them if they're not as intelligent as their kids. That's the mistake they make.

JOYCE moves CLOSER to JANICE, still LOOKING OUT the window toward GEOFFREY.

JOYCE

The world is littered with brilliant failures, Mrs. Wallace. He doesn't need you to be a peer. (PAUSE). He just needs you to be his mom.

JANICE CONTINUES to LOOK OUT. Down below, her SON takes shot after shot in the dimming light.

INT. YANKEE TICKET WINDOW - NIGHT

GEOFFREY'S OLDER BROTHER HARVEY, who looks in his mid-20's, is SELLING TICKETS to a line of NEW YORK YANKEE FANS. GEOFFREY KNOCKS on the window of the BOOTH and HARVEY MOTIONS him inside.

HARVEY

Little brother. Thought I might be seein' you tonight.

GEOFFREY

Mom's workin'.

HARVEY

Mom is always workin'. I only got "C" level tonight. (PULLS OUT A COUPLE OF TICKETS SET OFF TO THE SIDE). Right field line. You still want 'em?

GEOFFREY

C'mon man, it's Boston.

HARVEY

Yeah I know it's Boston. That's why I only got "C" level.

GEOFFREY

Alright.

HARVEY

I'll try and get in.

GEOFFREY reluctantly GRABS the TICKET and TAKES OFF. HARVEY TURNS to the next person in line.

HARVEY

How many?

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the BASEBALL GAME. A shallow FLY-BALL is CAUGHT and the CROWD offers only a lukewarm cheer.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY MUNCHES on a handful of PEANUTS just as his BROTHER SITS DOWN in the STADIUM SEAT next to him. HARVEY HANDS HIM a folded-over NOTEBOOK and then reaches out for a HANDFUL of SHELLS himself.

GEOFFREY

Hey.

HARVEY

Thought you might've already left.

GEOFFREY

They let you listen back there?

HARVEY

I listen to the crowd. Sounded pretty quiet.

GEOFFREY SERUGS somewhat and CRACKS OPEN another PEANUT.

HARVEY

How late's Mom workin'?

GEOFFREY

She's prob'ly home by now.

HARVEY

She listen on the radio so she knows when to look for you?

GEOFFREY NODS as he tries to work the fold back out of the NOTEBOOK.

HARVEY

She used to do that with me. I had this little radio I'd keep....n'case I went and did somethin' else.

GEOFFREY

You read all of this?

HARVEY

Yeah I read it. (SHAKES HIS HEAD).
Fourteen years old...man, where you
gettin' ideas like that?

GEOFFREY

Like what?

HARVEY

Like dyin',...like bein' alone. Kid
your age shouldn't even be thinkin'
about that stuff...

GEOFFREY SMOOTHES OUT the PAGES.

HARVEY (CONT.)

...and here you are writin' it.

GEOFFREY

I don't think about it too much.

HARVEY

Yeah? (LAUGHS A BIT, BUT LOOKS AT HIS
BROTHER CLOSELY). You write it like
you're 70 years old and you already
done it all.

GEOFFREY

You don't think about those things?

HARVEY

No. I don't think about those things.
(GRABS SOME PEANUTS). What do your
teachers say about it?

GEOFFREY SHRUGS.

HARVEY

You showed any of your friends?

ANOTHER SHRUG.

HARVEY

They've never seen it, have they?

STILL NOTHING.

HARVEY

I thought so.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM - NIGHT

HARVEY and GEOFFREY WALK SIDE-BY-SIDE, packed in
with other FANS leaving the ballpark.

GEOFFREY

Mom says you should drop by this
weekend. She gets off early.

HARVEY

Sure.

GEOFFREY

She ever talk to you about, y'know, how she's gettin' by?...

HARVEY

...Mom never talks money. I think it'd be too close to admitting she couldn't do it without Dad.

GEOFFREY

She's been workin' too much.

HARVEY

Well...if you're worried, you should tell her. And she'll say thank you for askin', tell you she's fine, and that'll be the end of your talk. Just like it is with me. (PAUSE). I don't know how she did it when the both of us were there.

They continue to WALK, until GEOFFREY SAYS...

GEOFFREY

The school wants to move me up another grade.

HARVEY

(SMILES, NOW REALIZING WHY GEOFFREY STAYED TO TALK WITH HIM). I thought they'd already talked to you about that?

GEOFFREY

Yeah...well, they're done talkin'. We gotta decide before we get too far into the year.

HARVEY

And you don't want to. Is that it?

GEOFFREY

I dunno. I got friends.

HARVEY

They'll still be friends.

GEOFFREY

Maybe. It's just...y'know, things are good right now.

HARVEY

This gonna mess with your plan?

GEOFFREY

This isn't about that...

HARVEY

...high school, maybe a year or two of college and then the N-B-A. And then you start writin' checks and solvin' everybody's problems,...isn't that how it works?

GEOFFREY

It's not like that.

HARVEY

No?

GEOFFREY

You played four years.

HARVEY STOPS SUDDENLY, making sure GEOFFREY gets his next point.

HARVEY

And now I'm selling tickets for a couple bucks over minimum wage. Listen, I may not know too much, but I do know that ten, fifteen years from now, missin' one year of ball ain't gonna mean much...not to you it won't. (PAUSE). And you aren't me, okay? Don't you forget that.

HARVEY starts WALKING again, leaving GEOFFREY to think about his message.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

Harvey'd been a hell of a player when he was my age, but he blew his knee out and the medical plan we had didn't quite make it as good as new. So Harvey was always workin' on me to succeed where he'd failed. I wanted that too...

INT. SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

GEOFFREY is on a PAY PHONE, a BROKEN GLASS PANEL to one side.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

...we just weren't talkin' about the same thing.

GEOFFREY

Yeah. (PAUSE). Okay. (PAUSE, THEN ALMOST WHISPERS AS HE GLANCES UP TO MAKE SURE NO ONE'S WATCHING). Yeah, me too.

INT. SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

GEOFFREY HANGS UP the PHONE and WANDERS OVER to the SUBWAY PLATFORM where HARVEY is waiting.

HARVEY

She worried?

GEOFFREY

She hates me takin' the train this late.

HARVEY

It shoulda been here already. (SHORT PAUSE). I can take it if you want?

GEOFFREY

Naw, that's okay.

HARVEY

Geoffrey, those things I was sayin' out there...y'know, about the...

GEOFFREY

...I know.

HARVEY

I just need to do that big brother thing every once in awhile.

GEOFFREY

It's okay. I like when you do that.

The FLICKERING LIGHT of an oncoming SUBWAY TRAIN.

HARVEY

You sure you don't want me to go with you?

GEOFFREY

Naw, I'll be okay.

The TWO BROTHERS EMBRACE, not just a polite hug, but one of genuine affection.

HARVEY

Tell Mom I'll call her tomorrow.

GEOFFREY

I will.

The TRAIN SLOWS DOWN...

HARVEY

Geoffrey. (PAUSE AS HIS BROTHER TURNS AROUND). Just remember, lot of kids dream of bein' the next Jordan.

No response.

HARVEY

It's a million-to-one shot just to even get there.

GEOFFREY gets set to hop the train, but turns...

GEOFFREY

Not for me it's not.

GEOFFREY'S GONE, leaving HARVEY to MUTTER as the TRAIN PULLS AWAY...

HARVEY

Fuckin' Nike.

INT. GEOFFREY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY is BUDDLED over his computer, late at night, the glow of the INTERNET reflecting off his face.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

What Harvey didn't know, what no one knew, is that I was tryin' to put some of my writing out to a few more people.

INT. GEOFFREY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY'S OWN HOMEPAGE GLIMMERS, complete with a list of his stories. Down in the bottom corner it reads...

YOU ARE VISITOR NUMBER.....00034

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

Very few.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

JOYCE PUSHES a THUMB TACK into a SMALL POSTER, its edges CURLING underneath. An OLD PHOTO of EDGAR ALLAN POE stares down on the BORED STUDENTS.

JOYCE

Edgar Allan Poe. Born 1809 in Boston, home of the Red Sox...

GROANS from the kids.

JOYCE (CONT.)

...grew up in England before his family decided to move back to Baltimore, home of the Orioles.

MARTIN

...fuckin' Orioles man...

JOYCE

...language Mister Leonard. I might let that slide with Boston, not with Baltimore. Structure...

MARTIN ROLLS HIS EYES.

MARTIN

Orioles is the noun...that other word is the verb.

JOYCE

Adjective, although technically...as you pointed out, that particular word can be a rather versatile one.

MARTIN

Yeah, adjective.

JOYCE

Next time find a new adjective, okay?.
Edgar Allan Poe died at the age of
only 40, anybody know how?

The CLASS MURMURS, but that's about it.

JOYCE

He died because he was an alcoholic
and a drug abuser. Opium and cocaine.

RONNIE

They didn't have no cocaine back
then.

JOYCE

Yeah? Tell that to Poe. Anybody know
what his most famous work was? (NO
ANSWER AGAIN). Nobody? It was "The
Raven," a short story he wrote in
1845, and a story he wrote at a time
when he was obsessed with death.

CONNIE

I thought the Ravens was like some
kind of football team.

MARTIN

There's a team obsessed with death.
Always gettin' their asses kicked.

JOYCE

That's where they came up with the
name. Not many pro football teams
named after a classic short story,
are there? Any of you ever read it?

NOTHING.

JOYCE

Anyone? (SHORT PAUSE). "Once upon a
midnight dreary, while I pondered
weak and weary?"

The CLASS COBS AND AARS.

JOYCE

No one? (PAUSE). Geoffrey?

The STUDENTS grow QUIET as GEOFFREY'S put on the
spot...again.

JOYCE

..."while I pondered weak and weary?"

He SHRUGS. Another STUDENT...

RONNIE

Why's Geoffrey always s'posed to know
that stuff? Maybe I read it.

CLASS

Yeah.

JOYCE

Okay,...so everyones happy Geoffrey.
doesn't know it...

A few scattered "yeah's" from the kids.

JOYCE

Okay Ronnie. How 'bout it,..."while I
pondered weak and weary"...

RONNIE

I said maybe I read it.

The class LAUGHS while JOYCE looks concerned at
their celebration of ignorance. She GLANCES at
GEOFFREY, their eyes meet, but he TURNS AWAY.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The BELL RINGS and the STUDENTS GRAB their BOOKS
and PILE OUT the door. JOYCE CALLS OUT their
assignment, without much response.

JOYCE

I need those essays done by Thursday
and pages 20 through 30 of the text.
Thank you. (TO GEOFFREY). Geoffrey,
hang on a second.

He STOPS, uneasy, aware of the other students.

JOYCE

You gonna tell me you've never read
Edgar Allan Poe.

GEOFFREY

Not much.

JOYCE

Not much, or never.

GEOFFREY

I don't know...I read a little.

JOYCE

A little huh? So how come you didn't
answer me today? (PAUSE). How come?

GEOFFREY

I'm no better than...those guys.

JOYCE

S'that it? You worried they're gonna
think you're better than they are?

GEOFFREY doesn't say anything, just looks away.

JOYCE

Well...you're right. You aren't any
better than they are. (SHORT PAUSE).
But you are different than they are,
and you know, and I know, that you're
goin' places most of them won't go.

GEOFFREY

So?

JOYCE (IMPASSIONED)

So take some of 'em along for the ride. They may not get as far as you, but they'll sure be a hell of a lot further than they would've been without you. If you want to be a real friend to these kids, show 'em what they can do, 'stead of letting 'em be satisfied with what they can't.

He NODS and HEADS for the door. After a brief second, she CALLS OUT to him.

JOYCE

Geoffrey? (PAUSE AS HE TURNS). D'you read the text?

GEOFFREY

Most of it.

JOYCE

...so there's nobody here anymore.

GEOFFREY

What?

JOYCE

... "suddenly there came a tapping"...

He waits for a moment, unsure, then SAYS...

GEOFFREY

... "as of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door..."

JOYCE waits for more...and it comes...

GEOFFREY (CONT.)

... "take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door. Quoth the Raven (POINTS TO JOYCE)..."

JOYCE (SOFTLY)

... never more.

GEOFFREY SMILES and TURNS into the HALLWAY. JOYCE CLOSES her TEXTBOOK and WHISPERS to herself.

JOYCE

... wasn't in the text.

INT. BASKETBALL GYM - DAY

GEOFFREY STANDS at the FREE THROW LINE, calmly hitting every FREE THROW he SHOOTS. A MAN about thirty years his senior STANDS UNDER THE BASKET, and TOSSES THE BALL back to him.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)
 Bob Raymond was a rarity when it came to basketball coaches in that he actually taught a real subject: math.

RAYMOND
 There's some talk of having you try out for the varsity this fall.

GEOFFREY
 Some talk?

RAYMOND (SMILES)
 A lot of talk.

GEOFFREY
 I didn't think they liked freshmen doin' that.

RAYMOND
 Usually been an academic concern.

Another FREE THROW HITS the bottom of the net.

RAYMOND
 Would your family have any problem with that?

GEOFFREY
 No.

RAYMOND
 Well...just think about it okay?

GEOFFREY
 Okay. (ANOTHER SHOT NESTLES IN).

RAYMOND
 How many of these you made?

INT. GEOFFREY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY'S SITTING in front of his computer, an old worn-out DESK LAMP giving off the only light.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)
 The day I made 133 free throws in a row was also the day I got visitor number 35 on my computer.

INT. GEOFFREY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The ENVELOPE SIGN BLINKS, with the words "NEW MAIL" underneath. He CLICKS IT and the WORDS from the e-mail scroll out...

You're overwriting. Write it like you'd say it.

GEOFFREY (PUZZLED)
 Overwriting?

He LOOKS DOWN at the rest of the message.

I made some changes to a couple of your works.
Let me know if you need any more help.

Bill

GEOFFREY

What I need Bill, is for you to be
leavin' my stuff alone. I don't...

The words trail off as he LEANS CLOSER to the
computer, suddenly entranced by what he sees.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A KITCHEN CUPBOARD loudly SLAMS SHUT as JANICE
angrily wheels around on her SON.

JANICE (HOT)

No! Absolutely not!

GEOFFREY

But Mom,...I...

JANICE (CUTS IN)

...we've barely got enough money to
keep that computer thing goin', now
you're tellin' me we need a new one,
and the only thing I told you, the
only thing, was not to go talkin'
with anyone you don't know.

GEOFFREY

It's okay...I didn't...

JANICE

...so what exactly did you tell him?
This...this...

GEOFFREY

Bill.

JANICE

This Bill. D'you tell him where we
lived?

GEOFFREY

No...

JANICE

D'you give him our phone number. So
help me god Geoffrey, if you gave him
our phone number...

GEOFFREY

I didn't give him anything.

JANICE

'Cause if I get some stranger showin'
up at my door this week ready to try
a few opening liners on my son...

GEOFFREY

Mom...I didn't give him anything,
okay?

JANICE EXHALES, trying to calm down.

GEOFFREY

It's just...

JANICE

What?

GEOFFREY

I just never saw anybody that could write like this.

JANICE, still upset, TOSSES a DISHTOWEL aside.

JANICE

You promise me you're gonna let this go, okay? No more with this guy.

GEOFFREY

Okay.

JANICE

You promise me.

GEOFFREY

I promise.

EXT. SCHOOL BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of a NEW YORK URBAN SCHOOL, a handful of FALL LEAVES SWIRL from the ONE OR TWO remaining TREES.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY, his LOADED-DOWN BACKPACK SLUNG over his shoulder, WALKS into the SCHOOL OFFICE.

RECEPTIONIST

Hey Geoffrey...

GEOFFREY

Hi. (PULLS OUT A COUPLE OF SPIRAL NOTEBOOKS FROM HIS BACKPACK). Is it okay if I leave these for somebody?

RECEPTIONIST

Sure. Who's it for?

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

STUDENTS WALK around between classes, bumping shoulders and slamming locker doors.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY sneaks a PEEK through the window of the school office --- the NOTEBOOKS still untouched on the front desk.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A TEACHER DRONES ON, while GEOFFREY sits, very impatiently, waiting for another check on his notebooks.

TEACHER

...the only prime numbers to...

INT. RESTROOM - DAY

GEOFFREY DRIES his hands, then HEADS DOWN the nearly deserted hallway toward the office.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY LOOKS inside and sees the notebooks are GONE. He SMILES and TURNS, RUNNING right into...

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

...an unfamiliar MAN, in his MID-TO-LATE 60's, maybe EARLY 70'S. The collision KNOCKS the MAN'S SUNGLASSES OFF, and scatters a couple of the NOTEBOOKS, GEOFFREY'S NOTEBOOKS, onto the floor.

ELDERLY MAN

Christ...

GEOFFREY

Sorry...I...

GEOFFREY STOPS as he notices that the notebooks are his own. He quickly GLANCES UP at the MAN to see his face, just as the sunglasses go back on. The MAN says nothing more, PICKS UP GEOFFREY'S NOTEBOOKS, and quickly WALKS DOWN the hall.

GEOFFREY GAZES at the ELDERLY MAN'S SILHOUETTE as he leaves the school.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

GEOFFREY and MARTIN are picking through their lunch, SLOSHING the milk right out of the carton.

MARTIN

So that's why you missed the last half of Raymond's class?

GEOFFREY

Did he say anything?

MARTIN

About you? (LAUGHS SOFTLY AND SHAKES HIS HEAD). I don't think so.

GEOFFREY EXHALES, a touch disappointed.

MARTIN

What? You mad nobody gets mad at you?

GEOFFREY

No.

MARTIN (GETS UP)
 'Cause that ain't changin' anytime
 soon, not around here it's not.

BOTH WALK toward the TRAY DROP-OFF WINDOW.

MARTIN
 You did miss Simon comin' down.

GEOFFREY
 Doctor Simon? What did he want?

MARTIN (SERUGS)
 He didn't say nothing, just talked
 with Raymond for a couple minutes,
 while this other guy was standing
 with him over by the door.

GEOFFREY
 What other guy?

MARTIN
 I don't know. Some guy wearing one of
 those suits no one wears around here.

They SCRAPE OFF their LEFTOVERS into the BARREL.
 UNSETTLED, GEOFFREY PUTS his TRAY on the COUNTER
 and FEELS a TAP ON THE SHOULDER. He TURNS to see
 the RECEPTIONIST from the SCHOOL OFFICE.

RECEPTIONIST
 Geoffrey...Doctor Simon needs to see
 you for a few minutes after lunch.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - DAY

GEOFFREY FOLLOWS the RECEPTIONIST inside the main
 office area, the DOOR to SIMON'S OFFICE OPEN...

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)
 For most kids, getting called in to
 the principal's office was death. For
 me, it usually meant new textbooks.

RECEPTIONIST
 You can go ahead and go in.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)
 We always called 'em "Simon Says"
 meetings. I never got nervous, but
 then again...it was usually just the
 two of us...

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - DAY

GEOFFREY ENTERS and sees SIMON behind his desk,
 an UNKNOWN MAN, in the suit, off to the side and
 GEOFFREY'S MOTHER in another CHAIR. They ALL
 STAND UP to GREET HIM.

SIMON
 Come on in Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY MOVES TOWARD the CHAIR next to his MOTHER. He looks at her and whispers...

GEOFFREY

What's goin' on?

JANICE

I don't know.

Everyone SITS DOWN.

SIMON

Mrs. Wallace, Geoffrey. This isn't an easy thing for me to do, considering how much this school values you, your son, as one of our students. (PAUSE). But it would be negligent of me as an educator were I not to endorse what this gentleman has come here today to offer you.

SILENCE as GEOFFREY and his MOTHER TURN to look at the MAN.

SIMON

This is David Bradley. He's with the Mailor school here in New York.

BRADLEY REACHES OUT to SHAKE their hands.

BRADLEY

Mrs. Wallace. Geoffrey. Pleasure.

JANICE

You're with Mailor? Mailor-Callow?

BRADLEY

You're familiar with us?

SIMON

Mailor-Callow is the top preparatory school in the city. Only the very best go there.

GEOFFREY and JANICE can't say a word.

BRADLEY

Geoffrey, we've had a chance to review your recent statewide test scores and they are,...well to put it mildly, they're very impressive. Some of the most impressive we've seen.

BRADLEY SMILES.

BRADLEY

Which I guess leads to me why I'm here this morning. Mrs. Wallace, we'd like to have your son (LOOKS OVER AT GEOFFREY),...Geoffrey, we'd like to have you attend our school. Come take a look for a couple of days, see what you think...but that's why I'm here and that's what our offer is...to

give you a chance at one of the best prep education's in the country.

SILENCE.

BRADLEY

That something you'd be interested in?

MORE SILENCE.

SIMON

Don't feel that you have to make a decision right away.

GEOFFREY

I like it here at Franklin.

SIMON

We know you do son. And we know that leaving the district for another school, certainly a private school, won't be easy. (PAUSE). But the fact of the matter is...you're a freshman and the timing will never be better, (PAUSE)...and the other fact is we aren't Mailor. You go there, you write your ticket to any college in the nation when you're done.

Again...a momentary silence.

BRADLEY

Mrs. Wallace,...you must have some questions...

JANICE

There's no way I could ever begin to pay for this.

BRADLEY (SMILES)

We're not asking you to.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

JANICE WALKS UP to the DOOR of JOYCE'S CLASSROOM, GEOFFREY alongside her.

JANICE

We'll talk tonight, okay?

GEOFFREY

Okay.

JANICE

You're a good kid. Know that?

She suddenly EMBRACES HIM, tightly.

GEOFFREY

Mom. Hey...

JANICE

I know. I know. No hugs in school. Go on.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The DOOR OPENS and GEOFFREY SHEEPISHLY ENTERS. JOYCE is just beginning her lesson but SMILES at GEOFFREY, with a knowing look of what's happened.

JOYCE

We're just getting started Geoffrey, so go ahead and take your seat.

GEOFFREY SITS DOWN close to MARTIN, who silently MOUTHS the word "NEAT" to him. GEOFFREY NODS, to let him know they'll talk later.

JOYCE

Another week, another author. And today...

The CLASS GROANS as JOYCE UNROLLS another POSTER and TACKS IT UP next to EDGAR ALLAN POE. She PULLS IT DOWN AND...

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

...GEOFFREY'S EYES WIDEN. The POSTER is that of the MAN WHO PICKED UP GEOFFREY'S NOTEBOOKS. The PHOTO was taken years ago but it's clearly and unmistakably the gentleman who's reading his stories.

JOYCE

William Forrester. Born in 1931 right here in New York.

GEOFFREY is STUNNED.

STUDENT

...alright, a Yankee man.

JOYCE

Brooklyn, Dodger man. So anybody here ever hear of William Forrester?

No one has.

JOYCE (CONT.)

Didn't think so. (TURNS TO WRITE ON THE BOARD). When William Forrester was 22 years old, 1953, he set out to write his first novel. Know how a lot of people talk about writing the great American novel?

A few NODS.

JOYCE

Well...Forrester did it, on his first try. (HOLDS UP A PAPERBACK). "Avalon Landing," considered by most to be

the best American novel of this century...maybe the best one ever.

MARTIN

What's it about?

JOYCE

You're all about to find out. (MOANS FROM THE STUDENTS). It's set just after World War Two...about one of our soldiers that's come home, and a lot who didn't. A lot of people think Forrester put so much into that book that, for whatever reason, he never wrote another one.

STUDENT #2

Another war book?

JOYCE

Another book, period. The publishers all spent the next few years waiting for the sequel to the great American novel, but it never came. He was seen a few times in the years after that, but not very often. And as for the interviews? Well, there were never any of those.

STUDENT #3

You ever read his book?

JOYCE

Only a couple dozen times. (PAUSE). I'm asking you to read it once.

A few PROTESTS, but not from GEOFFREY.

JOYCE

Any questions?

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

On that particular day, asking if I had any questions was a little like asking if I wanted any butter with that popcorn.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

CLOSE on the BINDING of FORRESTER'S BOOK "AVALON LANDING." It's quickly PULLED from the shelf, GEOFFREY'S EYES scanning it from top to bottom.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

I envisioned red ink dripping over my notebook, the remaining hints of white on the page only the accents to Forrester's massacre of my work.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

A BASKETBALL GAME is played in the distance, but GEOFFREY SITS in a doorway, shielded from a light MIST OF RAIN, READING the BOOK.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO) .

For someone who hated being around people, Forrester knew what they were about. 202 pages that could've been written yesterday. The structure, the characters, the dialogue, all of it was perfect. Most books you can tell you're about done with 20, maybe 30 pages to go, but Forrester's?...

INT. GEOFFREY'S ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE on the FINAL WORDS of the BOOK as GEOFFREY TURNS the last page and CLOSES the back cover. His MOTHER is LEANING up against the DOORWAY.

JANICE

So why all the interest in dead authors?

GEOFFREY

He's not dead.

JANICE

I thought you liked the newer ones?

She WALKS OVER and softly PULLS IT AWAY.

JANICE

Forrester. I had to read this when I was in school. (FLIPS THE PAGES).

GEOFFREY

He's the guy...(PAUSE), that...we're reading in class.

JANICE (SITS DOWN)

Y'know when I was gettin' ready for my last year in high school, they sent us this letter. Showed us our classes and everything. (OPENS THE BOOK AGAIN). We had this long list of books that we were gonna read that school year. That was about the time your grandma was startin' to get sick, but I remember she took me down to the library and we checked out all those books before any of the other kids could get there. (LAUGHS). Like there was this race to read 'em all. (LONG REFLECTIVE PAUSE). I read every one of those books...not all of 'em before your grandma died, but I got through 'em all. Even this one.

She hesitates for a moment, caught up in the memory of her mother, then GLANCES at the BOOK.

JANICE

I thought for sure he was dead.

GEOFFREY LOOKS BACK at his mom.

GEOFFREY

Does it ever bother you? How things worked out?

JANICE KISSES HIM on the forehead.

JANICE

Things worked out fine honey.

EXT. NEW YORK ROAD - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT looking out from a CAB as it approaches the MAILOR-CALLOW SCHOOL. GEOFFREY'S reflection can be seen in the cab window, looking out at the IMPOSING OLD BUILDINGS. A VOICE-OVER by BRADLEY begins as GEOFFREY continues to stare...

BRADLEY (VO)

Mailor-Callow was built in 1878. All of the buildings they used then, we use now. Enrollment is limited each year to 750, which means some of the best students in this state, even those who want to get in, don't.

INT. MAILOR BUILDING - DAY

GEOFFREY and BRADLEY WALK down an ornate HALLWAY, their FOOTSTEPS CLICK and ECHO on the OLD FLOOR.

BRADLEY (VO)

We'll keep you for the first half of the day or so. Any questions, now's the time to ask. Then you'll have a week to make a decision...if you need it.

INT. MAILOR HALLWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY and BRADLEY approach a YOUNG WOMAN, in her EARLY 20'S.

BRADLEY

Geoffrey, I'd like you to meet Claire Spence. She's one of our teaching assistants, down this year from Wellesley. She'll be showing you around this morning.

CLAIRE HOLDS OUT her hand.

CLAIRE

Hello Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY

Hi.

INT. MAILOR HALLWAY - DAY

CLAIRE and GEOFFREY WALK down the hall.

CLAIRE

Don't worry about answering any questions or anything today. The best thing to do is just try and observe. Besides, the teachers here aren't into student involvement too much. They're usually too busy listening to themselves.

GEOFFREY barely hears, too busy GAWKING at the surroundings.

GEOFFREY

Your lockers are made out of wood.

CLAIRE

They tried to put in some regular ones a couple of years ago, but it took about a week for the parents to notice.

GEOFFREY

What happened?

CLAIRE OPENS the DOOR to a CLASSROOM.

CLAIRE

They took 'em out. Around here, they don't even want this sounding like other schools.

GEOFFREY STEPS IN and all grows quiet. He LOOKS around at the students...all obviously from very rich, and very white, families.

TEACHER

Mister Wallace?

GEOFFREY NODS. The TEACHER POINTS to a DESK.

TEACHER

Right over here please.

CLAIRE WHISPERS to GEOFFREY.

CLAIRE

I'll come get you before lunch.

GEOFFREY reluctantly WALKS toward his seat, most of the students not even glancing at him.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

GEOFFREY'S in his SEAT, half DOODLING on his notepad, as the TEACHER DRONES ON...

TEACHER

...Lincoln became the first incumbent to be renominated for President since 1840. The man who was President that year was?...

CAMERA CLOSE on GEOFFREY'S NOTEPAD as he quickly SCRIBBLES Van Buren.

TEACHER

...Martin Van Buren. Now Lincoln's running mate that year was? Anyone? People, we should know this...if we can turn to page 110 you'll find...

GEOFFREY WRITES JOHNSON...

TEACHER (CONT.)

...Andrew Johnson, who at the time was the Military governor of the state of Tennessee. As for the Democrats...

GEOFFREY QUICKLY JOBS DOWN MCCLELLAN...

TEACHER (CONT.)

...they were represented by George McClellan, who was, of course...

INT. HALLOR LUNCEROOM - DAY

CLAIRE and GEOFFREY SIT at a LUNCEROOM TABLE, their TRAYS in front of them. GEOFFREY isn't shy about CLEANING UP every bite. CLAIRE SMILES.

CLAIRE

Don't they feed you at your school?

GEOFFREY

Not like this.

GEOFFREY casually GLANCES at CLAIRE'S TRAY, which still has a couple of things left. She SLIDES IT OVER.

CLAIRE

What's it like at a public school...

GEOFFREY

You never been to one?

CLAIRE

I wanted to do my student teaching at one.

GEOFFREY

So why didn't you?

CLAIRE

My father's on the board of directors here. (PAUSE). Never had a son like his friends from the club, so he sent me to Browning, for prep, then to Wellesley, for college. and then when it came time for my student teaching assignment, they — the school, my parents — told me to come here. I don't think public schools get a lot of discussion.

GEOFFREY SMILES.

CLAIRE (CONT.)

One time I overheard my father tell my mom that considering my gender problem, it was the only way I'd ever get Mailor on my resume.

GEOFFREY

So how 'bout when you get done here? I mean once you're out, you can do whatever you want, right?

CLAIRE offers a knowing smile, not quite ready to explain to GEOFFREY that it isn't that easy.

CLAIRE

We'll see. (GETS UP). C'mon, we got one more thing to get you to...

GEOFFREY WIPES OFF his face with a NAPKIN.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

CLAIRE and GEOFFREY STROLL down the hallway, only a handful of STUDENTS surrounding them.

CLAIRE

I was hoping you'd get a chance to meet with Professor Crawford, but they didn't put him on your schedule.

GEOFFREY

What's he teach?

CLAIRE

Writing, literature. With your test scores, you'll practically live with him.

GEOFFREY

He been here long?

CLAIRE (SMILES)

He's been here as long as some of these buildings and he's about as flexible. Crawford has two rules. He talks, you don't. Last term one of his students, been with him for three years, challenged him on a point in class and we found out a couple weeks later the kid was right.

GEOFFREY

He apologize?

CLAIRE

Crawford? (LAUGES). No one left to apologize to.

The SOUND of a GYM CLASS, SNEAKERS SQUEAKING on the floor, slowly RISES in the background.

CLAIRE

Last class of the day.

They BOTH WALK into the...

INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

...BRIGHT LIGHTS of the MAJOR GYMNASIUM. A P-E GAME is in progress, a quick brilliant PASS from one player to another leads to an easy hoop. The P-E TEACHER YELLS OUT...

P-E TEACHER

Alright, next!

INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

GEOFFREY LOOKS ON, suddenly right on his own turf again. CLAIRE studies him, seeing the change in his expression as he GAPES at the THOUSANDS OF SEATS in the ARENA.

CLAIRE

You've done this before.

GEOFFREY

You guys fill this up?

CLAIRE

Oh yeah.

INT. GYM - DAY

GEOFFREY, now dressed-down, RELUCTANTLY WALKS out onto the court.

P-E TEACHER

Let's get paired up now!

GEOFFREY hooks up with a YOUNG MAN who looks about two or three years older.

YOUNG MAN

Who are you?

GEOFFREY

I'm just...

YOUNG MAN

Just check it, okay?

The YOUNG MAN TOSSES GEOFFREY the BALL, a little too quickly. GEOFFREY FUMBLES IT slightly and gives it back.

YOUNG MAN (YELLS)

Ball's in!

INT. GYM - DAY

The GAME FLOWS. GEOFFREY'S keeping pace, but he looks unsure. The other players, especially the YOUNG MAN he's guarding, are precise in their execution, hitting hoop after hoop.

P-E TEACHER

Nine-six. Let's go. First to eleven.

INT. GYM - DAY

The YOUNG MAN has the ball, GEOFFREY guarding him a little tighter.

YOUNG MAN

You gonna give me this? Huh?

He JUMPS, getting off a clean shot over GEOFFREY. The BALL NESTLES into the net. GEOFFREY TURNS to see his OPPONENT BACK-PEDALING, SAYING...

YOUNG MAN

...you guys play any defense in the city?

INT. GYM - DAY

A glimmer of ANGER in GEOFFREY'S EYES. A TEAMMATE PASSES HIM the ball and he's suddenly intense. He HAWKS the ball close to his OPPONENT, who's now back-tracking, but staying with him. Silently GEOFFREY BURSTS past him and DRIVES to the hoop, laying it in. The SPEED is BREATHTAKING.

P-E TEACHER

Ten-seven. Hartwell, a little defense might be nice.

A TEAMMATE PASSES the ball to the YOUNG MAN, HARTWELL, who TURNS and finds GEOFFREY DRAPED all over him.

HARTWELL

Too late man.

GEOFFREY

Get it past the line.

HARTWELL

What'd you say?

GEOFFREY

I said...get it past the line.

INT. GYM - DAY

Suddenly, GEOFFREY'S DEFENSE is so TIGHT that HARTWELL can't advance the ball. Finally, in frustration, he YELLS OUT...

HARTWELL

I need some help!

He can't get it to the half court line. The P-E TEACHER'S WHISTLE BLOWS...

P-E TEACHER

Ten seconds. Other way.

HARTWELL

Shit!

INT. GYM - DAY

The BALL is TOSSED to GEOFFREY. HARTWELL closes in on him...

HARTWELL

C'mon...

GEOFFREY EXPLODES BY HIM, reaching the other end of the court, and RISES for a JUMP SHOT. It HITS the bottom of the net.

INT. GYM - DAY

HARTWELL DRIBBLES, with GEOFFREY CLOSE, even a shade tighter on him.

HARTWELL

Not this time...uh, uh...

GEOFFREY says nothing, staying tight, TIGHT, TIGHTER, until he SWISHES into...A SCREW set by another PLAYER. HARTWELL STREAKS into the open, PASSING to a TEAMMATE who calmly DROPS the winning basket into the hoop.

P-E TEACHER

That's it...let's shower up, you got fifteen minutes till next class.

HARTWELL TURNS to GEOFFREY and SAYS...

HARTWELL

Need more than the street out here.

GEOFFREY doesn't reply; but SITTING up very HIGH in the STANDS, OBSERVING IT ALL...

INT. GYM - DAY

...the school's BASKETBALL COACH: JEFF WALSH, a MAN in his LATE 30'S, EARLY 40'S, silently keeping tabs on GEOFFREY'S PERFORMANCE.

EXT. HALLOR - DAY

CLAIRE LEANS IN the window of the CAB, GEOFFREY. in the BACK SEAT.

CLAIRE

You have any questions, you call me okay?

GEOFFREY

Okay.

CLAIRE

You can't turn this down, you know that, don't you?

GEOFFREY

That's what everybody's tellin' me. .

CLAIRE REACHES OUT to SHAKE GEOFFREY'S HANDS and there's genuine warmth in her expression, much different from the cold, old-school look offered by so many others at the school.

CLAIRE

I'll call you next week.

The CABS PULLS AWAY and CLAIRE WATCHES it, and SHAKES HER HEAD ever so slightly.

INT. CAB - DAY

GEOFFREY GAZES straight ahead, not choosing to look back on the MAILOR CAMPUS.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

Pulling away from Mailor, there was little doubt as to whether I'd be back. Instead it was the realization that Hartwell was about to take up full-time residence in my thoughts until I returned. I had run into ignorant racism before, which my mother had told me was the most dangerous, but this had been my first confrontation with arrogant racism. I had never had an encounter that affected me quite as much...

EXT. FRANKLIN SCHOOL - DAY

The CAB PULLS UP in the PARKING LOT and GEOFFREY GETS OUT and STRETCHES his sore muscles.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

...until the one I had about two hours later.

...as the CAB PULLS OFF, he HIRES his BACKPACK up on his shoulder, and notices across the way...

WILLIAM FORRESTER WALKING out a side-door of the school, briskly HEADING DOWN the sidewalk.

GEOFFREY WATCHES him for a second and then, decides to FOLLOW AFTER HIM...from a distance.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

FORRESTER continues to WALK, now on one of the busy sidewalks of central New York. He blends in, his SUNGLASSES and HAT protecting him from the off-chance of someone recognizing him. GEOFFREY TAGS ALONG behind.

EXT. NEW YORK SUBWAY - DAY

FORRESTER DESCENDS the stairs to the SUBWAY, his curious pursuer, GEOFFREY, not far behind. When

the AUTHOR GETS ON the TRAIN, GEOFFREY HOPS the same one, different door.

INT. NEW YORK SUBWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY, STANDING in a corner of the train, WATCHES FORRESTER from a distance. The elderly WRITER is SITTING toward the front.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

I knew my only chance of having any conversation with Forrester was if I knew where he lived. Having avoided so many interviews over the years, I figured one of two things had to have happened: either he'd convinced those reporters to stop asking...or they just didn't know where to look.

After a moment, FORRESTER REACHES into a SMALL BAG he's been carrying. He PULLS OUT a "National Enquirer" and begins to READ.

GEOFFREY does a double-take, amused the world's greatest living author is reading a tabloid.

INT. NEW YORK CITY APARTMENT - DAY

The FRONT ENTRY to a very average NEW YORK APARTMENT BUILDING OPENS and FORRESTER GOES IN. He WALKS UP the STAIRS, SHUFFLING, as he heads to his own apartment.

Reaching the top, he PULLS OUT the KEYS and starts to OPEN the DOOR. GEOFFREY OPENS the MAIN DOOR BELOW, LOOKS UP and their EYES MEET right as FORRESTER TURNS THE KEYS.

GEOFFREY

Hello...

FORRESTER says nothing and OPENS THE DOOR. He PULLS THE KEYS OUT just as GEOFFREY SAYS...

GEOFFREY

Mister Forrester?

FORRESTER STOPS and, so quietly, MUTTERS...

FORRESTER

Shit.

GEOFFREY

Excuse me?

The LEGENDARY AUTHOR slowly TURNS.

FORRESTER (WEARY)

Delivery's tomorrow.

GEOFFREY

No...I'm, uh...

FORRESTER

...Tate's only supposed to give the address. You talk to him?

GEOFFREY

I'm not the delivery. That's...that's not how I got your name.

FORRESTER EXAMINES GEOFFREY for a second...

FORRESTER

Then who are you?

GEOFFREY

I'm Geoffrey Wallace

FORRESTER

You're Geoffrey Wallace?

GEOFFREY BRIGHTENS.

GEOFFREY

Yeah.

FORRESTER

Geoffrey Wallace.

FORRESTER WALKS IN, leaving the DOOR OPEN behind him. GEOFFREY, now convinced the awkward part of their meeting is over, BOUNCES UP the STAIRS and goes inside. FORRESTER doesn't even bother to shut the door.

FORRESTER

So you're Geoffrey Wallace?

GEOFFREY (NODS)

Yeah. I thought I'd...

FORRESTER (CUTS IN)

...well knowing exactly who you are allows me to ask you this question with a slightly more personal touch. Geoffrey, why the fuck did you follow me home?

GEOFFREY is stunned.

FORRESTER

Need me to repeat it? Why the fuck are you here?

GEOFFREY

I wanted to...

FORRESTER

I don't give a rats ass what you want. Just like, from the looks of things, you don't give a rats ass what I want. Because if you cared about what I want, you'd know that I don't have guests. You have any idea why that might be?

GEOFFREY

I didn't...

FORRESTER

Answer the goddamn question. Why don't I have guests?

FORRESTER MOVES OVER to a CHINA CABINET with BOOZE all over it. He starts to POUR a DRINK.

GEOFFREY

Because you don't want any?

FORRESTER

'Cause I don't want any. That is a goddamn fuckin' bullseye, Geoffrey Wallace. (SIPS HIS DRINK). And it also begs a question doesn't it?

GEOFFREY

I just wanted to, y'know...

FORRESTER

Talk?

GEOFFREY

Yeah.

FORRESTER

Talk about what?

GEOFFREY

I dunno...I mean...

FORRESTER

You're losin' it here kid. Simple question. What is it you want to talk about?

GEOFFREY

I thought...y'know, my writing...

FORRESTER

Yeah? What about your writing?

GEOFFREY

D'you read all of it?

FORRESTER (LAUGHS)

I wake up about five each morning, after getting up maybe a half dozen times during the night to shake out a piss I wouldn't have even had to take fifty years ago. So yeah...I think I can manage a little reading time.

GEOFFREY

What'd you think?

FORRESTER

Well if you had gone into your school instead of coming here, you'd know right about now, wouldn't you?

GEOFFREY doesn't know what to say.

FORRESTER

How old are you?

GEOFFREY

Fourteen.

FORRESTER

And you're black.

GEOFFREY

Last I checked.

FORRESTER PAUSES.

FORRESTER

Thirty years ago if I would've asked some black kid that question, you know what he'd say? Yes sir. Like it was the most perfectly reasonable question in the world. You're black? Yes sir. Now I got 14 year old kids, in my own damn apartment, sayin' "last I checked." I'd say race relations have come a hell of a long way, wouldn't you?

No response.

FORRESTER

Or are you one of those that still think things got a ways to go?

GEOFFREY

Last I checked.

FORRESTER (NODS)

Maybe your range of intelligence does extend a bit beyond writing. Your mother know you're here?

GEOFFREY

No.

FORRESTER

And if she did?

GEOFFREY

I told her I wouldn't, y'know, meet up with anyone I talked with on the computer.

FORRESTER

Smart woman.

GEOFFREY

Well, I didn't think...y'know...

FORRESTER

You didn't think because of who I am that there might be any problem...

GEOFFREY

Yeah...

FORRESTER

You don't have any idea who I am.

GEOFFREY

You're William...

FORRESTER

...what I am is an old white man living in an apartment with a 14 year old black kid here, who if I decided to pull a gun out right now and leave you bleeding to death on the carpet you're standing on, there wouldn't be a question in the world, (PAUSE), now would there?

GEOFFREY SHAKES HIS HEAD, growing ANGRY...

GEOFFREY

That's not it...

FORRESTER

That piss you off?

FORRESTER CROSSES the room slowly till he's right in front of GEOFFREY.

FORRESTER

You don't know what to do right now, do you? You're thinkin', if I say "fuck you" to this guy, he'll never talk to me again. Be kind of a waste, wouldn't it? (PAUSE). But if I let him run me down with this racist bullshit, what does that make me? (TAKES A DRINK). So what does that make you?

Again, no response from GEOFFREY, now simmering.

FORRESTER

See what I meant when I said write it like you'd say it.

GEOFFREY

My mother taught me never to swear.

FORRESTER

She religious?

GEOFFREY

No.

FORRESTER

So why's that important to her?

GEOFFREY

(PAUSE). She said if I talked that way, it wouldn't matter how smart I was, people would still think I was nuthin' more than a gang-banger.

FORRESTER

Again...smart woman.

GEOFFREY

My mother's not here right now.

FORRESTER, curious, CLOSES IN even more.

FORRESTER

No...she isn't.

GEOFFREY, bursting with anger, BITES his lip and holds back. But the contempt on his face...

GEOFFREY

I won't.

FORRESTER

Oh, I'd say you did. An expression is worth a thousand words. Or in this case,...maybe just two.

FORRESTER LOOKS GEOFFREY over and for a second, neither has anything to say, until...

FORRESTER

Now I'm gonna say this as politely as I can, but Geoffrey...I need you to get the hell out of my apartment. (PAUSE). Better yet, why don't you write me five thousand words on why I should leave William Forrester the fuck alone. (ANOTHER PAUSE). You got any problem with that?

GEOFFREY

No.

FORRESTER WALKS into the KITCHEN.

FORRESTER

Shut the door. It's already locked.

GEOFFREY STANDS for a moment, stunned. Finally he LEAVES, CLOSING the DOOR behind him.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY thinks about knocking on the door again, but thinks better of it, SHUFFLING down the stairs and LEAVING the APARTMENT BUILDING.

EXT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

It's late afternoon as GEOFFREY SITS curbside in front of his own apartment, flipping through the pages of his NOTEBOOKS.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

I decided not to tell anyone about my run-in with Forrester. Even if they had believed me, explaining what had happened wouldn't be easy.

The NOTEBOOK PAGE isn't flooded with RED INK, but there are several sentences carefully edited, and a handful of scribbled comments in the margin.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

His written comments lacked the hurt of his spoken ones; just a precise dissection of word after word and sentence after sentence, each of his suggestions precisely correct...

INT. GEOFFREY'S BEDROOM - DAY

GEOFFREY TYPES AWAY, furiously writing on his outdated computer.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

...so concerned was I about losing his comments that a bizarre pattern started to emerge. I would type in a couple of sentences and...

The YOUNG GEOFFREY STOPS, HOLDS DOWN TWO BUTTONS and SAYS...

GEOFFREY

...save.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

...type in only two or three more...

GEOFFREY

...and save...

INT. MARTIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MARTIN is in his BED. GEOFFREY'S in a SLEEPING BAG on the floor, on his back, softly TOSSING a BASKETBALL up into the air.

GEOFFREY

You ever meet anyone famous?

MARTIN

How famous?

GEOFFREY

Y'know, somebody most people'd know who it was...if you told 'em.

MARTIN

Nobody like that comes 'round here.

GEOFFREY

But, I mean what if they did...and you knew they wouldn't want you tellin' anyone about it.

MARTIN (ROLLS OVER)

You meet someone at that school?

GEOFFREY

Nah.

MARTIN

So why you askin'?

GEOFFREY

I was just wonderin'.

There's a lull in the conversation, GEOFFREY still tossing the BALL into the air.

MARTIN

Hey Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY

Yeah?

MARTIN

You're still gonna come over here, y'know, with this new school and everything...aren't you?

GEOFFREY'S caught off guard by the question.

GEOFFREY

Yeah. Sure.

About that time, VOICES start to rise from out in the living room; the SOUND of a MAN and a WOMAN ARGUING. MARTIN LOOKS OVER at the CLOSED DOOR.

MARTIN

Guess my dad's home.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

JANICE and GEOFFREY SIT on the FRONT STEPS of their apartment, waiting. There are no words between them until a YELLOW CAB PULLS UP.

JANICE

You sure there's nothing we forgot?

GEOFFREY (SERUGS)

I don't think so.

JANICE

What about those books they sent...

GEOFFREY

We checked everything Mom.

JANICE PICKS some LINT off his SHOULDER.

JANICE

You sure?

GEOFFREY

Yeah.

JANICE SMILES at her own nervous manner.

JANICE

You speak up, so they can hear you, okay?

GEOFFREY

I will. (HE GETS IN THE CAB).

INT. CAB - DAY

The CAB DRIVER LOOKS BACK at GEOFFREY.

CAB DRIVER

You the kid goin' to Mailor?

GEOFFREY

Yeah.

The CAB DRIVER gives him the once-over and NODS, impressed that a young kid from Brooklyn is getting that kind of chance.

CAB DRIVER

Alright.

GEOFFREY says nothing, just TURNS to look out the rear window at his mother. She WAVES, and he TURNS to look back forward, a hint of quiet fear and uncertainty on his face.

EXT. MAILOR MAIN BUILDING - DAY

GEOFFREY WALKS slowly, very reluctantly, toward the stairs that lead up to the MAIN HALL of MAILOR. OTHER STUDENTS, who've been there all along, cruise past him up the stairs.

INT. MAILOR MAIN OFFICE - DAY

GEOFFREY'S empty BACKPACK is on the desk in front of him. A CLERK for the school is on the opposite side of the desk, LEANING OVER a stack of papers as she shows GEOFFREY his schedule.

CLERK

...fifth period, western civ with Parson. Sixth period, trig with Daly, he writes small so sit close, and seventh is phys-ed with Kellerman.

GEOFFREY

Where do I go now?

CLERK

Modern lit and composition with Crawford. He's down the hall in 114.

GEOFFREY

Thanks.

CLERK

Oh...and a word of advice? If you're ever late for Crawford's class, it's best if you just don't show up.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The DOOR OPENS at the back of a HUGE CLASSROOM, so similar to the halls on college campuses. The seats, some two hundred or so, slope down to the lecture area. GEOFFREY ENTERS, the only one in the room, except for an ELDERLY MAN, PROFESSOR ROBERT CRAWFORD, at the BLACKBOARD.

GEOFFREY GLANCES UP above the BLACKBOARD, and notices a series of PAINTINGS of GREAT AUTHORS. GEOFFREY focuses in on the one that is clearly FORRESTER.

GEOFFREY WALKS DOWN the stairs and takes a seat, the NOISE of which gets CRAWFORD to turn around.

CRAWFORD

Class doesn't start for ten minutes.

GEOFFREY

Should I...y'know, wait outside?

CRAWFORD MOVES OVER to his own DESK and FLIPS through some papers, then STOPS on one.

CRAWFORD

Geoffrey Wallace? (GEOFFREY NODS).
Did you bring a writing sample?

GEOFFREY

I, uh...nobody said...

CRAWFORD

I was told you'd be bringing a writing sample.

GEOFFREY suddenly PAWS through his BACKPACK, hoping to find anything. He PULLS OUT one of the NOTEBOOKS that he had given FORRESTER and OPENING IT, sees the NOTES that FORRESTER has scribbled all over the margins.

GEOFFREY

I've got this...

CRAWFORD has already TURNED his back on GEOFFREY and has resumed his writing on the blackboard.

CRAWFORD

Leave it on my desk please.

GEOFFREY nervously HEADS DOWN the stairs and PLACES the NOTEBOOK on CRAWFORD'S DESK. The PROFESSOR doesn't even glance over, his CHALK already scraping words on the board again, as GEOFFREY goes back to his seat and SITS DOWN.

INT. MATH CLASS - DAY

The MATH TEACHER is WALKING between the DESKS as the STUDENTS concentrate on the QUIZ in front of them. GEOFFREY'S JOTTING DOWN answer after answer when the BELL RINGS. The MATH TEACHER SAYS...

MATH TEACHER

Pencils down. (THE STUDENTS PUT THEIR PENCILS ON THE DESK). Hand your paper to the front. (THE PAPERS HEAD TO THE FRONT OF EACH ROW AND AS THE TEACHER PICKS THEM UP...)...pages 60 through 90 in the text by tomorrow. Test is on Friday.

GEOFFREY tries to CRAM another large TEXTBOOK, his BACKPACK now barely able to hold everything.

GEOFFREY (WHISPERS)

...60 through 90...

INT. FORRESTER'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

GEOFFREY'S reluctance from earlier in the day pales in comparison to the apprehension on his face now. He CLIMBS the stairs to the FRONT DOOR of FORRESTER'S APARTMENT and KNOCKS.

Nothing. He KNOCKS AGAIN. And still nothing.

GEOFFREY

Mister Forrester? (SILENCE). Mister Forrester?

The DOOR remains shut.

GEOFFREY

I won't stay. I just want to give you something.

Still no answer. GEOFFREY PULLS OUT a NOTEBOOK from his BACKPACK and tries to slide it under the door...but...

GEOFFREY

I'll leave it...under...(BUT IT WON'T FIT).

KNEELING DOWN, GEOFFREY, frustrated, PULLS the NOTEBOOK back and SITS DOWN across the hallway.

GEOFFREY

C'mon man...I know you're home.

Still nothing.

GEOFFREY

Maybe I should go find me some "New York Times" writer...give him your home address.

GEOFFREY TOSSES DOWN the notebook at the base of the door, just as the FRONT DOOR OPENS. FORRESTER GLARES at him.

GEOFFREY

I was just kiddin' about that "New..."

FORRESTER

What do you want?

GEOFFREY

Nuthin'. I just...wanted to bring by, y'know, that thing you wanted me to do.

FORRESTER

What thing?

GEOFFREY

Y'know,...five thousand words on why I should leave William Forrester the fuck alone.

GEOFFREY PICKS UP the NOTEBOOK and HOLDS IT OUT.

GEOFFREY (CONT.)

I wrote it last night.

There is a long, unbearable silence, but GEOFFREY keeps HOLDING it out, and FORRESTER keeps STARING at him, until he finally SHUTS THE DOOR. GEOFFREY SHAKES HIS HEAD and SLUMPS against the wall behind him.

GEOFFREY

Shit.

But he doesn't move. He waits,...and waits some more, until the DOOR OPENS again and...

FORRESTER

I thought your mother told you never to swear.

INT. FORRESTER'S KITCHEN - DAY

FORRESTER DISSES UP a couple of BOWLS OF TOMATO SOUP, as GEOFFREY SITS at an old, beat-up KITCHEN TABLE.

FORRESTER

Don't let it get cold. It gets that filmy stuff on top.

GEOFFREY

What stuff?

FORRESTER

Just stir it.

GEOFFREY

Ours never gets nuthin' on it.

FORRESTER

Anything on it. You put milk in it?

GEOFFREY

You're s'posed to put milk in tomato soup?

FORRESTER SITS and PULLS OUT some cigarettes.

FORRESTER

I've never done any interviews, but I gotta be honest, I always kinda wondered what the first question might be. (PAUSE). Whether milk goes in tomato soup wasn't the one that jumped to mind.

GEOFFREY

S'that mean I can ask you something?

FORRESTER LIGHTS UP a CIGARETTE.

FORRESTER

There something you need to know?

GEOFFREY

How come you didn't write another book?

FORRESTER (EXHALES)

I don't think so. (PAUSE). You should have stayed with the soup question. The soup question was the perfect question.

GEOFFREY has no clue.

FORRESTER (CONT.)

The object of a question is, or should be, to obtain information that matters to us, right? Not to ask a question we think others would ask, or that others would be impressed we thought to ask. It's like those TV reporters, they ask these piss-poor questions, and in the middle of one of the piss-poor answers they get, the camera cuts back so I can see the expression on the person who asked the question. Now if the question is a decent one, what I need to see is the expression on the poor bastard who's answering the question. You asked if milk goes into tomato soup, which was perfectly reasonable when you consider that your mother was probably raised in a home that never dreamed of wasting milk money on soup when a can of water was just fine. Do you put milk in tomato soup? Good question. In contrast to "why didn't you write a second book?"...which fails to meet the criteria of obtaining information that matters to us. It may matter to some critic who needs to write a piece in tomorrow's paper so he can keep his sorry-ass existence going, but to you?...rather worthless.

FORRESTER takes another drag.

GEOFFREY

I don't know if I have any more soup questions.

FORRESTER

No? (PAUSE). So why'd you come here?

GEOFFREY hesitates.

GEOFFREY

I wanted to give you...

FORRESTER

...we went through this the other day. Simple question, soup question. Why'd you come here?

GEOFFREY

I wanted to see if you really hated my writing that much.

The GREAT WRITER lets GEOFFREY stew a minute.

FORRESTER

You ever started reading a book...and found out a few pages in that it wasn't worth a shit?

GEOFFREY

Yeah.

FORRESTER

And what'd you do?

GEOFFREY

Stopped readin' it, I guess.

FORRESTER

You find any red ink on the last page of your notebook?

GEOFFREY

Yeah...but...(HE STOPS AND REALIZES WHAT FORRESTER JUST TOLD HIM).

FORRESTER

Anything else?

GEOFFREY

Did you mean all those things you said the other day? Y'know, 'bout me bein' black and all.

FORRESTER

Everybody's got their own line. You know what I mean by that?

GEOFFREY

No.

FORRESTER

It's how far they'll go, how much bullshit they'll put up with, before they finally (MOTIONS WITH HIS HAND)

draw the line and say...what it was you wanted to say. I wanted to see where your line was.

GEOFFREY

But I never said anything.

FORRESTER

Yeah you did. Most people anymore, they talk but they don't really say anything. I go out there and within ten minutes somebody I've never seen before'll tell me to have a nice day. Truth is, that person doesn't care what kind of a day I'm gonna have. The less you care about someone, the more you talk to 'em. The people we care about most, we don't talk to. Funny how it works, isn't it?

GEOFFREY

Can I ask you one more thing?

FORRESTER GRINDS OUT his cigarette and looks up at GEOFFREY.

GEOFFREY

What's it like?

FORRESTER

What's what like?

GEOFFREY

Writing a book...like you did?

FORRESTER thinks for a moment before SAYING...

FORRESTER

Maybe you'll find out.

INT. GEOFFREY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY SITS in front of his COMPUTER, but there is none of the familiar clacking sound on the keyboard.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

It would be nice to say that I had an unspoken understanding with Forrester that I was not to tell anyone about him. But when it came to matters of privacy, Forrester wasn't into the unspoken thing. He made it clear that if I told anyone anything, I couldn't come back. Which I actually took as good news because it meant I could come back. But it was right about then that it started happening. Whether it was because I suddenly had Forrester reading my writing, or Crawford picking it apart,...I was having a lot of trouble putting two sentences together.

INT. CRAWFORD'S CLASSROOM - DAY

CRAWFORD'S class is packed tight with STUDENTS. The ELDERLY PROFESSOR STANDS at a LECTERN in the front of the room.

CRAWFORD

This year's writing competition has been scheduled for the last week of winter term. All entries will need to be turned in by the end of next month. I'd like to encourage all of you, even first year students, who may not have the body of work as some of the rest of you, to take part.

The BELL RINGS and the STUDENTS FILE OUT, but GEOFFREY STOPS when he hears CRAWFORD CALL OUT...

CRAWFORD

Mister Wallace!

GEOFFREY WALKS against the flow of students, till he reaches CRAWFORD. The professor HANDS GEOFFREY his NOTEBOOK.

CRAWFORD

Rather ambitious thoughts for someone your age.

GEOFFREY

Thank you.

CRAWFORD

And you wrote all of it, I trust?

GEOFFREY looks puzzled.

GEOFFREY

Yeah...a few weeks ago.

CRAWFORD CLEANS his GLASSES, his expression one of doubt.

CRAWFORD

Of course. (FOR A MINUTE IT SEEMS AS IF HE'S DONE, UNTIL HE ADDS...). Oh, and the comments written in the margin? (LOOKS AT HIS GLASSES TO MAKE SURE THEY'RE CLEAN WHILE GEOFFREY HESITATES). The comments, Mister Wallace, who wrote them?

GEOFFREY (UNSURE)

One of my teachers.

CRAWFORD

One of your teachers? Really?

GEOFFREY doesn't know how to respond.

CRAWFORD

Public schools might be a little more indulgent of that type of writing. (PUTS HIS GLASSES BACK ON). But not here, understand?

GEOFFREY

Yes sir.

CRAWFORD

Good day Mister Wallace.

GEOFFREY BITES his lip and WALKS OUT.

INT. MAILOR STUDENT HALL - DAY

CLAIRE and GEOFFREY are EATING SACK LUNCHES at a SECOND-FLOOR TABLE, overlooking the main entrance to the exquisite old building.

CLAIRE

You gotta let those things go. Keep quiet, do what he says, go on to college. You won't be the first kid who's done it that way.

GEOFFREY

I don't think he believes I wrote the stuff I gave him.

CLAIRE

Look,...you're a smart kid. Put yourself in his place. He sees the school bringin' in this new kid, not before the school year gets started, but a few weeks after. Right around the time they can take advantage of this other thing he can do...besides writing.

GEOFFREY

What?

CLAIRE NIBBLES away and LOOKS UP at GEOFFREY.

GEOFFREY

'He thinks they brought me here to play basketball?

CLAIRE

...you think that wasn't part of the reason?

GEOFFREY

They never even saw me play.

CLAIRE

You sure about that?

CLAIRE WIPES her face with a NAPKIN, patiently waiting for a response.

CLAIRE (CONT.)

You just make it easier for 'em. The way you write?...no one asks any questions.

GEOFFREY

Crawford let you read it?

CLAIRE (NODS)

Geoffrey,...I believe you wrote every word in there. But I can see where he might have his doubts. (PAUSE). No one writes like that...no one 14, no one 24, no one 34. (PAUSE). And that much talent can scare some people.

A break in the conversation as they MUNCH.

CLAIRE

So who did write on your paper?

GEOFFREY

What do you mean?

CLAIRE

You know what I mean. And don't try and tell me it's some teacher you had because whoever it was, they knew more about writing than you do. And a person who knows that much doesn't work at a high school in Brooklyn.

GEOFFREY doesn't know what to say, wanting so much to have someone to talk to about FORRESTER, yet not wanting to break his trust.

CLAIRE

Some college professor?

GEOFFREY LOOKS AWAY, and CLAIRE suddenly gets very serious.

CLAIRE

Who is it Geoffrey?

Finally...

GEOFFREY

I gotta go.

CLAIRE

Hey?...

GEOFFREY suddenly GETS UP and LEAVES the table, CLAIRE --- BEWILDERED --- WATCHES him go.

INT. GYM - DAY

About TWO DOZEN PLAYERS, all DRENCHED in sweat, PASS the BALL as they do a conditioning drill. COACH JEFF WALSH PACES along the sidelines of the court, WHISTLE DRAPED around his neck.

WALSH

Let's push it a little gentlemen.
This is not gym class anymore, this
is the real thing.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

Jeff Walsh had been the coach at
Mailor for two years and didn't want
to be there too many more. He had his
sights on one of the Ivy League jobs.

HARTWELL, GEOFFREY and one other PLAYER CRISPLY
PASS the BALL between them.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

John Hartwell, senior guard from last
year's state runner-up. Since our
first meeting on the court, I had
found out his dad was Phil Hartwell,
who used to play for the Knicks. Good
defense, not much of a shot and
plenty of attitude, all of which he
had managed to pass along to his son.
He hung around just long enough to
get the first couple of those million
dollar contracts and set up his kid
to get in here.

As the PLAYERS close in on the basket, HARTWELL
FIRES the BALL to GEOFFREY, who RISES and DUNKS
the BALL THROUGH the basket. He RUNS BACK, but
not before HARTWELL eases up next to him.

HARTWELL

Just try layin' it in next time.

GEOFFREY STARES at him as he RUNS down the court.

INT. GYM - DAY

TEN PLAYERS are on the court, in an all-out game
between two teams. GEOFFREY'S on one team, and
HARTWELL on the other; but they're not guarding
each other...yet.

A PLAYER on GEOFFREY'S TEAM TOSSES him the ball
and GEOFFREY gives a quick head fake. His
OPPONENT BITES and GEOFFREY GLIDES through the
lane, JUMPS, and hits a soft shot.

WALSH.

Nice. Back on defense now.

INT. GYM - DAY

One of the PLAYERS brings the ball up the court
and spots HARTWELL COMING UP the sideline. He
PASSES HIM the BALL but at the last second
GEOFFREY steps in and STEALS IT. HARTWELL PURSUES
but is no match for GEOFFREY'S speed. GEOFFREY
softly LAYS IT IN and TURNS to HARTWELL.

GEOFFREY

Better?

HARTWELL SIMMERS.

INT. GYM - DAY

HARTWELL TAKES THE BALL up the court himself, and as he CROSSES the half-court line, a teammate sets a screen. HARTWELL breaks free for a second, but suddenly finds himself GUARDED by GEOFFREY.

HARTWELL

What you gonna give me?

GEOFFREY

Givin' you nuthin' man.

HARTWELL FAKES a shot, but GEOFFREY doesn't bite and is ready when HARTWELL DRIVES HARD to the basket. GEOFFREY SLIDES in front of him, but HARTWELL LOWERS his shoulder and SLAMS into him, sending BOTH PLAYERS to the floor.

HARTWELL

Foul!

GEOFFREY

I had the spot.

HARTWELL

I said foul!...

GEOFFREY

...no way man. I was set.

WALSH STEPS IN.

WALSH

Alright, alright. Let's get some water, okay. Suicides in five minutes and you two shoot. (POINTS TO BOTH GEOFFREY AND HARTWELL).

HARTWELL WALKS away, a look of frustration and disgust on his face. GEOFFREY LEANS OVER, SWEAT DRIPPING onto the floor. One of his TEAMMATES is doing the same next to him.

GEOFFREY

What are suicides?

TEAMMATE

They do 'em at the end of every practice. Each team gets one guy to shoot free throws. First guy to miss, all the guys on his team run between the lines. (PAUSE). Coach usually doesn't let Hartwell shoot.

GEOFFREY

Why not?

TEAMMATE

'Cause he doesn't miss very often.

INT. GYM - DAY

GEOFFREY is on one free throw line, HARTWELL on the other. They BOTH SHOOT...and HIT. The PLAYERS YELL OUT in unison...

PLAYERS

One...

The SHOTS CONTINUE, each one SETTLING into the bottom of the net.

PLAYERS

...two, three, four.

GEOFFREY and HARTWELL don't look at each other, each concentrating, focusing only on the rim in front of them. The SHOTS RAIN DOWN.

PLAYERS

...eleven, twelve...

WALSH PACES, waiting to see who cracks.

PLAYERS

...eighteen, nineteen...

The FREE THROWS POUR IN, each player sweating, not so much from exertion, but from stress.

PLAYERS

...twenty eight, twenty nine...

HARTWELL softly MUTTERS as he DRIBBLES...

HARTWELL

Damn...

BOTH PLAYERS are machines, BURYING each SHOT.

PLAYERS

...forty eight, forty nine...

WALSH

Hold it!

All becomes quiet, except for the SOUND of a couple of BASKETBALLS BOUNCING.

WALSH

We're gonna be here all night. Each of you makes the next one, and no one runs. Wallace,...you first.

GEOFFREY, with all eyes on him, calmly DRIBBLES TWICE, SHOOTs...and MAKES IT. His TEAMMATES break into celebration.

INT. GYM - DAY

HARTWELL BOUNCES the BALL, EXHALES, and SHOOTs. The BALL NICKS the front of the rim, BOUNCES OFF the BACKBOARD, RATTLES a couple of times, and settles into the NET.

The PLAYERS YELL OUT, RUNNING OFF the court for the LOCKER ROOM. Only HARTWELL, GEOFFREY and WALSH remain.

WALSH

Gentlemen, that was one of the most impressive things I've ever seen on a basketball court. (PAUSE). And why do I know it wasn't good enough for either one of you.

WALSH WALKS OFF the court, leaving GEOFFREY and HARTWELL behind. They LOOK at each other for a minute, waiting to see if the other will offer any acknowledgment. It doesn't come.

INT. STARBUCKS - NIGHT

GEOFFREY OPENS the DOOR to his MOM'S STARBUCKS COFFEE SHOP. JANICE is finishing up a COFFEE DRINK for a CUSTOMER.

JANICE

Hey Geoffrey. Lose your key again?

GEOFFREY

No.

JANICE

You just came to walk me home?

GEOFFREY

I was thinkin' about it.

JANICE (SMILES)

Lemme just finish up a couple things.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

JANICE and GEOFFREY DRIFT slowly along the sidewalk leading to their apartment. GEOFFREY NODS toward one of the windows.

GEOFFREY

Mrs. Carr's already got her Christmas stuff up.

JANICE

She gets those lights so close to the curtain. Every year I gotta go down, tell her to move 'em.

GEOFFREY

I can go talk to her.

JANICE

Nah, that's alright. I need to go see her anyway. (SHORT PAUSE AS THEY REACH THE OUTSIDE STEPS). Seems like you haven't been gettin' a lot of sleep lately.

GEOFFREY

Don't worry 'bout me.

JANICE

It's my job to worry about you. (ALL IS QUIET FOR A MOMENT). Everything okay at school?

GEOFFREY

I been hearin' you up pretty late.

JANICE

You didn't answer my question.

GEOFFREY

Yeah,...things are okay. How come you don't ask about it more?

JANICE

I figure you'd tell me.

JANICE TURNS the KEY to go inside.

GEOFFREY

Mom?

JANICE

Hum?

GEOFFREY

You'd let me know if we didn't, you know,...if we couldn't do this.

They GO INSIDE and UP the STAIRS.

JANICE

They're the ones payin' for it.

GEOFFREY

No...I mean, you payin' for me to take the train...and then a cab out there. (PAUSE). You're doin' that every day.

JANICE

Yeah...well. That school doesn't have many kids from this neighborhood. (SHE OPENS THE MAIL BOX AND SOUNDS A LITTLE UNSURE). We'll be okay.

INT. FORRESTER'S APARTMENT - DAY

FORRESTER is STANDING in front of one of his BOOKSHELVES, crammed tight with hardbacks. GEOFFREY is a few feet away, scanning the titles.

FORRESTER

Robert Crawford is the guy they've got teaching you to write?

GEOFFREY

You know him?

FORRESTER

I went to school with him.

GEOFFREY

You went to school with Crawford?

FORRESTER PULLS OUT a BOOK and TOSSES it over to GEOFFREY. GEOFFREY TURNS it to see the author.

GEOFFREY

He wrote this?

FORRESTER

Three or four years after I did. Both of us had one book published.

GEOFFREY

This any good?

FORRESTER (LAUGHS)

Lemme tell you something about that book. We had this kid in our class by the name of John Campbell. Quiet kid, pretty decent writer. Crawford was always hangin' out with him,...in class, out of class. Campbell and I were always tradin' our stuff back and forth, though Crawford never knew it. Crawford...he knew where to put the words, but Campbell...Campbell knew how to write. He never had much in the way of money...

GEOFFREY isn't quite sure what FORRESTER means.

GEOFFREY

You sayin' Crawford paid Campbell to help him with his book?

FORRESTER (SERUGS)

I'm just sayin' I knew how Campbell wrote.

GEOFFREY

How did Crawford write?

FORRESTER

You ever see that movie they made about Mozart? The one that had that guy Salieri in it, always cursing God for giving Mozart the gift and not him?

GEOFFREY

Yeah.

FORRESTER

Crawford is Salieri.

GEOFFREY (SMILING)

Who's Mozart?

FORRESTER

You want me to tell you this?

GEOFFREY

Sorry.

FORRESTER

There are a lot of writers out there, some of them teachers, who know that writing is the very highest form of thinking. They know the old rules that allow for our expression of ideas, know those rules backwards and forwards. They know about spelling, about punctuation, about words, they know all of that. (PAUSE AS HE SITS DOWN IN FRONT OF AN OLD MANUAL TYPEWRITER). They just don't know how to write.

GEOFFREY

How do you know?

FORRESTER SCROLLS in a SHEET OF PAPER into the old typewriter, NODDING toward a nearby COMPUTER.

FORRESTER

Sit down.

GEOFFREY SITS in front of the MAC.

FORRESTER

Write.

GEOFFREY

Write what?

FORRESTER

Anything. Doesn't matter.

GEOFFREY

I can't...

FORRESTER

...think about something that you remember like you're still there, and then...just keep the keys moving.

FORRESTER BEGINS to TYPE...and doesn't stop, or even slow down.

GEOFFREY

What are you...

FORRESTER

I haven't decided yet.

GEOFFREY

...but you're typing, you're...

FORRESTER

...writing, like you will be when you start pushing those keys. Go.

GEOFFREY cautiously TAPS OUT a couple of words and then STOPS. FORRESTER is still TYPING.

FORRESTER

Why'd you stop?

GEOFFREY

I'm thinking.

FORRESTER

No. No thinking. You think later. Get to the bottom of the page.

GEOFFREY

But...

FORRESTER

Put some words on the paper, for crissakes.

FORRESTER is suddenly in a trance, his fingers flying at 90, maybe 100 words a minute on the old typewriter. His eyes almost GLAZE OVER as the words pile on top of each other. GEOFFREY can't do anything but STARE as the typing continues incessantly, not so much as a hint of a pause.

The words come even faster. GEOFFREY STANDS UP and WALKS BEHIND FORRESTER to watch. After a few seconds, FORRESTER finally STOPS and YANKS OUT the paper, HANDING it to GEOFFREY.

FORRESTER

You write with your heart, then you re-write with your head. If you're worried about writing the perfect page one, you'll never get to page two.

FORRESTER GETS UP and WALKS OFF toward the kitchen...

FORRESTER

You see my cigarettes around here anywhere?

GEOFFREY GAPES at what's been written.

INT. MCDONALD'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

GEOFFREY gets some CHANGE BACK from the CLERK on the other side of the counter. He GRABS a couple BAGS OF FOOD and TURNS toward the KETCHUP TABLE. HARVEY is LEANING UP against it, READING FORRESTER'S SHEET OF PAPER.

HARVEY

You wrote this?

GEOFFREY

What do you think?

HARVEY

I think your new school knows what it's doin'.

HARVEY HANDS the PAPER back to GEOFFREY and GRABS some NAPKINS.

EXT. MCDONALD'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

HARVEY and GEOFFREY PUSE OPEN the MCDONALD'S DOOR and WALK OUT onto the sidewalk, scrunching their JACKETS UP against the cold.

HARVEY

You sure you should be eatin' this stuff before your first game?

GEOFFREY

What's wrong with it?

HARVEY

I just thought they might have, you know, something different they want you to eat.

GEOFFREY

I thought you always ate here before you played? (PAUSE). Didn't you?

HARVEY REACHES IN for a handful of FRENCH FRIES.

HARVEY

You know what's the worst thing about talking to you?

GEOFFREY

What?

HARVEY

You never answer anything. (MUNCHES). Everytime you get asked smethin', you ask a question back.

GEOFFREY

That's not true man. I answer things.

HARVEY

Not unless you have to. I swear man, it makes me crazy sometimes.

GEOFFREY

So ask me smethin'...

HARVEY

I asked you whether you should be eatin' this Mcshit before your game...you come back with smethin' about what's wrong with that. I asked if you...

GEOFFREY

...man, that's just talkin'.

HARVEY

...no, talkin' is talkin'. And you don't talk.

GEOFFREY

What's wrong with askin' questions?

HARVEY SMILES at another question.

HARVEY

It just means you never have to say anything.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY LACES his shoes, slightly older than most of the ones worn by his teammates. The one thing they share though, is the nervous look on their faces.

HARTWELL is a couple of players down and LOOKS OVER at GEOFFREY for a moment, but says nothing.

INT. LOCKER ROOM HALLWAY - NIGHT

The PLAYERS CROWD TOGETHER in a BUDDLE. HARTWELL puts his hand in the middle and the other PLAYERS put their HANDS on top.

HARTWELL

Alright, this is step one tonight. Let's get it done. On three. One, two, three!...

TEAM

Mailor, go!

HARTWELL PUSHES OPEN the DOOR to the GYM.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

The LIGHTS, the CROWD, the NOISE; all suddenly bear down on the MAILOR TEAM. The BAND strikes up the fight song and the team begins to shoot layups. GEOFFREY looks nervous.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

The REFEREE TROWS the BALL into the air and the two BIG MEN for each team JUMP. The BALL is TAPPED to HARTWELL.

HARTWELL DRIBBLES the BALL up the court, the CROWD LOUDLY CHEANTING in the background. He CALLS OUT as he sets up the play.

HARTWELL

Geoffrey!!

GEOFFREY looks confused for a second. He BREAKS for the basket and HARTWELL TROWS a perfect pass. GEOFFREY LAYS IT IN and the CROWD ROARS. As he RUNS, HARTWELL HOLDS OUT his hand...

HARTWELL

Nice shot.

GEOFFREY SLAPS HIS HAND.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

I don't know what surprised me more that night...me scoring 26 points or Hartwell actually calling me by my first name. I've still got the next days newspaper clipping...eight for ten from the floor, ten for ten from the free throw line.

The GEOFFREY HIGHLIGHT SHOW CONTINUES: a SERIES of effortless baskets, one after the other.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

What was surprising is that I started putting down that line almost every night that season. And while I was putting down that kind of line on the court, I was putting down very few lines on the paper. My success on the court, and lack of it off, was fueling what Harvey had always called "the plan." I not only bought into it, I invested in it...seeing each of those shots as a step toward money that would change everything.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY PUTS ON his STREET CLOTHES, a TEAMMATE COMING BY to congratulate him.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

Of all the words William had put down on paper, I was guessing "basketball" wasn't too high on the list. I think the only thing he prob'ly knew about basketball is that it was a noun...

TEAMMATE

Nice game man.

GEOFFREY

Thanks.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

...but there was another writer named William, who had it pretty close when he wrote that stuff about this being the winter of our discontent.

INT. MAILOR HALLWAY. - DAY

CLAIRE and GEOFFREY hurriedly WALK down the hall, covering the last few strides before arriving at CRAWFORD'S CLASSROOM.

CLAIRE

D'you get your presentation turned in?

GEOFFREY

I got it in this morning.

CLAIRE

Cutting it a little close, isn't it?

CLAIRE OPENS the DOOR and HOLDS IT.

INT. CRAWFORD'S CLASS - DAY

CRAWFORD STANDS in front of his class once again, striking his familiar imposing stance as his STUDENTS settle into their seats.

CRAWFORD

People, if you please...we do have a class this morning...

GEOFFREY finds a seat, while CLAIRE takes a chair close to CRAWFORD'S DESK. CRAWFORD turns his back on the class and begins to SCRIBBLE OUT on the blackboard...

"It is an ancient Mariner, and he stoppeth one of three. By thy long grey beard and glittering eye, now wherefore stopp'st thou me?"

CRAWFORD STEPS BACK and calmly rubs the chalk from his hands.

CRAWFORD (REPEATS)

It is an ancient Mariner, and he stoppeth one of three. By thy long grey beard and glittering eye, now wherefore stopp'st thou me? (PAUSE). Anyone?

No one speaks. CRAWFORD waits...and waits.

CRAWFORD

Little more Friday morning reticence than usual, I see...

After what seems like minutes, he POINTS to a YOUNG MAN in one of the first few rows.

CRAWFORD

Mister Coleridge.

COLERIDGE looks as if death has decided to drop by for a visit...and then it grows worse.

CRAWFORD

Please. (CRAWFORD MOTIONS FOR HIM TO STAND UP). How many students would you say we have in this room today?

COLERIDGE

Um...(LOOKS AROUND)...I don't know.

CRAWFORD

Why don't you humor us with a guess.

COLERIDGE

Maybe a hundred?

CRAWFORD

A hundred. And of that hundred, there isn't one person here who knows the author of this piece? (PAUSE). I find that remarkable, don't you find that remarkable Mister Coleridge?

CRAWFORD STROLLS in front of the BLACKBOARD, softly REPEATING the words that are written out.

CRAWFORD

Well, perhaps we can back into this a bit. Mister Coleridge, in looking at this piece, what, if any, conclusions would you say we should be able to draw?

COLERIDGE slowly sinks into the panic of not having the slightest clue.

COLERIDGE

You mean about the author?

CRAWFORD

About anything.

Again...nothing.

CRAWFORD

Do any of the words strike you as unusual?

COLERIDGE hesitates some more.

CRAWFORD

Mister Coleridge, feel free to view this as the appropriate time for an answer.

COLERIDGE

Stoppeth?

CRAWFORD

Stoppeth. And why is that unusual?

COLERIDGE

It sounds old.

CRAWFORD

It does sound old, doesn't it? And do you know why it sounds old...Mister Coleridge?

COLERIDGE SHAKES HIS HEAD.

CRAWFORD

Because it is old. It is almost two hundred years old to be precise, written before you were born, before your father was born, before your father's father's father was born. (WALKS UP CLOSER TO HIM). But that does not excuse the fact that you

don't know who wrote it, now does it
Mister Coleridge?

COLERIDGE

I'm sorry sir, I...

CRAWFORD

You, of all people in this classroom,
should know who wrote that passage,
and do you know why Mister Coleridge?

CRAWFORD MOVES to within a few inches of the
frightened student.

CRAWFORD

Do you know why that is...Mister
Coleridge?

Suddenly...from a few rows back, GEOFFREY softly
WEISPERS...out of sympathy...

GEOFFREY

Just say your name man.

CRAWFORD'S HEAD SNAPS toward GEOFFREY and their
eyes meet.

CRAWFORD

I'm sorry. Did you have something to
contribute Mister Wallace?

GEOFFREY hesitates, but only for a moment.

GEOFFREY

I said he should say his name.

CRAWFORD

And why would it be helpful for
Mister Coleridge here to say his
name?

GEOFFREY

Because that's who wrote it.

There's a hush in the room. Everyone waits,
including CLAIRE, anxiously watching it all from
her seat. CRAWFORD WALKS BACK to the CHALKBOARD
and WRITES OUT beneath the passage...Samuel
Taylor Coleridge.

CRAWFORD

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1882. Very
good Mister Wallace. Perhaps your
skills do range a bit farther than
just the basketball court. Now...if
you'll all turn to page...

CRAWFORD'S WORDS FADE as COLERIDGE, humiliated,
tries to vanish into his chair. The CAMERA MOVES
CLOSER on GEOFFREY, his lower lip TREMBLING in
anger over CRAWFORD'S arrogance. FORRESTER'S
WORDS reverberate in his mind...

FORRESTER (VO)
 ...it's how far they'll go, how much
 bullshit they'll put up with, before
 they finally...

GEOFFREY BLURTS OUT...

Further. GEOFFREY

CRAWFORD LOOKS UP.

Excuse me? CRAWFORD

...don't... CLAIRE (WHISPERS)

GEOFFREY
 You said perhaps my skills range a
 bit farther than the basketball
 court. Farther relates to distance,
 further is a definition of degree.

The room grows ice cold.

CRAWFORD
 Are you challenging me on this Mister
 Wallace?

GEOFFREY
 I'm just saying that you, of all
 people in this classroom, should know
 the proper use of those terms.

CRAWFORD GLARES at GEOFFREY for several seconds
 before finally, softly, SAYING...

CRAWFORD
 If we can turn to page 234 please...

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY WALKS OUT the DOOR, wanting just to get
 out, but CLAIRE is on his heels.

CLAIRE
 What the hell was that about?

Nothing. GEOFFREY

She CATCHES UP with him.

CLAIRE
 Hold on. Don't you walk away from me
 on this.

GEOFFREY (STOPS)
 What do you want me to do Claire? Sit
 there and let him do that, let him
 run that kid down...

CLAIRE

You don't understand, he will crucify you for something like this...

GEOFFREY

What...like he did with that kid in there?

CLAIRE

That's Crawford...

GEOFFREY (FURIOUS)

...that's bullshit!

CLAIRE runs her fingers through her hair, trying to figure out what to do.

CLAIRE

Listen, I'll try and talk to him...

GEOFFREY

...yeah, you talk with him. You do that Claire.

GEOFFREY WALKS OFF, leaving CLAIRE behind.

INT. FORRESTER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

FORRESTER is WASHING the DISHES. He GLANCES OVER at GEOFFREY, SITTING at the KITCHEN TABLE.

FORRESTER

You gonna apologize?

GEOFFREY

No.

FORRESTER continues to WASH.

GEOFFREY

You think I should?

FORRESTER TURNS OFF the water and GRABS a TOWEL to DRY his hands.

FORRESTER

You beat him at his own game. Nothing to be sorry about. (A PAUSE AS HE HANGS UP THE DISH-TOWEL). That's one reason I never did much out there (NODS TO THE WINDOW). Too easy to get pissed off.

GEOFFREY (SMILES)

You really never talked to anybody ever?

FORRESTER

What the hell kind of sentence is that? You really never talked to anybody ever?

GEOFFREY

You never talked to anyone? Even when people were reading your book?

FORRESTER takes in the question, waiting to see if GEOFFREY changes it.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY LIBRARY - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT of a NEW YORK LIBRARY BUILDING, the LIGHTS SHINING off the old steps in front.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY LIBRARY - NIGHT

GEOFFREY BOUNDS up the steps, two at a time.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

I knew Forrester had enough royalty money to buy me dinner for the rest of my natural born life, but my use of the word "when" in that question had put my own wallet in danger.

INT. NEW YORK CITY LIBRARY - NIGHT

GEOFFREY WALKS UP to one of the LIBRARIANS.

LIBRARIAN

Yes?

GEOFFREY

I need to check out a book.

The WOMAN REACHES for her COMPUTER.

LIBRARIAN

...and which one are you looking for?

GEOFFREY

William Forrester. Avalon...

LIBRARIAN

...Landing. (TYPES IN THE TITLE AND TURNS BACK TO GEOFFREY). We have 54 copies at this branch, (HE STARTS TO SMILE)...but...they're all checked out.

GEOFFREY

All of them?

LIBRARIAN

I can put you on the waiting list?

EXT. CHINESE TAKE-OUT STAND - NIGHT

GEOFFREY SHELLS OUT some MONEY, HANDING it to the ELDERLY MAN who runs the STAND. The MAN GIVES HIM TWO PLATES OF STEAMING FOOD in return.

GEOFFREY

Thanks.

The OLD MAN NODS and GEOFFREY TAKES the FOOD over to the CURB, where FORRESTER WAITS. GEOFFREY SITS DOWN next to him, right on the CURBSIDE, and HANDS HIM ONE of the PLATES.

GEOFFREY

They got this contest at school.

FORRESTER

What kind of contest?

GEOFFREY

It's this...I guess they do it every year, some kind of literary thing.

FORRESTER

I entered one of those once.

GEOFFREY

Only one?

FORRESTER

Muhmm.

GEOFFREY

D'you win?

FORRESTER

Of course I won.

GEOFFREY

What? Like money or somethin'?

FORRESTER

The Pulitzer.

GEOFFREY

Did they make you show up to get it?

FORRESTER (SMILES)

No. (FLOWS INTO HIS FOOD WITH HIS CHOPSTICKS). You gonna do it?

GEOFFREY

I already turned it in...but...after this morning...

FORRESTER

What is it? Just some writing?

GEOFFREY

Yeah, but then you have to read it. In front of everybody.

FORRESTER SHAKES HIS HEAD.

FORRESTER

What the hell does that have to do with writing. Writers write so that readers can read. Let somebody else read it.

GEOFFREY

You never read your book?

FORRESTER

In public? Hell, I barely read it in private. You know those things they do?...that art-house, coffee shop reading shit?

GEOFFREY

Yeah.

FORRESTER

Y'know why they do that?

GEOFFREY

Sell books, I guess.

FORRESTER

No, they do it because they wanna get laid, that's why. They could care less about the dozen or so books they'll sign, as long as one of those books belongs to someone with a skirt.

GEOFFREY

Women will sleep with you 'cause you wrote a book?

FORRESTER

Women will sleep with you if you write a bad book. A woman reads your stuff, she'll be asking you to her place for coffee before you can finish signing your name.

GEOFFREY

Maybe she just wants to talk.

FORRESTER

Not if you're signing those books at a coffee shop, she doesn't.

GEOFFREY SMILES.

FORRESTER

Hell, the pages they read in public usually don't even belong in the book. Half of 'em slip it in on the last rewrite.

GEOFFREY

You ever sleep with someone who read your book?

FORRESTER doesn't even blink as he takes a bite.

FORRESTER

Sure.

GEOFFREY

Wow.

FORRESTER

But...it was a hell of a good book.

GEOFFREY

Did you ever get married?

FORRESTER TURNS and LOOKS AT GEOFFREY for a long moment.

FORRESTER

Not exactly a soup question, is it?

GEOFFREY

I guess not.

But instead of ignoring the question...

FORRESTER

No...I never did.

GEOFFREY

Why not? You never met anyone?

FORRESTER doesn't want to go any further.

FORRESTER

Yeah, I met plenty.

He GETS UP and WALKS OFF.

FORRESTER

I need a fork for this.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

GEOFFREY tries to balance a TEXTBOOK and a NOTEBOOK on his lap, as he SCRUNCHES into the window seat of a SCHOOL BUS. ONE of his TEAMMATES is ASLEEP next to him. GEOFFREY SCRIBBLES an answer on his notepad, but he's having trouble staying awake himself.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

We won our first fifteen games of the season. Home games, road games, all of 'em. Walsh and Hartwell seemed to be in a particularly good mood, but they'd done it before. Me? I was just tired.

INT. MAILOR HALLWAY - DAY

CLAIRE WALKS down the middle of the hallway, no one else around, her footsteps ECHOING off the wooden lockers. Without so much as a moment's pause, she SWINGS OPEN the door to one of the CLASSROOMS and quickly tells the TEACHER...

CLAIRE

I need to see Geoffrey Wallace.

GEOFFREY LOOKS UP from his DESK.

INT. MAILOR HALLWAY - DAY

CLAIRE and GEOFFREY now STRIDE together, heading toward the opposite end of the hallway.

CLAIRE

They've been in there for about an hour now.

GEOFFREY

Who's they?

CLAIRE

Crawford, Matthews and my father. He's here for the board meeting, but that's not till this afternoon.

GEOFFREY

He's in there now?

CLAIRE

Yeah.

GEOFFREY

D'you talk with him?

CLAIRE

Nope.

They come to the DOOR to the CONFERENCE ROOM and CLAIRE PULLS IT OPEN.

CLAIRE (NOT CALM)

Just stay calm...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

GEOFFREY and CLAIRE ENTER the room, which is lavishly decorated with a decades-old look. THREE PEOPLE are SEATED at the far end of the flawless ANTIQUE TABLE: CRAWFORD, PROFESSOR CARL MATTHEWS and CLAIRE'S FATHER, DR. GEORGE SPENCE. CRAWFORD MOTIONS for GEOFFREY to take a seat.

CRAWFORD

Mister Wallace...please.

SPENCE

Claire.

CLAIRE

Hello Daddy.

CRAWFORD

Ms. Spence; this will not directly concern you, but I know that you and Mister Wallace have established a certain rapport...so you're welcome to stay if you wish.

CLAIRE (NERVOUS)

Thank you.

Both GEOFFREY and CLAIRE SIT DOWN at the table, next to each other, but a few seats away from the rest.

CRAWFORD

Mister Wallace, let me introduce you to everyone here. Professor Matthews I know you're familiar with, and this is Doctor George Spence, who serves as a member of our board. (PAUSE). The three of us this morning have been reviewing your presentation piece which you turned in a few days back. (PAUSE). You happy with it?

GEOFFREY

I liked it.

CRAWFORD

I can see why. In fact, Professor Matthews and I are in agreement that it's easily the most impressive piece that was handed in. We feel that with merely an adequate oral presentation, which I'm sure you would be capable of, it would, in our estimation, easily win this year's competition.

CLAIRE REACHES OUT to SQUEEZE GEOFFREY'S ARM, but GEOFFREY doesn't SMILE.

CRAWFORD

Mister Wallace, any reason why you don't share Ms. Spence's response to that news?

Still no reaction from GEOFFREY. CLAIRE looks confused; quickly GLANCING at GEOFFREY, who's looking at the table, and then her FATHER, who calmly looks at her, not blinking.

CLAIRE

What's going on?

CRAWFORD

Perhaps it's because Mister Wallace here already knows what we've been able to determine. (PAUSE). Is that the case Mister Wallace?

CLAIRE

Determine what?

CRAWFORD

...that you stole the material for your presentation.

GEOFFREY

No...

CRAWFORD

Isn't that true, Mister Wallace...You stole it...

GEOFFREY

...no...

CRAWFORD

...stole it. Not word for word, but close enough...

GEOFFREY

...I didn't steal anything!

CLAIRE (FURIOUS)

How dare you...how dare you come...

SPENCE (FIRMLY)

Claire...

CLAIRE STOPS, not prepared to take on her father quite yet, and SITS BACK DOWN. CRAWFORD SCOOTs a COUPLE of PHOTOCOPIES across the table.

CRAWFORD

This is your piece, correct?

GEOFFREY slowly NODS. CRAWFORD SCOOTs a COUPLE MORE PHOTOCOPIES toward both GEOFFREY and CLAIRE.

CRAWFORD

And if you could read the highlighted portion please.

GEOFFREY and CLAIRE READ, but say nothing.

CRAWFORD

You having trouble finding it?

GEOFFREY SHAKES HIS HEAD.

CRAWFORD

It's the "New Yorker," 1959. Written by William Forrester. The William Forrester. (PAUSE). I actually went to school with him, several years before he wrote his book. And long before he wrote an essay that very few people know was ever published. Except, apparently, for you.

CLAIRE slowly DROPS the PAPERS toward the table.

CRAWFORD

...as of this morning Mister Wallace, your entry in this year's competition has been formally withdrawn. I will be submitting a complete review of this matter to the full board at next month's meeting, at which time they will consider possible sanctions, which may include the revocation of your scholarship to this institution. You will, of course, be given the opportunity to appeal...should you choose to do so.

There is only silence.

CRAWFORD

Young man, plagiarism is something we take very seriously at Mailor-Caliow. (CRAWFORD SLOWLY STANDS UP). Just because you're struggling with your own words, does not give you the liberty to use someone else's.

INT. CAB - DAY

CLAIRE and GEOFFREY are in the back seat. CLAIRE GAZES straight ahead while GEOFFREY, a look of pure dejection on his face, SITS opposite her. Nothing's said for a moment,...until...

CLAIRE

So where'd you find it?

GEOFFREY!

I've never seen it...

CLAIRE

C'mon Geoffrey, (PAUSE), some of the things in there...(HER WORDS TRAIL OFF, ANGRY AND HURT).

Another LONG PAUSE.

CLAIRE

...he didn't need much...and now he's got this.

GEOFFREY looks worse.

CLAIRE

You're gonna have to tell your mother when you get home.

GEOFFREY

Pull over.

The CAB DRIVER PULLS OVER and GEOFFREY FLINGS OPEN the DOOR before the CAB even stops. He barely makes it out the door before he THROWS UP near the curb. The handful of PEDESTRIANS scatter out of the way, a look of disgust on their faces. CLAIRE GETS OUT and puts a hand on his shoulder.

CLAIRE

Go ahead and sit down. C'mon...

He SHAKES HIS HEAD as the CAB DRIVER LOOKS OUT.

CAB DRIVER

He alright?

CLAIRE

Yeah, just give us a couple minutes.

She SITS DOWN on the curb, a safe distance from the mess, while GEOFFREY keeps his eyes firmly on the asphalt below, hands still on his knees.

CLAIRE

Listen, why don't I talk to her...

GEOFFREY (SOFTLY)

...it was Forrester.

CLAIRE

What?

GEOFFREY

I said it was Forrester.

CLAIRE

I know it was Forrester...

GEOFFREY

No. (WIPES HIS MOUTH). You asked me that one day who wrote that stuff on my paper. (PAUSE). It was Forrester. (CLAIRE GAPES). It's been Forrester. (PAUSE). I've been talking to him.

CLAIRE can't respond for a moment.

CLAIRE

No one talks to William Forrester.

GEOFFREY isn't willing to argue, but the look on his face convinces CLAIRE it's true.

EXT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

The CAB PULLS in front of GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT BUILDING and GEOFFREY slowly GETS OUT.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

The cab fare from Mador all the way to Brooklyn wasn't cheap even when traffic was good, but by the time I got done telling Claire everything, we'd racked up a fare that even her father was gonna notice.

CLAIRE GETS OUT on her side and LEANS on the roof of the CAB while GEOFFREY, still looking more than a bit shaky, CLIMBS the CONCRETE STEPS.

CLAIRE

You sure you don't want me to stay for awhile?

GEOFFREY

Naw, I'm alright.

CLAIRE

Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY

What?

CLAIRE

If Crawford knows you've been working with Forrester...might help explain a few things.

GEOFFREY
I promised him I wouldn't.

CLAIRE (NODS)
Might be worth askin' him.

GEOFFREY
I'll think about it.

GEOFFREY UNLOCKS the OUTSIDE APARTMENT DOOR.

CLAIRE
Hey? (GEOFFREY TURNS). Is he amazing?

GEOFFREY
Yeah. (HE OPENS THE DOOR, BUT LOOKS BACK AT HER). Thanks, y'know...for...

CLAIRE
Your welcome.

GEOFFREY GOES INSIDE and CLOSES THE DOOR, leaving CLAIRE to only softly MUTTER...

CLAIRE (TO HERSELF)
Unbelievable.

INT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

GEOFFREY and JANICE quietly, too quietly, EAT their dinner. GEOFFREY'S having trouble meeting his MOM'S concerned expression.

JANICE
We don't have money for an attorney.

GEOFFREY
We won't need any attorney.

JANICE
Old white men don't let young black kids make a fool out of them.

GEOFFREY
That's not what this is about.

GEOFFREY tries to avoid things by STANDING UP and REACHING for her plate.

GEOFFREY
I'll get dishes.

JANICE
We'll get 'em later.

GEOFFREY ignores her and PICKS UP her PLATE.

JANICE
Where do they say you got the story?

GEOFFREY
It doesn't matter. (HE PLACES THE DISHES ON THE COUNTER).

JANICE

It doesn't matter? Geoffrey...we're talking about you losing this whole thing, every bit of it, (PAUSE)...and that doesn't matter to you?

GEOFFREY

Not as much as it does to you.

JANICE

You're not going back to Franklin.

GEOFFREY

I don't belong out there.

JANICE

Why not? Those tests you took...

GEOFFREY (CUTS IN)

...man, I don't wanna hear about those tests! All I ever hear are these tests...that I got this score here, so I gotta do this! Or I got this score over here...

JANICE

But you did so well...

GEOFFREY

...so what how I did! (PAUSE). All anyone ever says is how I did.

JANICE

You know what I think it is? I think you're scared you are better than those kids out there. And if you play their game, you can't play your game anymore.

GEOFFREY

That's bullshit...

She SLAPS HIM.

JANICE

Don't you ever talk that way to me. You understand?

Silence.

JANICE (CONT.)

All gotta be part of this plan of yours, doesn't it? Can't have nuthin' get in the way of that. Well, lemme tell you something...your plan may be the only thing you got left.

GEOFFREY

What's that s'posed to mean?

EXT. FRANKLIN BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

It's late at night, only a dim overhead light makes it possible for GEOFFREY to see the basket. He TAKES SHOT after SHOT, all of them finding the bottom of the net.

INT. FORRESTER'S APARTMENT - DAY

GEOFFREY'S slouched on FORRESTER'S worn-out old COUCH, flipping through some age-old MAGAZINE. FORRESTER can be heard in the kitchen rummaging around in the FREEZER.

GEOFFREY

You were out of ice last drink.

INTER-CUT with FORRESTER in the KITCHEN. He's HOLDING an ICE-TRAY and gently PUSHES his finger into one of the soon-to-be ice cubes. His finger PUNCHES THROUGH...

FORRESTER

Ow!...son of a bitch!

GEOFFREY

You just checked those.

FORRESTER (MUMBLES)

Damn it...

FORRESTER POURS himself a SCOTCH that's not on the rocks.

GEOFFREY

So when you gonna tell me why you never wrote a second book?

Nothing from the other room.

GEOFFREY

D'you hear me?

FORRESTER MOVES into the DOORWAY, SLURPING away.

FORRESTER

So where'd this sudden streak of curiosity come from?

GEOFFREY

Well...I figure if you've had enough of those to keep pushin' your finger into ice trays...

FORRESTER WALKS IN, SITS DOWN in a SMALL CHAIR.

FORRESTER

I said everything I wanted to say.

GEOFFREY (LAUGHS)

You wrote that book fifty years ago and you say you never had anything else you had to put down on paper?

FORRESTER

Not for any publisher, I didn't.

GEOFFREY

S'crazy man.

FORRESTER

A lot of women go through childbirth and swear they'll never go through it again.

GEOFFREY

Yeah...well most of 'em do. Few years go by and they forget all that.

FORRESTER

They don't forget anything.

GEOFFREY

Yeah, but the money...

FORRESTER

...there was plenty of money from the first book.

GEOFFREY

How much?

FORRESTER (DRINKS)

Enough.

GEOFFREY

Must be nice. (PAUSE). Havin' enough.

EXT. CONEY ISLAND RESTAURANT - NIGHT

It's now DARK, but the STREETLIGHTS SHINE DOWN on GEOFFREY and FORRESTER as they WALK ALONG the SIDEWALK. They're in an old, not quite run-down neighborhood that looks like it hasn't changed in years. FORRESTER looks like he's had five glasses of scotch.

GEOFFREY

We've been walkin' for like an hour.

FORRESTER

You know, when I was your age...

FORRESTER OPENS the DOOR to a SMALL RESTAURANT, the WORN-OUT SIGN above reads only CONEY ISLAND.

GEOFFREY

...never mind. (HE GOES INSIDE).

INT. CONEY ISLAND RESTAURANT - NIGHT

FORRESTER WALKS IN, GEOFFREY behind him. Only two or three CUSTOMERS are inside the joint, which has old PHOTOS of the DODGERS and other BASEBALL GREATS all over the WALLS. A SHORT MAN in his 60's, maybe early 70's, is behind the counter.

FORRESTER

Hey Frank.

FRANK

Hey Bill. Been a couple weeks.

FORRESTER

Yeah. We'll be in the back, okay?

FRANK

Sure.

INT. CONEY ISLAND RESTAURANT - NIGHT

FORRESTER and GEOFFREY SIT DOWN in an OLD BOOTH with SEATS that look like they should have had new covers put on decades ago.

GEOFFREY

For a guy that a lot of people think is dead, you get around.

FORRESTER

They take care of me here.

FRANK WALKS UP.

FRANK

Been awhile since you brought company in Bill.

FORRESTER

Frank Nudo, this is Geoffrey Wallace. (PAUSE AS HE LOOKS AT GEOFFREY). He's a friend of mine.

FRANK

Good to meet you Geoffrey.

FORRESTER GLANCES at GEOFFREY.

FORRESTER

You ever had a coney from this side of Brooklyn?

GEOFFREY

-Naw. I had some other ones though...

FORRESTER (SMILES)

Bring him a double with, a side of mac, and something to drink. Whatta you want?

GEOFFREY

Water's good. What's a double with?

FORRESTER

And I'll take a double with, you still got that mustard?

FRANK

Sure do.

FORRESTER

...and a side of mac. And a beer.

FRANK WALKS OFF and FORRESTER TURNS to GEOFFREY.

FORRESTER

Double with. Double coney island with everything on it. And don't worry about the beer, we're still walkin'.

GEOFFREY

I wasn't sayin' anything.

FORRESTER LOOKS OVER at GEOFFREY, with a look of real affection.

FORRESTER

I usually don't have this many.

GEOFFREY NOTICES all the PHOTOS on the WALL.

GEOFFREY

You know these guys?

FORRESTER

Yeah. (HE POINTS). There's Newcombe, Reese...Koufax over here.

GEOFFREY

Any Yankees?

FORRESTER

Not at this table.

GEOFFREY

You're like a Dodger lifer, right?

GEOFFREY PEERS closer, and sees a PHOTO that catches his attention.

GEOFFREY

Who's this guy?

In the middle of all the BASEBALL PHOTOS is an old PHOTO of a WORLD WAR TWO SOLDIER. FRANK COMES to the table with the SALADS, but says nothing as FORRESTER calmly WATCHES GEOFFREY'S EXPRESSION.

FORRESTER

That's my brother.

GEOFFREY

Your brother?

FORRESTER

That's Robert. He was a few years older than me.

GEOFFREY (PEERS)

Doesn't look like you.

FORRESTER

We used to come here after the games, when Frank's dad was still runnin'

the place. We'd sit right in this booth. Get double with's'.

GEOFFREY

What happened to him?

FRANK ARRIVES with the BEER.

FORRESTER

Thanks Frank.

FORRESTER takes a long SIP, never breaking his GAZE at GEOFFREY.

FORRESTER

He was 22, which would have made me about your age. Maybe a little older. Robert had been overseas for about three years, he was part of the 116th regiment. All those guys that couldn't wait to get over there, well, Robert didn't mind waiting. He figured the longer he was here, the quicker he'd be back. But, like everyone else, he got called up, hell, seemed everybody was gettin' called up. Even Ted Williams was over there.

GEOFFREY

I read that somewhere.

FORRESTER

So it's June of '44 and every night we listen to the radio about how we're startin' to kick the shit out of everybody. And all I'm thinkin' about is that maybe we'll get a '45 baseball season with real players and that Robert and I...well, that we'd be back, y'know...

FORRESTER'S VOICE TRAILS OFF for a minute. He TAKES another SIP.

FORRESTER

So we're listenin' to, something, I can't even remember...and this guy comes on ...says we invaded Normandy. Didn't say who, just that pretty much everyone who was around was headin' for the beach. (PAUSE). That first day, (SHAKES HIS HEAD), nobody knew anything. Mom was a mess.

FRANK shows up with the CONEYS, but knows not to stick around.

FORRESTER

Go ahead, 'fore it gets cold.

GEOFFREY can't eat a bite.

FORRESTER

We found out couple weeks later that Robert didn't make it. Nothing else, just that he was part of "day one." (LONG PAUSE). 'Bout a year later, we get this knock on the door from one of the guys who'd been with Robert. John something. Anyway, John had made it up Omaha. Y'know you see all those pictures of Utah Beach and Gold Beach and how bad it was? It was nuthin' compared to what those guys, to what Robert, saw at Omaha. So John...he tells us they'd been running through these drills for weeks before they actually hit the beach. And they had these models, real models of the beach, with all the buildings and the trees, s'posed to be everything, even this church on the hillside. And they tell 'em they shouldn't study the buildings too much, 'cause the air attack before's gonna take out all that stuff. Said when they got there they'd be able to walk ashore.

FORRESTER STOPS for a moment.

FORRESTER (CONT.)

So John says it started to rain and they were within a hundred yards or so of the beach and there are more "Hail Mary's" goin' on than you'd hear on Easter Sunday. And the captain stands up and gets everyone ready for the door to drop on this ship. And once that door went down, you went. If you stayed, you got shot. So Robert's standin' there and the door goes down...

FORRESTER TAKES another SIP.

FORRESTER (CONT.)

...and all the buildings are there, the ones they said would be gone. Even the church is standing straight up, its steeples...and the grass is green...(FADES OFF). And John says this one guy yells out, "where's the fuckin' air corps?"

FORRESTER SMILES.

FORRESTER

Turns out there were too many clouds, and the B-17's...not a single bomb hit the beach, not even the bluff. (PAUSE). And at that moment, every man on that ship knew he was dead. And Robert went...

FORRESTER STOPS, a hitch of EMOTION in his voice.

FORRESTER

You think about that...next time you feel pressure sittin' in front of a typewriter.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT of MADISON SQUARE GARDEN.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The CROWD and the SCHOOL BANDS are already LOUD.
The PA ANNOUNCER BOOMS OUT...

PA ANNOUNCER (VO)

New York's Madison Square Garden welcomes you to tonight's opening round games of the state basketball championship...

INT. LOCKER ROOM RESTROOM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY is STANDING in front of a URINAL, as HARTWELL COMES IN and takes the one next to him.

HARTWELL

First game in the Garden...most guys usually too nervous to take a piss.

GEOFFREY doesn't say anything, just FLUSHES, LOOKS at HARTWELL, and WALKS OUT.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN COURT - NIGHT

The starting lineups are being introduced by the PA ANNOUNCER. The MAILOR TEAM has formed a narrow tunnel for the STARTERS to run through.

PA ANNOUNCER (VO)

...at guard, a six foot one freshman, Geoffrey Wallace!

GEOFFREY RUNS OUT to center court, SLAPPING the HANDS of his TEAMMATES as he goes.

PA ANNOUNCER (VO)

...and at guard, a six foot senior, John Hartwell.

HARTWELL RUNS OUT. QUICK CAMERA CUT to show his FATHER in the STANDS. The ENTIRE MAILOR TEAM PUTS their BANDS TOGETHER.

HARTWELL

Three nights of work and we're state champions. Okay?

TEAM

Alright!

HARTWELL

On three...one, two, three...

TEAM

Mailor, go!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN COURT - NIGHT

The TEAM BUDDLES around WALSH.

WALSH

Alright, these guys are gonna be nervous, so we're gonna press 'em right out of the gate. Don't let 'em breathe till the first time-out, okay? (THE TEAM NODS). Alright, let's get it done!

The STARTERS GET UP, TOCK IN their JERSEYS one last time, and head for center court.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

JANICE and HARVEY are in the CROWD, CHEERING for GEOFFREY as he HEADS ONTO the court.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The BALL is TOSSED into the air, TIPPED, and the game begins. MAILOR'S OPPONENT gets the BALL and the PLAYER that has it is immediately SWARMED by both HARTWELL and GEOFFREY.

The PLAYER JUMPS and TROWS a PASS over them, but the BALL is STOLEN by a MAILOR PLAYER, who STREAKS down the court and LAYS IT IN the basket.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

WALSH APPLAUDS from the sideline.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The GAME CONTINUES; a MONTAGE of CRISP PLAYS by the MAILOR TEAM. HARTWELL SCORES, GEOFFREY SCORES, the TEAM SCORES.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The MAILOR TEAM COMES to the sideline during a time-out. The STARTERS are given WATER, while WALSH KNEELS in front of them.

WALSH

Turner and Wallace, you're back in in five minutes. We got a long game, so let's pace ourselves, okay?

The TEAM GOES BACK onto the court. WALSH SLAPS GEOFFREY on the knee.

WALSH

Nice job.

GEOFFREY SLURPS from a WATER BOTTLE.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The PLAYERS are RESTING at their lockers, the SOUND of the GARDEN coming through very faintly. WALSHE SAYS to no one in particular...

WALSHE

...we come out in the second half just like we did in the first. First few minutes are critical. Don't give these guys any reason to think they can stay with us.

GEOFFREY GLANCES over at HARTWELL, who's FATHER is SITTING next to him, lecturing.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The GAME RESUMES with HARTWELL TOSSING a HIGH PASS to GEOFFREY, who GRABS IT, and SLAMS IT into the HOOP.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

JANICE and HARVEY BREAK into APPLAUSE.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The TEAM DROPS BACK on defense, the look of confidence growing on the MAJOR PLAYERS' FACES.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

...BACK AND FORTH...the TEAMS PUSH each other...

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

ONE of the OPPONENT PLAYERS DRIBBLES close to HARTWELL. Now brimming with arrogance, HARTWELL MUTTERS...

HARTWELL

It's over man...

The PLAYER, ANGRY, BLISTERS past HARTWELL and HITS a short SHOT.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

HARTWELL BRINGS the BALL back up the court and TROWS IT to GEOFFREY, who's coming off a screen. GEOFFREY SHOOTS...and MISSES.

The OPPONENT GRABS the REBOUND and LOOPS a LONG PASS to a wide open TEAMMATE, who makes an easy score.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

WALSHE

Time-out!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The MAILOR TEAM GATHERS around WALSH.

WALSH

What the hell's goin' on out there?!
We got too much time left to be
talkin' to their players, understand
me? (LOOKS DIRECTLY AT HARTWELL). You
understand me?

HARTWELL

Yeah...

WALSH

Now let's play the game, alright?

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The TIME-OUT is over, but when the game RESUMES,
there is a subtle difference in momentum. The
OPPOSING TEAM is suddenly HITTING several of its
SHOTS, forcing some turnovers. MAILOR, for the
first time in the game, looks vulnerable.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

WALSH LOOKS UP at the SCOREBOARD.

Mailor 62 Creston 57 Time - 2:46

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

ONE of the CRESTON PLAYERS SHOOTS...and SCORES.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

WALSH CALLS OUT to GEOFFREY...

WALSH

Geoffrey! Down low!

GEOFFREY DRIBBLES and PASSES it to his TEAMMATE,
DOWN LOW. The TEAMMATE TURNS, SHOOTS, and MISSES.
A CRESTON PLAYER REBOUNDS.

GEOFFREY

Shit.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The CRESTON POINT GUARD sets up the play, getting
NO TALK from any of the MAILOR PLAYERS.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

Mailor 62. Creston 59 Time - 1:18

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

A CRESTON PLAYER SHOOTS...and MISSES, but before
anyone from MAILOR can get the BALL, a CRESTON
PLAYER GRABS IT and PUTS IT in the HOOP. The
GARDEN CROWD ERUPTS.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

A MAILOR PLAYER TAKES the BALL out of bounds, but can't find anyone to throw the ball to; everyone is covered tightly.

HARTWELL

Throw it in! Throw it in!

WALSH

Time-out!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The MAILOR PLAYER YELLS...

MAILOR PLAYER

Time-out!

The REFEREE BLOWS his WEISTLE...

REFEREE

Too late. Five second violation, we're goin' this way!

He SIGNALS that CRESTON has the BALL and the NOISE from the CRESTON FANS is DEAFENING.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT .

Mailor 62 Creston 61 Time - :44

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The MAILOR PLAYERS come to the sideline, SHAKEN by the CRESTON RALLY. WALSH STEPS IN to try and calm them...

WALSH

This is still our game, okay? We make a stop here and they'll have to put us on the line. And it's over when that happens. Do...not....lose your composure here! They're the ones that have to score, not us. Don't foul them. Force them to make a shot.

The PLAYERS NOD.

WALSH

Now listen. If they score, we're not calling a time-out. We want to get the ball right back in. (HE LEANS IN). If that happens, I want only Hartwell or Wallace to touch the ball. Anybody else gets it and they'll foul you. Just Hartwell and Wallace, nobody else, understand?

The PLAYERS NOD.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

A CRESTON PLAYER INBOUNDS the BALL to a TEAMMATE.
The CROWD NOISE, THE DIN, OVERWHEELMS the SOUND of
the GAME BELOW. The CLOCK TICKS...

...36...35...34...

GEOFFREY and HARTWELL are tenacious with their
defense, not giving an inch...

...26...25...24...

The CRESTON PLAYER tries to DRIVE, but can't.

...16...15...14...

He RISES for an off-balance shot...

...10...9...8...

and the SHOT FALLS INTO the BASKET.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

GEOFFREY PLEADS for the BALL from his TEAMMATE as
the CRESTON PLAYERS and CROWD start to CELEBRATE.
The TEAMMATE QUICKLY PASSES the BALL to GEOFFREY.

...7...6...

GEOFFREY SPRINTS for a last second shot...

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

HARVEY SCREAMS...

HARVEY

Shoot it!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

...5...4...

GEOFFREY SAILS PAST the halfcourt line, HARTWELL
YELLING for the BALL...

HARTWELL

Geoffrey!

...but there's no time to throw a pass...

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

GEOFFREY PUSHES the BALL straight to the hoop,
not content with a JUMP SHOT...

...3...2...

...the BALL LEAVES his HAND as GEOFFREY is
JOSTLED, it seems, by the entire CRESTON TEAM.

...1...

...it HITS THE RIM...

...BZZZZZZZZZZZZ...

...and the SHOT...ROLLS OFF the RIM. The CRESTON CROWD ROARS...but...

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

A WHISTLE has BLOWN. The REFEREE WAVES his ARMS and SAYS...

REFEREE

Twenty-four. On the air. Two shots.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

Now both CROWDS REACT; the MAILOR CROWD, and TEAM, CHEERING LOUDLY. The CRESTON COACH...

CRESTON COACH

Oh...no! No foul, that was no foul!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The REFEREES CLEAR the PLAYERS OFF the COURT, all EXCEPT for GEOFFREY.

Mailor 62 Creston 63 Time - :00

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The HEAD REFEREE HANDS GEOFFREY the BALL. He's all alone on the court, BOTH CROWDS CHEERING at a FEVER PITCH.

REFEREE

Take as much time as you want son.

GEOFFREY BOUNCES the BALL...once, twice, stopping after the second bounce as he always does. He calmly SHOOTS the FREE THROW...and MISSES!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The NOISE from the CRESTON CROWD VIBRATES through the arena.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

JANICE CLASPS her HANDS to her lips.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

GEOFFREY shows no reaction, calmly TAKING the BALL for his second free throw. He BOUNCES once, twice, then STOPS. He SHOOTS...and MISSES AGAIN.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The CRESTON CROWD SURGES onto the court, MOBING the PLAYERS. The MAILOR TEAM stares in disbelief, HARTWELL with more than a measure of contempt. GEOFFREY KNEELS at the line, STUNNED.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

GEOFFREY is in the SHOWER, the WATER SPILLING over his head. He's all alone.

EXT. MAILOR TEAM BUS - NIGHT

GEOFFREY is the last one to get on. He LOOKS at his TEAMMATES, who look back, but don't say a word. He WALKS DOWN the aisle, trying to find a seat and sees one NEXT TO HARTWELL; but HARTWELL, without even LOOKING AT HIM, SAYS...

HARTWELL

Back of the bus boy. Remember?

GEOFFREY WALKS to the BACK OF THE BUS and SITS, all alone, SCOOTING OVER to LOOK OUT the window.

INT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

GEOFFREY OPENS the FRONT DOOR and PLOPS his BAG on the FLOOR. EXHAUSTED, he WALKS UP the stairs. His MOTHER, in a bathrobe, COMES OUT of her bedroom and waits for him.

JANICE

Geoffrey...

GEOFFREY

Not tonight Mom. Okay?

JANICE

But honey...

He DISAPPEARS into his room, softly CLOSING the DOOR behind him.

INT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

JANICE SITS all by herself at the small DINING TABLE, quietly SPOONING a CUP OF COFFEE. There is not a sound...until...

...the DOOR BELL RINGS.

JANICE PULLS HERSELF UP, MUTTERING to herself as she LOOKS at the CLOCK. She PUSHES the BUTTON by the FRONT DOOR.

JANICE

Yes?

There's nothing for a second...but then, an unmistakable VOICE RESPONDS...

FORRESTER (OC)

Mrs. Wallace?

JANICE (TIRED)

It's almost eleven. Who is this?

INT. APARTMENT STAIRWAY - NIGHT

JANICE DESCENDS the STAIRS, a mix of caution and fascination on her face. FORRESTER is politely standing a few steps away from the glass along the side of the main door.

JANICE MOVES CLOSER to the WINDOW and LOOKS OUT. She REACHES IN her BATHROBE POCKET and PULLS OUT a BENT-COVERED OLD COPY OF "AVALON LANDING" and TURNS to the BACK. She compares the MAN on the FRONT STEP to the MAN on the BACK COVER. They are the same.

INT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CAMERA CLOSE on a CUP OF COFFEE being POURED.

JANICE

I'm surprised he hasn't told you what's been going on at school.

FORRESTER

He'll tell me. Kids that age need to sort things out for themselves before they let us start workin' it. (JANICE STOPS POURING). Thank you. (HE SIPS). You worried about him?

JANICE

After what happened tonight?

FORRESTER

You remember when you were fourteen?

JANICE (SMILING)

Some of it.

FORRESTER

Most of the serious mistakes we make, we'll make after we're fourteen. The mistakes he's making right now? He won't even remember he made 'em a few years from now. So...you just let him make 'em.

JANICE

He won't say it, but he wanted to do well in that contest.

FORRESTER

Mailor's an old school.

JANICE

Which means?

GEOFFREY

Sometimes old schools do things their own way.

JANICE SIPS and NODS.

FORRESTER

Your son is a very talented young man, Mrs. Wallace.

JANICE

How talented?

FORRESTER

As a writer?

JANICE

Mhmm.

FORRESTER

Someone asked that question about me a long time ago, and the person who was asked, who, by the way, was the right person to ask, made the mistake of answering it. (PAUSE). I think I'll do your son a favor...and not make that mistake.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The BACON SIZZLES as JANICE KEEPS an EYE on her SON, who is QUIETLY EATING some cereal. She thinks about saying something, but doesn't.

INT. MAILOR BOARDROOM - DAY

A HALF DOZEN or so ELDERLY MEN SURROUND the CONFERENCE ROOM TABLE, CRAWFORD at one end.

BOARD MEMBER #1

...and is there any doubt in your mind that this may be nothing more than a coincidence?

CRAWFORD

The text is not an exact match, but it's highly unlikely that anyone, especially a student this young, could come up with such a consistent style on his own.

SPENCE

Has he disputed the accusation in any way?

CRAWFORD

No.

BOARD MEMBER #2

You understand,...Mr. Crawford, that any recommendation we make, against this type of student, will put us in a most uncomfortable position.

CRAWFORD

Mister Chairman, this should not in any way be seen as a matter of racial or any other type of discrimination. This is merely a case of a student breaking the rules of this school.

The BOARD MEMBER NODS. CLAIRE'S FATHER sits a few seats down, very quietly, looking very unsure as to what the BOARD should do next.

EXT. MAILOR CAMPUS - DAY

GEOFFREY SITS ALONE on the EDGE of one of the CAMPUS FOUNTAINS, half-heartedly trying to read a book, whole-heartedly trying to avoid everyone.

CLAIRE WALKS UP.

CLAIRE

So...life pretty much over?

GEOFFREY (SMILES)

Pretty much.

CLAIRE

Walsh got the assistant's job over at Princeton.

GEOFFREY

Yeah?

CLAIRE

Kinda makes you wonder what would have happened if you would've made those shots, doesn't it?

GEOFFREY actually LAUGHS somewhat, which CLAIRE welcomes, but there's quickly an awkward silence.

CLAIRE

So what are you gonna do?

GEOFFREY

I was thinkin' I'd go back.

CLAIRE (NODS)

Is that 'cause you want to?

GEOFFREY

Doesn't matter what I want.

INT. FORRESTER'S APARTMENT - DAY

FORRESTER POURS himself a DRINK, FLOPPING some ICE CUBES in after the fact. Some of it SLOSHES OUT. GEOFFREY'S SITTING nearby.

FORRESTER

...so you dropped out of the contest?
(SHAKES HIS HAND). Damn it.

GEOFFREY

You're s'posed to put those in first.

FORRESTER has an agitated tone to his voice.

FORRESTER

...I don't need any help when it comes to drinking.

GEOFFREY stays quiet.

FORRESTER

So what happened?

GEOFFREY

I told you.

FORRESTER

Tell me again.

GEOFFREY

I didn't think it was good enou...

FORRESTER (CUTS IN)

...Christ Geoffrey, you're fourteen years old. You got another thirty years before you can even think about bullshit'n me.

GEOFFREY

...well, what do you want me to say?

FORRESTER

I want you to tell me what really happened with that piece of paper you turned in...

GEOFFREY

I couldn't think of anything!

FORRESTER

Fourteen years old and the well's dry? Is that it? Do you have any idea why I let you sit here in this place every day! You think it's because I'm lonely?!

GEOFFREY

Maybe.

FORRESTER PAUSES for a moment, not sure if he's furious or whether GEOFFREY'S right.

FORRESTER

Get over on that typewriter...

GEOFFREY

No...I'm not doin' that again...

FORRESTER literally SHOVS HIM toward it.

FORRESTER

Sit down and write.

GEOFFREY

Man, don't you push me...

FORRESTER

Write, goddamn it!

FORRESTER'S so angry, he SPILLS most of his DRINK onto his sweater.

FORRESTER

Shit.

GEOFFREY

Maybe I should do this later...

FORRESTER

Crawford, I swear...he is a pompous, an...overbearing,...a....a...

GEOFFREY (SITS)

Write it like you'd say it...

FORRESTER

He's an asshole! A textbook arrogant, condescending asshole,...(PAUSE AS HE EXHALES WITH PURE ANGER). And I'd tell him that too.

GEOFFREY

You'd talk to him?

FORRESTER

You...should be writing.

GEOFFREY

Writing what?

FORRESTER

Writing anything.

GEOFFREY

I told you, I can't think of anyth...

FORRESTER

You are pathetic, you know that? You are absolutely pathetic. Why the hell I ever opened that door a few months ago...(PAUSE). I'm gonna leave this room and when I get back you will have a thousand words on something when I get back, anything.

GEOFFREY

A thousand words? How long you gonna be gone?

FORRESTER'S PUTTING his COAT ON and is already PULLING OPEN the DOOR.

FORRESTER

And not on the computer. (POINTS TO THE DECADES OLD TYPEWRITER).

FORRESTER SLAMS the DOOR. GEOFFREY SHAKES his head and LOOKS at the old machine. He examines the side for a power switch, but obviously can't find one. For several seconds he STARES BLANKLY at the SHEET and then PUSHES one of the KEYS. He FLINCHES at the KEYSTRIKE.

EXT. FORRESTER'S APARTMENT - DAY

It's late in the afternoon, the shadows getting longer on the brick walls outside. GEOFFREY is seen through the window, TYPING at a furious pace, reminiscent of the days before his writing block.

INT. FORRESTER'S APARTMENT - DAY

The DOOR OPENS and FORRESTER COMES IN, struggling a bit to PULL the keys out of the lock. He FLIPS on the LIGHTS.

FORRESTER

Geoffrey?

...but there is nothing. FORRESTER WALKS OVER to the old TYPEWRITER and sees a brief HANDWRITTEN NOTE on the top.

I'll be at 54th and 12th. Please come as soon as you get back.

FORRESTER LOOKS BELOW and SEES, still tucked in the roller, a SINGLE SHEET of PAPER that is packed with words; all of it single-spaced. He PULLS IT OUT and NOTICES TWO MORE SHEETS nearby.

The look on his face, as he begins to read it, is almost one of reverence. After several seconds, he TOUCHES the page with his HAND, checking to see if it's real.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY WAITS inside one of the TICKET BOOTHS at YANKEE STADIUM, the only one with the LIGHTS TURNED ON.

FORRESTER WALKS UP and SHRUGS his shoulders as if to say...I'm here. GEOFFREY SMILES and WALKS OUT of the TICKET BOOTH, CLOSING the DOOR behind him.

GEOFFREY

I didn't know if you were comin'.

FORRESTER

This isn't my neighborhood.

GEOFFREY STARTS to WALK along the side of the BUILDING and FORRESTER FOLLOWS.

GEOFFREY (SMILING)

That a little fear I hear from the world's greatest living author?...who may lose part of that title if he hangs out around here too long.

FORRESTER

I've been here before.

GEOFFREY

Remember when I first met you and you

were sayin' all that stuff 'bout how
if you shot me nobody'd ask any
questions?

FORRESTER

Yeah?

GEOFFREY

Well...folks in this neighborhood
aren't exactly the curious type.

The PAIR APPROACH a shadowy GATED AREA to the
park. The OUTLINE of a SINGLE PERSON can be made
out, WAITING in front. FORRESTER HESITATES.

GEOFFREY

It's my brother.

They REACH HARVEY, who SWINGS OPEN the GATE.

HARVEY

How much time you want?

GEOFFREY

Just a few minutes.

HARVEY gives FORRESTER a quick once over.

HARVEY

Hey.

All THREE GO IN and HARVEY LOCKS UP.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM FIELD - NIGHT

A COUPLE of FLASHLIGHT BEAMS SHINE across the
PLAYING FIELD.

GEOFFREY (VO)

Hey Harvey? C'you turn the lights on
for us?

HARVEY (VO)

The big lights? This ain't like no
movie where they just flip some
switch and everything comes on. We
turn those lights on and we got some
company real soon.

GEOFFREY

I can't see nuthin'.

HARVEY

You can't see anything.

FORRESTER

Thank you.

GEOFFREY

Hey...grammar boys. I know what it
should be.

HARVEY

So why don't you say it that way?

GEOFFREY

'Cause it sounds better the other way.

INT. YANKEE VISITORS DUGOUT - NIGHT

The FLASHLIGHT BEAMS STEP DOWN into the DUGOUT and GEOFFREY JUGGLES HIS while he REACHES INTO his pocket. He FUMBLES AROUND, but manages to PULL OUT a couple of CANDLE STUBS.

GEOFFREY

William, you doin' okay?

Nothing from FORRESTER as GEOFFREY LIGHTS the MATCHES and FIRES UP the CANDLES. He PUTS THEM DOWN on the DUGOUT BENCH...and the light shows...

INT. YANKEE VISITORS DUGOUT - NIGHT

...a look of WONDERMENT on FORRESTER'S FACE, more ALIVE than at any time we've seen him. He GAZES OUT on the FIELD, a TOUCH of MIST in his eyes.

GEOFFREY

This is the visitors side. I guess I figured...

FORRESTER

I know.

GEOFFREY

...you bein' a Dodger fan and all.

SILENCE for a moment.

FORRESTER

Why'd you bring me here?

GEOFFREY LOOKS OUT on the field.

GEOFFREY

'Cause it's your birthday man. I checked in the almanac.

FORRESTER TURNS and LOOKS at his young protégé.

GEOFFREY

They don't even have you on the dead list yet.

FORRESTER (SMILES)

So you're a Yankee fan.

GEOFFREY

Yeah...well. Harvey helps me out.

FORRESTER

Least they stayed here. '56 the Dodgers sold Ebbetts Field to some real estate company. Not even there any more, just some...offices and things like that.

GEOFFREY

I know.

FORRESTER

We'd spend our summers there. And a lot of our falls here.

FORRESTER REACHES OUT and SMOOTHS the DIRT just above the top step. He SLOWLY SCALES the dugout steps and PAUSES at the top.

FORRESTER

Hell hath no fury like a baseball fan betrayed. Right?

FORRESTER WALKS OUT to THIRD BASE, and STANDS ON TOP of it, BALANCING while he LOOKS AROUND. He CROUCHES DOWN and quietly GRABS a handful of the infield dirt.

INT. YANKEE DUGOUT - NIGHT

HARVEY slides over toward GEOFFREY.

HARVEY

So how do you know this guy again?

GEOFFREY WATCHES FORRESTER LOOK AROUND the park.

GEOFFREY

He's my teacher.

INT. YANKEE STADIUM BLEACHERS - NIGHT

Sitting, all alone, in the darkness, several rows over the dugout, is CLAIRE. She has her HANDS in an almost PRAYERFUL position, as she looks down on FORRESTER.

EXT. MAILOR SCHOOL - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the MAIN MAILOR BUILDING.

INT. MAILOR HALLWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY STANDS just outside the closed doorway to the MAIN CONFERENCE ROOM. CRAWFORD APPROACHES, ready to go inside. He carries a FILE OF PAPERS under his arm and STOPS when he SEES GEOFFREY.

CRAWFORD

You decided to talk to the board?

GEOFFREY

No. I don't think so.

CRAWFORD

I see. Any particular reason?

GEOFFREY

Yes.

CRAWFORD

But...not one you want to share...

GEOFFREY

I just wanted you to know that the way it worked out...isn't the way you think it worked out.

CRAWFORD

That doesn't explain too much.

GEOFFREY

No...I guess it doesn't. (NOTHING FROM EITHER). You prob'ly need to get in there...

GEOFFREY starts to WALK AWAY, but CRAWFORD TURNS and SAYS...

CRAWFORD

Mister Wallace?

GEOFFREY STOPS and TURNS to look at him.

CRAWFORD

Why'd you choose Forrester?

GEOFFREY

Same reason you chose Campbell.

GEOFFREY WALKS AWAY again, leaving CRAWFORD speechless behind him.

INT. MAILOR AUDITORIUM - DAY

GEOFFREY WALKS DOWN the sloped aisleway, all the while GAZING at a BANNER behind the STAGE and the PODIUM. The room is empty and half dark.

110th Annual Writing Symposium

He CLIMBS the STEPS on the side of the STAGE and WALKS to the PODIUM, the SOUND of his FOOTSTEPS ECHOING.

GEOFFREY moves behind the PODIUM and gently holds it on each side. Too tall for the microphone, he PULLS IT UP and SPEAKS INTO IT.

GEOFFREY

Hello? (HE THUMPS IT). Hello?

From the darkness above...A VOICE...

CLAIRE

Go ahead.

INT. MAILOR AUDITORIUM - DAY

GEOFFREY LOOKS UP, but only sees the OUTLINE of CLAIRE in the doorway. She WALKS DOWN into the LIGHT.

CLAIRE

Yours is the one I wanted to hear.

GEOFFREY

They done in there?

CLAIRE

Yeah.

GEOFFREY

What happened?

CLAIRE (EXHALES)

The regents committee voted against you. It'll go to the full board next week, but...it's just a formality.

GEOFFREY doesn't say anything.

CLAIRE

You can still appeal of course.

GEOFFREY gives a knowing NOD.

GEOFFREY

What if I,...y'know, left before the end of the year. Could I, maybe get some of the scholarship money...

CLAIRE

That's not how it works. There's no money that really changes hands...

GEOFFREY

...sure.

GEOFFREY NODS and WALKS UP toward CLAIRE.

CLAIRE

I guess that's the price of hangin' out with one of the world's greatest authors. You start to write like him, huh?

GEOFFREY

I guess.

He STARTS to WALK BY HER and she REACHES OUT for him.

CLAIRE

Geoffrey.

At first he doesn't stop, until he gets to the DOOR. He TURNS and LOOKS BACK, ready to say THANK YOU, but merely THUMPS his hand softly on the side of the DOORWAY before LEAVING.

INT. GEOFFREY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

GEOFFREY is wide awake in his bed, looking up at the POSTER of MICHAEL JORDAN on his ceiling. The POSTER shows JORDAN concentrating intensely on a shot he's about to take.

In his own mind, GEOFFREY HEARS the CROWD at the CRESTON GAME growing louder...and LOUDER.

REFEREE (ECHO VO)

Take as much time as you want son...

The MEMORY stabs away, as GEOFFREY HEARS the BALL BOUNCE ONCE, TWICE...and then CLANGS off the rim.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

FORRESTER and GEOFFREY STROLL through the park.

FORRESTER

Two weeks ago, all I heard about was this basketball game and this writing thing. Now I don't hear anything.

Silence.

FORRESTER

Why am I not hearing anything?

After a long moment...

GEOFFREY

They threw me out of school.

FORRESTER STOPS. GEOFFREY KEEPS WALKING a couple of steps before, reluctantly, TURNING to face him.

GEOFFREY

They said I stole some stuff from a thing you wrote.

FORRESTER

What thing?

GEOFFREY

Something, some essay you wrote in "The New Yorker"...a long time ago, I guess.

FORRESTER

That was forty years ago.

GEOFFREY

Muhmm.

FORRESTER

Did you?

GEOFFREY

Did I what?

FORRESTER

Steal the article?

GEOFFREY

No.

FORRESTER NODS, satisfied, but...

GEOFFREY

...I took it from that sheet you wrote.

GEOFFREY TURNS AWAY, not able to look at him.

GEOFFREY

That day you were tryin' to get me to write...you were right next to me, and you wrote this page in, like nuthin'.

FORRESTER is speechless, stunned.

GEOFFREY

I had to turn something in,...and I couldn't...I figured the only thing you ever published was your book and there'd be no way anybody would ever know...

GEOFFREY searches for the right words...

GEOFFREY

I'm sorry. I...I know you must be disappointed.

After a LONG PAUSE, FORRESTER softly REPLIES...

FORRESTER

Only that you didn't have the guts to use your own words.

INT. FORRESTER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

FORRESTER'S DRINKING again. GEOFFREY SITS across the room, looking very much like he wants to be anywhere else.

GEOFFREY

I should get goin' pretty soon. I...

FORRESTER

...what happened at the free throw line that night?

GEOFFREY

What?

FORRESTER

That night you lost the game. What happened?

GEOFFREY

I missed two...

FORRESTER

I know what you did...I wanna know why you did it.

FORRESTER GETS UP to put more ice in his drink.

FORRESTER

Wasn't basketball your shelter? The one thing you could always control?

GEOFFREY

You can't make every shot...

FORRESTER

...but you came pretty close, didn't you? Weren't you the one that told me you could make a hundred free throws in a row, or something like that?...

GEOFFREY

Not with that many people...

FORRESTER

...people don't make a difference to a tough kid like you, do they? You didn't even see those people, did you?

GEOFFREY

...what are you asking me?

FORRESTER

...I'm asking you why you missed those two free throws?

GEOFFREY

I just missed 'em!

FORRESTER

Were you scared? When you stood there on that line, all alone...that scare you to be out there?

GEOFFREY

Yeah...sure I was...

FORRESTER

Why?

GEOFFREY

I don't know...I...

FORRESTER

...because you'd fucked everything else up?

GEOFFREY'S feeling FORRESTER'S heat.

GEOFFREY

...no...yes...I guess...

FORRESTER

You guess? You couldn't write a word, you stole my writing and you got yourself kicked out of school. Yeah, I'd guess so too.

GEOFFREY

I don't want to talk about this...

FORRESTER

...and yet you could've brushed all of that away by making just one of those free throws, right?

GEOFFREY starts to BREAK DOWN under FORRESTER'S persistence.

GEOFFREY

No.

FORRESTER

No?

GEOFFREY

No.

FORRESTER

Did you think you'd make it?

GEOFFREY

No.

FORRESTER

Why? Because of the pressure?

GEOFFREY

Because of everything. Because I was scared they'd never let me play again or...or...that I'd...that I'd never be able to write again...like I used to...

FORRESTER

Tell me something, why is it that you wrote so well when you were at your old school, wrote like shit for six months, and then started writing like you used to...(POINTS TO THE ANTIQUE TYPEWRITER)...two days ago?

GEOFFREY, OVERCOME, can't answer.

FORRESTER

What changed?

GEOFFREY

I don't know...

FORRESTER

Sure you do. What changed?

GEOFFREY

I guess...

FORRESTER

...don't guess. Know! What changed?

GEOFFREY

I missed those free throws...

FORRESTER

...and what did that mean?

GEOFFREY

...it meant we lost the game.

FORRESTER

Try again.

GEOFFREY

It meant I was gonna get kicked out.

FORRESTER

...and what did that mean?

GEOFFREY

...it meant I was gonna get kicked out of the best private school in the...

FORRESTER

...oh for crissakes...don't start talkin' like their p-r department. What did it mean?

GEOFFREY STOPS AGAIN.

FORRESTER

C'mon, say it. Say it like you'd say it!

GEOFFREY

I don't know!...

FORRESTER

...yes you do. You missed that free throw on purpose, didn't you?

GEOFFREY

No!

FORRESTER

You missed it, because you wanted to miss it. Why?

GEOFFREY

I didn't...

FORRESTER

Why did you miss it?

After a long moment,...

GEOFFREY

I was tryin' to make it...but...I just wanted to stop havin' to do things the way everyone else wanted me to...

FORRESTER PAUSES and gives a HINT of a smile, a look of supreme satisfaction. He SLOSHES his drink and WALKS BACK toward the KITCHEN.

FORRESTER

Where's the rest of the ice?

INT. MAILOR HALLWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY is CLEANING OUT the few things left in his locker. STUDENTS come and go around him, but no one pays him the slightest bit of attention. He keeps FILING things in his backpack.

INT. MAILOR OFFICE - DAY

STANDING at the FRONT DESK, JANICE SIGNS a couple of PAPERS. Sitting in a chair a few feet away, GEOFFREY'S HOLDING a BOX of his things.

CLERK

We'll send the rest of it to your home.

JANICE

Thanks.

JANICE TURNS to GEOFFREY.

JANICE

Let's get you out of here.

INT. MAILOR HALLWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY, his MOM right next to him, takes one last WALK down the school's MAIN HALLWAY. Softly, from another part of the building, he hears the amplified VOICE of a student giving his writing presentation. The SOUND is followed by APPLAUSE.

INT. MAILOR AUDITORIUM - DAY

GEOFFREY and his MOM quietly, reluctantly, ENTER the AUDITORIUM and take a seat in the back.

INT. MAILOR AUDITORIUM - DAY

The AUDITORIUM is JAMMED with STUDENTS, TEACHERS and ALUMNI. A STUDENT is at the PODIUM...

STUDENT

The winter's darkness, and cold, is but a momentary prelude to the new day of spring...

CRAWFORD is at a TABLE on the STAGE, along with FOUR OTHER PANELISTS. His EYES meet GEOFFREY'S for a brief moment.

STUDENT (CONT.)

...for while its grip seems endless, our perseverance is equal. Awaiting that moment of hope, new hope, that is home to our dreams.

The STUDENT, still nervous, STOPS and noticing the AUDIENCE isn't sure if he's done...ADDS...

STUDENT

Thank you.

The AUDIENCE politely CLAPS for the presentation.
CRAWFORD LOOKS OVER the PROGRAM in front of him.

CRAWFORD

We still have quite a few more to go,
so if we could take a short break...

A FEW of the STUDENTS DASH UP and OUT...

CRAWFORD

...let's keep it five minutes please.

The ALUMNI exchange pleasantries.

INT. MAILOR AUDITORIUM - DAY

GEOFFREY and JANICE remain seated in the back and don't notice the MAN who WALKS into the room, working his way against the flow down to the STAGE.

It's FORRESTER.

INT. MAILOR AUDITORIUM - DAY

FORRESTER quietly WEAVES through the STUDENTS, and the room starts to grow quiet. The STUDENTS, the TEACHERS, EVERYONE in the room GAZE at FORRESTER, most not quite sure who he is, but all certain they know him from somewhere.

By the time FORRESTER gets close to the STAGE, CRAWFORD STANDS UP, GAPING at the appearance of the writer who many weren't even sure was alive.

FORRESTER CLIMBS the STEPS and, without even the slightest acknowledgment of CRAWFORD, moves to the PODIUM. He PUTS on his READING GLASSES and PULLS OUT a SINGLE SHEET OF PAPER. The ROOM grows SILENT.

INT. MAILOR AUDITORIUM - DAY

GEOFFREY is giving CRAWFORD a run in the GAPING department. On the other side of the room, CLAIRE does the same thing.

INT. MAILOR AUDITORIUM - DAY

FORRESTER ADJUSTS his GLASSES a bit, and finally LOOKS UP at the CROWD. Everyone...the students, the teachers, the alumni...all give their full attention to the man at the podium.

FORRESTER

My name is William Forrester.

He TURNS to search the PORTRAITS of all the great AUTHORS that adorn the upper reaches of the stage. He POINTS to the one of himself.

FORRESTER

I'm that one. Over there.

A MURMUR from the crowd, but it is quickly very quiet again.

FORRESTER

...I decided this morning that I would come up here on this stage, because a very good friend of mine wasn't allowed to. (PAUSE). I have a problem with these competitions...and the reason for that is that they suggest that if a student fails one year, that he...or she...can learn enough to maybe win the next year. To improve. (PAUSE). I'm sure some of them, some of you, do improve. At least your professors probably tell you that, as a courtesy...

A RIPPLE of LAUGHTER from the STUDENTS.

FORRESTER

But there are some writers, a small handful, who cannot, and should not be taught how to write. What they should be allowed to do...is write. And it is that select few, that are the real teachers.

GEOFFREY'S EMBARRASSED, CRAWFORD not sure if he's HUMILIATED or FURIOUS. FORRESTER merely shifts his attention to the PAPER BELOW.

FORRESTER

I wrote this piece a few years back and I thought I'd read a short part of it, if that's alright...

LIGHT, RESPECTFUL APPLAUSE from the AUDIENCE. The BACK DOORWAYS are suddenly CROWDED with TEACHERS and OTHER FACULTY MEMBERS who have been made aware of FORRESTER'S appearance.

FORRESTER (READS)

Losing family...forces us to find our family. Not always the family that is our blood, but the family that will become our blood. Even that which is within ourselves.

A BUSH.

FORRESTER (CONT.)

Life is how you anticipate it. If we could look back on our lives, to read the three or four sentences that someone would scribble for the rest of us not to care about, we'd learn that the most important events in our lives...pass by, without us even knowing until years later. Sometimes never. Anticipation. We lose our own life's moments, because we are trying to find the ones that others tell us are important. We end our lives with

the question, "how will I be remembered by others?," while never stopping to think about how we would remember it ourselves.

The AUDIENCE is CAPTIVATED. GEOFFREY LOOKS UP in wonder as MORE AND MORE PEOPLE SQUEEZE into the back of the room.

FORRESTER (CONT.)

If life is indeed a game, we learn too late that it's a game that is not won or lost; it's a game that too often simply is not played. We search for answers, while never caring about the questions.

FORRESTER PAUSES.

FORRESTER (CONT.)

And near the end, the only thing that is left to say is...I wish I had seen that, or I wish I had done that. Or I wish. (PAUSE). And the wish is only a hope that cannot be granted. We end our lives on a wish that can only be handed on to another who will desire the same. Anticipation.

The CROWD is too stunned to even move. FORRESTER softly FOLDS the PAPER.

FORRESTER

I have never been much of a religious man, so if confession is indeed good for the soul...well, I'm about to find out. As some of you in this room may know, I have a reputation as having lived a rather solitary life, and when I am written about...the word *author* is usually preceded by a variety of descriptions: resentful, hostile, bitter. (LOOKS UP). I can dispute none of those...because for the most part, it is a proper choice of words. It's a decision that I made on my own, (PAUSE), and it's a decision I regret.

FORRESTER STOPS for a second to take a breath and gather his thoughts.

FORRESTER (CONT.)

Most of you are too young to even know what the wishes are yet. But I look at the words that read, "and near the end the wish is only a hope that cannot be granted."

For the first time, FORRESTER'S rigid demeanor cracks. On the verge of TEARS, he continues...

FORRESTER (CONT.)

...and I realize that the one wish that was granted me so late in life is the friendship of a remarkable young man...

GEOFFREY'S EYES start to WELL UP.

FORRESTER (CONT.)

He says it is I that am the teacher. (PAUSE). But in truth, it is I who have done the learning. (ONE MORE PAUSE). Thank you.

He WALKS OFF the stage and the first CLAP is heard, then ANOTHER and ANOTHER, and the APPLAUSE begins to SWELL. He is nearly halfway up the AISLE when he HEARS CRAWFORD at the PODIUM.

CRAWFORD

Excuse me. Mister Forrester? Mister Forrester?

FORRESTER STOPS and TURNS to LOOK BACK. The AUDIENCE is SILENT once again.

FORRESTER

Robert.

CRAWFORD

I'm sure most of us will need a few days to grasp the significance of what just happened. The quality of your writing, (SHAKES HIS HEAD), is still something that the rest of us can only aspire to. It is remarkable.

FORRESTER

Thank you Robert.

FORRESTER BEGINS to WALK OUT again, but within a few feet of GEOFFREY he TURNS BACK to CRAWFORD.

FORRESTER

By the way Robert...I lied.

CRAWFORD

I'm sorry?

FORRESTER

About the piece I read. (SMILES). I didn't write it.

FORRESTER HANDS the PAPER to GEOFFREY as a new ROUND OF APPLAUSE BEGINS, this time for the young man, not the writing legend.

CRAWFORD can only stare as FORRESTER, GEOFFREY and JANICE WALK OUT together.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

Walking out of Mailor that day, with my mother on one side, and Forrester on the other...surrounded me with a

warmth I had never felt before, and
have never felt since.

The APPLAUSE CONTINUES. CLAIRE is part of it, but
TEARS are also STREAMING down her face.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

It is an upscale RESTAURANT, the likes of which
FORRESTER would have loved, had he chosen to dine
at one. FORRESTER, GEOFFREY, JANICE...and CLAIRE
are at a window TABLE; the last of their dinners
in front of them. The WAITER POURS the WINE.

WAITER

Are you sure you wanted a second
bottle of the Domaine, sir?

FORRESTER

Why?

WAITER

It's just...that the cost is rather
prohibitive.

CLAIRE

He's sure.

FORRESTER

I forgot how prohibitive...

The WAITER POINTS to the CHECK. FORRESTER SMILES
as he PLACES the CORK in front of GEOFFREY.

FORRESTER

May want to hang on to that.

They all LAUGH.

GEOFFREY

Y'know...you read pretty good for
someone who doesn't like to read.

FORRESTER

I had good material.

CLAIRE

How'd you know Crawford would do
that?

FORRESTER

Because I knew he'd want to be a part
of it.

JANICE

They've already called.

GEOFFREY

Who?

JANICE

Bradley...over at Mailor. He called
this afternoon.

FORRESTER

They want him back?

JANICE

Mhmm.

FORRESTER

Let 'em want.

GEOFFREY

So when's the last time you were in a place like this?

FORRESTER

Like this? Not only were you not even a twinkle in your mother's eye, but your mother was not even a twinkle in your grandmother's eye.

FORRESTER RAISES his WINE GLASS. JANICE does the same, while GEOFFREY HOLDS UP his WATER GLASS. FORRESTER REACHES for the WINE BOTTLE and POURS a SIP into an EMPTY COFFEE CUP. He LOOKS at JANICE.

FORRESTER

You mind?

JANICE SHAKES her head. GEOFFREY awkwardly HOLDS UP the COFFEE CUP while FORRESTER SAYS...

FORRESTER

To new wishes...

ALL

To new wishes...

The GLASSES CLINK. SMILES and LAUGHTER surround the table.

ADULT GEOFFREY (VO)

It was as if my last day at Mailor had been my graduation day. I knew then that William had been pushing me for this one moment, that by letting me fail, he had actually let me succeed. And at that moment, as we raised our glasses, I saw something different in our relationship. William had stopped being the teacher and the affection I saw from those eyes, was what I knew could only come from a father...even though he had never been one, and I had never had one.

INT. FRANKLIN GYM - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of a GROUP of FRANKLIN KIDS playing BASKETBALL.

INT. FRANKLIN GYM - DAY

GEOFFREY'S not playing in the game, but instead is quietly SHOOTING BASKETS on one of the GYM'S SIDE HOOPS.

CLAIRE WALKS IN and SITS on the BLEACHERS. She WATCHES GEOFFREY for a few seconds, until he SPOTS her, SMILES, and COMES OVER.

CLAIRE

Hey.

GEOFFREY

Hey.

CLAIRE

They weren't sure where you'd be, so...I took a chance on looking here.

GEOFFREY

I don't start till next week.

CLAIRE

That's good. You could use a few days off.

GEOFFREY

So what are you doin' here?

CLAIRE

They told me there were a couple job openings for next fall. The pay's terrible but...I hear they got some good students comin' back.

GEOFFREY

What's your Dad say?

CLAIRE

I'll make it up to him by marrying rich. (SMILE AND A PAUSE). You seen William?

GEOFFREY

Naw. I think he needed a couple days off too.

CLAIRE

Prob'ly so. (PAUSE). Well...I got a cab outside...

GEOFFREY (NODS)

We'll see you around.

CLAIRE

I hope so.

GEOFFREY SMILES at her and goes back to his HOOP, SHOOTING away, all under the watchful eye of next year's teacher.

INT. GEOFFREY'S BEDROOM - DAY

The SUNSHINE POURS into GEOFFREY'S BEDROOM as he STIRS AWAKE. He SCRATCHES his HEAD and SWINGS OUT of bed, PULLING ON a PAIR OF SWEATS.

INT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

GEOFFREY TEUMPS down the STAIRS and STOPS at the bottom to look out the window. He HEARS a SOFT NOISE behind him,...CRYING.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

GEOFFREY GOES IN to the KITCHEN and sees his MOTHER at the tiny DINING ROOM SET. Her FACE is STREAKED with TEARS.

She LOOKS UP at him, not knowing what to say. The MORNING NEWSPAPER is open in front of her. After a few seconds she finally WHISPERS...

JANICE

It was cancer baby. He told me about it that night he came over.

Confused, GEOFFREY SLUMPS into the CHAIR opposite his MOTHER. He SLOWLY PULLS the NEWSPAPER toward him and the STORY and PHOTO LEAP OUT at him...

NOTED AUTHOR WILLIAM FORRESTER DIES, SUICIDE SUSPECTED

A PHOTO of FORRESTER, from years ago, STARES OUT at GEOFFREY. GEOFFREY'S MOTHER finally adds...

JANICE

He just didn't want to go through all the pain.

GEOFFREY LEANS OVER, much CLOSER to the PAPER, and PUSHES HIS HAND gently on the crease, so that it RESTS WIDE OPEN on the TABLE.

JANICE

I'm sorry baby...I'm so sorry...

GEOFFREY DISSOLVES into TEARS and can only put his head on his mother's shoulder...

JANICE

...I'm so sorry.

INT. FORRESTER'S BUILDING - DAY

GEOFFREY CLIMBS the STAIRS leading up to his old friend's APARTMENT. He REACHES the top, and can only stare at the door for a minute. He KNOCKS, out of habit, but of course there is no answer. He tries to TURN the DOORKNOB, but finds that it is firmly LOCKED.

He WALKS BACK DOWN the stairs, despondent.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

GEOFFREY and MARTIN SIT on the STAIRS, the SUN
DIPPING behind the buildings.

MARTIN

He never told you about it?

GEOFFREY

Nav.

MARTIN

Would you have wanted him to?

GEOFFREY

Yeah. I don't know...maybe.

MARTIN

Sounds to me like the way it went, is
the way he wanted it to go.

INT. NEW YORK BOOKSTORE - DAY

GEOFFREY WALKS ALONG the SHELVES of a BOOKSTORE,
looking for the book he never got around to
buying.

He STOPS, and PULLS a CRISP, HARDCOVER COPY of
"AVALON LANDING" from the shelf. He OPENS it to
the BACK FOLD of the DUSTCOVER and GAZES at the
OLD PHOTO of FORRESTER.

INT. NEW YORK BOOKSTORE - DAY

GEOFFREY WALKS UP to the CASHIER, who RINGS UP
his purchase.

CASHIER

Twenty three-95.

GEOFFREY HANDS HIM TWO BILLS.

CASHIER

Out of 25. (REACHES FOR THE CHANGE).
Lot of people doin' the same thing as
you. You ever read this?

GEOFFREY

Yeah. Just never bought it.

CASHIER

What's your name?

GEOFFREY

Geoffrey.

The CASHIER HANDS HIM his CHANGE.

CASHIER

...and 25. Nice purchase Geoffrey.

INT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

GEOFFREY COMES IN and there's A MAN in the LIVING ROOM with his MOTHER, a few PAPERS on the TABLE in front of them.

JANICE

Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY

I don't wanna talk to any schools.

He starts to RUN UP the STAIRS, but his MOTHER SAYS...

JANICE

He's not from any school.

GEOFFREY STOPS and the MAN SAYS...

MAN

Geoffrey, I'm from "The New Yorker."

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

The "NEW YORKER" MAN is at the TABLE with JANICE and GEOFFREY. GEOFFREY has a PEN in his HAND and is SIGNING PAPERS.

NEW YORKER MAN

It'll run in our April issue, your paper in its entirety and a report on the speech at Mailor, Forrester's that is.

GEOFFREY

Do we get to read it before?

NEW YORKER MAN

Absolutely. (POINTS TO THE PAPER). One more right here. And...if I can get the paper itself.

JANICE

Here. (SHE HANDS HIM THE PIECE OF PAPER, CRUMPLED).

GEOFFREY

I need that back.

NEW YORKER MAN

I'll make a copy of it and bring this back to you before I go to the office.

GEOFFREY NODS.

NEW YORKER MAN

We will send you a check for the five thousand dollars we agreed to. You will have to put it in a trust of some sort, of course, until you're eighteen. Might buy you a month or so

of college. (PAUSE). It'll be a great piece.

GEOFFREY

Maybe I'll be lucky enough to have someone steal it from me some day.

NEW YORKER MAN

(CONFUSED). I'm sorry?

GEOFFREY

Nothing.

The NEW YORKER MAN STANDS UP and SHAKES HANDS.

NEW YORKER MAN

Well...I think everything's in order then.

JANICE

Thank you.

NEW YORKER MAN

You're a lucky young man Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY

Yeah? Why's that?

The NEW YORKER MAN PAUSES at the door.

NEW YORKER MAN

Because he chose you.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM FIELD - DAY

GEOFFREY SITS in the VISITORS DUGOUT, on the same bench where he sat with FORRESTER only a couple of weeks back.

He PICKS at the WAX that melted from the candle that night, the only SOUND...the SOUND of the wind as it RUSTLES through the EMPTY STADIUM.

INT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

GEOFFREY BOUNCES a BASKETBALL as he WALKS INTO the APARTMENT, His MOM'S VOICE CALLS OUT from up above...

JANICE (OC)

Geoffrey! Is that you?

GEOFFREY

Yeah.

JANICE (OC)

Could you check dinner on the stove?
And no bouncing!

GEOFFREY

Sorry.

He STOPS BOUNCING, grabs an APPLE on his way to the KITCHEN, but before he can get to the stove,

the DOORBELL RINGS. He WALKS OVER and PUSHES the BUTTON.

GEOFFREY

Yeah?

INT. APARTMENT STAIRWAY - DAY

GEOFFREY HOPS DOWN the STAIRS and OPENS the DOOR. The UPS DELIVERY MAN is standing on the landing; ONE PACKAGE under his arm, ANOTHER at his feet.

UPS MAN

You Geoffrey Wallace?

GEOFFREY

Yeah.

UPS MAN

Certified from the law offices of Roberts and Carter. I'm gonna need some I-D and you need to sign for both of 'em...here and here. That one's pretty heavy. (HOLDS OUT AN ENVELOPE). The legal guy says to make sure you read this. His number's on the back...says he'll call you in a couple days.

GEOFFREY has a PUZZLED LOOK on his face.

INT. GEOFFREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

His APPLE still in his mouth, GEOFFREY BACKS IN through the front door, CARRYING both of the BOXES. His MOM CALLS OUT again...

JANICE

Geoffrey? Is dinner okay?

GEOFFREY

Yeah...it's fine.

He PUTS THE BOXES DOWN and starts to OPEN the larger of the two. PULLING BACK THE LID, he REACHES INSIDE, and gently LIFTS OUT FORRESTER'S OLD MANUAL TYPEWRITER.

GEOFFREY SLUMPS into the CHAIR behind him and LOOKS at the old antique, BRUSHING his HAND, oh so carefully across the top.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

GEOFFREY has a BASKETBALL under one arm and the SMALLER BOX under the other. He WALKS the last few yards to his HIGH SCHOOL'S OLD OUTDOOR COURT. There is no one in sight.

A VOICE-OVER of FORRESTER READING the contents of his LETTER BEGINS...

FORRESTER (VO)

Dear Geoffrey. I know you must be looking for answers to the questions you undoubtedly have, and I have little doubt you'll find them. I always used to tell you to write it like you'd say it, and for you that advice was especially important. You never did talk much, but when you did, you never wasted words, and you never wasted your questions. But don't question this.

GEOFFREY REACHES the BASKETBALL COURT and PLOPS DOWN on the BLACKTOP, the BALL on his one side, the BOX on the other. He STARTS to LACE UP his SHOES.

FORRESTER (VO)

Someone I once knew wrote that "life is how you anticipate it." You need to know that I anticipated this and did something I never dreamed I could do. I shared something. And that sharing taught me what I was too afraid to learn; that there were years I had wasted. You helped give me back some of those years.

GEOFFREY STANDS UP and WALKS OVER to the FREE THROW LINE, LUGGING the BOX just a few inches away from him. It's LID is halfway OPEN, and STARTS to FLAP in the LIGHT BREEZE.

FORRESTER (VO)

Of all the things I could give you, this is the one that makes the most sense.

GEOFFREY begins to SHOOT FREE TROWS, the first SHOT RIPPING straight through the net.

FORRESTER (VO)

Losing family forces us to find our family. Even within ourselves. Take this for you...and your family...

ANOTHER FREE THROW HITS the net. The CAMERA MOVES CLOSER to the BOX at GEOFFREY'S FEET, the LID starting to FLAP EVEN MORE.

FORRESTER (VO)

...to new wishes...

The WIND CATCHES the LID of the box one last time and BLOWS IT OPEN. Inside, there are HUNDREDS of SHEETS of PAPER, close to a thousand, all BOUND tightly together. It's a MANUSCRIPT.

The LID OPENS EVEN WIDER and the CAMERA CLOSES IN
enough to show the scant few words on the very.
TOP SHEET.

"WORSHIP" A NOVEL BY WILLIAM FORRESTER

The FREE THROWS CONTINUE; the SOUND ECHOING as
each SHOT NESTLES into the bottom of the hoop.

FADE OUT