

TKO

Written by

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FADE IN.

EXT. FAIRVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

SUPER: Tallahassee, Florida

It's a brisk Autumn day and parents wait outside the school for the bell to ring.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

BUSTER BARKLEY, BM, 10, sits in a classroom, nervously tapping his foot and eyeing the clock, which says 3:48. His books are already packed and he's ready to sprint when the bell rings in 2 minutes.

The TEACHER erases the blackboard, which contains the structure of a cell.

TEACHER

There will be a quiz on what we just went over and chapter 8 from Murphy. You'll need to be able to dr--

The bell rings and students start packing up. Buster leaps to his feet and is out the door before the teacher even finishes talking.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Mr. Barkley?

He's already gone.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Slow down everyone!

Groans. But they comply.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

On the quiz, you'll need to be able to label the parts of the cell.
Dismissed.

The students rush out the door.

EXT. FAIRVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Buster is the first kid out the door. He makes it to the bike rack before any other kid makes it outside.

He unlocks his Huffy. The school door opens and Buster looks up in fear.

It's not whoever he's afraid of. He puts his lock and chain in his backpack and hops on the Huffy.

RICHIE (O.S.)
(in a teasing, sing-songy
voice)
Buster Brown...?

Buster panics. He pedals away, looking back to see RICHIE and three other bullies getting on their bikes.

RICHIE (CONT'D)
We're coming for you Buster Brown!

The other bullies laugh as they mount their bikes. Richie is a WM, 12, chubby with red hair and red cheeks. He grins at Buster.

Buster pedals as fast as he can, and he's around the corner before the others can follow. He pedals down the block as fast as he can. Once he reaches the end of the block, he looks back to see Richie and the others, who are gaining on him.

CUT TO:

Buster pedals the Huffy through the entrance to the Oak Lawn Trailer Park, almost getting hit by an exiting minivan. The van honks at him, but he ignores it.

Richie and the other bullies aren't far behind. They give chase, hooping and hollering.

CUT TO:

Buster glides his bike into the driveway of a run-down trailer. In the front yard is an old rusted Ford pick-up sitting on blocks.

Buster hops off the Huffy and lets it crash to the ground. Richie and the other bullies arrive and hop off their bikes, surrounding Buster.

Buster runs towards the front door, but one of the bullies blocks his way.

BUSTER
Move!

The bully laughs. Richie steps up and punches Buster in the face. He falls to the ground.

RICHIE
You ain't going nowhere--

BUSTER
Dad!

The bullies laugh.

RICHIE
Calling for your daddy won--

The front door slams open. Out comes Buster's dad, MASON, WM, 50s, gray hair, thick and muscular. He points a shotgun at Richie.

MASON
Get your hands off my son and get
the hell off my property!

He pumps the shotgun, which freezes the bullies. Buster pulls free from the bullies' hands and slips inside the trailer.

MASON (CONT'D)
Get goin'!

The bullies get on their bikes and pedal away. Richie stares back at Mason.

MASON (CONT'D)
Come back here and I'll kill ya!

He goes inside.

INT. MASON'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Mason steps inside and closes the door, locking it behind him. Buster stands nearby. Mason puts the shotgun down and smacks Buster upside his head.

MASON
What the hell was that?

He looks towards the television where a boxing match plays. Buster shrugs.

Mason punches him in the chest. Hard. Buster recoils and starts to cry.

MASON (CONT'D)
I'll give you something to cry
about.

Mason punches him in the head. Buster stares at the boxing match, zoning out.

MASON (CONT'D)
Don't be bringing people to my house!

Mason punches Buster in the head again. Buster falls and hits his head on the wall. He's unconscious.

Mason stares at him for a while.

MASON (CONT'D)
Get up.

He nudges Buster with his foot. Buster doesn't respond.

MASON (CONT'D)
Dammit.

He reaches for his phone.

EXT. OAK LAWN TRAILER PARK - LATER

PARAMEDICS load Buster into an ambulance. Mason stands near the front door, speaking to a POLICE OFFICER.

POLICE OFFICER
How many of them were there?

MASON
Three. They were riding bikes. They were his age. Bullies.

The police officer writes in a notebook as the ambulance pulls away, Buster in the back.

EXT. FAIRVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

On a cold day, the students are bundled up heavily as they rush inside.

Buster slowly bikes up to the rack as the bell rings. He locks the bike up, a new scar on his forehead.

He goes inside. Late.

INT. FAIRVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL - LATER

Buster walks into the school. He stops at his locker.

Richie and the bullies walk down the hall. Buster looks up and makes eye contact with Richie. Richie flinches, Buster notices and smiles to himself as he closes his locker.

RICHIE
I... I gotta go.

He turns and walks down a different hallway, leaving the other bullies baffled. The bell rings and the kids rush to get inside in time.

Richie seems lost. He sees the PRINCIPAL and another RESOURCE OFFICER walking towards him, deep in conversation. Richie dips down to drink water and avoid being noticed.

RESOURCE OFFICER
He was arrested this morning. Took four men to take him down.

PRINCIPAL
So HE killed the mother?

RESOURCE OFFICER
That's what they say.

PRINCIPAL
Poor Buster.

Richie's eyes grow wide. He quickly stands up straight and stares after them.

Richie grins.

EXT. FAIRVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL - LATER

The school bell rings and kids start emerging from the building. Richie waits at the bike rack, eyes peeled for Buster.

Buster walks outside. He sees Richie standing in front of his Huffy. Buster frowns.

BUSTER
You didn't learn your lesson did you?

Buster drops his backpack and steps towards the grinning Richie, his fists balled up. Richie laughs.

RICHIE
I'm not here to fight... I know how crazy your dad is...

Richie puts his hands up in a defensive posture.

RICHIE (CONT'D)
That's why he got arrested today.

Buster is shocked. His fists relax.

BUSTER
What?

Richie nods, still grinning.

RICHIE
I heard the principal talking about
it...

Buster is speechless.

RICHIE (CONT'D)
Said they arrested him for killing
your mom.

Buster throws a right cross, cold knocking Richie out.

EXT. OAK LAWN TRAILER PARK - DAY

Buster pedals his bike into the driveway. He hops off and lets it crash. He hurries toward the front door, a grim look on his face.

He looks over and sees his father's truck in the driveway and frowns.

INT. MASON'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Buster walks in and tosses his key on the counter between the living room and kitchen. He hears someone in the bathroom and takes a few steps in that direction.

BUSTER
Dad?

The toilet flushes and the sink briefly turns on. Buster waits impatiently.

The bathroom door opens and Buster's AUNT AMY walks out. She's a WF, 40s, glasses and a black bob haircut.

AMY
Hey, Buster. How you doing?

She walks towards Buster with pain on her face. He sees her face and he tears up.

BUSTER
Is it true?

She nods. He bursts into tears. She hugs him.

CUT TO:

Buster and Amy sit side-by-side on the couch. Both have puffy eyes and sniffly noses.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
So what's going to happen now?

Amy gets a grim look on her face.

AMY
Well, I talked to Gerald...

Buster frowns.

AMY (CONT'D)
He wants nothing to do with any of this...

BUSTER
Of course.

AMY
You'll keep living here. Your dad owns this plot of land, so there's no rent. I'll pay the bills. And I'll bring you food.

Buster kinda likes the idea of having his own place.

AMY (CONT'D)
You'll keep going to school and I'll come pick you up for church on Sundays.

Buster frowns.

BUSTER
Do I have to?

He's half-sarcastic, half-serious. She rubs his head as they both laugh.

INT. MASON'S TRAILER - DAY

Buster sits on the couch watching boxing. He's taking notes.

A knock at the door. He stands up and the door opens. It's Amy. She walks in carrying two bags of groceries.

AMY

Help me carry in these groceries.

He walks towards the front door.

CUT TO:

In the kitchen, Buster puts away the groceries. Amy comes back in the trailer and shuts the door. Buster looks up.

BUSTER

That the last of it?

AMY

Yes.

BUSTER

Thanks again, Aunt Amy.

She smiles.

AMY

This one has a little something extra in it.

She sets a plastic bag filled with Betamax tapes on the counter.

AMY (CONT'D)

That old Betamax your father had still working?

Buster laughs.

BUSTER

Yeah. He has a bunch of old boxing matches recorded. Watches them all the time.

Amy grins.

AMY

Well here are some new movies for YOU to watch.

He starts looking through the movies, which have been taped from TV, the names handwritten on the side: *Halloween, Night of the Living Dead, I'm Gonna Get You Sucka, Hollywood Shuffle, White Men Can't Jump, Brewster's Millions, Rocky, Burglar.*

AMY (CONT'D)
You seen any of those?

Buster shakes his head.

BUSTER
I've never gotten to choose what's on TV when dad's home.

Amy frowns.

AMY
You gonna watch 'em?

He grins.

BUSTER
I'm gonna watch 'em all tonight.

They both laugh. Amy hugs him.

INT. MASON'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Buster is watching *Burglar*. He's really into it. Whoopi Goldberg and Bobcat Goldthwait drink olive oil from a bottle in a store. Goldthwait puts the olive oil bottle back on the shelf.

WHOOPI
What are you doing?

BOBCAT
Putting it back.

WHOOPI
You already opened it. We have to pay for it.

BOBCAT
I don't understand you. You'd, like, steal the Chrysler building, but now we got to pay for olive oil?

WHOOPI
It's not what you steal, it's who you steal from.

Buster nods along with Whoopi.

Series of shots of Buster watching the other movies and enjoying himself. The last one he watches is *White Men Can't Jump*.

He's particularly interested in the basketball scenes.

INT. FAIRVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL GYM - DAY

COACH MURRAY walks Buster into the gym. A dozen kids in Fairview jerseys practice basketball.

COACH MURRAY
Hey everyone!

The players pause their scrimmage and gather round. The kids all stare at Buster, who is taller and more muscular than they are.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)
This is Buster Barkley. We're going to let him try out. Run today, see if he has potential to join our team.

The other kids don't really pay him any attention. He walks onto the court. The ASSISTANT COACH hands him a white practice jersey and he puts it on.

A series of shots of Buster being terrible at basketball:

-He tries to pass to a teammate, but it's too high and goes out of bounds.

-An airball.

-A shot that clangs off the rim.

-He misses a good pass.

-A teammate tries to set a pick and Buster smashes into it.

-Another shot clangs off the backboard.

Eventually, the other players stop passing him the ball and play around him. At the end of the scrimmage, Buster sits on the bench in frustration.

Coach Murray sits next to him, a concerned look on his face.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)
 It doesn't look like you're ready
 for basketball. Not enough for me
 to find a spot on the team.

Buster nods grimly.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)
 Maybe if you spend the next year
 practicing really hard, maybe we
 can find--

BUSTER
 Don't worry about it. This isn't
 for me.

Coach Murray nods and smiles.

COACH MURRAY
 Same advice applies. Spend a year
 getting ready, THEN go for what you
 want.

BUSTER
 Okay.

COACH MURRAY
 If I see any opportunities for you,
 I'll pass them along.

BUSTER
 Thanks.

He trudges out of the gym. The other players are doing much
 better without him.

EXT. FAIRVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

In a large open field between the school building and the
 baseball fields, about 30 kids play "bust meat." One KID runs
 with a football while ALL the other kids chase him.

Before long, he is tackled by half a dozen kids, somewhat
 roughly. The kid stands up while everyone stands ready. He
 throws the ball as high as he can into the air and runs out
 from under it.

Several kids settle under the ball, vying to catch it. Buster
 is taller and stronger, though, and he catches the ball.

The second Buster catches it, Richie blindsides him. But
 Buster was ready and Richie bounces off and crashes to the
 ground.

Buster takes off running with the ball. Other kids try to grab him, but he slips through their grasp.

A LARGE KID comes barreling at him. Buster lowers his shoulder and takes the impact, spins out of the way and runs past the goal line.

As he crosses the line, he holds the ball up in celebration. One of the bullies hits him in the back with a cheap shot that knocks Buster to the ground.

Buster pops up and punches the bully in the side of the head. The bully starts to fight back, but COACH JACKSON, BM, 30s, overweight, breaks them up.

COACH JACKSON
None of that! Off to the
principal's office you go!

He drags them towards the office.

EXT. FAIRVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Buster hops on his Huffy and speeds away from the school. He looks around as he turns the corner, but no one seems to be following.

He pulls into his driveway. He hops off the bike and lets it crash.

The second he does, Richie and the bullies hop out of various hiding places and surround him.

RICHIE
Hey, Buster Brown, home pretty
early, huh.

BUSTER
Get off of my lawn.

The bullies laugh.

RICHIE
You don't have your old man--

Buster punches faster than Richie can react, landing a blow on his nose and drawing blood. Richie screams. The others are stunned into inaction.

Buster runs for the front door. It's locked, but broken. He yanks hard enough and it opens anyway. He rushes inside.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Get him!

The bullies rush towards the door.

Buster comes back out, pointing the shotgun at them.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

He's chickenshit! He's not going to shoot--

Buster fires the shotgun over their heads. The other bullies run, but Richie lingers.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

You're psycho!

BUSTER

Come on my property again, I'll kill you.

He pumps the shotgun again and levels it at Richie's chest. Richie turns and runs. Buster follows him with the shotgun.

RICHIE

Psycho!

Buster grins.

EXT. MASON'S TRAILER - LATER

Buster walks out to the covered carport, which is a literal junkyard. Mason never threw anything away.

Buster picks up a broken microwave and carries it to the trailer park's dumpster.

CUT TO:

About half the junk is gone. Buster sees something that grabs his interest.

He moves a box of motor oil out of the way and uncovers a weight bench.

He rubs his head for a second, then starts hauling more junk.

CUT TO:

The junk is gone. The weight bench is a bit sun-faded, but in good shape and complete. Buster finishes sweeping the area with a push broom and sets it aside.

Buster loads the weight bar, with 80 pounds. He lays down and does a bench press. The first one is difficult, but he does more and more.

INT. MASON'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Buster watches Rocky, taking notes. It gets to the final boxing match.

Buster stands up and shadow boxes, copying Apollo Creed's every move.

EXT. MASON'S TRAILER - LATER

Buster has cleaned and fixed up the trailer. It has a new paint job, the grass is cut, everything's very clean.

Coach Murray pulls into the driveway and parks behind Mason's old truck. Murray gets out of his pick-up and walks for the front door. As he does Amy pulls up to the curb. She waves at Murray and he knocks on the door.

INT. MASON'S TRAILER - DAY

Buster, Amy and Coach Murray sit in the living room chatting.

COACH MURRAY

I'm not here in an official capacity. I just wanted to check in on you. Hadn't seen you in a while and I've... heard some things.

Buster looks down in shame.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)

Wanted to hear your side of things. And you...

He looks towards Amy.

AMY

I'm his aunt. I brought groceries.

Coach Murray nods. He turns back to Buster.

COACH MURRAY

So... how have you been lately?

Buster shrugs.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)
Do you need anything. I'm here to help.

BUSTER
I'm good.

Coach Murray nods.

COACH MURRAY
Stop by my office Monday. I might have something for you.

Buster nods. Coach Murray gets up to leave. He looks towards Amy.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)
Can I talk to you for a moment. Outside.

He walks to the door and opens it. He looks back at Buster.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)
Monday.

BUSTER
Sure, coach.

Amy gets up and walks toward the door. The adults step outside. Amy pushes the door shut behind her, but not all the way.

Buster moves close to the door and eavesdrops.

EXT. MASON'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Amy stands with her back to the door, her arms crossed. Coach Murray faces her.

COACH MURRAY
I'm really trying to figure out what's eating at Buster.

Amy looks at him skeptically.

AMY
You a counselor? Psychiatrist?

Murray smiles.

COACH MURRAY
Basketball coach.

She laughs with contempt. He accepts it.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)
I know. But I'm afraid if I don't
help him no one will.

She frowns.

AMY
I'm helping him.

Murray nods.

COACH MURRAY
You getting him help for that
growing anger problem?

She's puzzled.

AMY
Growing anger... he doesn't have--

COACH MURRAY
Ma'am, do you live here in the
house with Buster?

AMY
N-no...

COACH MURRAY
Well if he isn't getting sufficient
support, I'll have to report him to
Child Protective Services. If I--

AMY
I understand. What do you need to
know?

COACH MURRAY
What exactly is the living
situation and why?

Amy takes a deep breath.

AMY
Father Mason is in prison. He
killed the mother, Ginger. My
sister. I have custody, but my
husband, Marshall, wants nothing to
do with Buster. He doesn't even
want to see him. But I buy the
groceries, pay the bills and
whatnot.

COACH MURRAY
All that legal?

She shrugs.

AMY
Legal as it needs to be. The judge
signed off on it.

COACH MURRAY
And how's he doing, in your
estimation.

AMY
He doesn't really tell me much, but
he seems to be doing okay. Grades
are good. He's been cleaning and
fixing this place up.

Coach Murray looks around skeptically.

AMY (CONT'D)
I know. You should've seen it
before. This is a big improvement.

Coach Murray nods, he's suitably impressed.

INT. MASON'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Buster sleeps in his bed, shirtless. He notably has much more muscle mass than before.

EXT. MASON'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

A ski mask-wearing THIEF picks the lock to the front door. He opens the door quietly and listens inside.

Satisfied no one is awake, he slips inside and shuts the door.

INT. BUSTER'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buster stirs. He's a light sleeper. He leans quietly and looks down the hall. He sees movement.

Buster reaches for the shotgun, which leans against the wall next to the bed. He gets up silently and tiptoes down the hall.

He sees movement and stops.

Buster aims the shotgun low and fires. A man screams.

EXT. MASON'S TRAILER - LATER

Buster stands in front of his trailer, talking to a reporter. The bright lights of a news camera illuminate the night.

BUSTER

Nobody sneaks into a man's house that late at night for a good reason. I was taught that a man defends his castle.

REPORTER

Man? What are you... like 12.

BUSTER

10.

She is shocked.

INT. COACH MURRAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Buster sits in Coach Murray's office. The office is sparse. A desk, a filing cabinet and two chairs, no art to speak of.

COACH MURRAY

I did a lot of thinking after talking to your aunt.

Buster listens, but doesn't respond.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)

You're dealing with a lot of anger... rightfully so... a lot of aggression...

BUSTER

Yeah.

COACH MURRAY

I talked to some of the counselors and they say the best thing to do with... all that... is to channel it.

Buster nods.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)

Have you thought about boxing? I know a guy who runs a gym. He could train you...

BUSTER

My dad was a big boxing fan...

Coach Murray frowns.

COACH MURRAY

I'm sorry. I didn't mean--

Buster shakes his head.

BUSTER

No, it was the one thing about him
that made sense.

COACH MURRAY

So you're interested?

Buster frowns.

BUSTER

I can't afford it.

Coach Murray smiles.

COACH MURRAY

I don't think that'll be a problem.
Meet me here after school.

Buster nods.

EXT. FRANK'S BOXING GYM - DAY

Frank's gym sits in a poor, run-down metal warehouse. It's connected to a busy auto shop. Coach Murray and Buster go in the front door.

INT. FRANK'S BOXING GYM - CONTINUOUS

Coach Murray and Buster stand next to FRANK, BM, 50s, as he watches a sparring match in the ring. Frank was a boxer when he was younger, but he's long past those days physically.

FRANK

Saw you on TV the other night.

Buster looks at Coach Murray, who gives him a reassuring nod.

BUSTER

Yes, sir.

FRANK

You ever done any boxing?

Buster shakes his head.

BUSTER
No... my father did.

Frank looks at Buster closely.

FRANK
That why you want to box?

Buster doesn't answer. Frank looks at Coach Murray.

COACH MURRAY
Buster here's had a rough time of
it lately. Bullies. Father locked
up. He needs a way to channel all
his anger and frustration.

Frank looks to Buster.

FRANK
That right, son?

Buster nods.

BUSTER
But I can't pay.

Frank smiles.

FRANK
I think we can handle that.

Frank and coach Murray shake hands and the coach leaves.

EXT. FRANK'S BOXING GYM - DAWN

It's early in the morning, people are still making their way to work. Buster arrives at the gym, eager to get started.

INT. FRANK'S BOXING GYM - CONTINUOUS

Buster walks towards Frank, who just finished sweeping the floor. He puts the broom away and greets Buster.

FRANK
Morning.

Buster nods a greeting.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You have a good, hearty breakfast
this morning?

BUSTER
I had cereal.

Frank frowns.

FRANK
Well that won't do.

He reaches in his pocket and hands Buster \$20. He points to
Nanny's, a diner across the street.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Go over to Nanny's... tell 'em
Frank sent you... get two of the
meat lover's breakfast, one for
you, one for me.

Buster shrugs, takes the money and crosses the street. Frank
keeps an eye on Buster, noticing that the younger man frowns
and is grumpy.

CUT TO:

Frank and Buster sit in the back of the gym, finishing up
their breakfast. Buster eats his last slice of bacon.

Frank pulls a slip of paper from his pocket and hands it to
Buster. It's a list of workout activities.

FRANK (CONT'D)
That's your daily routine. Once
you've got that down, we'll get in
the ring.

BUSTER
I've gotta do all of this every
day?

Frank nods his head with a grin.

FRANK
And you gotta eat three squares a
day, I'll give you a menu. Stick to
it.

Buster's not sure he's gonna like this.

BUSTER
When do I have to start?

Frank stands up and clears the table.

FRANK
You already have.

A series of shots of Buster working out.

-Buster running the nearby streets.

-Buster bench pressing 125 pounds.

-Buster jumping rope.

-Buster working the speed bag.

-Buster working the heavy bag.

-Buster once again running the streets.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Buster walks into Frank's office, sweaty and breathing hard, He towels himself off.

FRANK
Have a seat.

Buster does.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You have a good workout?

Buster nods.

BUSTER
Yeah.

FRANK
I can tell. I've been keeping my eye on you. You've been doing good.

Buster grins.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You know, back when I started this place, I couldn't afford any equipment. I used to go out to the city dump and dig around for things I could use.

BUSTER
Really?

FRANK

Yep. My cousin Leonard worked out there and he'd sneak me in. Took me years to find enough equipment, but I found it.

BUSTER

How'd you get THIS stuff?

Frank laughs.

FRANK

Started with one trainee. He learned what I had to teach. He got some fights. Started winning some. That brought in more trainees, more money, new stuff.

BUSTER

That easy?

Frank laughs again.

FRANK

Nothing easy about it. Years of hard work.

Frank hesitates.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You know who that first trainee was?

Buster shakes his head.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Your father.

Buster looks up sharply. His eyes practically begging for more.

BUSTER

You knew my dad?

FRANK

Knew him well.

BUSTER

He always such un unrepentant asshole?

They both laugh. Frank gets up and walks into a storage closet.

He comes back out with a cardboard box and sets it on the table. He pulls out and unfolds a piece of paper and hands it to Buster.

Buster takes it and reads it. It's a flyer for a match between his father and some boxer named Jimmy Negan.

FRANK

Your dad wasn't just good. He was a contender. He had a chance.

Buster frowns.

BUSTER

What happened?

Frank shrugs.

FRANK

He got mixed up with the wrong people. They convinced him to throw a fight. He did his part. Not only did they not pay him, they threw him under the bus.

Buster stares at him in disbelief.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Got himself a lifetime ban from getting in the ring. His promising career was over almost as soon as he started.

BUSTER

Good, that's what he deserved.

Frank frowns.

FRANK

That was the first time he went to prison. Wasn't long, but was long enough. He came out a different man.

BUSTER

I remember.

FRANK

That's when he started drinking--

BUSTER

Violently.

FRANK

That's when he started drinking
violently. Lost all his friends.
Got violent with Ginger and...

Frank looks at him sympathetically.

BUSTER

...and I know the rest.

Beat.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

I was there.

Frank places a comforting hand on Buster's shoulder.

Another older BM, 50s, GRADY, joins them.

FRANK

Let me introduce you to somebody...

Frank gestures to Grady. He and Buster shake hands.

GRADY

Grady.

BUSTER

Buster.

FRANK

If there's anybody in the Sunshine
State who knows more about boxing
than me, it's Grady.

Buster is impressed.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You two should get to know each
other well before you ever set foot
in a ring.

Buster considers it, but he's not convinced. Grady is
confident.

EXT. GOLD'S GYM - NIGHT

Buster approaches the modern, well-kept corporate chain gym.
He gets close enough to look through the window, but no
closer.

He watches a lot of richer white men and women enter the gym. Inside, he sees two men with perfect hair and fancy, expensive gloves, trunks and boots. They don't take the sparring match too seriously.

He walks around to the back of the building. He makes sure no one is watching and sneaks over to the dumpster. He opens it up and digs around. He pulls out an old, ripped speed bag and runs off with it.

EXT. MASON'S TRAILER - DAY

Buster finishes wrapping the ripped speedbag with duct tape. He hangs it from the top of the carport.

He starts working on it, but he's not that good at it yet.

But he doesn't give up.

EXT. MASON'S TRAILER - DAY

SUPER: One year later.

The covered carport is now a full boxing training area. The weight bench has been supplemented with dumbbells, a heavy bag and a speed bag. A jump rope hangs from a nail. Everything is used, worn and faded.

Buster practices on a speedbag. He's noticeably more muscular now.

He's intense and focused, but he's uneven and not at all fluid in his motions. He can only keep it going for a few seconds before he loses rhythm and has to start again.

But he doesn't give up.

INT. FRANK'S BOXING GYM - DAY

MUSIC PLAYS: Filter, "Hey Man Nice Shot"

A series of images of Buster training:

-Doing a bench press.

-Jumping rope.

-Working the speed bag.

-Running on the streets.

-Doing an overhead press.

-Working the heavy bag.

INT. FRANK'S BOXING GYM - DAY

SUPER: One year later.

Buster works the speed bag. His timer goes off and he stops.

GRADY
Good work. Seeing definite
improvement.

Buster doesn't hear him, he stares wistfully at two BOXERS sparring in the ring.

GRADY (CONT'D)
You hear me?

BUSTER
What?

Grady chuckles.

GRADY
Good work today. You're getting
better.

Buster never takes his eye off the boxers.

BUSTER
Can I get in the ring?

Grady shakes his head.

GRADY
To skinny, too slow.

Buster continues to watch the boxers.

INT. FRANK'S BOXING GYM - DAY

SUPER: Two years later.

MUSIC PLAYS: Lo-Fidelity All-Stars, "Battle Flag (Remix)"

A series of images of Buster training:

-Doing a bench press. He's lifting more weight.

-Jumping rope. He's going faster and adds a crisscross.

- Working the speed bag. He's smoother and faster.
- Running on the streets. He's running faster.
- Doing an overhead press. He's lifting more weight now
- Working the heavy bag. He's stronger and his form is better.

INT. FRANK'S BOXING GYM - DAY

Buster works the heavy bag, smashing the hardest punches he's ever thrown. Grady watches, impressed. Grady turns and looks at Frank across the room.

Frank nods.

Grady walks over to Buster. Buster looks up at him.

BUSTER
How about now?

Grady nods.

GRADY
Okay.

Buster raises his arms like he won a fight.

EXT. LEON COUNTY CIVIC CENTER - NIGHT

The civic center is a relatively small arena near the state capitol building. Small groups of people make their way to the box office.

A digital sign next to the building reads "Amateur Boxing Tonight!"

INT. LEON COUNTY CIVIC CENTER - CONTINUOUS

SUPER: First amateur bout.

Buster stands in his corner, talking with Grady.

GRADY
This kid is skinny. Overpower him.

Buster nods. The bell rings and Buster rushes out to meet his opponent, ROLLINS, whose name is conveniently on his belt.

SUPER: Round 1

Buster immediately lands an overhand right, which grabs Rollins' attention. He goes defensive and covers up while Buster lands a series of blows on Rollins' arms and gloves.

Rollins lands a sharp jab that backs Buster up and both boxers are tentative throughout the rest of the round.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 3

Buster lands a sharp left jab that snaps Rollins' head back, but it doesn't hurt the boxer, it angers him.

Rollins unleashes a flurry of body blows that put Buster on the defensive. He drops his arms to protect his sides.

Rollins sees the opening and floors Buster with a left hook to the head. Buster gets up quickly, and once the referee is satisfied, the round continues.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 6

Buster has recovered and he aggressively goes after Rollins. Rollins thinks Buster is still wobbly and he also approaches aggressively.

Rollins throws a few jabs that Buster blocks. Buster slips inside and launches an uppercut that land squarely on Rollins' jaw. He immediately goes limp and falls to the mat. The referee calls the bout over.

A series of shots of Buster knocking out five other boxers.

After the last, Buster returns to his corner.

GRADY (CONT'D)

We're going to have to find you
some tougher guys to fight.

Buster grins.

EXT. BUSTER'S TRAILER - DAY

SUPER: Three years later.

The carport boxing gym is still around, but everything has been updated and is much nicer. Buster practices with new gloves and a new speedbag. He's leaner and his form is perfect.

His cell phone rings. He's annoyed and ignores it. It keeps ringing.

BUSTER

Fuck!

He stops and rips off the glove. He struggles, but he gets it off and answers the phone.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

What?

GRADY (O.S.)

That how you greet your manager?

BUSTER

Sorry, was working out.

GRADY (O.S.)

How was your birthday?

BUSTER

Fun.

GRADY (O.S.)

You feel any different?

BUSTER

If there's a difference between 20 and 21, I can't tell.

Grady laughs.

GRADY (O.S.)

How do you feel? Ready to jump in the ring?

BUSTER

Ready as I'm gonna be.

GRADY (O.S.)

Well... you got an offer.

Buster grins.

BUSTER

Are you serious?

GRADY (O.S.)

Serious as a heart attack. That's not too soon, is it?

BUSTER

Of course not. I'm ready. I've BEEN ready.

GRADY (O.S.)

Just making sure, this is a professional boxing match. It is dangerous.

BUSTER

No, I'm definitely ready. Who is it?

GRADY (O.S.)

Freddy Gonzalez in Tampa.

BUSTER

Never heard of him.

GRADY (O.S.)

He's new. Like you. In fact, I can probably get you plenty of bouts in that area.

Buster grins.

BUSTER

Let's do it.

Buster hangs up.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA, YEUNGLING CENTER - NIGHT

SUPER: University of South Florida, Tampa/Freddy Gonzalez

Small groups of people make their way to the Yuengling Center, which is lit up for tonight's event. The marquee says "Boxing Tonight!"

INT. YUENGLING CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Inside, the center is about half full. Grady leads Buster towards the ring.

ANNOUNCER

Hailing from Tallahassee, Florida... and weighing in at 173 pounds... Buster "Brown" Barkley!

Buster climbs into the ring.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
And his opponent, from Opa Locka,
Florida... Freddy Gonzalez!

The two fighters face off in the center of the ring. Freddy grins, Buster is stoic. He shakes a little with nervousness. Freddy spots it.

FREDDY
First time, rookie?

Buster ignores him.

FREDDY (CONT'D)
I won't knock you out too bad.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 1

They bump gloves and retreat to their corners.

Freddy comes out aggressively, going straight at Buster and landing three quick left jabs, then a right cross that gets Buster's attention.

Buster fights defensively at first, blocking most of Freddy's jabs.

Buster swings wildly, but misses. Freddy lands a couple of blows, but they don't do much damage.

Freddy lands a few more solid blows, then the bell rings.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 8

The bell rings. Buster and Freddy meet quickly, landing simultaneous rights. Buster offers up two jabs, the second one stings and Freddy gets angry.

FREDDY (CONT'D)
Tired of this shit. Time to take a
nap, kid.

Freddy advances on Buster, testing his defenses with a tentative jab. Then a strong right to the ribs.

Buster swings wildly with his right. Freddy ducks and laughs.

Buster comes back with a left and lands it squarely on Freddy's jaw. The shot rocks him and the humor drains from Freddy's face.

Freddy tries to fend Buster off, but a right-left combo knocks Freddy to the ground.

Stunned, he scrambles to his feet, but he's kinda wobbly.

Grady urges Buster to be aggressive. Buster advances, seeing fear in Freddy's eyes. Three straight rights put Freddy down and he doesn't get back up this time.

The crowd offers a tepid response as the referee declares the match over.

SUPER: Record 1-0

INT. BUSTER'S LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Buster drinks directly from a champagne bottle. Grady enters the room.

GRADY
So, not bad for your first
professional boxing match. How did
it feel?

Buster grins.

BUSTER
Fan-fucking-tastic!

GRADY
Hell yeah!

BUSTER
Let's fight everyone!

Grady grabs the champagne bottle and takes a swig.

EXT. AMALIE ARENA, TAMPA, FLORIDA - NIGHT

SUPER: Amalie Arena, Tampa/Wardell Smith

Amalie Arena is lit up for boxing. A banner over the entrance says "Paul-Woodley II." A sign on the box office says "Sold Out."

INT. AMALIE ARENA - CONTINUOUS

The arena is packed with 16,000 people. Grady and Buster stand in the ring. WARDELL SMITH, BM, 25, and his crew make their way to the ring.

ANNOUNCER

And in the other corner... Wardell
"Lights Out" Smith!

In Buster's corner, Grady checks on Buster's boots.

GRADY

Do they fit?

Buster looks down at his boots.

BUSTER

They don't feel right.

GRADY

Someone stole your good ones. Do
the best you can and we'll get some
new ones before the next fight.

Buster nods. The bell rings.

SUPER: Round 1

Buster heads out to the center of the ring, but he almost
slips and falls before he reaches Smith.

Smith lands a couple of jabs and Buster almost falls. He
defends himself and backs away.

He tries to throw his jab at Smith, but Buster barely
maintains his balance.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 3

Smith comes out aggressively, he's noticed that Buster's
boots aren't good and he sees the young man tentative and
wobbly. He delivers three body shots on Buster's left side,
hurting him.

Buster pulls away from the blows and Smith pursues him into
the corner.

A left jab backs Buster into the turnbuckle and Smith starts
raining both hands onto Buster's body.

Buster realizes he's more steady in the corner and he leans
back on the turnbuckle. He unleashes several heavy shots that
drive Smith back.

Buster stays in the corner. Smith comes back in and starts pounding on Buster's body.

Buster lets Smith punch his arms until he's tired. Buster lands an uppercut on Smith's jaw. Smith is shaken. Buster follows with a combination that sends Smith crashing to the canvas.

The referee calls the fight over.

SUPER: Record 2-0

EXT. TAMPA CONVENTION CENTER - NIGHT

SUPER: Tampa Convention Center/Stephen "Steel" Wallace

The lights of the Convention Center twinkle on the waters of the Bay. Crowds make their way to the venue. The digital marquee says "Boxing Tonight."

INT. TAMPA CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Buster stands in the center of the ring, facing off with STEPHEN "STEEL" WALLACE.

REFEREE

Let's have a good fight!

Buster walks back to his corner.

GRADY

How do the boots feel?

BUSTER

Much better.

He glares at Wallace.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 3

Buster tentatively tests Wallace with his jab. He thinks he sees an opening and throws a wild uppercut that misses. Wallace responds with a right that catches Buster by surprise.

Buster goes down, but he's quickly back to his feet. The referee lets them fight again and Wallace presses him.

Buster evades him for a few seconds and the bell rings. Buster almost runs back to his corner, not even looking at Wallace.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 4

The bell rings. Buster has his second wind and he wades right in. Wallace is surprised at Buster's aggression and is caught off guard by Buster's right cross.

Wallace staggers backwards. Buster pursues him landing blow after blow on Wallace's head. The third blow knocks Wallace down. He stumbles to get up, but can't maintain his balance.

Wallace crashes back to the mat. Buster wins again.

SUPER: Record 3-0

EXT. CARIBE ROYALE RESORT, ORLANDO - NIGHT

SUPER: Caribe Royale Resort, Orlando/"Mighty" Mike Mitchell

The sprawling complex is filled with people. A banner over the entrance says "Redemption Night, 8 exciting Boxing Matches."

INT. CARIBE ROYALE RESORT - CONTINUOUS

Buster awaits his opponent, who climbs into the ring.

ANNOUNCER

And in this corner... weighing in at 184 pounds... the #7 ranked IBF Cruiserweight contender... "Mighty" Mike Mitchell!

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 1

Buster rushes out aggressively and lands a few left jabs before pounding MITCHELL with a brutal right that floors him.

Buster waits in a neutral corner while Mitchell struggles to get back to his feet.

The referee tells them to continue. Buster wades in and lands several combos that wobble Mitchell.

Buster smiles, he gets kinda cocky. Mitchell lands a powerful left on Buster's jaw. Buster is shaken, but isn't hurt. He hangs back until the bell rings.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 5

Buster confidently bounces around Mitchell, who bleeds from his left cheek, just under the eye, which is swelling.

Buster punches Mitchell in his wounded eye. Mitchell recoils in pain and then gets angry.

Mitchell lands a series of blows to Buster's head, knocking him to the canvas.

Buster gets up quickly and beats the count. Mitchell rushes in again, pushing Buster towards the ropes.

Buster steadies himself against the ropes. He sneaks in an uppercut that staggers Mitchell.

The bell rings and the fighters reluctantly part.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 8

Buster and Mitchell face off in the center of the ring. Mitchell lands a jab. Buster lands two.

Buster blocks Mitchell's next blow with his gloves, then lands a short uppercut to Mitchell's jaw.

Mitchell lands a weak shot on Buster's shoulder. Buster lands two of three combo punches to Mitchell's head.

Mitchell lands a shot to Buster's head. Buster returns with a hard blow to Mitchell's bloody eye.

Buster lands several more jabs as Mitchell retreats. The bell rings.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 10

Mitchell's eye is swollen shut. He moves hesitantly towards Buster. Buster sees Mitchell's reluctance and he rushes out from his corner.

Buster lands a shot to Mitchell's eye and Mitchell clinches.

The referee breaks them up. Mitchell dances away, doing is best to stay away from Buster.

Buster chases him. He keeps landing blows on the retreating Mitchell. They score points, but don't do any damage.

Buster moves closer, looking for the knockout. Mitchell holds his arms close to his body and high, blocking most of Buster's punches.

Buster gets a bit frustrated and lets his guard slip. Mitchell sneaks in an uppercut that rocks Buster. He stumbles backward.

Mitchell chases him, landing two quick lefts, then a right. Buster is hurt and he nearly trips over his feet. He grabs the rope to keep himself up.

Mitchell lands another blow and the bell rings. The referee jumps in and breaks them up.

Buster stumbles back to his corner, just barely managing to stay on his feet.

CUT TO:

Buster and Mitchell flank the referee. He grabs them by the wrists.

REFEREE

Judge Braun scores it 118-111.
 Judge Smith scores it 117-113. And
 Judge Jordan scores it 120-109. The
 winner and still undefeated...
 Buster Brown Barkley!

The referee holds up Buster's arm. The crowd cheers

SUPER: Record 4-0

EXT. FLA LIVE ARENA, SUNRISE, FLORIDA - NIGHT

SUPER: FLA Live Arena, Sunrise, Florida/Flash Thomas

Crowds make their way past the palm trees towards the venue. A banner over the entrance reads: "Home of your NHL Champion Panthers!"

INT. FLA LIVE ARENA - CONTINUOUS

SUPER: Round 1

Buster has put on weight. He's nearly 200 pounds.

The bell rings, and Buster rushes out to meet his opponent, FLASH THOMAS. Thomas is shorter and chubbier than Buster.

Thomas immediately lands a shot to Buster's jaw, rocking him. Buster unleashes a barrage of blows that rock Thomas. He clinches and the referee splits them up.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 6

Thomas is a bit unsteady. Buster notices and guides him into the corner.

Buster is faster and stronger. He lands a series of combos that get to Thomas. Thomas is hurt bad enough that he stops fighting back and is defenseless.

The referee steps in and stops the bout. Buster leaps in triumph.

SUPER: Record 5-0

EXT. SEMINOLE HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO, HOLLYWOOD, FLORIDA - NIGHT

SUPER: Seminole Hard Rock Casino

Buster walks through the casino in a designer suit. Some people kinda recognize him. Not enough to approach him, but he gets stares and whispers.

He sits down at a blackjack table and sets his chips on the table.

When he looks up, he makes eye contact with the player across from him, NICOLA.

He places his wager. The dealer gives him two face cards. He raises. Everyone other than Nicola drops out. She raises. She takes two more cards while he holds.

He reveals his 20. She has two 6s, a 5 and a 4.

She rakes in her winnings, which are substantial.

BUSTER
(to the dealer)
Again.

Nicola grins.

NICOLA
You a glutton for punishment?

Buster grins back.

BUSTER
You have no idea.

The dealer distributes new cards.

CUT TO:

Buster is all-in. Nicola has lots of chips left.

NICOLA
You should probably go before this
nice young gentleman has to clock
out.

She smiles at the dealer and flips him a chip. He returns the smile.

BUSTER
Dammit.

He flips his cards to reveal 18. She laughs. She stands up and seductively whispers in Buster's ear.

NICOLA
Bring my money to the bar...

She walks away.

The dealer flips over Nicola's cards to reveal a 21 with two cards.

DEALER
The lady wins again!

Buster gathers up her winnings.

BUSTER
She told me--

The dealer waves him off.

DEALER
I thought she was joking.

Buster makes a sarcastic face.

CUT TO:

Buster and Nicola sit at the bar. Close, legs intertwined. They are the only people left in the bar.

Buster holds up his empty glass and shakes it towards the BARTENDER. Nicola sips from a mostly full glass of pinot noir.

The bartender refills Buster's scotch with a single pour. He shakes the glass again and the bartender fills it the rest of the way.

BUSTER

Thank you, I'll put you in my will
for your generosity.

Nicola laughs.

NICOLA

(playful)

You always drink this much?

He holds up his glass to toast. She picks up her wine glass and clinks them together. They both take a sip, his quite a bit larger.

BUSTER

Only here at the casino. When it's
not fight night. I get my tab taken
care of, so...

NICOLA

So drinks are on you?

They both laugh.

BUSTER

Hell yeah.

He gestures toward the bartender.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

Whenever she's here, she doesn't
pay.

The bartender laughs.

NICOLA

Are you trying to get me drunk, Mr.
Professional Boxer?

He catches her admiring how well his shirt fits over his muscles. He smiles.

BUSTER
Only if you want me to.

She returns his smile and they stare into each other's eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. BUSTER'S HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Nicola lays on her back on the bed while Buster goes down on her. She screams, then pulls him up to kiss her.

The sex continues.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NEW YORK - NIGHT

SUPER: Madison Square Garden, New York/Carl Jackson

From his corner, Buster looks out into the crowd and sees Nicola in the first row. He winks. She smiles. The bell rings.

SUPER: Round 1

Early in the round, Buster is the aggressor. He lands several hard shots that have his opponent, CARL JACKSON, on the ropes. Jackson wobbles a bit.

Buster glances into the audience and smiles at Nicola. Jackson surprises Buster with a right to the face. The blow floors Buster and Nicola recoils in shock.

The bell rings. Buster gets up. The referee checks him out and says he's good to go.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 2

Jackson comes out smiling. Buster is grim-faced. He attacks Jackson with a haymaker that Jackson dodges. A counterpunch lands on Buster's ribs.

Jackson is bent over from the dodge. Buster rains down a heavy blow on the top of Jackson's head and the man goes down.

The referee counts Jackson out.

Buster smiles at Nicola, who is both scared of and attracted to him.

SUPER: Record 6-0

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - NIGHT

Later that night, Buster leads Nicola through the city streets. He sees a small Irish pub.

BUSTER
Let's get some ale?

NICOLA
What the hell is ale?

He looks at her, puzzled.

BUSTER
Would you rather have grog?

They both laugh.

INT. SMITTY'S PUB - LATER

They sit at the bar. Close, legs intertwined as before. They are the last people in the bar. It's late.

NICOLA
Why are we here? Why can't we go
have sex?

He shakes his head.

BUSTER
Match day. No sex on match day.

She scoffs.

NICOLA
Says who? Your manager? You a grown
man letting--

BUSTER
No. It's my rule. It's my way of
keeping my body and mind clean.

NICOLA
Really?

BUSTER
Haven't broken the rule yet.

NICOLA
And?

BUSTER
Haven't lost yet.

NICOLA
But that can't be--

BUSTER
You can stay over, though...

She smiles.

NICOLA
And why would I want to do that?

She takes a sip of wine.

BUSTER
So I can fuck the hell out of you
at sunrise.

He takes a sip of his scotch. She does a spit take, spraying wine all over the bar.

She grabs his hand and pulls him towards the door.

NICOLA
You can still do oral right? That
won't despoil your sacred body?

BUSTER
I don't see any reason why not.

She grins and yanks him outside.

INT. BOARDWALK HALL, ATLANTIC CITY - NIGHT

SUPER: Boardwalk Hall, Atlantic City, New Jersey/Steve Gideon

The fight is already in progress. The crowd is rowdy and into it.

SUPER: Round 1

As he moves to the center of the ring, he looks into the crowd for Nicola. She's not there. Because he's distracted, he takes a surprise jab to the face.

He gets angry, smacks his gloves together and presses towards his opponent, STEVE GIDEON, landing a flurry of blows to his head. Gideon clinches.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 5

Buster looks for Nicola again. She's still not there. His anger grows. He moves forward aggressively towards Gideon.

Buster swings wildly, but he only manages a glancing blow. Gideon lands a hard shot to Buster's ribs.

Buster grimaces, but he starts pummeling Gideon. Gideon returns Buster's punches, blow-for-blow.

They continue to exchange devastating blows until Buster's punch slips and hits Gideon below the waist. He's wobbled, but he doesn't go down.

The referee pushes Buster into a neutral corner.

REFEREE

Low blow. That's a point.

The referee checks out Gideon.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

You good to go?

Gideon nods and slaps his gloves together.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

Go!

Gideon swings wildly and connects with the side of Buster's head.

Buster shakes it off and rushes Gideon, raining punches. Buster backs him into the ropes and Gideon becomes defenseless.

The referee stops the bout. Buster jumps up on the ropes and yells to the cheering crowd.

SUPER: Record 7-0

INT. MGM GRAND GARDEN ARENA, LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

SUPER: MGM Grand Garden Arena, Las Vegas/Whitt Maximilian

The bell rings.

SUPER: Round 4

Buster has his opponent, WHITT MAXIMILIAN, boxed into the corner. He's battering the man with body blows.

Maximilian lands a right on Buster's chin. Buster wobbles a bit, shakes it off and rains a barrage of blows on Maximilian's head.

After five blows to the head, Maximilian goes down. The referee sees the brutal punches and calls the fight. Buster jumps for joy.

SUPER: Record 8-0

INT. BARCLAYS CENTER, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK - NIGHT

SUPER: Barclays Center, Brooklyn, New York/Roman Whirry

The bell rings.

SUPER: Round 5

There are 10 seconds left in the round. Buster's opponent, ROMAN WHIRRY, chases him into the corner.

Buster misses with an uppercut. Whirry uses the opening to land a brutal combo to Buster's face. He falls into the ropes and grabs them to hold himself up.

The bell rings. Buster stumbles back to his corner.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 6

The bell rings.

Buster staggers away from his corner, his vision starting to blur.

He doesn't rush out to meet Whirry. Whirry aggressively comes at him, but Buster dances out of the way.

He keeps running from Whirry so much that the crowd starts to boo. Buster doesn't care, though. He runs as much as he can and clinches when he can't get away.

The bell rings. A few more scattered boos.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 10

Buster is winded. Whirry isn't much better. They start the round slowly, barely even punching. More boos from the crowd.

The boxers clinch. The referee breaks them up. Buster lands a few blows. Whirry is out of gas and stops punching.

Buster takes advantage and starts landing blow after blow. Whirry wraps his arms around the referee and he ends the fight.

SUPER: Record 9-0

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A DOCTOR looks at the results of a cat scan.

DOCTOR
How many fights have you had?

BUSTER
Nine?

The doctor frowns.

DOCTOR
Really? Your scan makes it seem like a lot more.

BUSTER
What does that mean?

He's agitated.

DOCTOR
You have more damage than you should with your age and experience.

Buster contemplates for a moment.

BUSTER
Does that mean I have to quit?

The doctor frowns.

DOCTOR
Not yet.

Buster smiles.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
But soon.

The smile fades.

INT. BUSTER'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Buster stumbles across the room to the open and ransacked minibar. He pulls out the last mini bottle and drains it. He searches for more, but he has already thoroughly emptied the room of alcohol. Empty bottles and cans are scattered around the room.

BUSTER
Well that's no fun.

He grabs his wallet and leaves the room.

EXT. SEMINOLE LIQUORS - LATER

Buster stands before a very low-rent liquor store. He stumbles as he goes in.

INT. SEMINOLE LIQUORS - CONTINUOUS

Buster pays the CLERK for a pint of whiskey. He takes the cap off and starts drinking.

CLERK
Hey! You can't drink that in here!

Buster doesn't stop.

BUSTER
It's a liquor store... it's liquor...

CLERK
That doesn't matter.

BUSTER
Since when?

The clerk points to the prohibition sign.

CLERK
Since always.

Buster keeps drinking as he heads for the door. The clerk picks up the phone as if to call the police, but hangs up once Buster is outside.

EXT. NICOLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Buster stands outside Nicola's house and finishes the whiskey. He tosses the empty bottle and walks to the front door and knocks.

INT. NICOLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Buster sits on a stool in front of the counter while Nicola cleans the kitchen. She's already dressed for bed. She's a little annoyed, banging dishes and avoiding eye contact.

BUSTER
What you doing?

She looks at him with venom in her eyes.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
What?

NICOLA
Clearly I'm doing dishes.

Buster is wounded. He wants to say something, but bites his tongue.

He gets up and opens the fridge. He roots around inside until he finds a beer.

Nicola turns and glares at him.

BUSTER
What?

She turns back to the dishes.

Buster chugs the beer.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Where do empties go?

She vaguely waves towards a recycling bin in the hallway. He trashes the bottle and goes back to the fridge for more. But he doesn't find any more. He shuts the fridge.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
You got anything else to drink?

She stops washing the dishes and grips the sink in silent rage.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
What's up your ass?

She glares at him. Buster starts opening cabinets looking for something else to drink.

NICOLA
What's wrong with you?

BUSTER
What?

NICOLA
Get out of here!

He's genuinely baffled.

BUSTER
What did I do?

She pushes him out the door and slams it behind him.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Bitch.

NICOLA (O.S.)
And don't come back.

She locks the door.

EXT. SEMINOLE HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO - NIGHT

SUPER: Seminole Hard Rock Casino

The lights of the casino's giant guitar dominate the skyline. Crowds make their way to the entrance.

INT. SEMINOLE HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO - CONTINUOUS

Buster wears a tailored suit as he sits down at a poker table. At the center of the table sits BROOKS, WM, 30s, who is surrounded by three beautiful and sexy women, a BLONDE, a BRUNETTE and a REDHEAD. All white and in their mid-20s.

Brooks eyes Buster carefully. He recognizes the boxer, but plays it cool.

Buster puts his chips on the table. He makes eye contact with Brooks, who smiles at him. Buster is embarrassed at first and looks away.

Buster looks back and Brooks is still smiling at him.

BROOKS
Are you him?

BLONDE

Him who?

She giggles. Buster nods. Brooks grins.

BROOKS

Ladies, meet our new friend, Buster
"Brown" Barkley, one of the best
upcoming boxers in the world.

The women get excited. The blonde and the redhead snuggle up
to Buster with grins on their faces.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

He's going to be heavyweight
champion before too long.

The redhead pulls Buster by his chin, so they make eye
contact.

REDHEAD

Is that true?

Buster blushes.

BUSTER

Yeah.

She grins and kisses him on the cheek. The blonde kisses him
on the other cheek. She pulls Buster's face her way,

BLONDE

That's really exciting.

She softly kisses him on the lips. He enjoys it, but then
gets worried and backs away.

BLONDE (CONT'D)

Something wrong?

BUSTER

(to Brooks)

Aren't they with you?

(to the blonde)

Aren't you with him?

Everyone laughs except Buster.

BROOKS

We're all just friends.

BLONDE

Good friends.

BRUNETTE
Friends with benefits.

She leans in and kisses Brooks. The dealer watches all this with amusement.

REDHEAD
Do YOU want to be our friend?

She takes him by the hand and pulls him towards the elevators. The other women follow.

Buster turns to the dealer and waves to his and Buster's chips.

BROOKS
Have all this sent to room 7609.

DEALER
Yes, sir.

Brooks tips the dealer and follows the women.

INT. BROOKS' HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Buster joins Brooks and the ladies in his multi-room hotel suite for the after party.

A series of shots of them partying: drinking, snorting coke, dancing, the ladies making out, Buster having sex with the ladies.

INT. SPORTS CENTRAL STUDIO

This leads us to the very futuristic and busy Sports Central set. Blue is the dominant color. At the desk are INESTA MORGAN and MAJOR SUMRELL

Inesta is an athletic Black woman in her 30s, with short, styled hair. She wears a tailored pantsuit. She is confident and open.

INESTA
Welcome back.

Major is over 6' and 220 lbs. He played football and has stayed in shape, despite being in his 40s. He has a thin mustache and wears stylish glasses.

MAJOR
We thank you for watching Sports Central

INESTA

And more importantly, our sponsors
thank you.

Fake laughter.

MAJOR

Tonight, we're going to take a
closer look at the career of a
rising star in the boxing world,
Buster "Brown" Barkley.

The screen beside Major's head shows a head shot of Buster.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Few athletes have a background like
Buster "Brown" Barkley. The son of
a convicted murderer, Buster was
essentially an orphan who raised
himself starting at the age of 10.
From an early age, Buster was into
boxing. He spent years blazing a
path through the amateur ranks
before going pro, where his success
continued unabated.

INT. LITTLE CAESARS ARENA, DETROIT, MICHIGAN - NIGHT

SUPER: Little Caesars Arena, Detroit, Michigan/Jose Marquez

MAJOR (V.O.)

First, Barkley fought Jose Marquez,
another relative newcomer.

JOSE MARQUEZ faces off against Buster.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Marquez hung in early, rocking
Barkley with a savage uppercut in
the third.

Marquez lands the uppercut. Buster almost goes down.

MAJOR (V.O.)

But Buster Brown came back and
knocked Marquez down three times in
the fifth before the referee
stopped the fight.

A series of shots of Buster knocking Marquez down:

-A combo ending with a right cross.

-A 5-punch combo to Marquez's head.

-A savage left to Marquez's body.

MAJOR (V.O.)

After that body blow, Marquez never got back up, continuing Barkley's winning streak.

SUPER: Record 10-0

INT. CASINO MIAMI, FLORIDA - NIGHT

SUPER: Casino Miami, Florida/Colin Fitzsimmons

INESTA (V.O.)

Next up was Colin Fitzsimmons, but the Irishman was completely outclassed.

COLIN FITZSIMMONS comes out of his corner confidently. Buster rocks him with an overhand right to the head.

INESTA (V.O.)

Buster's first punch staggered Fitzsimmons, who tried to hide the rest of the round.

Fitzsimmons dances away, but Buster follows him quickly. He guides Fitzsimmons into the corner and unleashes a 21-punch barrage that floors Fitzsimmons.

INESTA (V.O.)

Barkley chased Fitzsimmons into the corner and unloaded a devastating flurry of blows that made him feel unwelcome in his adopted homeland.

MAJOR (V.O.)

That first round knockout might make Fitzsimmons reconsider his application for American citizenship.

SUPER: Record 11-0

INT. AMALIE ARENA - NIGHT

SUPER: Amalie Arena/Darrell Dixon

DARRELL DIXON faces off against Buster.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Darrell Dixon did much better for most of his fight against Barkley, even getting a knockdown in the fourth.

A series of body blows to the same spot on Buster's ribs knock him to the canvas.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Barkley managed to recover, but he was losing on points until a wild haymaker from Dixon missed, leaving his jaw exposed.

Dixon misses wildly on his punch. Buster counters with a brutal shot to Dixon's jaw. Dixon is unconscious before he hits the mat.

SUPER: Record 12-0

INT. TAMPA CONVENTION CENTER - NIGHT

SUPER: Tampa Convention Center/Maynard Gans

MAJOR (V.O.)

Buster next squared off against Maynard Gans. His easy victory was marred by a low blow.

MAYNARD GANS and Buster face off. They exchange jabs. They trade combinations that are dodged or blocked. Until the last punch from Buster, which is WAY below the belt. Gans falls to the mat.

The referee sends Buster to a neutral corner.

REFEREE

Low blow. That's a point.

CUT TO:

MAJOR (V.O.)

Other than the 4th, when the low blow deduction was assessed, Barkley won most rounds.

Buster and Gans exchange blows. Buster pushes Gans into the corner and traps him. A left jab rocks Gans into the ropes. Buster unleashes a flurry of blows. Gans stops fighting back after the fifth punch, but Buster lands a dozen more unanswered shots before the bell rings.

Buster raises his hands. He knows he won.

MAJOR (V.O.)

After that closing flurry, Barkley easily won a unanimous decision.

SUPER: Record 13-0

INT. SPORTS CENTRAL STUDIO

Inesta and Major sit at the news desk. The Sports Central set is very futuristic and busy. Blue is the dominant color.

INESTA

With a record of 13-0, with 11 knockouts, people are asking what's next for the young man.

MAJOR

Barkley currently sits as the #3 ranked contender by the IBF. If he keeps winning--

INESTA

And he's shown no signs of slowing down.

MAJOR

He'll definitely start getting attention from the other governing bodies. Sources at the WNO suggest he'll be in their rankings really soon.

INT. SPORTS CENTRAL INTERVIEW STUDIO

Buster sits in the television studio, across from reporter SHARON ALLIGOOD, WF, tall, mid-20s. She has long red hair and wears a calf-length skirt and matching jacket.

ALLIGOOD

Thank you for joining me today.

They exchange pleasant smiles.

BUSTER

Of course. Thank you for having me.

ALLIGOOD

Is this your first on-air interview.

He chuckles.

BUSTER

Yes, it is.

ALLIGOOD

Don't worry, I'll take it easy on you.

BUSTER

Much obliged.

ALLIGOOD

What got you started in boxing?

Buster shrugs.

BUSTER

My dad watched it all the time. I hated it at first, but I got used to it. Before long, I found out it was the thing that I knew the most about, so...

ALLIGOOD

So, what drives you to get out there and keep fighting?

Buster frowns.

BUSTER

Anger. There are a lot of things to be angry about. I take my frustrations out by legally beating up other dudes.

Alligood half laughs.

ALLIGOOD

Okay, let's lighten things up a bit... Tell me who you're dating.

Buster laughs.

INT. GORDO'S CUBAN RESTAURANT, TAMPA - NIGHT

Buster and his party fill up a large table in the back of the restaurant. To one side of Buster are Brooks and his ladies. On the other side are Frank and Grady.

BROOKS

Before we go any further, we should toast Buster and his upcoming championship bout.

Brooks holds up his champagne glass.

FRANK
 (quietly to Grady)
 Didn't we already do this.

The two laugh and then join the toast. Buster is already very drunk.

BROOKS
 Time for presents!

He dumps cocaine on the table and starts chopping it into lines with a credit card. The ladies cheer. Buster grins.

Brooks points the credit card at Frank and Grady. Both shake their heads.

FRANK
 No thank you.

GRADY
 In fact, we need to take off.

The ladies boo. Brooks chops up five lines. Frank and Grady stand up and put on their coats. Buster frowns.

BUSTER
 C'mon? We're just getting started.

FRANK
 Another time.

GRADY
 Not for me.

Buster shrugs and snorts a line. He passes a short straw to the blonde, who accepts it joyfully.

EXT. GORDO'S CUBAN RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Grady walk outside. Frank shakes his head.

FRANK
 That ain't headed nowhere good.

GRADY
 I'll keep an eye on him.

FRANK
 Keep two.

They both laugh humorlessly.

Nicola walks up to them. Both men offer a concerned look when they see her.

NICOLA
Frank. Grady. Leaving early?

Frank nods.

GRADY
Not exactly our scene in there.

FRANK
Too fast for my blood.

Nicola frowns.

NICOLA
Something bad?

Grady looks at her with a grim face.

GRADY
I wouldn't go in there if I were
you.

She gives him a look of apology. That says I have to.

GRADY (CONT'D)
Be careful.

FRANK
Take care of yourself.

NICOLA
I always do.

She hugs each man.

INT. GORDO'S CUBAN RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Nicola walks in and she stops short. Buster is doing a body shot off of the blonde while the brunette and redhead snuggle up and rub on him. Brooks snorts a line of coke.

Buster does his shot, then kisses the blonde's breast. He looks up and makes eye contact with Nicola.

He freezes like a deer in the headlights.

Nicola bursts into tears and runs out of the restaurant.

BROOKS
Don't go! Join us!

Brooks and the ladies laugh. Buster doesn't.

INT. GORDO'S CUBAN RESTAURANT - LATER

Coach Murray walks in and stops short. He looks around the remains of the party. Half-empty plates and drinks everywhere. Remnants of coke on the table. Everyone is blitzed out of their minds and half-undressed.

COACH MURRAY
Where is everyone?

BUSTER
I guess they left. Must've gotten board.

The women laugh.

COACH MURRAY
Saw Nicola outside.

Buster shrugs. Murray stares at him with disdain, even pity.

COACH MURRAY (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

Buster glares at him.

BUSTER
What do you care?

COACH MURRAY
I... you know what... I don't care anymore.

He turns and walks out. Brooks and the women laugh out loud.

Buster stares after Coach Murray, embarrassed. He drains his Scotch.

EXT. SMOOTHIE KING CENTER, NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

SUPER: Smoothie King Center, New Orleans/Manny Duran

The lights of the Smoothie King Center illuminate the New Orleans night. Crowds mob the entrance, almost fighting their way inside.

The sign over the entrance says "IBF Championship Bout."

INT. SMOOTHIE KING CENTER - CONTINUOUS

The building is packed with a raucous crowd. Half in support of Buster and half in support of MANNY DURAN, HM, early 30s.

SUPER: Round 1

Duran gets off to a good start, landing several combinations and fending off Buster.

Buster defends against anything bad. The round is even.

CUT TO:

SUPER: ROUND 2

Duran lands an overhand right that knocks Buster into the ropes. Buster covers up as Duran unleashes a 10-punch combo.

Buster slips away and Duran hits his shoulder as he goes.

Duran pursues, launching jabs that force Buster into the corner.

Buster swings wildly and lands a low blow that floors Duran.

The referee pushes Buster towards a neutral corner.

REFEREE

One warning. I've seen your fights.
Next time it'll be a point.

Buster frowns. Duran is up and the referee clears him. He immediately lands a combo to Buster's head.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 4

Duran keeps Buster at bay with a strong left jab. He lands a strong right cross that Buster shakes off.

Buster tries several combinations, but Duran dodges or blocks them all.

Duran lands a solid shot to the head, but Buster's counter punch rocks Duran. He stumbles backwards. Buster chases but the bell rings and the referee steps between them.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 5

Duran is still not full strength and he starts the round tentatively, moving a lot and protecting himself. He keeps his gloves high and Buster goes for the body.

But his blow goes low.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

That's a point.

The referee checks Duran then lets them fight. The boxers land simultaneous heavy blows. After, they're both tentative and dance around until the bell rings.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 8

Buster comes out aggressively. He lands three left jabs on Duran.

Duran backs away and Buster follows, landing a massive overhand right to the side of Duran's head. Duran stumbles for a few steps then falls to the mat.

Buster goes to a neutral corner as the referee counts Duran. The boxer gets up and is steady enough, the referee resumes the fight.

Buster immediately pushes for the knockout, but Duran lands an uppercut that hurts Buster. He starts bleeding and blood drips into his left eye.

Buster tries to shake the blood out of his eye. He tries to intimidate Duran by approaching aggressively.

Duran launches a shot at Buster's left eye.

Buster swings back, but his punch lands low again. Duran goes down.

The referee disqualifies Buster and declares Duran the winner while he's writhing in pain on the floor.

Buster leaps into the air in disbelief. He tries to get to the referee, but Grady rushes out and pulls him away. Buster accidentally elbows Grady in the face and a group of men grab Buster and yank him back to his corner.

SUPER: Record 13-1

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Buster sits across from a PSYCHIATRIST, who goes over Buster's test results.

PSYCHIATRIST
Well, there's nothing in any of
your tests that explains it.

Buster looks at him, puzzled.

BUSTER
Are you saying it's all in my head?

The psychiatrist smiles politely.

PSYCHIATRIST
Well, yes and no.

Buster frowns.

PSYCHIATRIST (CONT'D)
It's psychological. There's no
visible damage.

BUSTER
That sounds good.

PSYCHIATRIST
It mostly is.

BUSTER
Mostly?

PSYCHIATRIST
You still have the problem. Even if
we don't know the cause.

BUSTER
Then what do we do about it?

PSYCHIATRIST
We talk about it.

Buster scoffs.

PSYCHIATRIST (CONT'D)
Why do you think you can't stop?

Buster starts getting angry.

BUSTER
Who says I can't stop?

PSYCHIATRIST

You did.

BUSTER

I never... you know what, I'm done with this.

PSYCHIATRIST

Buster?

Buster angrily stands up and crosses the room to the door.

PSYCHIATRIST (CONT'D)

Buster?

Buster leaves and doesn't shut the door.

PSYCHIATRIST (CONT'D)

Buster?

The psychiatrist stares after him, but Buster is gone.

EXT. AMERICAN AIRLINES CENTER, DALLAS - NIGHT

Fans line up to enter the arena. A banner hangs over the entrance featuring the faces of Barkley and Freddy Gonzalez. It reads "The Rematch."

INT. AMERICAN AIRLINES CENTER - CONTINUOUS

SUPER: American Airlines Center, Dallas/Freddy Gonzalez

Once again, Buster faces off against Freddy Gonzalez. The men meet in the middle of the ring.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Barkley didn't stop fighting after the loss, but he was notably less effective. Rumors were that he stopped doing his reportedly brutal workout regime and super strict diet. And it showed.

SUPER: Round 1

Buster aggressively rushes at Gonzalez. Freddy rocks him with a right cross and Buster is quickly in danger.

The first round is Gonzalez badgering Buster, who is tentative and somewhat scared. He dances away a lot and the crowd boos.

Gonzalez steadily lands punches, but nothing really hurts Buster.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 4

Gonzalez and Buster exchange blows in the middle of the ring. Buster lands a few good jabs, but Gonzalez sneaks in an uppercut that knocks Buster to a knee.

He's back up pretty quickly, but clearly he's hurt.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 7

Gonzalez has Buster trapped in the corner. Buster blocks all of Freddy's headshots, but he isn't able to counter.

Gonzalez lands a brutal shot to the ribs and Buster goes down.

Gonzalez is sent to the neutral corner. Buster struggles to get back up and barely makes it to his feet.

The referee clears him to fight and Gonzalez rushes at Buster aggressively. Buster throws a few weak jabs. Gonzalez counters with a left hook that lands squarely on Buster's jaw. Buster goes limp and crashes to the canvas.

The referee declares Gonzalez the winner. Gonzalez and the crowd go crazy.

SUPER: Record 13-2

INT. BUSTER'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Buster's hotel room is dark. He lays in the bed, drinking and reading hateful Tweets on his phone. He finishes the last of his beer.

He picks up the room phone and dials room service.

BUSTER

Can I get some champagne? Two bottles?

His cell phone rings and he picks it up.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

Hey Brooks, what do you want?

He listens.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Nah, I'm staying in tonight. Not
feeling it.

He listens.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Will do.

He hangs up.

CUT TO:

Buster sits in a chair. One of the champagne bottles is empty. He drinks from the other. He swallows the last drop.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Dammit!

He throws the bottle at the television, cracking it. Buster goes into a rage. He pulls the television from the wall and throws it at the sliding glass door. It doesn't break.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Dammit!

He picks up a chair and throws it through the door. It shatters. Buster grins.

Buster goes on a rampage, tearing up anything in the room that he can.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The hotel MANAGER knocks at Buster's door.

MANAGER
Mr. Barkley. We've had a noise
complaint and--

A loud crash inside scares the manager and he runs back to the elevator.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Two uniformed police officers carry Buster towards the front door. He struggles to get away from them, but he's too drunk and can barely stay on his feet.

BUSTER

Let go of me! I'm gonna be the
heavyweight champion of the world.

WHITE OFFICER

Not tonight, you aren't.

BLACK OFFICER

Looks to me like you're about to be
heavyweight champion of the
homeless.

BELL HOPS carry Buster's hastily-gathered belongings and
trail behind, directed by the manager.

MANAGER

Get that thug out of here. Toss his
stuff off the property. Toss him,
too.

The manager stays inside, but watches them take Buster
towards the parking lot.

EXT. HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

The officers toss Buster to the sidewalk, off the hotel
property, and onto a public parking lot. The bell hops toss
Buster's stuff at him. They return to the hotel.

BLACK OFFICER

If you come back, make sure you
notice that we're armed, Mr.
Heavyweight Champion.

He rests his hand on his pistol and glares at Buster for a
moment. Then he goes back inside.

Buster drunkenly stumbles to his feet and gathers his stuff.
He stumbles towards a rental car, dropping items as he goes.
He stashes his stuff in the back seat then meanders back to
get the dropped items, only managing to fall once.

He gets back in the car, burps and drops his keys on the
floor. He leans down to pick them up and smacks his head on
the steering wheel. He passes out.

EXT. HIGHWAY 19 - NIGHT

The highway is relatively empty as Buster drives along,
struggling to keep the car in the right lane. He weaves the
car past a cop stationed beneath a billboard. The cop turns
on his lights and pulls out to follow Buster.

Buster pulls over. The cop gets out and carefully approaches Buster's window. Buster rolls it down.

OFFICER
Son, do you know why--

He freezes when he sees Buster's face. He grins.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Buster "Brown" Barkley!?

Buster nods.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
I'm a huge fan. Can I get your autograph?

The officer holds out his pen and notebook. Buster scrawls something illegible and hands it back.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Thanks, champ! You partying tonight?

BUSTER
Just tryin' ta get home.

The officer frowns.

OFFICER
That's good. You're a little too intoxicated to be driving.

BUSTER
Are you arresting me?

The officer shakes his head.

OFFICER
No, but you're gonna have to walk home.

Buster frowns.

BUSTER
But I live in Tal... It's too far.

The officer shrugs.

OFFICER
Is there somebody you can call?

BUSTER
At this time of night?

OFFICER
I love you, man, but I can't let
you drive tonight.

Buster gets out and locks the car.

BUSTER
Okay, okay...

The officer holds up the autograph.

OFFICER
Thanks, champ!

He returns to his patrol car. Buster watches him go.

BUSTER
(sarcastic)
You're welcome.

Buster starts walking along the highway.

CUT TO:

Buster is further along Highway 19. He waves as the officer
drives past him.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Fuck this shit.

He calls Brooks.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Come pick me up.

INT. BROOKS' SUV - LATER

Brooks drives along Highway 19. Buster sits in the passenger
seat.

BUSTER
Thanks for the lift. Some cop
targeted me. Trying to teach me a
lesson or something.

BROOKS
No problem. I'm glad you called me.
A couple of opportunities fell in
my lap.

Beat.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
PAID opportunities.

BUSTER
I'm listening.

BROOKS
The first is easy. Just a meet-and-greet with a high roller.

BUSTER
Sounds easy enough.

BROOKS
Thursday. I'll pick you up and take you to the hotel.

Brooks hands him a card with the name Gordon Broun on it.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Guy's a promoter and he wants to pitch you a special event.

BUSTER
What is it?

Brooks shrugs.

BROOKS
He didn't give me the details.

Buster pockets the card.

Brooks slows down and pulls to the side of the road.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
This you?

Brooks parks behind Buster's car.

BUSTER
Yeah.

Buster gets out, clearly still drunk.

BROOKS
Thursday?

BUSTER
Yeah.

Buster waves and gets in his car.

EXT. BUSTER'S TRAILER - LATER

Buster pulls the car into the driveway. He smashes into a trash can, shattering his headlight as he comes to a stop.

He gets out of the car, forgets to shut the door and stumbles towards the front door of the trailer.

The lights are out, the boxing gym is dirty with leaves and cobwebs and the yard is overgrown.

Buster fumbles with the keys. He drops them but awkwardly catches them and almost falls to the ground. He steadies himself, then vomits.

He goes inside.

INT. BUSTER'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Buster goes to the fridge and gets a beer. He opens it and takes a sip. He looks around the dirty and dusty trailer.

He pulls out his phone and dials Nicola. It instantly goes to voicemail. When he hears the beep, he throws the phone across the room.

He takes a sip from the beer, walks into his bedroom and collapses face first on the bed. The beer bottle falls and spills on the carpet.

EXT. VIDEOTRON CENTER, QUEBEC CITY, CANADA - NIGHT

SUPER: Videotron Center, Quebec City/Maynard Gans

The Videotron Center dominates the Canadian skyline as throngs of fans make their way inside.

INT. VIDEOTRON CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Buster faces off against Maynard Gans.

INESTA (V.O.)

After the two brutal losses, Barkley signed up for the second rematch of his career, against Maynard Gans, who Barkley defeated in a controversial decision last year that was tainted by a low blow.

In the crowd are a bunch of rough looking guys wearing T-shirts with Gans' name on them.

INESTA (V.O.)

In the early rounds of the fight,
Gans supporters were rowdy, on a
short fuse.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 3

Gans lands a left-right combination that shakes Buster a bit. He stumbles backwards, trips over his feet and lands on his ass. The crowd cheers.

REFEREE

That's a fall, no knockdown.

The referee sends Gans to a neutral corner. He checks out Buster, who is good to go.

Buster is angry and goes after Gans aggressively. He lands two jabs to Gans' face.

Gans takes a big swing but misses as Buster ducks under it. Buster throws a combination of body blows, the second one lands low. The referee doesn't see it, but the crowd does. They start booing.

A second later, a water bottle flies in the ring. It hits Buster in the back. He whips around and glares at the crowd.

BUSTER

Who threw that?

The referee tries to restrain Buster. More bottles fly into the ring. Several fights break out in the stands between Gans and Barkley supporters.

A glass bottle hits the turnbuckle, bounces off and smashes to the floor.

The referee calls the bout and rushes from the ring. Buster, his team and other officials rush from the ring towards the locker room while bottles rain down on them.

INESTA (V.O.)

It was clear that angry Gans fans
were behind the violence, and
referee Butch Morten disqualified
Gans.

SUPER: Record 14-2

EXT. SEMINOLE HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO - NIGHT

SUPER: Seminole Hard Rock & Casino/Caldwell Pope

Rowdy crowds approach the entrance. The fans are riled up for what promises to be a wild night.

INT. SEMINOLE HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO - CONTINUOUS

Buster faces off against CALDWELL POPE.

SUPER: Round 3

MAJOR (V.O.)

Barkley's next few fights would be just as controversial, including his match-up against journeyman Caldwell Pope.

Buster and Pope spar in the middle of the ring, exchanging brutal punches. A savage Pope uppercut knocks Buster down.

He struggles to get up and the referee waves the fight off, declaring Pope the winner.

BUSTER

What? You've got to be kidding.

The referee shakes his head and continues to wave the fight off.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

I can still go.

The referee keeps shaking his head.

Buster shoves the referee, sending him backpedaling across the ring. Grady pulls Buster out of the ring before things get worse.

MAJOR (V.O.)

After starting his professional career 13-0 in dominating fashion, with 11 knockouts, Barkley was 1-3 in his last four bouts.

SUPER: Record 14-3

EXT. TOYOTA ARENA, ONTARIO, CALIFORNIA - NIGHT

Barkley stands outside the arena watching the fans file in.

He takes a deep breath, then heads inside.

INT. TOYOTA ARENA - CONTINUOUS

SUPER: Toyota Arena, Ontario, California/Jeff Green

Buster faces off against JEFF GREEN.

 INESTA (V.O.)
 And then things got weird for
 Barkley. He was up against former
 champion Jeff Green, who was only 5-
 5 in his last 10 matches.

SUPER: Round 1

The bell rings. Green rushes to the center of the ring. Buster doesn't, instead he kneels on one knee and seems to pray to himself.

Green is confused. He jabs Buster to the head tentatively.

The referee forces himself in between the fighters and starts counting Buster out.

 INESTA (V.O.)
 Barkley seemingly kneeling in
 protest, confused his opponent and
 angered the referee who gave him a
 warning.

Buster gets to his feet. Green advances, but Buster dances away. Green follows, but Buster stays out of reach. The fans boo.

The bell rings. Green returns to his corner. Buster does not. He continues dancing around the ring and starts crying.

The referee is baffled and leans towards the scorer's table, asking them what to do.

Buster climbs out of the ring and walks out of the building to a chorus of boos.

 INESTA (V.O.)
 Reportedly, Barkley never returned
 to the locker room. He exited the
 building in his boxing gear and
 went home, baffling everyone
 involved.

The referee declares Green the winner. Green is just as shocked as everyone else.

SUPER: Record 14-4

EXT. T-MOBILE ARENA, LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

SUPER: T-Mobile Arena, Las Vegas/Porter Wagner

Large crowds make their way inside. The digital banner says:
"Tonight Only: Buster Barkley."

INT. T-MOBILE ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Buster faces off against PORTER WAGNER.

MAJOR (V.O.)

But the strangest fight of all was
Barkley's matchup against rising
star Porter Wagner.

SUPER: Round 4

Porter lands an overhand right to Buster's face. At this
point, both of Buster's eyes are nearly swollen shut.

MAJOR (V.O.)

Wagner was putting a heavy beating
on Barkley, but it was a smashing
right in the fourth that sent
things off the rails.

Buster backs away from Wagner. The blonde climbs into the
ring, while Brooks and the other ladies watch and laugh.

The blonde takes her shoe off and starts smacking Wagner in
the head. Wagner sharply pushes her away. She drunkenly
bounces into the ropes and falls to the mat.

Buster is enraged. He runs and leaps onto Wagner's back.
Wagner swats at him, but can't reach.

The referee calls the fight, disqualifying Buster.

Buster bites Wagner on the cheek. Wagner screams and freaks
out, trying to bash Buster with his gloved hands. Grady and
Wagner's team yank Buster off Wagner's back as the crowd goes
crazy.

SUPER: Record 14-5

INT. NEVADA BOXING COMMISSION OFFICE - DAY

Dressed in a suit and flanked by Grady and a LAWYER, Buster stands before a tribunal from the Nevada Boxing Commission.

Commissioner BRUCE BROWN sits in the center and speaks for the tribunal.

BROWN

Buster Barkley, please stand.

Buster and his LAWYER stand.

BROWN (CONT'D)

Based upon conduct unbecoming of the sport, you are hereby banned from competitive boxing in the state of Nevada for one year.

Buster looks down in shame.

BROWN (CONT'D)

Based on our conversations with other jurisdictions, you won't be licensed to box in any U.S. state or territory during said year.

Grady puts a hand on Buster's shoulder.

INT. PRESIDENTIAL SUITE, SEMINOLE HARD ROCK - NIGHT

Buster enters the presidential suite at the Hard Rock, joining Brooks, the ladies and FLOYD. Floyd is super excited to see him.

BROOKS

Floyd, meet Buster "Brown" Barkley.
Buster meet Floyd.

Floyd shakes Buster's hand vigorously.

BUSTER

Floyd what?

Floyd frowns.

FLOYD

Let's not.

Buster backs down, holding his hands up.

BUSTER

No worries.

Floyd grins.

FLOYD
Brooks, drinks.

Floyd winks at Brooks, but where Buster can't see it. Brooks waves the ladies out the front door and he goes to the bar.

Buster frowns.

BUSTER
The ladies aren't partying?

Brooks pours powder from a capsule into Buster's drink and stirs it in.

BROOKS
They'll be back. They have an errand to run.

Brooks hands him his drink. He hands another to Floyd and the men toast. Buster coughs a little as he swallows. Brooks and Floyd exchange a glance. Floyd smiles.

BUSTER
That's strong. I need to sit down.

He sits, taking another sip of his drink before setting his glass down. He looks drowsy.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
What WAS that?

BROOKS
Scotch and soda.

BUSTER
It tasted--

Buster passes out.

FLOYD
Was that too strong? Did you kill him?

Beat.

FLOYD (CONT'D)
I mean, it doesn't matter to me, but I can't have him dead, so you'd lose--

BROOKS

He's fine. He'll only be out for an hour, so you'd better get started.

Brooks tosses Floyd a gym bag. Floyd opens it and it contains two pair of boxing gloves. Floyd grins.

CUT TO:

Buster is still unconscious, but he's now shirtless, wearing boxing trunks and gloves. Floyd is dressed the same way.

Brooks holds Floyd's phone, ready to take pictures.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

You want action shots?

Floyd shakes his head.

FLOYD

Nah, he looks passed out, so let me work him over and then the shots will look like it's after the fight.

BROOKS

Whatever floats your boat, man.

Floyd approaches Buster's unconscious body, fists raised.

He tentatively punches Buster in the face. Brooks laughs nervously.

Floyd sets himself and punches Buster harder. Buster's head falls to the side.

Floyd punches him again. Harder.

Then he proceeds to batter the unconscious boxer with blow after blow.

Brooks drops the phone to his side. He stops watching the first time Brooks draws blood.

Floyd beats Buster in the face and on the body until he's too tired to go on. Floyd stops, breathing heavily.

Brooks turns to see Buster beaten badly. Bleeding from several cuts, skin red nearly everywhere from the repeated blows. Brooks almost vomits.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

You done?

A giddy Floyd poses next to Buster, holding his glove close to Buster's battered face.

FLOYD
Hell yeah. Take a bunch.

The CAMERA stays on Brooks as he starts snapping pics. He takes about a dozen.

FLOYD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Now do some fun ones. For social.

Brooks frowns as he snaps more pics. Floyd giggles in the background. After another half dozen shots, Brooks stops taking pics. He sets Floyd's phone down.

BROOKS
Now get out of here. I need to call an ambulance.

Brooks pulls out his own phone. Floyd boos.

EXT. LUCKY'S PUB, TALLAHASSEE - NIGHT

SUPER: Six months later.

Buster stands outside a hole-in-the wall Irish pub, talking on the phone.

BUSTER
Yes, Grady, I'm here.

He listens.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Found the card cleaning up.

Beat.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Supposed to be a promoter. But I've never heard of him.

Buster listens.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
I will.

He hangs up.

INT. LUCKY'S PUB - LATER

Buster sits inside Lucky's, at a table across from GORDON BROUN.

GORDON
So that's it.

BUSTER
Two weeks? One fight at a private venue? For 50?

Gordon nods and grins.

EXT. LUCKY'S PUB - LATER

Buster walks outside and calls Grady.

BUSTER
I got a fight. In two weeks.

He listens.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Amateur bout for 50. It's better than nothing.

He hangs up and lets the tension drain from his body.

EXT. GORDON BROUN'S HOUSE, TAMPA - DAY

Buster goes around the side of a large suburban Tampa home. In the backyard, an amateurish boxing ring has been set up. Waiting for him is Gordon Broun, grinning.

GORDON
Dude, I'm so glad you could make it.

Buster is annoyed.

BUSTER
What the hell is this?

GORDON
The only match you can get. Get your gloves on.

Buster reluctantly complies.

GORDON (CONT'D)
Now get in the ring, motherfucker.

Buster glares at him, then complies. Gordon grins.

Inside the ring, Buster faces off against a mountainous WM, 20s, FRANTZ. A referee signals for them to start.

Frantz is cocky and runs directly at Buster.

FRANTZ

Saw that video of that random dude
knocking you out in a hotel room.
This is gonna be fast and fun.

Buster smashes Frantz with a powerful overhand right and the giant amateur is out before he hits the mat. The crowd of ne'er-do-wells, hangers-on and influencers goes crazy.

The referee helps Buster take off his gloves. Gordon hands him \$50.

BUSTER

That's it?

GORDON

This ain't Caesars. You want
another \$50. I can get you another
fight today.

Buster throws the boxing gloves at him.

BUSTER

Go fuck yourself.

Buster walks away as the next backyard fight starts. Gordon laughs then turns his attention to the bout.

INT. NEVADA BOXING COMMISSION OFFICE - DAY

SUPER: Six months later.

Dressed in a suit, Buster sits across from Commissioner Bruce Brown in his office.

BROWN

You can go to matches again now
that your suspension is over.

Buster frowns.

BUSTER

Go? Can I fight?

Brown gets a super serious look on his face.

BROWN

Only if you can find a boxer who will fight you and a promoter who will take on the match.

Buster frowns.

BROWN (CONT'D)

And you don't have a lot of options. Can't help you with an opponent, but there is a promoter who MIGHT take you on.

Brown slides a card over to Buster. He reads it.

BUSTER

Daniel Clamp? Never heard of him.

Brown smiles.

BROWN

Old New York guy. Was in business until he was attacked by some wild animals and decided to start "living his life" or some shit.

Buster shrugs and pockets the card.

EXT. CAESARS PALACE, LAS VEGAS - DAY

Buster enters Caesars as a audience member, not as a fighter.

A poster next to the door advertises tonight's event, a match for the light heavyweight championship.

INT. CAESARS PALACE - CONTINUOUS

Buster makes his way towards his front row seat. Once he arrives, he sees he's sitting next to Manny Duran.

Duran sees him and stands, shaking Buster's hand vigorously.

DURAN

Buster Brown!

Buster grins.

BUSTER

I haven't heard that in a while.

DURAN

Why not? It's a great nickname!

Buster laughs. He nods towards the ring.

BUSTER
Who you got?

Duran laughs.

DURAN
Neill, obviously.

Buster joins him in laughter. They watch the fight for a few seconds.

DURAN (CONT'D)
So I read about your father... your
mother... tragic.

Buster tightens up. He doesn't say anything. Duran looks on with concern.

DURAN (CONT'D)
I... uh... come from a... similarly
DARK background.

Buster looks over at Duran.

DURAN (CONT'D)
Father worked for one of the
cartels... he and my mother were
gunned down in front of me.

Buster empathizes.

BUSTER
Brutal.

DURAN
Doesn't get more brutal.

Beat.

DURAN (CONT'D)
But it's not a competition, you
know?

Buster tears up.

DURAN (CONT'D)
So I hear you're looking for a
bout?

Buster looks towards Duran eagerly.

BUSTER
You serious?

Duran nods.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
I can't begin to thank you enough.

Duran laughs.

DURAN
None of that biting or low blows,
right?

BUSTER
I promise.

They both laugh.

INT. OFFICE OF DANIEL CLAMP - DAY

Buster sits in DANIEL CLAMP's office. Clamp is pleasantly surprised.

CLAMP
How in the hell did you get Duran?

Buster shrugs.

BUSTER
Helps to know people, I guess.

CLAMP
The commission doesn't want this
fight in Nevada.

BUSTER
We can go anywhere. Florida?

CLAMP
Nobody else will take the fight.
Down there... it's like the Wild
West.

BUSTER
Why is Florida taking it?

CLAMP
Duran. He's got clout. And money.

Buster smiles.

CLAMP (CONT'D)
There are conditions...

Buster frowns.

CLAMP (CONT'D)
This is all or nothing. You HAVE to
keep it clean...

BUSTER
I can do th--

CLAMP
And you have to win.

Buster is shocked.

CLAMP (CONT'D)
If you win, you get \$4 million and
you will be licensed in any state.

Buster smiles.

CLAMP (CONT'D)
If you lose you get \$100k...

Buster frowns.

CLAMP (CONT'D)
And, win or lose, if you can't keep
it clean, you're done. Nevada,
Florida, New York, nobody. They
don't want anything to do with you
unless you can make them money.

BUSTER
I guess I have no choice.

CLAMP
Absolutely no choice.

Buster isn't happy about the deal.

EXT. CAESARS PALACE, PARADISE, NEVADA - NIGHT

SUPER: Caesars Palace, Paradise, Nevada/Manny Duran

Larger-than-capacity crowds surround the entrance. Some of
them won't make it inside.

INT. CAESARS PALACE - CONTINUOUS

Buster and Duran tap gloves and return to their corners.

SUPER: Round 1

Buster comes out confident, as if he has nothing to lose. Duran is even more confident, he knows he's in better shape.

Buster leads with his left jab, scoring several shots that don't really hurt Duran.

Duran lands a combination to Buster's head. Buster lands an overhand right that gets Manny's attention.

The two boxers nod in respect.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 3

Duran drives Buster into the corner with jabs. Once he has him trapped, Duran lands a seven punch combination that rocks Buster.

Buster swings wildly, and his punch goes low. Duran isn't hurt, but he goes to a neutral corner. The referee confronts Buster. The audience boos him.

REFEREE

That's a point. That's your only warning. Next time it's a DQ.

Buster nods. The referee checks on Duran.

Time freezes for Buster. He looks around. Sees disappointment on Duran's face. He sees Grady shake his head in disgust. He sees disdain on the referee's face. In the audience, he sees a variety of reactions--anger, pity, even fear. He sweats as he looks from face to face. He nearly panics and almost runs.

The referee brings the fighters together and Buster snaps back to reality.

The boxers tap gloves. Buster's eyes plead with Duran.

BUSTER

I'm sorry. It was an accident.

Duran scrutinizes his face for a moment. Then he taps Buster's gloves.

DURAN

Don't worry about it.

Buster smiles with relief.

DURAN (CONT'D)
But don't do it again.

Duran smiles. Buster nods.

REFEREE
Fight!

Duran surprises Buster with a right cross that makes sure Buster takes him seriously.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 4

Duran rushes out to meet Buster. Buster is less confident. He tries to ward Duran off, but Manny lands a right-left combination that makes Buster stagger backwards.

Duran presses his advantage, but Buster blocks or dodges all but Duran's weakest punches.

Buster dances away, protecting himself for the rest of the round.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 5

The two fighters stand in the center of the ring. Buster lands a left jab.

Duran nods and attacks with a left-right combination. Buster blocks both punches, but leaves himself open.

Duran lands an uppercut that floors Buster.

Buster pops back up and the referee signals for them to keep fighting.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 7

In the center of the ring, Duran swings with his right, but misses.

Buster counters with an eight-punch barrage. Duran stumbles backwards, bounces off the ropes and falls to the floor.

It takes him a second to get back up, but he does and the fight goes on.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 8

Duran has Buster caught in the corner, battering Buster's body.

They clinch up and the referee pulls them apart.

As they break, Duran lands a solid left that hurts Buster.

Buster gets angry and starts to swing wildly. The blow starts to go low. He stops himself.

Duran comes down on the top of Buster's head, knocking him to the mat.

Buster tries to get up but slips. He pushes through it with all his might and gets up in time.

CUT TO:

SUPER: Round 9

Buster and Duran stand in the center of the ring and exchange a flurry of more than a dozen blows.

Buster leaves himself open. Duran lands an uppercut on Buster's chin.

Buster stumbles back into the ropes, struggling to stay standing.

Duran presses the advantage, landing two more solid shots. Buster covers up. Duran keeps punching.

But Duran leaves an opening. And Buster lands an overhand right that devastates Duran. Duran stumbles back several steps, falls into the ropes and goes through them onto the scorer's table.

The referee declares Buster the winner. He leaps into the air with joy. His supporters mob the ring and lift him above their heads in celebration.

Someone pops a bottle of champagne and sprays everyone.

The fans put Buster down. Grady takes Buster's mouthpiece and gloves.

A fan hands Buster the half empty champagne bottle.

Grady shakes his head, but Buster doesn't see it.

Buster takes a deep look at the bottle.

He shrugs.

He takes a sip.

Then another.

Grady closes his eyes and looks down.

SUPER: Record 15-5

FADE OUT.