

THE RED ZONE

Written by

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**OVER BLACK:**

The ROAR of thousands of ROWDY FANS. They CHEER. SCREAM. STOMP. All building to a crescendo as --

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - DAY**

An AFL football game is in progress.

The running back -- ROBERT PETTIBONE (20s) detached, cold, darkly-tinted face mask, snaps out of a momentary daze - his head thick with thoughts - anticipates the football.

The man is a tank. Huge, arms that would make Thor jealous. His right arm -- ball-cradling arm -- is thick with veins bulging as they pump his powerful blood.

The ball snaps, the QUARTERBACK (20s) hands it off -- Pettibone cradles it tight in his powerful right arm --

He BLAZES downfield in LIGHTNING-FAST MOTION. Tacklers bounce off, but a group of FIVE DEFENDERS finally bring him down near the goal line. A gain of fifteen yards.

The packed hometown fans, on their feet, stomping, sporting team clothing, go CRAZY.

The Quarterback calls hurry-up offense -- hands off to Pettibone again -- Multiple defenders are BRUTALLY SLAMMED by the running back -- all fall violently to the turf as Pettibone DEFTLY RACES INTO THE END ZONE.

The WHOOPING ROAR of ecstatic fans grows deafening.

Without fanfare, Pettibone drops the football to the ground and jogs to the sideline. None of his teammates approach him.

The scoreboard reads: HAWKS 52, VISITORS 24.

Below the scoreboard is a KOREAN MAN (50s), dressed entirely in black except -- a mint green pocket square.

He does not pay attention to the scoreboard, but washes his eyes over the ecstatic fans, all melting in the palm of Pettibone's hands.

The Man nods to himself, impressed. He eyes Pettibone, adjusts his jacket, leaves.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - OWNER'S BOX - DAY**

The arrogant team owner, FORREST MONROE (60s) surrounded by his cronies, surveys the entire madding scene, dollar signs in his eyes.

Beside him is no-nonsense General Manager, STEPHEN PHILLIPS (50s).

FORREST

I don't know how the hell he does it, and I don't care. He's money in the bank.

STEPHEN

He's definitely a machine, but machines break, too... what I'm worried about is our defensive line. Our offensive series are so fast, our defense is on the field eighty percent of the time.

FORREST

You're always worried.

STEPHEN

That's my job.

FORREST

It's a simple formula. Give the ball to Pettibone as much as possible. He scores every time.

Stephen looks nervous at the idea.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - SIDELINE - DAY**

The OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR (40s) approaches COACH JAXON (50s), a steely veteran preoccupied with the game.

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR

Hey, Jax, why don't we throw a pass for once?

COACH JAXON

You lookin' to get fired? Just get the ball to Pettibone.

Coach Jaxon eyes Pettibone, sitting on the sidelines, with muted concern.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - PRESS BOX - DAY**

Amidst a gaggle of press reporters watching the game and furiously making notes on their laptops sits CALI NEAL (20s), spunky, driven, sticking out amidst the other reporters.

She's largely disinterested in the sport but the awe Pettibone carries with him catches her attention. She notices the argument around him occurring on the sideline.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY (LATER)**

Inside the raucous locker room, the players laugh, shout and cheer. A teammate, WILL, (20s) is joking around with another teammate, BROCK, (30s).

WILL

That freakazoid was like a bull in a china shop.

BROCK

Old Scarface was knocking 'em down like bowling pins.

They don't realize Pettibone is right behind them.

PETTIBONE

My ears are burning.

The surprised players turn to Pettibone.

BROCK

Hey man, just locker room talk, don't mean nothin' by it.

PETTIBONE

Good thing I'm not overly sensitive.

Pettibone leans over Brock's helmet, PRESSES HIS RIGHT HAND down on it, leaning his entire weight over it -- THE HELMET CRUMPLES like it's in a steel press -- NEARLY FLATTENS THE HELMET into the bench.

The players gawk in fear.

PETTIBONE

Sorry about your helmet. Don't mean nothin' by it.

Pettibone walks to the training room.

Brock examines his helmet.

BROCK  
Like a goddamn Pepsi can...

WILL  
At least he talked to you.

They watch Pettibone walk off, slightly fearful of him.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - DAY**

After the game, elated, half-inebriated people scramble to find their vehicles. Cali exits the stadium, heading for the parking structure.

Just then, she spots --

ARI (20s), a cocksure professional walking with SARAH (20s), gorgeous and shapely. They exchange flirtatious glances as they walk.

CALI  
No way...

Cali buries her rage, strides over to the pair, who laugh together at something he said.

CALI  
Hope I'm not interrupting anything.

Ari whips around, caught off guard.

ARI  
Cali. I--er--I thought you were at the office. What are you doing here?

CALI  
Working.

ARI  
You? At a football game?

CALI  
I got assigned the game because Matty was sick. Every assignment, there's always a story behind it. Looks like I just found a big one.

Cali glares at Sarah - animosity palpable.

ARI  
Sarah, Cali. Cali, Sarah.

They acknowledge each other.

CALI

Sarah... how do you know Ari?

SARAH

I'm not lying for you, Ari. You can straighten your own shit out.

Sarah leaves abruptly. Ari makes a futile attempt to explain. No words come, only flailing gestures.

CALI

At least she has morals. And I have an article to write. This has got to be the final straw.

She walks away. Ari looks like he's stepped in dog shit.

ARI

Cali, come on. Let me explain.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - COACH'S OFFICE - DAY**

Pettibone, now in street clothes, walks by Coach Jaxon's office. He stops. Jaxon is drinking a beer, watching the later game on TV.

PETTIBONE

Getting paid overtime, Coach?

Jaxon turns to see him. His face neutral.

COACH JAXON

Homework for next week's game. Though, I don't know why I bother.

PETTIBONE

The Stingers are no joke.

COACH JAXON

They're all a joke to you, kid. But I'm gonna sit here, have a few more beers, and pretend I make a difference.

The men stare at each other.

PETTIBONE

You should be happier. We got a W.

COACH JAXON

Yeah, without much help from me.

PETTIBONE

Why did you take me out? I was on a roll.

Jaxon shifts uncomfortably and looks guilty.

COACH JAXON

Just trying to protect you.

Pettibone's expression shows this isn't true.

COACH JAXON

Football's been my life, kid. The fans, players, coaching, strategy, camaraderie. But since you came along... this ain't football.

PETTIBONE

It's only a game.

COACH JAXON

Child's play, right?

Pettibone holds his stare until Jaxon looks back to the TV. Pettibone continues on.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - PARKING LOT - DAY**

Around the back of the stadium, Cali sits on some steps, holding back tears and trying to gather herself.

As she looks up, she sees Pettibone exiting through the players and staff entrance and into the parking lot. She makes a snap decision, gets up and heads over to him.

Cali gets closer to Pettibone, who heads to his car. However, there is a fence separating the parking lot from the rest of the stadium.

NASH (60s), a security guard, jumps in front of her, stopping her from going any further.

NASH

Whoa, whoa.

She stops and faces the security guard.

NASH

Where ya think you're going, little lady? Players and staff only.

She cocks an eyebrow.

CALI

Little lady? You seriously just called me that?

NASH

Well you're little. But maybe I spoke too soon referrin' to you as a lady.

She stews, but brushes it off.

CALI

I'm here to get a quote from Mr Pettibone.

He eyes her press badge.

NASH

You must be the new beat reporter. Well, here's the deal: you can't see Pettibone off the football field.

CALI

Because I'm a woman?

NASH

It don't matter what you got between your legs. Nobody interviews him.

She bites her tongue at his comment. Then...

CALI

How does a rookie have the clout to turn down an interview?

NASH

Respect the rules or you won't get any interviews. Probably ever.

CALI

Is this a team directive? The AFL? Pettibone's reps? Or is he some alien super-being that peels his skin off when he's not on the field?

NASH

Pettibone sets his own rules. And he's off limits. As is this parking lot.

CALI

So I need to talk to him to get his permission to talk to him, but he has a rule not to talk to him? You hear how ridiculous that sounds?



He points for her to turn around. Cali is impassioned but realizes she's not going to win this fight, leaves.

However, Pettibone has been watching this exchange from afar, intrigued by Cali. They catch each other's eye, Pettibone smiling wryly before getting in his car. Cali sulks off.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT**

Pettibone arrives home, entering into the sitting room. He seems isolated by this rather hollow and empty mansion.

He dumps his bag on the floor and flops on the couch, frustrated and wheels turning. He gets out his phone and makes a call.

PETTIBONE  
Security office please...

**EXT. NEWSPAPER BUILDING- NIGHT**

A sleek structure houses the offices of the LOS ANGELES CHRONICLE.

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - CUBICLE - NIGHT**

A frustrated Cali types the events of the football game on a computer. EMERIC SWAIN (60s), a weary, skeptical sports editor, approaches her and hands her a note.

CALI  
What's this? Pink slip?

EMERIC  
Ooo... someone's a bit salty this evening.

CALI  
Sorry. Been a shitty day.

EMERIC  
Well, hopefully this'll brighten it up. You got an interview with one Robert Pettibone. Call his contact.

CALI  
What? Pettibone? But he doesn't... wait--why me?

EMERIC

Ask him. He requested you specifically.

**EXT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - DAY**

Cali approaches a gate protecting a lavish, sprawling mansion. She rings the intercom. The gate swings open.

She takes everything in as she approaches the front door, which opens to reveal FRANK (30s), Pettibone's portly personal assistant.

FRANK

You the reporter?

CALI

Expecting someone else?

He motions for her to enter. Cali glances inside. The interior exudes a generic extravagance. Frank, directs her to --

**DRAWING ROOM - DAY**

High ceilings. Grand detail, but cold. Looks un-lived in. Sparse furnishings. Blank walls. No knickknacks.

PETTIBONE (O.S.)

You don't seem impressed.

Cali is almost shocked by his up-close appearance as he brushes past her. She fumbles as she pulls a notebook from her bag.

CALI

You have very minimalist taste.

PETTIBONE

So I've heard.

(re her notebook)

What's that for?

CALI

Some questions I'd like to ask.

He grabs the notebook, tears it in half like it's a single sheet of paper.

CALI

That was uncalled for. And rude.

PETTIBONE  
You've got fifteen minutes.

Cali says "wow" to herself, then brings out her camera.

PETTIBONE  
I didn't consent to a photo.

CALI  
I could just pull a Google image, but  
the fans'll want to see you at home.

He scoffs at the notion then thinks for a moment.

PETTIBONE  
Alright. But only one.  
(adjusts his profile)  
My photogenic side.

CALI  
Say "Limburger."

No reaction. Cali snaps the photo of an unsmiling Pettibone.

While Pettibone's back is to Cali, she snaps another, a sort-of-selfie of them. He whips around.

PETTIBONE  
I heard that.

CALI  
It was a selfie. That a crime?

PETTIBONE  
It ought to be. You got your shot.  
Delete the second or your phone ends  
up like your notebook.

She stashes her camera.

CALI  
You called me here. I don't need this  
treatment and I don't need a handout.

PETTIBONE  
Every reporter wants a piece of me. A  
career-making scoop. I'm giving it to  
you.

Cali takes a beat to process the angles.

CALI  
Okay, my mysterious career-maker,  
where are you from?

PETTIBONE

You already know this. And if you don't, you're a pretty shitty reporter because you don't do your research.

Cali is thrown by his brusque, condescending manner.

CALI

I did do my research. But all the info were just wiki-facts. I wanted to hear who you really are. From the Clydesdale's mouth.

He smirks at this.

PETTIBONE

Clever.

(then)

I was born in Peoria. Was a walk-on at an AFL tryout. The Hawks took a chance on me and I excelled. End of story. Not very flashy, sorry.

CALI

Don't you want your fans to learn more about you?

PETTIBONE

Not particularly.

She takes that in.

CALI

Most AFL players are all ego and no substance. You seem like you couldn't care less about the fame.

He wanders the room to look out the window.

PETTIBONE

Is that why you're a sports reporter? The fame? Working your way up to the desk on Sports Center?

CALI

I'm not a sports reporter. I was just covering for a colleague.

PETTIBONE

How generous of you.

CALI

I do whatever pays the bills.

PETTIBONE

And real journalism doesn't?

CALI

What's real journalism? Tracking down drug cartels? Chasing a political Pulitzer?

PETTIBONE

Uncovering dark truths?

He turns to her. It's a hard stare. Loaded. He stares her down. She looks away. Sits down.

CALI

What's the reason that you ask me to come here?

He weighs her. She finally makes eye contact and doesn't break it. He takes a breath...

PETTIBONE

The point spread is fixed.

It's the last thing she expected to hear --

CALI

What?

PETTIBONE

Did you notice they took me out of the game at a certain point? When it didn't make sense to. They do that a lot.

CALI

I assumed it was because of injury concerns. If they run you too long, odds are you'll get hurt.

PETTIBONE

They take me out after we comfortably cover the spread.

It's like someone handed her proof of presidential corruption.

PETTIBONE

I want you to write about it.

CALI

I can't write that. It's potentially slanderous.

PETTIBONE

You're quoting me, not fact-checking.

CALI

But the Hawks lost two games.

PETTIBONE

I assume they don't want to appear suspicious.

CALI

Could I have some water?

PETTIBONE

You gonna write it?

She can't seem to decide...

CALI

Why did you ask for me specifically?

PETTIBONE

Have you ever seen a little puppy getting beaten up by her older sisters and brothers but she keeps scrapping no matter how hard it is?

She looks offended.

CALI

I'm not a dog.

PETTIBONE

But you're a scrapper. I know one when I see one.

Her eyes wander to his scars on his face and neck.

CALI

Is that where you got the scars? Scrapping?

PETTIBONE

Bad acne when I was a kid.

CALI

Superheroes get acne?

PETTIBONE

I'm no superhero.

CALI

Then what are you?

His left arm begins to shake. He links his hands beside his back. Cali notices, but doesn't let on.

PETTIBONE

Time's up.

CALI

I can't write a story like that without proof. It could end my career--  
-

PETTIBONE

It could also make it--

CALI

I can't--

PETTIBONE

Then I wish you luck.

He eyes the door. Frank is there holding his hand out for her to follow him. Cali weighs up her options. She needs something...

CALI

Okay. But first you need to tell me a bit more about you. I need at least something of a profile.

PETTIBONE

Deal.

Cali places her phone on the table, pressing the record function. Pettibone exhales deeply. Checks his shaking left arm.

As he prepares to talk, a camera up in the corner of the room shifts silently to focus on Pettibone examining his arm.

#### **INT. MONITORING ROOM - DAY**

A MONITORING OPERATOR (30s) conducts surveillance on multiple screens that focus on Pettibone's entire house.

The main screen displays the tight view of Pettibone rubbing his hand up and down his left arm.

The KOREAN MAN stands over the Operator's shoulder. This is DR. QAY. He looks bothered by what he just witnessed.

DR. QAY

Make a note to Dr. Meng to examine this arm that seems to be causing the subject a problem. It may be rejecting after all.

The Operator nods and scribbles a note.

Qay takes one last look at Pettibone on the smaller screen.

DR. QAY

Don't fail us now...

**INT. CALI'S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE - DAY**

Cali enters a small yet stylish apartment. Bursting at the seams with personality, unlike Pettibone's home.

**INT. CALI'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY**

In the kitchen, Ari, wearing an apron, dices vegetables while simmering a rich sauce on the stove. He turns to Cali as she enters.

CALI

What are you doing here?

ARI

Trying out that bouillabaisse recipe again.

CALI

You have some nerve.

ARI

Still pissed, I see.

CALI

You think I catch you with another girl and I'm just going to forget about it?

Ari puts down the knife.

ARI

You didn't give me a chance to explain.

CALI

Go on, explain.

Pressure is on Ari, who struggles to know what to say...



ARI

You've been so...distant lately.  
You're always at work.

CALI

So because I'm always at work gives  
you the green light to hook up with  
something on the side?

ARI

I need something Cali! You used to  
make me feel special. Now you just  
make me feel... out there.

Cali is hurt.

CALI

How long has this been going on?

ARI

... A few months.

Cali scoffs.

CALI

I never would have expected this from  
you. You're pathetic.

ARI

You never expected it from me because  
I worshipped you. You took me for  
granted.

Cali recoils, but the truth of it stings a little.

ARI

But I want to try to make it work, I  
want to make it up to you.

CALI

With bouillabaisse? I think we're  
past that.

Cali finally sits down, exhausted, resigned.

CALI

I have work to do.

ARI

... Do you want some bouillabaisse or  
not?

Cali, despite herself, no more argument left in her, nods.

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - CUBICLE - NIGHT**

Sitting at a desk, Cali stares at her computer screen. Looks at her new notebook. Notes scribbled all over. Fixed point spread stands out.

Frustration sets in. She crumples notes, tosses paper wads, screams in silence. Composing herself, she types.

ON THE COMPUTER SCREEN: She writes "Uncooperative." Deletes. "Pettibone is a pawn." Deletes. "The spread is fixed." Deletes aggressively. She lets her head thud to the desk.

LATER

Cali proofreads the results of her finished article. She deliberates her decision with great uncertainty.

CALI

So much for being a journalist...

She clicks save then send.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Pettibone lies in bed, wide-awake, shuffling and struggling to sleep. Eventually, in frustration, he gets up.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Pettibone finishes a glass of water and sighs, heavily. A loud noise makes Pettibone jump suddenly. He looks to the floor to see that it was just an apple rolled off the side.

Middle of the night, by himself, but even so, Pettibone's reaction seems over the top as he takes breaths to recover.

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY**

As Cali walks through the office, she is congratulated by various co-workers on the article. She's bewildered.

CALI

Thanks. Uh, thank you.

Cali settles in her cubicle. Emeric is suddenly standing over her, uncharacteristically upbeat.

EMERIC

Nice work, Cali. I didn't know what to expect. With him or you.

CALI  
Neither did I.

EMERIC  
The readers are eating it up. Tell me  
this is the first of a three-parter.

CALI  
You're kidding, right? It was fluff.

EMERIC  
Fluff sells copy. Everyone loves a  
look behind the curtain.

He turns and leaves. She soaks in it for a moment. Maybe it's  
good after all.

Her phone rings from her bag. She pulls it out: PRIVATE  
NUMBER. She warily answers --

CALI  
Hello?

**EXT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - DAY**

Pettibone paces in front of his estate. Earbuds in. Pissed.

PETTIBONE  
Where the hell did you come up with  
this horse shit?

INTERCUT with

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY**

Cali becomes visibly nervous.

CALI  
Um, Mr. Pettibo--

PETTIBONE  
You lied to me. It's nothing more  
than cotton candy and fairy tales.  
You made me look a dull, cuddly teddy  
bear.

CALI  
That's how people want to see you.

PETTIBONE  
I thought you might've had the nerve  
to run with the real story.

CALI

I couldn't quote you on the team's betting or anything else you said. I have to answer to the fans, the paper, the team, the AFL -- I'm not about to risk my career on something an over-paid rookie says.

She closes her eyes, silently scolds herself. Stupid. Waits for an explosion on the other end of the line.

Pettibone smirks at the shaky breath he hears on the other end. But then --

PETTIBONE

There's just no edge to your story, or to me.

She lets out a breath.

CALI

Ever hear the old adage, never meet your heroes? Fans want to feel good about their heroes, not something that knocks their heroes off the pedestal they've put them on. Plus you barely spoke to me.

(then)

And you and I both know I couldn't write the real story. Not... yet.

She waits. He scans the horizon, pondering a decision.

PETTIBONE

Write crap like that again and we're through.

CALI

Does that mean there's a next time?

His focus shifts to a Mercedes pulling up the drive. He ends the call and walks inside, not waiting to greet the person driving up.

Cali sets down the phone, thoughtful.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - DRAWING ROOM - DAY**

Pettibone looks through a grilled window as if he's looking through a prison grate. He's frustrated, almost bursting with pent-up energy.

DR. MENG (O.S.)  
Did you not feel like showing me in,  
Robert?

Pettibone turns to see DR. MENG (60s), a well-mannered yet cold woman with a slight accent, carrying a doctor's bag.

Frank enters the room to hand a glass of cola to her, then exits as she sips from the glass.

PETTIBONE  
Isn't that the whole reason for you  
placing your guard dog Frank here?

DR. MENG  
A carefully kept inner circle keeps  
prying eyes out.

PETTIBONE  
And keeps me in.  
(then)  
It's a cozy place. I even have a name  
for it: San Quentin.

DR. MENG  
I see you have not lost your caustic  
wit.

PETTIBONE  
Who's laughing?

DR. MENG  
Tell me about this reporter you had  
in here?

PETTIBONE  
Was Frank snitching on me?

DR. MENG  
Frank does not have to snitch.

Dr. Meng points to the cameras around the ceiling.

PETTIBONE  
She was just doing an interview.

DR. MENG  
I understand the need for  
appearances. But do not get too  
involved.

He chuckles.

PETTIBONE

Dictating my personal life now, Meng?

DR. MENG

Some respect, please. It's Doctor Meng. Just be careful. She is a reporter.

PETTIBONE

Respect goes both ways, so stop treating me like a child, Doctor Meng.

Dr. Meng is struck by his unusual tone. She opens the case, pulling out a long major mechanical hypodermic needle.

DR. MENG

We have noticed you giving attention to your left arm.

PETTIBONE

Just been tight lately. It's fine.

DR. MENG

Just tight?

PETTIBONE

Try getting rammed and banged up a few dozen times a week and see how your body feels.

DR. MENG

I might want to run some tes--

PETTIBONE

I said it's fine.

He stares hard at her.

DR. MENG

Sit. Your treatment is almost overdue.

PETTIBONE

Maybe that's a good thing.

Pettibone relents and lays down on the couch.

He rolls over and lifts his shirt -- a huge, thick scar wraps the full circumference of his lower torso.

DR. MENG

Are you really that unhappy being the strongest man on Earth?

She notices the tremors in Pettibone's arm. He avoids eye contact.

She cleans an area of his lower spine, then -- INJECTS THE HUGE NEEDLE through a LUMBAR PUNCTURE directly into his spinal column.

Meng pulls the plunger back -- it removes spinal fluid -- then a SECOND chamber injects FLUORESCENT ORANGE LIQUID.

Pettibone grimaces.

PETTIBONE

Strongest man on Earth, my ass.

DR. MENG

It's a small price to pay to prolong your precious existence.

The doctor continues assessing Pettibone.

PETTIBONE

What would happen to me if this treatment...stopped?

Meng stops in her tracks. She stares at him for a long time.

DR. MENG

Believe me when I say you don't want to know what happens.

PETTIBONE

You keep me locked in here, I can't say anything to anyone, and you tell me nothing.

DR. MENG

And in return you are an extremely overpaid man for playing a silly game.

Pettibone sits up and gets right in Dr. Meng's face, intimidating her.

PETTIBONE

Enlighten me. Please.

She's never seen him behave like this and is stumped.

PETTIBONE

(rubs his lower back)

I'm the one dealing with this shit after all.

She takes a moment, then --

DR. MENG  
Your body would shut down. Quickly  
and completely. You would enter a  
coma... and then... expire.

He stops rubbing his back, freezes. Definitely not what he  
expected. Turns his body and stares directly at Dr. Meng.

DR. MENG  
Precisely why we cannot allow this  
treatment to lapse.

PETTIBONE  
My survival depends only on you?

He winces like his entire body is on fire. He's clearly in  
pain and in shock.

DR. MENG  
You wanted to know.

PETTIBONE  
Trouble is, now I can't un-know.

Pettibone leans back and tries to relax, closing his eyes.

Meng watches him for a moment, concerned at this new turn,  
her eyes drift up to the camera in the corner --

**INT. MONITORING ROOM - DAY**

The screens switch to different angles that capture Pettibone  
and Dr. Meng. Dr. Qay stands over the Operator's shoulder.

Dr. Qay observes Pettibone and his reactions to the injection  
and her comments with great interest.

The monitor zooms in -- closer and closer to Pettibone until--

**INT. DRAWING ROOM - DAY**

Pettibone's eyes close, sinks deeper and deeper into the  
couch as he falls asleep under Meng's watchful eye --

**EXT. AFGHANISTAN - DAY - (FLASHBACK)**

*A convoy of American jeeps follow a desolate, damaged road in  
the midst of crumbling buildings.*



A *YOUNGER ROBERT PETTIBONE*, somewhat different looking but without the scars, rides in one of the jeeps --

*BOOM!* -- out of nowhere, an *IED DETONATES* just beneath the jeep, sending it *FLIPPING* through the air as the soldiers aboard go flying like rag-dolls.

Gunshots *RING OUT* -- the startled *COMMANDER (30s)* jumps out of his jeep. Chaos prevails --

*COMMANDER*

*AMBUSH!*

The soldiers collect themselves. *Pettibone* leads them into a blown-out building. As the troops take cover, a group of *INSURGENTS* surround their position, peppering the structure with bullets.

With his back against the wall, *Younger Pettibone* constantly looks over his shoulder while returning fire.

Next to him is *CORPORAL MATHIS (20s)*, frantically working on his jammed weapon.

*MATHIS*

Where'd they get those damn guns?

It's no use. *Mathis* drops his jammed rifle.

*YOUNGER PETTIBONE*

Those are our own damn guns.

*MATHIS*

Just great -- they ended up with all the working ones.

*Younger Pettibone* allows for a chuckle, takes the rifle.

*YOUNGER PETTIBONE*

What are you even doing in this hellhole?

*MATHIS*

Was my girlfriend's idea.

*YOUNGER PETTIBONE*

You're kidding?

*MATHIS*

She told me to go to hell and my dumb ass listened.

*Younger Pettibone* un-jams the gun, hands it back.

*MATHIS*

*Army told me that I can be all I can be. I thought they meant self-actualization, not armored piercing rounds aimed at my fucking skull. What are you in for?*

*YOUNGER PETTIBONE*

*You make it sound like prison --*

*A round of EXPLOSIVE ORDINANCE detonates nearby. (END FLASHBACK.)*

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT - (PRESENT)**

Pettibone JOLTS AWAKE -- panicked -- breathing out of control.

He gains his bearings, reaches to his lower back, wipes the sweat from his brow, realizes Meng has left.

He stares at the wall in front of him. Mind racing. Puzzled.

*PETTIBONE*

*What the fuck...?*

**INT. CALI'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Cali arrives at her mother's house, struggling through the front door balancing the key and a number of bags, with some more boxes waiting outside. Clearly, she's moving in.

*CALI*

*Mom?*

No answer. Cali dumps her stuff and surveys the house in front of her. She sighs heavily - this is not where she planned, expected, or wanted to be.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - DAY**

A huge game against the STINGERS is in progress -- electric atmosphere.

Pettibone takes his position behind the Quarterback. He breathes heavily beneath his shield. Fists clenched.

The ball is snapped -- handoff to Pettibone -- Pettibone shoots down the field, stiff-arms defenders and bum-rushes onward before nailing a thirty-five-yard touchdown.

The FANS erupt, they go crazy.

The score reads "HAWKS 39" and "VISITORS 10."

The fans CHANT Pettibone's name. He takes notice of it. Soaks it in for a moment. Heads to the sidelines.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - STINGERS' LOCKER ROOM - DAY**

Halftime. The Stingers' coach, DEAN (50s), is livid, ranting about the defense --

DEAN

--seen flag football games rougher than this. You've got another half to start hitting and hurting. Otherwise, we might as well go home and tell Pettibone he's too tough for us scared little ladies!

The players grumble, look at each other.

DEAN

If we're gonna win, we've got to take Pettibone out of this game.

The players nod, but nobody volunteers anything.

DEAN

Come on. You guys a bunch'a pussies? Who's gonna take this fucker out? He just put down Harrison with a broken collarbone. Who's gonna be next?

A STINGERS' PLAYER (30s) lifts his head.

STINGERS' PLAYER

You talkin' about a bounty?

DEAN

That's illegal and I never said that. I'm just saying Pettibone has to come out one way or another. You guys figure out the how.

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - CUBICLE - DAY**

Cali is at her desk, writing a story on a subject that isn't about Pettibone or football. However, she's struggling to concentrate.

She looks across the room, where she spots a SOME OF THE STAFF watching the Hawks game. Inspired, she pulls up a search tab and types in "AFL point spread fixing".

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - DAY**

SECOND HALF.

Pettibone gets the handoff. The entire opposing team concentrates on Pettibone and stuffs him at the line of scrimmage.

The Stingers' defense immediately employs dirty tactics -- one player grabs Pettibone's face-mask and twists -- they PILE ON after he's been tackled.

Penalty flags fly but the defense continues its assault on Pettibone.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - SIDELINE - DAY**

Pettibone stumbles to the sideline next to Coach Jaxon.

COACH JAXON

You know what they're doing, don't you?

PETTIBONE

'Course, and it's starting to piss me off.

COACH JAXON

Time to pass and set you up for some blocking?

PETTIBONE

Read my mind.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - DAY**

Pettibone trots back to the field.

The ball is hiked -- the Quarterback sets in the pocket -- Pettibone aggressively blocks defenders -- LEVELS them -- limp bodies fly to the ground, only a few are left standing.

The pass is completed for a touchdown as JENKINS (20s) lays out for an amazing catch -- the crowd goes wild.

Jenkins runs back down the field and jumps onto Pettibone's shoulders in celebration.

JENKINS

Thanks, man. I had 'em beat, but you opened a few holes for me.

Jenkins laughs. Pettibone allows for a rare smile.

Jenkins continues his celebration as he heads to the sideline. Pettibone takes a moment and soaks in the cheering crowd.

Then something catches his eye -- A MAN, staring at him, a smudge of black in a sea of team colors -- DR. QAY. Once Qay sees Pettibone looking at him, Qay turns away and disappears.

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - CUBICLE - DAY**

Cali is deep in research but not finding much. However, scrolling through, she sees a news article with the headline:

*Richard Sommers exits AFL role, citing 'creative and moral differences' and is awarded \$5 million payout.*

This piques her interest and she reads on.

**EXT. AFL HEADQUARTERS - DAY**

A monolithic skyscraper towers over a busy street.

**INT. COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE - DAY**

TRE KESSLER (50s), a sharply dressed Executive Vice President with a serious demeanor, walks purposefully into the office of --

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE (60s), bulky with an aloof air. He looks up.

TRE KESSLER

Tests came back on Pettibone.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

And?

TRE KESSLER

Negative. No steroids. Growth hormones. Nothing.

Commissioner Blackstone welcomes this news.

TRE KESSLER

But...the lab did find something,  
some substance. It's just not on our  
list of banned substances.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

What is it? Is it a problem?

TRE KESSLER

Our guys couldn't identify it. I  
don't think it's a problem.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

We were told nothing would show up at  
all.

TRE KESSLER

I know.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

Have you spoken to Qay?

TRE KESSLER

He told me that their methodology  
would leave no trace of anything.

Commissioner Blackstone leans back in his chair, anxious.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

Tickets and ratings are through the  
roof. The plan is working.

TRE KESSLER

The fans too. Interest in Pettibone  
is off the scale.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

Let's not rock the boat. Try and get  
hold of Qay again. I want to speak to  
him and get some reassurances.

Kessler nods and exits the room, leaving Blackstone pondering  
- is he making the right decision?

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - CUBICLE - DAY**

Cali is on the phone, on hold. In front of her is a notepad  
with a list of numbers on it, each with a line through it,  
until the bottom one. Finally, a RECEPTIONIST (40s) answers.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

Hello, Mrs. Sommers' office.

CALI

Oh hi, I was hoping to speak to Mrs. Sommers.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

Who's calling?

CALI

My name is Cali Neal. I'm a reporter with the Los Angeles Chronicle.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

What's this in regards to?

CALI

I'm trying to reach Mr. Sommers. I'm looking to speak to him about Robert Pettibone.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

This is Mrs. Sommers' office.

CALI

I know. But Mr. Sommers is well, a little hard to track down at the moment and I wanted to--

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

This is Mrs. Sommers' office.

CALI

Right. I--

CLICK. Cali appears frustrated, and at a bit of a dead end.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - FOYER - DAY**

As Pettibone enters the house, draining a bottle of water, he stops and grimaces, drops to his knees, writhing in extreme pain. His hand shoots to the back of his neck --

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - CUBICLE - DAY**

Cali is packing up her things and begins to leave. However, her office phone rings. She turns back to pick it up.

CALI

Cali Neal.

MR. SOMMERS (O.S.)

Ms. Neal. It's Richard Sommers.

Cali lights up. RICHARD SOMMERS (50s) speaks authoritatively.

CALI

Mr. Sommers.

MR. SOMMERS (O.S.)

Am I right in thinking you contacted my wife's office to try and reach me?

CALI

Yes -

MR. SOMMERS (O.S.)

How dare you? Totally unprofessional.

CALI

You're a hard man to reach Mr. Sommers.

MR. SOMMERS (O.S.)

With good reason. Please stop trying.

CALI

Why did you call me back?

MR. SOMMERS (O.S.)

Excuse me?

CALI

Your wife must have told you I called. Why did you call me? No one asked you to.

There is silence.

CALI

I know there's something going on at the AFL Mr. Sommers. I know it for a fact. I'm just trying to get to the bottom of it.

More silence.

MR. SOMMERS (O.S.)

Your article on Pettibone.

CALI

Excuse me?

MR. SOMMERS (O.S.)

That's why I called you back. It piqued my interest. I thought it was good.



CALI

Thank you.

Cali can sense she has his attention.

MR. SOMMERS (O.S.)

You'll have seen I recently received a payout. That included a pretty severe gag clause. So I can't speak to you Ms Neal. I'm sorry.

Cali looks disappointed, but Mr. Sommers lingers on the line.

MR. SOMMERS (O.S.)

But it all lies in Pettibone. You know how people say he's too good to be true? Well, that's not a bad line of inquiry to pursue if I were you.

The phone line clicks off. Cali is hooked...

*INT. BLOWN-OUT BUILDING - AFGHANISTAN - DAY - (FLASHBACK)*

*Younger Pettibone and Mathis take shelter near a window in the bombed-out building. IEDs EXPLODE, gunfire CRACKS in the distance.*

*MATHIS*

*You never answered my question?*

*YOUNGER PETTIBONE*

*What?*

*MATHIS*

*Why you joined up?*

*YOUNGER PETTIBONE*

*To straighten out my life.*

*MATHIS*

*You joined the army?*

*YOUNGER PETTIBONE*

*I needed discipline, motivation... and a check.*

*MATHIS*

*McDonald's has good benefits. And you're slightly less likely to get ass shot at.*

*YOUNGER PETTIBONE*

*I couldn't handle the uniform.*

MATHIS

*Let me clue you in, Bob, Uncle Sam's not a philanthropist.*

YOUNGER PETTIBONE

*Yeah, well... I kinda ran into some trouble at home.*

MATHIS

*You knock up a girl?*

YOUNGER PETTIBONE

*Worse.*

MATHIS

*You got knocked up?*

*They chuckle slightly.*

YOUNGER PETTIBONE

*Got arrested.*

*(then)*

*Guy at a basketball game kept fouling me. I fouled him back, hard. You might say it was an excessive flagrant foul. The police said it was an assault charge.*

*A group of ragtag TALIBAN FIGHTERS emerge from hiding to open fire. Pettibone and Mathis return a volley.*

MATHIS

*Man, I wanted to travel the world, not croak in some fucking desert.*

YOUNGER PETTIBONE

*Should'a joined the Red Cross.*

MATHIS

*You can be a funny guy when you want to, Bob--*

*A ROCKET BLASTS THROUGH THEIR POSITION, STRIKING MATHIS AND SPLATTERING HIM INTO PIECES.*

*Blood, viscera, limbs and organs decorate the walls in a ghoulish display. Pettibone -- paralyzed by the sight, he stares. Stricken. His ears ring. His eyes blur.*

*FELLOW SOLDIERS frantically bolt from their positions, prodding Pettibone to move. He gathers himself -- drops his gun -- sprints to the grotesquely obliterated remains of Mathis. He finds Mathis' DOG TAGS. Rips them off.*

*WHOOM -- A SECOND ROCKET STRIKE makes impact feet away -- thrusts Pettibone into the air -- rocky SHRAPNEL SCRAPES ACROSS HIS FACE -- RAKES FLESH.*

*He lies bleeding and prone, unconscious. One SOLDIER stops, tries to check on Pettibone, but the sounds of incoming mortar fire prompt him to run off.*

*Leaving Pettibone for dead -- (END FLASHBACK.)*

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - ENTRANCE - NIGHT - (PRESENT)**

Pettibone opens his eyes and all he sees is a decorative ceiling moving as something seems to be dragging him.

He looks above his head to see Frank struggling to drag him. Frank sees he's awake.

FRANK

Thank God. It's like trying to drag a fricking rhino.

PETTIBONE

What happened?

FRANK

You fell on your face as you were coming in the house. You've been out for almost twenty-five minutes. I called Dr. Meng. She's on her way.

PETTIBONE

Great. Next time just leave me on the ground and go make a sandwich or something.

Frank leaves. Pettibone gets to his feet. He sees Meng walking up the drive. He rolls his eyes and heads into the

**DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT**

Heads to the bar and pours a drink.

Dr. Meng enters. She immediately opens her bag and pulls out the needle. Pettibone notices but doesn't react.

DR. MENG

You passed out for no reason for what, thirty minutes?

He sighs, moves to the couch and lays down on his side, shuffles up his shirt. Stares hard at the ceiling. Dr. Meng performs the injection.

PETTIBONE

I'm seeing someone... in some kind of dream. A guy named Mathis. A soldier. And we were in a war-zone and he literally--he... he's blown to pieces. Right in front of me.

Nothing from Meng.

PETTIBONE

The first time I thought it was a dream. But this time it started right where the other one left off. And in the end... I died.

Pettibone looks to her. She exhales deeply, then makes eye contact and there is something heavy and regretful in it.

DR. MENG

It was not a dream, Robert.

Pettibone bolts up, wincing at the pain in his head.

PETTIBONE

What are you talking about?

DR. MENG

I was hoping this time would not come until I was no longer having to face you, but--

PETTIBONE

Just say it, Goddammit.

Her breath is shaky as she speaks --

DR. MENG

You see, you were a soldier and nearly died on the battlefield.

By Pettibone's concerned expression, Dr. Meng has grabbed his full attention.

**QUICK FLASHES:**

*INT. BLOWN-OUT BUILDING - AFGHANISTAN - DAY*

*-- Younger Pettibone lies prone on the ground, bleeding.*

-- SOLDIERS in FOREIGN UNIFORMS enter the space, guns drawn.

DR. MENG (V.O.)

*My benefactor had been searching for  
the ideal subject for a unique  
experiment.*

-- They search, then come across Younger Pettibone. They check his vitals. Determine he's alive.

DR. MENG (V.O.)

*You were young, physically fit,  
American in appearance, and clearly  
had a fighting spirit.*

-- The soldiers load Younger Pettibone on a stretcher and cart him away.

INT. LABORATORY - FOREIGN COUNTRY - NIGHT

*In a stark and sterile lab, Dr. Meng and her assistants work feverishly on Younger Pettibone.*

DR. MENG (V.O.)

*I used technology outside the scope  
of all known modern medicine to make  
you whole again. And beyond. That is,  
enhancing your strength immensely...*

INT. DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT

Pettibone's complexion has turned pale. Eyes transfixed.

DR. MENG

Have you heard of cloning?

PETTIBONE

What? Like, Dolly the sheep?

DR. MENG

Dolly was nothing compared to you.

PETTIBONE

Are you... are you saying I'm a  
clone?

DR. MENG

Not all of you. Just parts of your  
body.

He stares in shock. Lifts up his arms. Looks at the scars deep and numerous.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT**

The house phone rings. Frank answers it.

FRANK  
Frank speaking.

**INT. CALI'S CAR - NIGHT**

Cali's driving, speaking aloud on speakerphone.

CALI  
Oh hi Frank, it's Cali Neal. Can I speak to Robert?

FRANK (O.S.)  
Mr Pettibone is busy at the moment Ms Neal.

CALI  
Fine. Can you tell him to call me? It's urgent.

FRANK (O.S.)  
Can I pass on what it's in regards to?

CALI  
Just tell him... I'll do it. What he asked.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT**

Frank is a bit baffled.

FRANK  
Okay then.

Frank hangs up.

**INT. DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT**

Pettibone is still processing what Meng has told him.

PETTIBONE  
It wasn't a dream -- it was a nightmare. How is it possible?

He stands. Meng follows him as he paces.

DR. MENG

Using tissue samples, we recreated your DNA and grew the parts of you that were severely damaged by the bomb -- you are a transplant from yourself.

He whips around toward her.

PETTIBONE

I'm a fucking Frankenstein!?

Pettibone FIRES HIS RIGHT FIST into the back of a chair -- splinters it, wood flies. Meng weighs her words carefully...

DR. MENG

Not exactly... your brain, your heart, all yours. Your face was disfigured. We knew you wouldn't be recognized. It's mostly your musculature and nerv--

He is in front of her in a second -- leaning down over her -- fists clenched -- seething.

PETTIBONE

How could you do this to me?

DR. MENG

If we hadn't... you would have died in the desert.

He walks away from her, looks at his own hands and arms again, feels his chest. Absolutely overwhelmed with emotion.

PETTIBONE

No... I don't believe it.

DR. MENG

I'm sorry there was no way to brace you of the news. I can't blame you for being angry and confused.

PETTIBONE

Angry and Confused? Are you kidding me?

He spins to her, enraged --

PETTIBONE

So everything you've told me was a lie? Who you said I was? The secrets I have to keep? That was for my own fucking protection?

DR. MENG

Rober--

PETTIBONE

Who's behind this?

DR. MENG

It doesn't concern you--

PETTIBONE

This is my fucking life we're talking about. I have a right to know who's behind this.

She walks away from him.

DR. MENG

You lost all rights when you were reborn. You are no longer... who you were.

She moves to a specific spot where she sees the cameras can't pick her up.

PETTIBONE

My memory, were you behind that too?

DR. MENG

I'm a scientist, not a neurologist. You suffered a severe concussion from the bomb in Afghanistan. The result was amnesia.

She looks at the nearby camera.

DR. MENG

We're under a great deal of scrutiny here. I must be careful with my words. I cannot answer any more questions.

Pettibone notices her looking at the cameras. He takes a moment to collect himself.

PETTIBONE

My strength... I'm a freak like they say I am.

(then)

You should be in prison...

DR. MENG

If I were locked away, you would wither on the vine and we would both pay dearly.

(MORE)



DR. MENG (cont'd)

The treatments are far too advanced  
for even experts to understand.

Pettibone tries to take it all in. Dr. Meng looks at the camera in the hallway. She closes the door to block its entire view.

DR. MENG

Robert... despite what you may think,  
I am not a robot. I care about you as  
a patient, my prized patient. Most  
doctors only view patients as cases.  
They come and go, but you didn't go.

(then)

I can't help feeling that you're more  
than a patient. I do care about you  
as a person. And I will protect you  
at all costs.

She turns to open the door. He grabs her wrist and stops her.

PETTIBONE

Who are they? Please.

DR. MENG

You sound like a broken record.

PETTIBONE

And you sound like an old spy novel.

DR. MENG

Robert, you're hurting me.

PETTIBONE

How do those old monster stories  
always end? The freak turns on its  
creator.

Dr Meng breaks free and runs out of the room, leaving Robert alone with his entire world in tatters.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S FOYER - NIGHT**

Pettibone comes out into the foyer, breathing heavily.

PETTIBONE

Meng!

But there's no answer. Instead, Pettibone breathes increasingly heavily and slumps down against the wall. Blurry vision, dizzy head, heavy breathing - it appears he's having a panic attack.

PETTIBONE

Frank! I think I need some help.

Pettibone looks up at the camera looking at him, watching his every move. Frank rushes to him and helps him to his feet.

**INT. CALI'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Cali sits at the kitchen table eating some leftovers and scrolling through on her laptop. On her laptop screen, she continues searches on ROBERT PETTIBONE.

The links that come up are all about his playing, his team, his stats. Nothing before football.

Cali's mother, REGAN (50s), enters, creeping up on her.

REGAN

You're working late.

Cali jumps and puts her laptop screen down, hiding it from view. But Regan has already seen what's on it.

CALI

Yeah, I'm working on a big story.

REGAN

On that meat-grinding running back?

CALI

Don't call him that.

Regan raises an eyebrow at the look on her face.

REGAN

You're star-struck.

CALI

More like dumbstruck. He's not like anyone I've ever met.

REGAN

You said he was rude. Are you interested in him?

CALI

Interested? He's a story. I'm interested in all my stories.

REGAN

Come on. He's famous, rich, this beloved football sensation. How can you resist him?

CALI

Women are the furthest thing from  
this guy's mind.

REGAN

What? He's gay? Is that the story?

CALI

No. Well, I don't think so.

REGAN

So, what, then? Why are you so all  
about him?

CALI

There's something there. Something...  
darker under the surface. Like he  
wants me to uncover something but  
won't come out and say it...

REGAN

Sounds like he could be gay. Now that  
would be a story.

CALI

Mom, it's not that. Drop it.

REGAN

Have you spoken to Ari?

CALI

No.

REGAN

Are you going to?

CALI

Why?

REGAN

Look Cali, men cheat. All the time.  
Sometimes you have to look past it.

CALI

Mom!

REGAN

And you and this job, you know, you  
can get pretty sucked into it.

CALI

So you're saying quit my job and  
forgive my man? Real progressive mom.

REGAN

Not exactly, but sometimes you have to stick it out. Life isn't like a story you can just move on and chase the next one.

CALI

Mom. Stop!

Cali grabs her laptop and heads to her room, frustrated.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT**

With his head still spinning, Pettibone is laid out on the sofa while Frank attends to him.

FRANK

I'm obligated to inform you that Ms Neal called. Do you want me to tell her you're unavailable?

PETTIBONE

No, tell her I need to see her right away.

Frank frowns.

**INT. AQUATIC CENTER - NIGHT**

Frank leads Cali a room with a huge indoor swimming pool. Pettibone is doing laps, burning off his previous anxiety attack. Her jaw drops as he lifts himself out from the ledge - clad only in a Speedo.

Cali is shocked by the sight of Pettibone's severely scarred body -- top of his thighs -- one running the circumference of his torso... yet also intrigued by his muscle-bound frame.

PETTIBONE

Not a pretty sight, is it?

CALI

Well, I... I don't...

He smirks.

PETTIBONE

(points in a direction)

If you need to throw up, over there's the bathroom.

CALI

Actually, I'm quite fine seeing you --  
um--in--um--a -- grapes smuggler.

She winces at her own choice of words, then covers her mouth to suppress a laugh. He chuckles.

PETTIBONE

So she does have a sense of humor  
after all. That's a nice change of  
pace around here.

He motions for her to sit at a table with a tray of drinks set up, as he throws on a robe and flip-flops. They sit.

CALI

Now that I've met you, people always  
ask me about your romantic life.

PETTIBONE

Who's "people?"

CALI

The fans.

PETTIBONE

Just the fans?

A heavy moment of eye contact. She gives him nothing, but there's a smolder...

PETTIBONE

Tell them it's none of their  
business.

(then)

But if you're interested, that's  
another story. Are you? Interested?

CALI

Yes, but not in that way.

PETTIBONE

Good. Because I'm way out of your  
league.

She laughs.

PETTIBONE

What about you? Do you have a  
boyfriend? Girlfriend? Sex-life?

Cali becomes uncomfortable.

CALI

None of your business. Why do you keep changing the subject whenever I ask you a question?

PETTIBONE

Reporters have a way of twisting the truth.

He picks up a glass and takes a drink.

CALI

Then why invite a reporter into your home when you have nothing on but a thong?

He almost spits out his drink as he laughs.

PETTIBONE

It's not a thong.

CALI

Semantics.

She smiles. He wipes himself off.

PETTIBONE

Because fake news is my enemy. Privacy is my shield. And there's something about you that says I can trust my gut.

His comment makes her a little off-balance. She takes a drink. A long pull.

CALI

I was taught to respect facts. But with social media it's all about clickbait and gossip. It's distorted truth in ways we never imagined, creating this whole cottage industry based on semi-lies and almost-truths. But be careful, I can smell a lie like a fart in a car.

Pettibone laughs so hard he can barely catch his breath.

PETTIBONE

You're a scrappy little puppy, I'll give you that. Tough upbringing?

CALI

Some people have it worse.

PETTIBONE

At least you have self awareness.  
More than I can say for most  
reporters.

He holds up his glass for her to cheers. She does too. They stare at each other with something more than work in mind.

He motions to Frank standing nearby with a half-dozen swimsuits hanging off his arm.

PETTIBONE

Meet you in the pool.

CALI

In the pool? Hang on, I'm not--

He jumps up out of his chair, rushes to the pool with his robe still on -- CANNONBALLS -- the water drenches Frank. Cali bursts out laughing.

Pissed, Frank keeps his eyes on Cali with his arm stretched out. He attempts to blow the dripping water from his nose.

#### **INT. MONITORING ROOM - NIGHT**

The noise from Pettibone's loud splashing distorts the sound picked up from the microphone.

Qay sits alone in the room watching the monitors observing Pettibone and Cali as he taps his fingertips on the top of his thumb over and over, seething.

He watches as Cali takes a swimsuit. Frank sloshes off.

Qay tries to keep himself calm. He turns to a laptop and starts a video call.

#### **INT. AQUATIC CENTER - NIGHT**

Cali is now in the pool and swims over to Pettibone, who treads water.

CALI

So tell me about the scars.

PETTIBONE

It's a short story long and I only have about a half hour before you need to leave. We have an away game and I need to get ready. So...

Pettibone splashes near Cali. It's playful but also strange.

CALI  
What are you doing?

She splashes him back.

PETTIBONE  
I was in Afghanistan. That's where  
the scars are from.

Cali stops splashing, abruptly and awkwardly.

PETTIBONE  
But I only found this out a few hours  
ago.

CALI  
What?

PETTIBONE  
Something's going on Cali. And I need  
your help.

He splashes some more and becomes LOUDER.

PETTIBONE  
I didn't bring you here just for a  
swim. Splash me back. And smile.

CALI  
Why?

PETTIBONE  
We're being watched.

She splashes him and forces a fake smile.

PETTIBONE  
You'll never make it as an actress.

She splashes him again and chuckles, for real this time.

**INT. DR. MENG'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Meng flips through a book on her bookshelf when her laptop CHIMES. She turns to it in confusion. She moves and checks to see who is calling. Qay's incensed face fills the screen.

DR. MENG  
Doctor. I didn't know we had a call  
sched--



**INT. MONITORING ROOM - NIGHT**

DR. QAY  
 Why did you close Pettibone's office  
 door and block the camera's view  
 earlier?

**INTERCUT with****INT. DR. MENG'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

DR. MENG  
 I--I didn't realize--

DR. QAY  
 I'm in no mood for bullshit. I heard  
 you telling him about his past.

DR. MENG  
 He began to remember it. I just--

DR. QAY  
 Told him fucking everything.

DR. MENG  
 What was I to do?

DR. QAY  
 Not fall victim to your maternal  
 instincts.

Meng's eyes flit to a framed photograph of an ASIAN BOY (20s)  
 in a military uniform. Her eyes dart quickly back on Qay.

**INT. AQUATIC CENTER - NIGHT**

Pettibone and Cali, still in the pool, splashing each other.

PETTIBONE  
 Why did you want to talk to me?

CALI  
 I spoke to Richard Sommers.

Pettibone pauses briefly before splashing again.

**INT. MONITORING ROOM - NIGHT**

DR. QAY

You could have kept silent, you could have lied, but you didn't have to tell him the truth.

**INTERCUT with****INT. DR. MENG'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

DR. MENG

I believe it is a good thing. By having this information, Robert may push himself to test it even further, giving us an even stronger pool of data to pull from. The experiment is--

DR. QAY

Now in jeopardy. If we didn't need your science and formula to achieve our goals, I'd have cut you loose long ago.

Dr. Meng looks angry and frustrated.

DR. QAY

I'm giving you a direct order to end this relationship between him and the reporter. She is at his home right now frolicking with him in the swimming pool of all things. All his scars on display... they're too familiar. It will cause issues we don't want.

**INT. AQUATIC CENTER - NIGHT**

Pettibone looks struck by Cali's remark.

CALI

I read about his sudden exit and payout so I called him. He didn't say much but--

PETTIBONE

Stop.

CALI

What?

Pettibone splashes her again.

PETTIBONE

Not here.

CALI

Isn't that why we're splashing each other?

She splashes him. He splashes back.

PETTIBONE

It's far too risky. I'll call you with a time and place.

She nods, then stops splashing. Pettibone splashes her again.

PETTIBONE

That was just for fun.

**INT. DR. MENG'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

DR. MENG

I am only his creator, not his keeper. He still has his own free will.

**INTERCUT with**

**INT. MONITORING ROOM - NIGHT**

DR. QAY

And if he tells her what he knows, or thinks he knows, she will lap it up and spill it to the world. Control him, Meng, or I will have to step in to control her.

(then)

I'm sure you don't want another death on your conscience, do you?

He ends the video call.

Meng slams the lid closed. She picks up the photo of the Asian Boy and runs her hand along the edge, melancholy. She opens a window on her laptop.

The window is populated with a military file of Robert Pettibone. She moves the cursor to his face and lets it hover there. She looks back to the picture of the Asian Boy.

**EXT. OPPOSING TEAM FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - DAY**

The Hawks conclude their pre-game warm-ups for an away game. They gather into a pack except Jenkins, who notices Pettibone by himself.

A gaggle of reporters and videographers watches Pettibone stretching in warm-ups to hide his scars.

Jenkins separates himself from his teammates and jogs toward Pettibone. The teammates elbow each other as they watch --

WILL

That rookie's asking for trouble.

EVAN

Pettibone's gonna turn him into a pretzel.

Jenkins nervously attempts to get Pettibone's attention, but Pettibone doesn't look at him.

JENKINS

Hey. Pettibone.

Pettibone still ignores him.

JENKINS

I know you can hear me.

Jenkins then sits and starts stretching right in front of Pettibone. Jenkins' feet touch Pettibone's feet. Pettibone lifts up his head.

PETTIBONE

What the fuck are you doing?

JENKINS

Pettibone, I really gotta know how you got so jacked. You got Chris Hemsworth as your personal trainer? Or what? Wheaties? Spinach?

PETTIBONE

My name is Robert.

JENKINS

Right. Robert. I just--

PETTIBONE

I just work out. A lot.

JENKINS

Pettib--Robert... listen, I'm worried. They might cut me if I don't catch a few more TDs. But I can't because our offense is all about you.

PETTIBONE

I don't call the plays. Talk to coach.

JENKINS

I tried. He just shuts the door on me. But I got hands, man, you saw me catch that touchdown in the last game.

PETTIBONE

My God, Jenkins, my grandmother could have caught that ball -- you had a two-car length between you and the backs.

Jenkins thinks of another angle.

JENKINS

I know. I'm a rookie like you, but you're solid gold, dude. I'm at the bottom of the heap. They don't need me like I need this chance. I ain't gonna end up in some shit league.

Pettibone looks around. Fans begin pouring into the stands.

PETTIBONE

I know you've got talent, so does everyone else on this team. Believe it or not, you have an advantage over them.

JENKINS

I do?

PETTIBONE

You're on a rookie's salary, not one of those high-priced guys starting in front of you. When they start cost-cutting, guess who's going axed first? Just play and practice as hard as you can. I'll talk to coach. Try to get you more balls.

(getting up)

Excuse me, I've gotta go eat my Wheaties and spinach.

Pettibone slaps him on the back and walks away.

The teammates watch in awe as Pettibone has never done that.

**EXT. OPPOSING TEAM FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - (LATER)**

The REF's whistle blows and kickoff ensues. The ball soars, the fans ROAR. The Hawks receive the ball. Minimal run-back.

On the first play, the Quarterback FAKES A HANDOFF to Pettibone -- everyone converges -- the QB drops back, heaves a bomb to a wide open Jenkins, who catches it and --

SPRINTS TO THE END ZONE. TOUCHDOWN! The stunned crowd BOOS.

**INT. CORPORATE SUITE - DAY**

Forrest and Stephen watch together, isolated from the others in the loge. Stephen appears elated. Forrest looks perturbed.

FORREST

Where the hell did that come from?

STEPHEN

What are you talking about? We scored. You're getting spoiled. We have to tread lightly.

FORREST

You better talk to Jaxon to get his priorities straight. The game plan is running the damn football. If he fucks this up, we can't count on him.

STEPHEN

Forrest, they can't run on every play. Pettibone'll be burned out by the playoffs and that's where the payoff is at.

FORREST

But you don't know that. His stamina's superhuman. Doesn't even get winded. We haven't even pushed him close to his limit.

STEPHEN

I'm talking about the man's health. We can't sacrifice Pettibone before we get to the championship. Without him, we're up shit's creek without a paddle.

Forrest shakes his head like Stephen is an idiot.

**EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT**

The team plane has landed and Pettibone is the last to get off. He has a bag over his shoulder, but pauses when he gets to the bottom of the steps.

Just across the tarmac is Dr. Meng, walking up to him.

PETTIBONE

Odd place for a treatment.

DR. MENG

No treatment. We need to talk,  
somewhere without prying eyes or  
ears.

Pettibone's intrigued.

**EXT. FOOD TRUCK - NIGHT**

Pettibone sits across from Meng at a table, tacos before them, but they are not eating. Meng appears apprehensive.

DR. MENG

I had a son.

Meng stares at Pettibone's face.

DR. MENG

Your smile is a lot like his. Which  
is what probably drew me to you.

PETTIBONE

Had a son?

DR. MENG

A bullet ripped through his throat  
and nicked his arteries on his first  
tour...

PETTIBONE

I'm sorry.

DR. MENG

He's the reason I created the cloning  
procedure in the first place... but I  
could not save him...

Tears well up in her eyes, but she restrains from crying.

PETTIBONE

Would he have wanted you to?  
 (pointing to himself)  
 If this is what he would become?

She notices his left arm quivers a bit. He sees her glance and drops his arm.

DR. MENG

No. I don't think he would have. For years I've chased the idea that he would have. But seeing you, getting to know you, seeing your pain...I've changed my mind. Your body is starting to grate against all that you're being put through.... and so is your mind.

Pettibone follows her every word closely.

DR. MENG

Which leaves us in a position to perhaps... change the game?

PETTIBONE

How do we change our game?

DR. MENG

We shine the spotlight on them.

PETTIBONE

But you said--

DR. MENG

It's my science. I am the only one with the formula. I created the treatment, the methodology. Without me, they have nothing.

PETTIBONE

Who are they?

DR. MENG

I used to work for the North Korean government.

PETTIBONE

North Korea?

DR. MENG

They believed they could use cloning to create some kind of super army. It was misguided. But then that's not unusual for them.



Pettibone allows himself a slight smile.

DR. MENG

Eventually they realized what they were doing was unsustainable. But through all this, I actually made it work. It was on a smaller scale than they wanted but it was possible. When the program shut down, my department head promised to keep funding me independently if I did what he asked.

PETTIBONE

And what was that?

Dr. Meng shifts uncomfortably.

DR. MENG

He believed he could sell what we were creating to interested parties. Not on the scale of an army. But on an individual level.

Pettibone immediately gets the connection.

PETTIBONE

... like a player in the AFL.

DR. MENG

Who doesn't want the best player in the world for their league? Especially if the league is fighting off intense competition from other leagues. Put a superhuman phenomenon on display and you have more eyeballs, more interest and more--

PETTIBONE

Money.

Dr Meng nods. Pettibone absorbs her revelation then thinks about his role in this. He tries to recall.

PETTIBONE

Your department head, an Asian guy?  
Wears all black? Splash of green?

She looks concerned.

DR. MENG

You've seen him?

PETTIBONE

Creeping around, looking shady at a game or two. Always staring at me.

DR. MENG

His name is Dr. Joon Qay. If we can get information out there about his dealings... this man does not like his dirty laundry to be aired.

(then)

Public spotlight keeps me safe, keeps you safe, and may someday give you your own life back.

PETTIBONE

But... my treatment. You said without it I would--

DR. MENG

I promise you a lifetime supply. I have an office he doesn't know about. I set it up when he became increasingly controlling.

Pettibone nods solemnly.

DR. MENG

But I also have a theory about the will to live. The spirit can be stronger than the body. It depends on who's feeding the soul.

She offers a knowing raised eyebrow. Pettibone smirks and nods.

PETTIBONE

Why did you do it? Why even get involved with someone like this?

DR. MENG

I think I believed I could get my son back. Even when I didn't work with him. I think I...I wasn't ready to accept it.

Pettibone acknowledges her grief and reaches out a supportive hand.

DR. MENG

But now... if you have my back, I have yours.

PETTIBONE

I'll do the blocking.

They smile. She lets out a shaky breath as though she can finally relax.

**INT. CALI'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Cali sits at a small desk, continuing her search for information on her computer. The TV in the corner plays Sports Center highlights.

She scans the TV where it shows a run where Pettibone breaks six tackles, then sprints eighty-three more yards for a touchdown.

She shakes her head marveling at his massive talent. Her phone PINGS. She sees a message has come in. It is from a random number.

She taps it. It reads: *MEET ME AT PIER 21 TOMORROW NIGHT AT 11. RP.*

CALI

Why the beach?

(then)

I am not swimming again--

**INT. AFL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

Commissioner Blackstone and Tre Kessler of the AFL convene with Forrest and Stephen around a conference table. At the head of the table is a screen projecting a Zoom call with a GROUP OF AFL TEAM OWNERS.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

Look, we respect the issues you are raising. Ultimately, we can't give special treatment either way. To a player or a team.

FORREST

I'll tell you what the issue here is. Pettibone's putting too many of their players on injured reserve.

The Zoom Owners protest in unison.

OWNERS

That's absurd!/You're ridiculous!/Shut up Forrest!

One particular Owner...

OWNER 1

We want a full investigation into Pettibone!

STEPHEN

This is absurd. If anything, I'm the one who's been offended. Did you watch our game with the Stingers? They did everything but pants him. The fines and suspensions were a slap on the wrist.

OWNER 2

Something is off about him. We all know it. We can feel it. Something less than fair play is going on here.

Tre Kessler and Commissioner Blackstone exchange a furtive, anxious look.

FORREST

There's something's "off," all right. Sour grapes. They hate losing.

STEPHEN

I refuse to have him scrutinized.

OWNER 1

Look, if there's nothing to hide, you have nothing to fret about.

FORREST

You're barking up the wrong tree. Your teams can't tackle him, that's all. Doesn't mean anyone's violating policies.

STEPHEN

We've followed your protocol. He's been tested for PEDs, testosterone. The implications of this witch hunt goes against AFL protocol.

TRE KESSLER

Retesting him is a good place to start, Stephen.

STEPHEN

He's not a lab rat. The player's union will never go along with it, and neither will we.

OWNER 2

All we need is a unanimous vote.

FORREST

Well, if you consent, we're playing under protest.

TRE KESSLER

If he tests negative, you have a clear conscience.

The impasse creates a long uncomfortable silence until --

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

We'll agree to any retest you want.

Forrest and Stephen throw their arms up in frustration. The Owners nod and agree.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

This way we'll leave no stone unturned. And consequently, I hope it will put this issue to rest.

The meeting ends, TVs go blank and the men leave the room.

**INT. COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE - DAY**

Commissioner Blackstone and Tre Kessler walk into the Commissioner's office. Kessler makes sure the door is firmly closed behind him.

TRE KESSLER

You really want to do this?

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

I'm just as much a cog in the wheel as anyone. Don't worry, it'll go nowhere. But try get a hold of Qay again. Just to make sure.

TRE KESSLER

I'm starting to think...

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

What?

TRE KESSLER

What's the out on this? If we need one.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

Out? There is no out. Pettibone has to work.

TRE KESSLER

Or?

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

Or nothing. You've seen the recent boosts in revenue. The other leagues can't touch us. It's working exactly like we thought. And after the owners get their next profit-sharing check, they won't care. Time to just hold our nerve.

Kessler agrees, though both are unsure of this experiment despite their assurances.

**EXT. PIER - BEACH - NIGHT**

The CRASHING waves shine under the full moon. A solitary piece of driftwood floats beside the pier.

Cali arrives. Punctual. Checks watch. Spots Pettibone meditating on the sand. Eyes closed. Legs crossed.

She walks up.

CALI

So... asking a girl you barely know to meet you at a secluded beach close to midnight with nobody aro--

PETTIBONE

Shhh... silence and tranquility. Hard to find.

A moment passes. Cali sits in the sand. Pettibone opens his eyes. Uncrosses his legs. Stands. Peers at Cali.

PETTIBONE

This might be the one spot where people don't recognize me, or at least respect a person's privacy.

Pettibone looks around. His expression shifts. He notices conspicuous PASSERSBY glance at them. The passersby look at each other. Whisper something unheard. Then watch Pettibone and Cali again, then move on.

CALI

This is getting weird... even for you. Why did you want to meet?

PETTIBONE

You're the only person I trust.

CALI

But I'm a reporter...

PETTIBONE

I told you the games were fixed and you didn't milk it for all it's worth. Any other writer would have jumped on that, proof or not.

CALI

Oh, don't glorify me. I would have liked to write about it. But my editor would have handed it right back to me with my walking papers.

PETTIBONE

My point exactly. I trust your judgment. I trust you.

(then)

Now I'm going to tell you something, that will sound like science-fiction, but I'm asking you to trust me like I trust you.

Cali braces herself for what Pettibone is going to say.

PETTIBONE

Dr. Meng told me I was a living corpse after a bomb in Afghanistan struck me. With a unique and unknown medical science she put me back together and saved my life.

CALI

Alright, that's horrible but kind of incredible.

PETTIBONE

That's not the incredible part.

Cali appears puzzled and apprehensive.

PETTIBONE

Dr. Meng works for someone else. A psychotic madman with no ethical boundaries. Without my approval, or even my knowledge, they transformed me into a manufactured part human, part... clone. And the AFL are in on it.

She stares at him. Almost waiting for the punchline.

CALI

A clone? Robert, I'm sorry, but come on, this is a bit much--

PETTIBONE

Meng told me that her boss sold the idea of...well, me, to the AFL.

CALI

Why?

Pettibone sees the same Passers-by and pulls Cali along the pier.

PETTIBONE

The AFL is facing incredible pressure from competing leagues. I guess they thought having a superstar who seemed like he was from another planet would make their league unrivaled. All they see is the bottom line.

Cali processes everything he's just told her.

CALI

This is a lot to wrap my head around.

He sees that she doesn't believe him.

PETTIBONE

You saw my scars. All of them. At every joint. Every muscle.

CALI

You had surgeries. You said a bomb struck you. It's amazing that you survived, and the human body can do almost anything we ask it if--

PETTIBONE

I'm not natural. You saw me play. I am living proof of the experiment!

She jerks her head back at his raised voice. He calms himself. Both look around, careful that no one can hear.

PETTIBONE

They made me into something invincible.

CALI

But it's... it's never been done on humans. Science can't figure out--



PETTIBONE

Meng discovered a breakthrough in cloning. She created pieces of me, one at a time, stitched me together... developed a treatment to keep my body from rejecting the cloned parts.

CALI

What doctor would ethically do this?

PETTIBONE

She had her... reasons.

She absorbs the enormity of this revelation. Her reporter brain kicks into overdrive --

CALI

We need to blow the lid off this thing. This is illegal as hell. They didn't have your consent and they're using you as a pawn. We can expose them, we need to stop them.

PETTIBONE

Hang on. We need to be careful.

CALI

Robert. This is real-life, not some movie. Tom Cruise isn't about to run around the corner and beat up a dozen bad guys that drop from the sky.

He looks dead serious.

PETTIBONE

I have treatments. Consistently. A drug compound of some sort. And if something happens before Meng can safeguard everything... if I don't get them...

CALI

If you don't get them... what?

She looks concerned.

PETTIBONE

They sustain me. Keep my body working...

CALI

So they're basically holding you hostage?

He looks at her for a long moment.

CALI

It's a blessing to live, but not like this.

Wind blows hair across her forehead. He reaches over and tucks it behind her ear.

PETTIBONE

I knew you'd believe me.

CALI

It explains why professional sports have never seen anything like you. It's like genetically engineering a Michael Jordan or a Tom Brady. Guaranteed wins. Guaranteed success. Guaranteed eyeballs. All for a price.

She attempts to assimilate the revelations.

PETTIBONE

... when it's over, write my story. I want you to promise.

CALI

Over? What do you mean, when it's over?

PETTIBONE

If we dig into this. If you look into this... it could mean--

CALI

Your life.

The weight of it all hits them together. He looks out at the horizon. She reaches down and takes his hand in hers. They stare into the night together.

CALI

I promise.

They gather their emotions, Cali deep in thought.

CALI

Before this all comes down, why don't we have a little fun tonight?

PETTIBONE

I really don't feel like fun. There's too much to think about.

CALI

There's plenty of time for that later. There's a whole world out there.

PETTIBONE

In which they're always watching me.

CALI

Oh, I know a few hole-in-the-walls where they won't be watching you. Besides, I know a trick or two when it comes to losing a tail. I'm a reporter, remember?

She stands. Reaches to him. He takes her hand. She tries to pull him up, but it goes in reverse and she goes down and lands on his chest. Their faces are close. They breathe together. A very intimate moment.

PETTIBONE

So... these hole-in-the-walls?

She smiles. They stand up on their own. He pauses, shakes and squeezes his left arm. She leads him along the pier from the sand.

Sitting along the beach is an ominous parked car with Dr. Qay inside, observing and listening. As the couple leave, Qay rolls up the blacked-out windows.

**INT. GRAY WOLF TAVERN - NIGHT**

A dark, rundown dive bar. Cali and Pettibone hide inconspicuously in a corner. Drinks are already on the wooden table. She has wine, he has a soda.

PETTIBONE

(looking around)

Shouldn't this place be condemned?

CALI

You didn't want to be recognized.

They both smile. Their fingers touch on the table.

PETTIBONE

So... since I am literally placing my life in your hands... you hiding any secrets yourself?

She thinks and looks a bit guilty. She sighs.

CALI

I'm having problems in my relationship, or was having problems.

He raises an eyebrow.

PETTIBONE

You're in a relationship?

CALI

No. Sort of. I don't know. His name is Ari. I don't know... I'm having a hard time. We split up but...

PETTIBONE

But...

CALI

I don't want to drag you into that.

PETTIBONE

Drag me in.

CALI

My mother... she's an overbearing, controlling woman. She raised a guilt-ridden, inferiority-complexed, never-good enough girl. So I latched on to the first guy who saw me as something special.

PETTIBONE

But you clearly are.

CALI

I'm not so special, kind of an underachiever, just a reporter--

PETTIBONE

With integrity. That's no small feat.

CALI

Tell that to my mother. She told me to stay with Ari even though she knows he cheated on me. Guess what I did?

PETTIBONE

You broke up with the idiot.

CALI

I listened to her. I let her make me feel like she was right. Why did I listen to her?

(MORE)

CALI (cont'd)

(then)

I've developed into an assertive person in every aspect of my life except with her. Now she has me believing I should stay with a cheater because someone better probably won't come along. But I kicked his ass out.

PETTIBONE

See, you adapted. That's a sign of intelligence. Adapting to problems is a constant and part of life.

She looks at him, then looks embarrassed.

CALI

Oh my gosh, listen to me. What are my problems compared to yours?

PETTIBONE

Hey, stop... don't let seeking something bigger and better for your tomorrow ruin your today.

She looks at him with a bit of wonder.

CALI

Where'd that come from?

PETTIBONE

A fortune cookie. I eat a lot of takeout.

She laughs.

At the bar, a shaggy-looking drunk guy, BENNIE (40s), spots Pettibone.

He sits next to his BUDDIES who warn him not to approach Pettibone. Bennie shakes them off, pulls out his cell phone and staggers to Cali and Pettibone's table.

BENNIE

Hey, Pettibone, can I get a pic with you and your girlfriend?

PETTIBONE

I'd rather you not.

BENNIE

What about a real drink? What're you sipping, a Shirley Temple?

PETTIBONE

Whatever you had was too much. Do everyone a favor and go home.

BENNIE

(looking at Cali)  
Y'know, you could do better.

Pettibone stands up and confronts Bennie.

CALI

Robert!

BENNIE

Come on, you wanna go? Without all the padding and blockers, you'll hit the floor like a ton'a bricks.

Bennie SWINGS at Pettibone, who deftly ducks out of the way.

Pettibone STIFF-ARMS Bennie, sending him tumbling backwards, CRASHING into the bar, knocking over half-empty glasses which SHATTER to the floor.

His buddies, wanting no part of Pettibone, pick up their shaken friend.

Pettibone tosses some money on the table and ushers Cali out of the tavern -- people holding their cell phones up to capture the skirmish.

**EXT. DR. MENG'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT**

Dr. Meng exits an unremarkable building, locking up behind her. Her laptop bag and cases of medical equipment in tow.

She unlocks her car and goes to approach it. Hears a NOISE coming from the bushes. Pauses for a moment to glance in that direction, but sees nothing.

Shaking off uneasiness, Dr Meng is about to pull the door handle when a DARK FIGURE pops up and sticks a syringe into her neck.

She collapses as her bags fall to the ground -- her LAPTOP peeks out. A hand picks the bags up.

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY**

As soon as Cali arrives at work, the RECEPTIONIST points to Emeric Swain's office. Cali walks towards it, bracing for his admonishment.

**INT. EMERIC SWAIN'S OFFICE - DAY**

Emeric gestures for Cali to come in without looking up from his computer.

EMERIC

Shut the door.

She complies.

EMERIC

I understand you had an exciting night at the Gray Wolf. Mind telling me your version of what happened?

CALI

Not much, really. This drunk douche swung at Robert and he pushed the guy into the bar. We left.

EMERIC

That's not how it's playing out in the guy's version. He said Pettibone sucker-punched him without provocation. Says he only wanted a photo.

CALI

That's not what happened at all.

EMERIC

Well, that's what the public is reading this morning. I know these incidences get blown out of proportion, but it wasn't your smartest idea to go to a place like that with him. You could lose your credibility as an objective reporter. It's--

CALI

*Against policy to fraternize with the subjects you write about. I'm aware. But we're just friends, talking about his career.*

EMERIC

Regardless. I know you're writing a follow-up; otherwise, I might have to suspend you, or worse.

She takes a deep breath.

CALI

There's actually another angle to Robert's story that could really make a huge--

EMERIC

Just write the story I just told you to write. And don't call him by his first name. Jesus...

He shakes his head. A bit broken, Cali leaves.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - COACH'S OFFICE - DAY**

Coach Jaxon and Pettibone sit across from one another.

COACH JAXON

The guy's accusing you of injuring his back when he fell over the bar.

PETTIBONE

He was a wasted fan who wouldn't leave us alone. Did the news mention he tried to sucker punch me?

COACH JAXON

No, they forgot that part. I have one question for you: what were you thinking going out with Cali Neal?

PETTIBONE

Are there rules for going to a bar with a friend?

COACH JAXON

She's not a friend, she's a reporter. It doesn't paint a very wholesome picture of a star running back, does it?

PETTIBONE

The story is full of holes. There were witnesses.

COACH JAXON

It's cancel culture, Pettibone. From now on, keep your head on the field, not between some broad's legs. Go.

Pettibone freezes. Looks at him hard.



PETTIBONE

Is this from you, or are you  
delivering a message from someone  
else?

Coach Jaxon looks at him like he's a juvenile.

COACH JAXON

It's from me, the front office, the  
entire fucking league. Now get the  
hell outta my office and remember  
you're a fucking rookie.

PETTIBONE

Yeah. Sure.

He stands.

PETTIBONE

You can tell me what to do on the  
field all you want. But tell me one  
more time who to see, talk to, or get  
involved with, I'll be coming across  
that desk and you'll end up like that  
guy in the bar.

Pettibone punches the metal desk hard with his right hand,  
leaving a gaping dent. He leaves. Jaxon stares at the damage.

**INT. UNDERGROUND ROOM - DAY**

In a dark, empty room, Dr. Meng sits tied to a chair. She  
notices she's hooked up to an IV. Two black-clad GOONS on  
either side of her.

DR. QAY (O.S.)

So nice of you to join us, dear  
colleague.

A soft light illuminates Dr. Qay standing in the corner  
witnessing her struggle.

DR. MENG

Wh--what's going on--why are you  
doing this?

She pitches in the tied chair.

DR. QAY

I began to have concerns about your  
mouth. And the size of it.

Dr. Qay menacingly approaches.

DR. QAY

I believe you have become a "potential liability." See, you got too personal, too close with the subject. It caused you to make bad decisions. You revealed too much.

Dr. Qay sighs. Dr. Meng begins to seem weak and drowsy.

DR. QAY

And because your loyalty skewed and you failed to keep that reporter out of Pettibone's world, the curtain's been pulled back and the risk is just too high. You can no longer control the subject.

(then)

An association with such a rogue like yourself has become too risky...

DR MENG

I should have never trusted you.

DR. QAY

... I'm pulling the plug.

DR. MENG

What!? What about Robert?

Dr. Meng fights to stay alert.

DR. QAY

He'll sadly become a washed-up football player as he loses strength and eventually the ability to power his own lungs without his treatment. And then... after a while... a dead one.

DR. MENG

No, he's done everything you asked...

DR. QAY

It's okay. We'll make sure it just looks like complications with concussions. Easy peasy.

Dr. Qay opens the laptop bag and pulls out Meng's laptop. Checks the other bags and removes a couple of hard drives and flash drives.

Her eyes go wide at what he holds.

DR. QAY

And of course, your research will live on as we'll use your research and successes to create many new test projects.

DR. MENG

Please, you can't--

DR. QAY

It appears the idea to use such a global stage as the AFL to run our first test was a bit too... hard to control.

DR. MENG

You won't get away with this. I don't care what the consequences are. I'm going to tell the world what you are doing.

DR. QAY

Yes. You do that.

Qay grabs all of the bags and items and nonchalantly exits. Dr. Meng drifts slowly out of consciousness.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT**

Pettibone studies video and a game plan. He's in deep concentration. His cell phone rings, interrupting his thoughts. He answers mindlessly.

The voice of an unknown CALLER speaks.

CALLER (V.O.)

Robert Pettibone?

PETTIBONE

Yes.

CALLER (V.O.)

I am calling on Dr. Meng's behalf.

Pettibone leans forward, instantly attentive.

PETTIBONE

I'm listening.

CALLER (V.O.)

I am calling to inform you of the unfortunate passing of Dr. Meng earlier this morning.

PETTIBONE

What? That can't be right... I--

CALLER (V.O.)

I'm afraid she was found after an overdose.

PETTIBONE

Overdose? On what?

CALILER (V.O.)

I'm not at liberty to disclose that. But we know she's had a hard time since the passing of her son. Some people cannot cope with the pain.

Pettibone absorbs this, deeply conflicted. He's almost certain this is bullshit.

PETTIBONE

How can I reach Dr. Qay?

CALLER (V.O.)

I am sorry, I do not know that name.

PETTIBONE

Wait, who else can I call? My next treatment is scheduled for today--

CLICK.

Robert drops the phone, the implications dawn on him. Stricken, he slings the remote at the TV, EXPLODING the screen. He picks up the phone and dials.

PETTIBONE

It's me. I need to see you.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT**

Seated on the sofa, Cali commiserates with Pettibone. She maintains her distance, sensitive to Pettibone's situation, listens attentively.

PETTIBONE

I actually couldn't help caring for the woman, flaws and all. I do believe she looked out for me. She showed some empathy for the hand I was dealt, but she just couldn't help herself... she sweat blood for her science.

(then)

(MORE)

PETTIBONE (cont'd)

But now... her death... am I just going to fall apart and die, like she told me?

CALI

Isn't there anyone you can call? What about Frank?

PETTIBONE

He's gone. Just... disappeared.

They sit in the heavy silence. She gently touches his leg.

CALI

You can't give up. They've invested too much and have every reason to keep you alive.

His look says he doesn't have much faith in that.

PETTIBONE

I don't even have the treatment for someone to recreate. She was my only connection.

CALI

Our hospitals are the best in the world. I'm sure someone here can figure this out.

Pettibone suddenly remembers...

PETTIBONE

She said she had a secret office. Secret from Qay. She said she kept it from him.

CALI

Where?

PETTIBONE

She never told me. She meant to message me but...

CALI

Right. I've got a new assignment then. Give me everything you have on where this office could be - her address, mail, anything.

PETTIBONE

I don't know if I have any of that. But we can work on it.

(then)

(MORE)

PETTIBONE (cont'd)

Right now, my only chance is to play football.

CALI

You can't be serious. In the middle of all this?

She looks completely confused.

PETTIBONE

I need to see if my strength holds up.

CALI

It's not worth it. Not until you know you won't get hurt. You can't risk it.

PETTIBONE

There's no choice, Cali. I have to play. The world has to keep focusing on me if we have any chance of figuring a way out of this.

(then)

If anyone can find out who's behind this, it's you. Start with a person named Joon Qay. Q-A-Y. Dig for dirt like my life depends on it. Because it does.

Cognizant of Cali's hand, Pettibone squeezes hers. Offers her a forced grin. Emotion surges within her.

PETTIBONE

But first, let's get some privacy.

He gets up, drags a chair across the room to the corner. Stands on it -- yanks a CAMERA out of the corner ceiling. He moves the chair and proceeds to the next camera.

#### **INT. MONITORING ROOM - NIGHT**

There is no one on duty in the monitoring room but the monitors show the cameras going blank, one by one.

#### **EXT. LEOPARDS' FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - DAY**

GAME TIME. An away game. Playoff anticipation in the air. The crowd is AMPED.

The ball flies end-over-end into the sky to begin the game.

LATER

The Quarterback hands the ball off to Pettibone, who stumbles right out of the gate. With some effort, he regains balance to gain ten yards.

Next play. Another handoff. Pettibone looks slower than normal, still gains seven yards.

Pettibone abruptly gets winded. Takes himself out, jogs to the sidelines, panting.

**EXT. SIDELINE - DAY**

Coach Jaxon approaches Pettibone.

COACH JAXON

You good?

Pettibone is bent over, struggling to catch his breath.

PETTIBONE

I'm all right. Give me a breather every now and then.

COACH JAXON

A breather? First time I've heard that.

**EXT. LEOPARDS' FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - DAY**

**SERIES OF SHOTS:**

-- Pettibone gets another handoff. He breaks tackles and tries furiously to run down the sideline. A DEFENDER catches up to him AND BRINGS HIM DOWN.

DEFENDER

Too slow today, Superman.

-- Forrest and Stephen watch the game in frustration in their huge corporate suite.

-- The next play goes to Jenkins -- a reception. He runs fast after the catch, adding twenty yards. Pettibone lags behind and tries to block, but defenders flatten him.

-- In an unusual outing, Commissioner Blackstone and Tre Kessler are also in their own corporate box, watching on with careful, anxious and concerned eyes, despite attempting to appear neutral.

-- Pettibone fumbles on the following play and the ball is scooped up by a defender who runs ten yards the other way.

-- Forrest and Stephen -- alarm is in the air now.

FORREST

What the hell's going on?

STEPHEN

Take it easy, Forrest, everyone fumbles once in a while.

FORREST

Not Pettibone. Have him checked out.

**EXT. LEOPARDS' FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - DAY**

End of game. The scoreboard shows: "HAWKS 30, LEOPARDS 27."

**INT. CORPORATE CAR - DAY**

Commissioner Blackstone and Kessler ride in the back of a corporate car, shuttling them from the stadium. Kessler is making a call. He hangs up, no answer.

TRE KESSLER

Do you want to know how many calls that is I've made to him with no answer? I lost count after ten.

Commissioner Blackstone thinks, increasingly concerned.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

When's the treatment scheduled for?

TRE KESSLER

Tomorrow I believe.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

So we still have some time.

TRE KESSLER

Yes but--

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

Keep trying Qay until he answers.

TRE KESSLER

What don't you get? He's not going to answer. He's fucked us. Probably halfway around the world right now.



Commissioner Blackstone swallows this, not quite ready to hear it yet.

**INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - CUBICLE - NIGHT**

Cali burns the midnight oil -- breezes through her follow-up article requested by Emeric.

She looks worried. Checks the sports channels, and Pettibone's struggle. She closes her eyes, drops her head. Looks back at the screen with her hand over her mouth.

She flicks to a tab open: on it a list of registered office spaces in the local area.

EMERIC (O.S.)

Working late on the interview?

Noticing Emeric hovering over her shoulder, she quickly switches the screen.

CALI

Was about to send it over to you.

EMERIC

Better be. It's mid-week. Another day and people will forget. Can't wait to see it.

CALI

Same here.

EMERIC

I'm off for the night.

CALI

Good night.

As he goes away, Cali starts her research again.

She immediately scans the internet to find information on "Dr. Lin Meng" and "Dr. Joon Qay," yielding no results.

Frustrated, she continues to search the web to find names, titles, articles... She flies through search after search.

Then, she lands on the only valuable piece of information while searching: an article reporting the "overdose of Korean doctor in her apartment". She looks up the apartment on Google street view and scribbles down the address.

She sits back and thinks. She looks at the Emeric's office in front of her, which is empty. She notices his computer is still on. She gets up, picking up her bag --

**INT. EMERIC SWAIN'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Cali enters Emeric's office, seeing the computer is still logged in. She checks no one is watching her and approaches the computer.

**EXT. DR MENG'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT**

Cali pulls up in her car, opposite Dr Meng's apartment building. She hangs around until she spots A WOMAN heading for the door.

Cali gets out and follows her. The Woman opens the door and Cali sneaks in behind her.

CALI  
Forgot my keys.

The Woman ignores her, continues on her way.

Cali slips inside the building.

**INT. DR. MENG'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - NIGHT**

The Woman walks upstairs and Cali stays on the ground floor, moving to the mailboxes. She can't see Meng's name but finds, one mailbox with no name. This must be the one.

**INT. DR MENG'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT**

Cali walks down the hallway. She knocks on the door she believes is Meng's. But a man, MR. CHO (70s), answers.

MR. CHO  
Can I help you?

CALI  
Oh sorry. I thought this was Dr Meng's apartment.

MR. CHO  
Next door.

CALI  
Oh, thanks.

MR. CHO

Do you know what happened?

Cali does, obviously, but goes with a lie...

CALI

What happened?

MR. CHO

She was found dead. Overdose.

Cali feigns shock, relatively convincingly.

CALI

Oh my God.

MR. CHO

Did you know her well?

CALI

I was... someone she worked with.

Mr. Cho eyes up Cali suspiciously.

MR. CHO

Yes, well we were all very shocked.

CALI

You were good friends?

MR. CHO

We were neighbors.

Mr. Cho is surprisingly curt.

CALI

Right. Is her apartment--

MR. CHO

Empty. Her possessions have been cleared and given to her next of kin.

CALI

I see. I don't suppose you knew where she worked. Where her office was.

MR. CHO

I thought you said you worked together.

CALI

Sometimes. We worked together sometimes. But she said she had an office she went to occasionally?

(MORE)

CALI (cont'd)  
 And I think she might have left  
 something for me there.

MR. CHO  
 What do you do?

CALI  
 I uh... I worked in her lab.

Cali can't keep up with her lies. And Mr. Cho senses it.

MR. CHO  
 I don't know about any office. She  
 never mentioned it.

CALI  
 Oka--

MR. CHO  
 I should go. My pot is boiling over.

CALI  
 Okay. Thank you for your--

The door closes in Cali's face. Well, that was a bust.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT**

Pettibone sits, his eyes tracking Cali as she paces back and forth --

CALI  
 He wasn't exactly the friendliest  
 person I've ever met.

PETTIBONE  
 She never mentioned her neighbors.

CALI  
 I don't blame her - he was a grumpy  
 old man. But he mentioned something  
 about next of kin. Did she ever  
 mention anyone else in her life?

PETTIBONE  
 No one. I'm surprised she had any.

CALI  
 I need to find a way to get my hands  
 on her last will. Somehow. Meanwhile,  
 I'll try to get more sources for the  
 story.

(MORE)

CALI (cont'd)

Believe it or not, it's hard to get anyone to talk when you're reporting on a conspiracy.

PETTIBONE

I love the look in your eyes when you're chasing a story.

She sits next to him.

CALI

It's not a story. It's your lifeline.

PETTIBONE

Still. Your cheeks get all rosy. It's adorable.

His stare melts her a bit too much. She squeezes his knee.

CALI

I gotta get on the phone. Try to get someone on the line from this country's medical fields.

PETTIBONE

Do what you need to do. And let me know if I can help.

CALI

You just rest up. Big game tomorrow.

She leans in and kisses him on the cheek. She gets up, excited, and rushes to her phone.

While she isn't looking, Robert winces and rubs his leg gently where she squeezed. Worry floods his eyes.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT**

The hometown crowd is RAUCOUS. Beer flows. Fans jazzed. It's a huge game for both teams. The players are on the field.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - OWNER'S BOX - NIGHT**

As always, Forrest is seated next to Stephen.

FORREST

Did he see our trainers?

STEPHEN

Yes. Nothing obvious showed up except for a few bumps and bruises.

FORREST

He better come through. We don't have  
a prayer in the playoffs without  
Pettibone.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - PRESS BOX - NIGHT**

Cali finds the work station for beat reporters. She appears worried and preoccupied. Other reporters keep their distance.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT**

Game in progress. Pettibone runs the ball to the line of scrimmage when a DEFENSIVE TACKLE belts him to the turf. The Tackle stands over him.

DEFENSIVE TACKLE

That's for beating up fans in bars.

LATER

Despite his effort, Pettibone's play worsens. On the next play, he is sacked behind the line of scrimmage.

The DEFENSIVE END gets in his face.

DEFENSIVE END

What's wrong, Pantybone? You on the  
rag or somethin'?

The following play, the quarterback throws a short pass to Pettibone, who is --

CRUSHED as he gets the ball, which springs into the air and into the hands of a DEFENDER.

The defender bumps into Pettibone, picking himself up.

DEFENDER

Keep this up and your girlfriend  
won't have much to write about.

Pettibone wallops the Defender, who staggers backward. Players separate them.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - PRESS BOX - NIGHT**

Cali watches Pettibone's beatings on the field, pained. She tries to subdue her feelings as other reporters sneak a look at her to gauge her reaction.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT****ENTER MONTAGE:**

-- Pettibone is stripped of the ball. The Marshalls recover.

-- The Marshalls stuff Pettibone again without gaining a yard.

-- The crowd SHOUTS verbal abuse and jeers at Pettibone.

-- Pettibone tries to block only to be flattened. Jenkins pats him on the back, appearing to give him encouragement.

-- Cali, in the Press Box, visibly fights back tears as she attempts to take down notes. A lone KIND REPORTER briefly consoles her. Cali nods in appreciation.

-- Pettibone is given the ball -- he gets SANDWICED by two Linebackers -- CRUNCH -- he falls to the ground like a slab of meat. He doesn't get up. Referees and players wave for help -- trainers rush out -- ambulance comes.

-- Clearly distressed, Cali takes her belongings and exits. Some reporters take notice, whispering to one another.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - OWNER'S BOX - NIGHT**

Quiet permeates the room. Forrest on the brink of a meltdown.

Forrest HURLS a plate of appetizers against the wall, then stalks out of the box.

**INT. COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Commissioner Blackstone watches the game on TV, consumed with worry, nursing a glass of whiskey, then knocking it back.

**EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD - NIGHT**

Absolute silence. A pin could drop as everyone watches Pettibone get loaded onto a stretcher. As they lift him into the ambulance he raises his arm and gives a thumbs up.

The CROWD GOES WILD.

**INT. HOSPITAL - CT ROOM - DAY**

Inside the tubular CT machine, Pettibone lies on a flat patient table that moves into the imaging machine.

**ENTER MONTAGE:**

-- Blood is drawn from Pettibone in a lab.

-- Pettibone's vitals are taken. Nurses and Doctors examine his numerous scars in wonder.

-- Cali paces a hallway, a mess.

-- A vascular ultrasound is performed on Pettibone's abdomen.

-- Cali making phone call after phone call -- making notes -- always getting hung up on.

**INT. FOREST MONROE'S OFFICE - DAY**

The office is filled to the brim with sports memorabilia.

Forrest reads the results of the physical on Pettibone while Stephen sits patiently, waiting for Forrest to blow up. Sure enough, Forrest flings the paperwork at Stephen.

FORREST

Where'd he go, to a witch doctor?  
These results say nothing is  
physically wrong with him. He's the  
picture of perfect health.

(then)

Didn't they see his last game?

STEPHEN

They couldn't detect any foreign  
substance in his system.

FORREST

Maybe he's a head case.

STEPHEN

Could be psychosomatic... What do you  
want to do?

FORREST

I want to turn back time, we lost our  
asses on that last game.



STEPHEN

We have bigger to fry than that game, people are starting to ask about our use, or non-use, of Pettibone during a game.

Forrest pretends to hide his worries with bravado.

FORREST

Don't worry about it - he's no good to us right now. Dump him on the PUP list and pray for a miracle. Get Jaxon to break the news.

They both appear apprehensive as Stephen leaves.

**INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - COACH'S OFFICE - DAY**

Jaxon watches sports roundup, waits for Pettibone. He has a half-full pint of whiskey in his open drawer, a tumbler on his shiny new desk.

Pettibone arrives, resembling an apparition.

COACH JAXON

I want you to make me understand what happened, kid.

PETTIBONE

You saw it.

COACH JAXON

Night and Day. I could walk across the room and push you over with one finger right now.

No answer.

COACH JAXON

Winning in this league gives players, coaches, and fans an extraordinary high. It's unlike anything else a normal person would ever experience, no matter if it's gambling, sex or money...

(then)

They put you on the PUP list.

PETTIBONE

Physically Unable to Play? What a joke.

COACH JAXON

They're doing it to protect themselves. Can't find anything physically wrong with you. Can't put a head-case on that field.

Pettibone laughs softly to himself in bewilderment.

COACH JAXON

If it's any consolation, I'll be next. I heard Forrest say I should be scouting other teams - for a job.

PETTIBONE

Coach...

Pettibone takes a serious tone.

COACH JAXON

What?

Pettibone looks like he might be about to spill everything to Jaxon.

PETTIBONE

... you should go home, get some rest.

COACH JAXON

I'll get nice and cozy in this here bottle instead.

Jaxon pours another shot, offers it to Pettibone, who begs off and walks out.

COACH JAXON

It's just a game.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE = KITCHEN - DAY**

Cali sits at the island and simultaneously checks her laptop for data and makes calls.

CALI

(into phone)

No, that's not what I... does anyone there speak English? English?

She checks her screen, puts the phone down, exasperated. She checks another number on her computer and makes another call.

**SERIES OF SHOTS:**

- Cali making another call.
- Cali checking off more numbers.
- Cali dropping her phone on the desk and rubbing her eyes in frustration.
- Cali SCREAMING into her phone.
- Cali pouring a cup of coffee and going back to her list.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Cali has her phone to her mouth as she sits at the island.

CALI

You do? Great. May I speak to Qiang Lei?

Cali immediately gets cut off. She looks at her phone in sheer frustration.

CALI

My brain hurts.

PETTIBONE (O.S.)

When you start talking to yourself, it means it's time to stop.

She leans over and looks across the hall to see Pettibone lying on the couch in the drawing room.

CALI

I can't get through to anyone.

She gets up and walks to the

**DRAWING ROOM**

Pettibone moves to sit up.

PETTIBONE

You're looking for a needle in a haystack.

CALI

Yeah. Inside another, bigger haystack. I'm searching for two needles, one for North Korea and Los Angeles for another one.

(MORE)

CALI (cont'd)

(then)

I'm sorry, again, I can't get over what those AFL bastards did to you.

PETTIBONE

They sure didn't waste any time.

CALI

If they only knew.

PETTIBONE

The truth is... there's not much fight left in me. It was wishful thinking my treatment would continue.

She sits down next to him.

CALI

No, you can't give up now. There must be other options.

PETTIBONE

I'm not giving up, Cali.

(moves to rise)

I was given a second chance to live, and I refuse to die again. Let me take over, you need to get some rest.

Pettibone coughs and wheezes. His voice weakens as he speaks. She stops him.

CALI

Said the pot to the kettle. When I sniff something bad, I don't rest until I find out what's causing the smell.

PETTIBONE

A true journalist 'til the end.

Cali's frown turns into a slight smile.

**INT. AIRPORT - ROLLS ROYCE - DAY (MOVING)**

Dr. Qay scrolls emails on his phone as the car moves along a private tarmac. The phone rings. He answers on speaker. They speak in Korean:

DR. QAY

What it is? I'm about to board my plane.

VOICE (V.O.)

There is a large volume of inquiries  
being made about specific people  
whose names shouldn't be known.

Qay quickly concludes who is making the inquiries.

DR. QAY

... The reporter.

VOICE (V.O.)

You know this cannot happen. And in  
the end, her questions may come back  
to connect to you, Doctor. And... we  
can't have that. Our association  
ended when our contract ended. You  
understand?

Qay sighs heavily, pissed.

DR. QAY

No worries, I will handle it myself.

Qay ends the call.

DR. QAY

(to Driver)

Change of plans. Have them delay my  
flight for a few hours.

(then)

Time to clean up these loose ends  
once and for all.

**INT. NEWS OFFICE - CUBICLE - DAY**

Cali scrolls through a list on her computer. Many of the  
names and numbers are marked off -- the numbers are  
dwindling. Exhaustion and depression are setting in.

Emeric Swain steps up to the cubicle.

EMERIC

Stop whatever you've been working on  
about Pettibone. They want a new  
skew.

She isn't in the mood. She simply looks up at him.

EMERIC

Might be a tough one for you, but we  
need a piece on Pettibone's downfall  
in the AFL. Think you're up for it?

CALI

The newspaper wants to jump on the bandwagon of kicking a guy when he's down?

EMERIC

It's news, Cali. And you work for a newspaper, in case you forgot.

CALI

Why don't you get another writer?

EMERIC

You have loads more information than anyone else. But we only work with facts here, no personal views. No agendas.

She hesitates. Emeric leans over the cubicle wall.

EMERIC

Look... it's clear you got too involved with this guy. But he's the name on everyone's tongue right now. It's major news. If you can't see that, you better look for another vocation. If you get this article right, it could get you off this desk and onto more important stories.

CALI

I get it, I get it.

EMERIC

Good. Let's make it a priority. This story. Nothing else.

Emeric leaves and Cali stares at her computer. She then looks at her cell. Picks it up.

Her screensaver comes to life -- the selfie she took of her and Pettibone the day they first spoke.

CALI

More important stories...

She looks like she'll have a tear come to her eye but she steels herself. She dials the next number on her list.

**INT. DINING ROOM - PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Cali and Pettibone are eating dinner. Pettibone just pushes his food around. There's an awkward silence between them for the first time. Her eyes linger over him.

She excuses herself from the table.

Pettibone watches her get up and walk to her bag. Out she pulls a framed print of the selfie of Pettibone and her at their first interview. She hands it to him.

CALI

I kind of... got a small gift for you.

PETTIBONE

How'd you get this?

CALI

My selfie, remember? When you weren't looking? That first day.

PETTIBONE

Hmm...

CALI

What?

PETTIBONE

That's not my good side--

Pettibone tries to chuckle, then hacks and wheezes. Wincing in pain. She moves closer to him. Rubs his back. It's easy to see she's having trouble not being able to fix this for him.

PETTIBONE

Cali... I have to tell you something you probably already know.

(then)

I like you. I really, really like you. You're such an amazing woman and a kind soul and... and this situation for me isn't going to end well.

She holds back her tears. Drops her forehead against his temple.

PETTIBONE

My baggage... it's too much for anyone. The last thing I want is to drag you down. If you want to stop... leave. I get it. It would break my heart to break yours.

CALI

It's too late. Whatever happens to  
you happens to me.

He rolls his forehead to meet hers. They share a long look  
where love is clearly expressed by both sides.

Cali takes Pettibone in her arms and passionately kisses him.  
He can't resist. Pulls her in for an absolute show-stopper.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Cali, clad in only a huge t-shirt of Pettibone's, slips out  
of bed and looks at Pettibone, resting peacefully, almost a  
smile on his rugged face. She smiles to herself as well.

**INT. PETTIBONE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Cali sits at the island, phone in hand, laptop open.

She wearily enters a phone number. After a moment, a KOREAN  
MALE (30s), answers in a foreign language.

CALI

(into phone)

Do you speak English?

KOREAN MALE (O.S.)

Yes, I speak some English.

She almost drops her phone in surprise.

CALI

Oh--great--perfect. I'm trying to get  
in touch with Qian Zhang from your  
Department of Health and Science.

She squeezes her eyes shut, crossing her fingers in her head.

KOREAN MALE (O.S.)

He is not available.

CALI

But you know who he is?

A long pause.

KOREAN MALE (O.S.)

I am his assistant.

She punches the air in excitement. Calms...



CALI

I'm trying to find some information  
on a cloning experiment performed by  
Dr. Lin Meng.

Another long pause.

CALI

Hello?

KOREAN MALE (O.S.)

I am not authorized to speak about  
this.

Her face goes serious. Shit just got real. She stands, paces.

CALI

But you are aware of it? I'm calling  
on Robert Pettibone's behalf. He was  
her patient and he's very sick and  
might die if we aren't given access  
to that research.

KOREAN MALE (O.S.)

I know of the research project you  
reference.

Cali hears nothing except breathing on the other end.

KOREAN MALE (O.S.)

The demonstration was aborted - it  
became too unpredictable. We could  
not be connected to its failure,  
displayed for all the world.

CALI

Please... this man, he needs help.  
Now. Is there anyone who--

KOREAN MALE (O.S.)

Our country is not in the business of  
saving American lives. And if you're  
not careful, you will end up like  
that doctor.

CALI

Wait, what--

The Korean Male speaks in a whisper.

KOREAN MALE (O.S.)

We don't have what you need. She did.  
And knowing her, it's probably closer  
than you think. I cannot afford to  
say more. Do not call here again.

He ends the call. Cali stands there, stunned.

CALI

They killed her--

Cali senses something in her peripheral and turns to see DR. QAY in the archway -- SILENCER IN HAND -- THWUP -- she drops to the floor behind the island with milliseconds to spare as the bullet OBLITERATES the coffee pot on the counter.

Cali panics, eyes flitting wildly, looking for anything that might help her.

DR. QAY

You have only yourself to blame.

He moves his way around the island, gun aimed toward the floor, he darts around -- SHE'S GONE.

DR. QAY

I was about to leave this cesspool of  
a country, but you couldn't control  
yourself--

He darts to the other side, sees her foot as she darts back the other way.

He then climbs up onto the top of the island.

DR. QAY

You want to play hide and seek?

He moves his way forward -- gun aimed down -- draws a bead on Cali -- he pulls the trigger at the same time as -- WHOOSH! -- he's yanked backwards --

Cali, on the floor, jerks as two bullets CRASH into the floor inches from her -- she peeks out to see --

Qay hits the floor -- Pettibone grabs him and yanks him to his feet -- Qay swings the gun up -- Pettibone grabs it with his right hand -- crushes it -- rips it away and tosses it across the room.

Qay throws his free fist into Pettibone's face -- Pettibone jerks back, almost drops him -- but he lifts Qay with his right hand and SLAMS him down on the kitchen counter.

Cali looks around in panic -- picks up the gun -- it's useless -- Pettibone is in the way.

Pettibone presses his huge body on Qay's chest for leverage -- then wraps his huge right hand around Qay's face --

SQUEEZES --

A GUTTURAL SCREAM escapes Qay's throat --

Cali watches in shock as Pettibone, raging, squeezes harder and harder --

Qay's face begins to CRACK and CAVE from the pressure --his body flails, reaching out for anything -- his hand fumbles and reaches the cracked glass from the coffee pot.

He gets hold of a large shard as he BELLOWS from the pain -- his hand shaking --

Cali sees him lifting the glass --

CALI

ROBERT!

It's too late -- Qay drives the glass into Pettibone's side --

Pettibone SHOUTS and reaches for his side -- Qay takes his opportunity and scrambles off the counter.

Cali reaches for Pettibone as he drops to a knee.

Nearly blinded, face bloody and misshapen, Qay manages to make his way to the front door and out --

Pettibone pulls out the shard of glass and blood gushes from the wound. He shifts himself up, groaning, then collapses to the floor.

Cali gets to him and wraps her arms around him -- he cries out in pain.

CALI

Don't move. Hold your hand on the cut. I'm calling an ambulance.

She rushes to her phone and Pettibone holds his left hand on the wound, the blood pumping out through his fingers, his hand shaking intensely.

**INT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

**SERIES OF SHOTS**

- Pettibone's wound is stitched up.
- Pettibone is so weak he can barely lift his head.
- MRI takes a series of images of Pettibone.
- A GI performs an endoscopy.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

Pettibone, heavily bandaged, on a respirator, lies still, anticipating the unknown. Cali walks into the room with a cup of coffee. He removes the mask. His voice is raspy and soft.

PETTIBONE

You don't have to spend the whole day here, you know. There is that pesky job of yours.

CALI

Screw 'em. I'll wait until you sleep. We have to get this out there.

PETTIBONE

Can you do that?

CALI

I made sure I could.

PETTIBONE

This is... how Dr. Meng said it would end, sedate the pain until I die. I hope, for one time, she's wrong.

DR. WILLIAMSON (40s), self-assured yet compassionate, walks through the door, clipboard in hand, followed by a NURSE.

DR. WILLIAMSON

Hello, Mr. Pettibone. My name is Dr. David Williamson. Your wound didn't reach any organs, but our team of doctors looked over your results, and I'm afraid we've got quite a puzzle on our hands.

PETTIBONE

I am definitely a jigsaw.

The doctor offers a slight smile.

DR. WILLIAMSON

We can't seem to determine the cause of your illness, except for one abnormality: the noticeable fusion of your limbs.

PETTIBONE

Several years ago... I was severely injured in Afghanistan.

DR. WILLIAMSON

Yes, Ms. Neal here said you were in an, um, experiment outside the country, regarding... cloning?

PETTIBONE

Yes.

DR. WILLIAMSON

You can imagine how this cloning business sounds more like science fiction than fact.

PETTIBONE

If I didn't have the scars, and the need for a very specific treatment, I wouldn't believe it either.

CALI

I received a confirmation from a government employee with the Health and Science Department in North Korea. He couldn't say much but he was aware of the experiment.

DR. WILLIAMSON

Well, even so, it's obvious that you're in great pain and we need to get to the bottom of it so we can possibly treat it. Quickly.

Pettibone tries to respond, but cannot breathe. He abruptly GASPS for air and begins seizing up. Grabbing his chest, body contorting in agony. Then, he falls limp.

CALI

Robert!

She holds his hand, fighting back tears.

DR. WILLIAMSON

(to nurse)

Put his mask back on. Give him another vial of morphine.

LATER

As Pettibone sleeps fitfully, Cali types away on her laptop on her news story. She yawns, fights it off, keeps going.

She accesses the newspaper's website. Scrolls through stories. She then pulls up a note with a username and access code on it and she uses it to LOG IN. She pastes her article into a text box.

HEADLINE READS: *THE UGLY TRUTH BEHIND THE AFL.*

She looks over to Pettibone fighting for his life, then looks back to her computer and uploads the article.

**EXT. NEWS BUILDING - DAY**

Daylight breaks. Birds CHIRP. Cali strides through the entrance with a newfound strength.

**INT. NEWS OFFICE - DAY**

Cali enters the office with confidence. Emeric Swain, upset, motions her to his office. As she goes that way, everyone in the office watches her in shock and surprise.

**INT. EMERIC SWAIN'S OFFICE - DAY**

Cali stands while Emeric sits behind his desk.

EMERIC

You think you pulled a fast one, don't you? The phones are ringing off the hook and my e-mail inbox is to the brim. Everyone wants to know who authorized this story. And since I'm the sports editor, the buck stops with me.

CALI

The story is one hundred percent accurate.

EMERIC

I told you to write a story covering Pettibone's downfall, not a scathing expose of the Hawks and the AFL. Are you trying to get this newspaper sued? We can't even pull it because it's out there. Shared. Screenshot.

CALI

One of th--

EMERIC

I'm not finished. You know, I went to bat for you. Stood by you--

CALI

I'm not finished either. One of their players who made them millions this season is lying in a fucking hospital bed fighting for his life and they don't give a shit.

EMERIC

Well, I hope it was worth it, because you'll be going down with the ship, Cali. Pack up your shit. You're done.

CALI

Print is dead anyway.

She leaves with a smile of satisfaction on her face.

**INT. FOREST MONROE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Forrest and Stephen convene.

FORREST

I didn't think Pettibone was a rat, and to a reporter no less. How can she say we turned our back on him -- he was clearly sick.

STEPHEN

We said it was psychosomatic. Obviously, we were wrong.

Forrest picks up the newspaper, smacks it, reading --

FORREST

*The Hawks practice a cruel and callous version of football's business end. They are more concerned about winning than the well-being of their players.*

STEPHEN

That could be said about every team in the league. The league execs have screwed everyone over with this.

FORREST

Exactly. And yet we're the ones getting crucified.

STEPHEN

I can't believe they lied to us. Blackstone, Kessler. They've destroyed everything.

FORREST

The entire league could go under.

STEPHEN

What bothers me most is what she wrote about the betting.

FORREST

Let 'em try and prove it.

STEPHEN

In this culture? No proof needed. It would cost you the team and maybe jail time for us, and Jaxon.

Forrest's facial expression changes to one of great concern.

**INT. TRE KESSLER'S OFFICE - DAY**

As Kessler holds the phone to his ear, Commissioner Blackstone barges in, iPad in hand, the article up.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

That little parasite. Bringing up concussions, disabilities, arthritis, retirement funds, healthcare...

Tre holds his hand up to Blackstone, who looks offended.

TRE KESSLER

(into phone)

Okay, thank you. Keep me updated with any changes.

He hangs up the phone.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

I'm gonna buy this newspaper so I can fucking flush it down the toilet.

TRE KESSLER

Robert Pettibone is dying.

Blackstone stops in his tracks.



COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

What? It doesn't say that here.

TRE KESSLER

It will soon. I just talked to a contact at the hospital. He's seriously ill and getting worse. Something is killing him and they have no clue what it is. Apparently, he was receiving some treatment that kept whatever is killing him at bay.

A KNOCK on the door interrupts them. KESSLER'S SECRETARY (30s) opens the door.

KESSLER'S SECRETARY

Mr Kessler?

TRE KESSLER

Not now.

Kessler's Secretary enters then closes the door behind her.

KESSLER'S SECRETARY

The FBI are on the phone.

Kessler and Blackstone share a concerned look. They both realize they're screwed.

TRE KESSLER

Tell them I'll call them back.

KESSLER'S SECRETARY

I don't think you can call back the FBI.

TRE KESSLER

Well then tell them I'll be a minute.

Kessler's Secretary slinks away. Kessler's attitude shifts--

TRE KESSLER

Pettibone's in the dark about this treatment and the doctors can't figure out what it was. We might be able to do something. Or at least try.

Blackstone appears skeptical.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

You have an idea you want to share?

TRE KESSLER

We still have that blood test from the beginning of the season, right? Do you remember we found a substance in his blood that we couldn't identify?

Blackstone nods.

TRE KESSLER

Well maybe the hospital can. We only looked for the banned substances, nothing else. I want to get that sample over there ASAP.

COMMISSIONER BLACKSTONE

Slow down. Let's think about this.

TRE KESSLER

In God's name, it's a man's life. Do you want that on your conscience as you sit and try to spin it? We have no way out of this now. Might as well try and redeem ourselves a bit.

Kessler's reaction makes Blackstone see himself. He agrees to the go-ahead. He sits at his desk resigned to his fate. Kessler rushes out.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

Pettibone sleeps while Cali reads texts on her cell phone. Dr. Williamson and his nurse enter, waking up Pettibone.

DR. WILLIAMSON

I believe we have a sliver of good news. The AFL was able to find the blood sample they took when Robert entered the league. We're analyzing it right now and hoping it can help identify the substance you were treated with.

Cali looks to Pettibone with hope.

CALI

That's fantastic news.

DR. WILLIAMSON

Also, just in case, we've contacted experts in the field of cloning -- can't believe I'm saying this out loud -- and provided them with the test results and our findings. Cloning is out of our realm, but maybe they can help.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Pettibone receives another vial of morphine while Cali watches. His eyes blink then they close. Cali takes his hand, kisses it gently.

Dr. Williamson enters and waits for Cali to acknowledge him.

CALI

Any news?

DR. WILLIAMSON

Our lab's on it, but it may still take time.

(then)

Cali, his condition is worsening. At this point, we can't rule out putting him in a medically induced coma to buy us more time. But there is no guarantee he will be able to come out of it.

Cali's eyes well up.

**INT. HOSPITAL - DR. WILLIAMSON'S OFFICE - DAY**

Dr. Williamson pours over Pettibone's file -- baffled and frustrated.

A LAB TECHNICIAN (40s), holding paperwork, stands at his doorway, knocks. Dr. Williamson turns to him.

LAB TECHNICIAN

Doctor, we've isolated the substance.

The Lab tech hands him the results.

LAB TECHNICIAN

However, it's mixed with blood and has aged. It will take a lot of trial and error to determine the composition of the serum.

DR. WILLIAMSON

How long? Ballpark.

LAB TECHNICIAN

That's the problem. We don't know how long. It could be a day, could be months.

DR. WILLIAMSON

We don't have months. We may not even have a day.

LAB TECHNICIAN

Sorry, we'll keep trying.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

Dr. Williamson stands before Cali, standing beside a semi-conscious Pettibone. She looks at the doctor as if she's received an injection of true hope.

DR. WILLIAMSON

Yes, we have identified the serum in the blood. But it will take time to determine its exact makeup.

CALI

But we don't have time.

She looks to Pettibone as her hope now fades.

DR. WILLIAMSON

The lab knows how urgent it is.

The doctor squeezes her arm and leaves. Cali buries her head in her hands. Through his pain, Pettibone looks anguished. She sees an unknown number on her phone come up.

CALI

I just gotta take this. Don't you go anywhere while I'm gone.

PETTIBONE

You know where... to find me.

She kisses his forehead, then darts off.

**INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY**

Cali answers the phone.

CALI

Hello?

LAWYER'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hi there, I'm returning a call about a freedom of information request.

CALI

Hi there, yeah I...um, where are you from? Sorry, I've called a lot of numbers recently.

LAWYER'S VOICE (O.S.)

We're Greenwood & Co. We executed the will of Dr. Lin Meng.

Cali's eyes light up.

LAWYER'S VOICE (O.S.)

I'm afraid we can't help with your request. I'm just returning the call to ask to please stop calling.

CALI

No, no wait! You have to help me. Someone's life is at stake here. Dr. Meng had a patient only she knew how to save.

LAWYER'S VOICE (O.S.)

I'm sorry but I fail to see how that's our business.

Cali seems almost at a complete a loss.

CALI

I just...I just wanted to know who her next of kin was. Is there anyone who I could ask for help?

There is brief silence on the other end of the line...

CALI

Hello?

LAWYER'S VOICE (O.S.)

I'm afraid Dr. Meng didn't have a next of kin.

Cali's face falls.

LAWYER'S VOICE (O.S.)

Just obviously a neighbor that she was fond of.

CALI

A neighbor?

*Flash: The blank name on the list of Cali's neighbors mailboxes.*

It dawns on Cali and she leaps up.

**INT. DR MENG'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

Cali bangs on the door of Mr. Cho. Eventually, he opens the door. He says nothing, stares blankly at Cali.

CALI

Mr. Cho. I know she left everything to you. Lin.

Mr. Cho looks guilty.

MR. CHO

I don't know what you're talking about.

CALI

Please. Did she mention anything about an office? I need a vial from it. Robert Pettibone is on his death bed without it.

MR. CHO

Come in, Ms. Neal.

CALI

What... How... ?

MR. CHO

You should have told me you were a journalist. I looked you up.

CALI

I thought you wouldn't trust me.

MR. CHO

I don't trust all journalists. But one's with a glint in their eye that you do, then I trust. I should know... I was one of them.

**INT. MR. CHO'S APARTMENT - DAY**

Mr. Cho allows Cali to enter his apartment. He leads her through well-kept rooms as he speaks. Cali frantically looks around, trying to look for any clues.

MR. CHO

I believe you are digging for the right reasons... and trying to find out what happened to Lin.

Mr. Cho leads her eventually to a room, where he opens the door and reveals a lab office, complete with a desk, medical fridges and storage containers. Cali's eyes widen.

MR. CHO

She asked if she could use my spare room as an office.

Cali looks to Mr. Cho. The tone of his voice softens.

MR. CHO

The overdose, was not her. Perhaps you can shed some light on it... I miss her greatly.

It's clear from Mr. Cho's face that these two were great friends.

Mr. Cho moves to a fridge and opens it, revealing a trove of vials containing serum. Cali beams and sighs a heavy breath of relief.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

With Pettibone asleep, Cali desperately hands the vial to Dr. Williamson. Dr. Williamson scrutinizes the contents. He nods and rushes out.

**INT. DR. WILLIAMSON'S OFFICE - DAY**

Dr. Williamson's consumed with the puzzle of the serum, searching for more data on his computer. The Lab Technician appears at the door.

LAB TECHNICIAN

We have the results.

DR. WILLIAMSON

Positive, I hope...

The Lab Tech hands the results to the anxious doctor.

**INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY**

Cali, exhausted, grabs a coffee from the machine in the hospital lobby. She sits down and brings out her phone.

On it, there are loads of messages congratulating Cali on her story. She scrolls through some positive feedback, pleasantly surprised.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

Pettibone, weak and barely audible, opens his eyes and sees Cali right there staring at him, her face wet with tears.

PETTIBONE

What's wrong? Did I die?

She laughs, wiping tears, his joke catches her off guard.

PETTIBONE

You never should've written that article. You'll be ruined.

CALI

You know about that?

PETTIBONE

You won't believe what these nurse's say when they think you're passed out.

He offers a forced smile. She squeezes his hand.

CALI

I think I might just be alright.

PETTIBONE

Remember what you promised me... Don't let Dr. Meng take her secrets to her grave. They could help someone.

Robert takes Cali's hand, caresses it.

Dr. Williamson enters the room, the Nurse follows.

Cali shows a restrained expression of hope. Pettibone turns painfully to hear the news.

DR. WILLIAMSON

Robert, Cali, without question, we have flat-out identified the composition of the serum.



Cali jumps out of her chair, hugs Williamson, then Pettibone, who reciprocates the hug weakly. A tear falls down his face.

CALI

You're crying.

PETTIBONE

I thought I was going to die again  
and never see you again.

DR. WILLIAMSON

As we speak, the lab staff is  
recreating the duplicate serum.

CALI

When will it be ready?

DR. WILLIAMSON

The lab said hopefully by tomorrow.

(then)

Robert, you're a lucky man to have  
this firecracker on your side. If it  
weren't for her finding those vials,  
we'd still be scratching our heads.

Pettibone looks to her.

PETTIBONE

You found the vials?

CALI

Oh you know, just saving your life  
while you're sleeping.

He smiles then looks to the doctor.

PETTIBONE

You think I have a future with her?

DR. WILLIAMSON

I don't know about that, Robert, I'm  
no love doctor, so you'll have to ask  
the lady. But for your health? This  
is new territory, but I like your  
odds.

PETTIBONE

"I don't know" -- that's a popular  
phrase about my health.

They all chuckle.

DR. WILLIAMSON

Realistically, these developments could lead us to explore other fields like diseases, possibly a cure to cancer. That doctor's methods of cloning could change the world of science.

Pettibone takes it in, then looks at Cali's face.

PETTIBONE

All I really care about right now is changing mine.

**EXT. CITY STREET - DAY**

Cali and a limping Pettibone walk along a suburban street hand in hand.

CALI

So... you sure about this?

PETTIBONE

My situation could have easily been his, so I need to live the life he didn't get to. I can't move forward if I don't look back.

CALI

And what about us?

He stops. She turns to him. He takes a moment, then looks her in the eye.

PETTIBONE

I realize the man I used to be, before all that happened... he would have loved you, too. But, Cali... I can't promise you anything other than the here and now -- my future is a question mark.

CALI

Our future.

She looks down and takes his hand in hers.

PETTIBONE

I have a question... why did you even bother with me?

CALI

I felt sorry for you. I saw this lonely guy trapped in this great big house, with no friends... except me.

She smirks, then lifts her head to look at him, more serious.

CALI

I guess, in a way, I know something about having people telling you what to do with your life. And... I happened to fall in love with you. I wasn't even supposed to be at that game.

This warms him and his smile is infectious.

PETTIBONE

You went through a lot of trouble for a meat-head grunt like me. I have to thank you for giving me a second chance to cheat death.

(then)

And now I finally have an answer to Dr. Meng's theory.

Cali looks puzzled. Robert leans forward, intoning with great gravitas:

PETTIBONE

The will to live?

(then)

Here's living proof.

He smiles and kisses her deeply. Then they look to the house behind them.

CALI

You ready?

PETTIBONE

I'm not sure, but I'm never gonna waste another moment in my life.

She moves with him up the walkway of a bungalow, an American flag proudly displayed. They get to the door and Pettibone knocks and takes a deep breath.

After a moment, a WOMAN (50s) answers the door, looking at the duo questioningly.

PETTIBONE

Hello, Mrs. Mathis. I'm Sergeant Robert Pettibone, and I was hoping I could talk to you a little about the time I spent with your son.

He smiles. She looks like a tear may escape. She steps back and motions for them to come inside. The door closes softly behind them as...

**INT. A DARKENED ROOM - DAY**

A few low lights barely illuminate the room. No windows. Large storage lockers displaying clear glass fronts line the walls. Sounds similar to what is heard in a hospital overnight echo quietly.

A door opens. Someone walks in. The lights turn on. It's DR. QAY -- not that it's clear from his face -- which is bent, deformed, scarred, an eyepatch over one eye -- but his suit and green pocket square give it away.

He steps in and two LAB TECHS follow him. He walks the long room as the Lab Techs settle in behind workstations.

As he passes each of the large storage lockers, they reveal what is inside -- human bodies -- stitched, some limbs differing in size from others -- in suspended animation in a gelatinous ooze. There are DOZENS of them.

Qay gets to one and stops. He looks at the form of A WOMAN, her arms and legs much larger than what her torso would dictate. He takes a moment. Ponders.

DR. QAY

This one.

(then)

This one will be next. She's perfect.

A creepy, maniacal smile crosses his ruined face as --

FADE OUT

**THE END**