

UPPERCUT

Written by

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INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

SHIVA SINGHAVI (25) works the register at a dingy c-store.
He's joined by his sister, VIJAY SINGHAVI (12).

SHIVA
What's the capital of Cameroon?

VIJAY
Yaoundé.

SHIVA
What's the capital of Mongolia?

VIJAY
Ulaanbaatar.

SHIVA
Who's the all-time leader in triples?

VIJAY
Sam Crawford.

SHIVA
Ty Cobb. The Georgia Peach. Who the heck is Sam Crawford?

VIJAY
The all-time leader in triples.
Crawford had 309; Cobb had 295.

SHIVA
Interesting. What is...24 times 18?

VIJAY
432.

SHIVA
I was kidding. How'd you know that?

VIJAY
Daddy taught me. I know everything
up until 30 times 30. Things get a
little wonky after that.

OWNER (60), a Russian émigré, plods in.

OWNER
Hello, hello. Your rent is late.

SHIVA
We're actually a month early, but
my dad said to hold off since the
radiator's broken. We're freezing.

OWNER

Why is this my problem?

SHIVA

You own the store. That's sorta the upside of Dad trying to buy you out.

WOMAN (50) enters, followed by ROBBER (20).

OWNER

Where is your father now?

SHIVA

He's working.

OWNER

Working where? Where is he working?
All I see is you two doing nothing.

SHIVA

He's moonlighting as a security guard. At the Citibank on 74th.

OWNER

Your father wants store? 200,000 bucks. You want heat? 300 bucks more.

The dollar store oligarch RAPS his knuckles, leaves.

VIJAY (to herself)

What a dick.

Robber gets in line behind Woman.

WOMAN

Can I get two Lucky 7's?

Vijay makes the exchange. Woman leaves, Robber steps up.

ROBBER

You got them new Dutchmasters?

Shiva shakes his head. Robber draws a gun, aims it calmly.

ROBBER

Open the safe.

SHIVA

I don't know the combination.

Robber shifts the barrel to Vijay, COCKS the hammer.

ROBBER

One... Two...

Shiva lifts the bridge, advances upon Robber, then PUSHES him into a wall of magazines. PUNCHES fly, propping him up like a hail of bullets. He BOUNCES off the wall, then HITS the floor.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The doors BURST open, Robber's body a battering ram. Shiva sees an NYPD Impala. He drags Robber, hoists him on the hood.

Officers MIKE MURPHY (25) and MARK TULLIO (25) exit a store, dinner in hand. They size up the scene, and a fast calculus has them in recognition of Shiva, a friend of the beat.

TULLIO

Get that citizen off the goddamn car.
I will not lose my job by going viral
on TikTok.

SHIVA

People are moving on from TikTok.
They're into NeckFace or whatever.

MURPHY

He's looking like Jesus on the cross.

SHIVA

Actually, he's Latino, so that would
be "Jesús" on the cross.

Shiva grabs Robber's ankles, hauls him off the hood.
Murphy SNAPS on gloves, takes vitals.

MURPHY

You okay...? Buddy, listen to me.
Are you okay?

ROBBER

F-Fuck you. Pig.

Murphy pats his chest, nods briskly.

MURPHY

You're okay.

SHIVA

He pointed a fake Glock at Vijay. He
took off the tip, but not the stripe.

TULLIO

Let me get a statement... How is she
doin' in general?

SHIVA

I dunno. Better than you and me.

TULLIO

Listen, Shiva: I know this isn't your first rodeo...but save it for the ring.

EXT. JACKSON HEIGHTS - DAY

Shiva runs with pace on Roosevelt Avenue, an overly crowded, highly congested Broadway, deep in the heart of Queens.

Jackson Heights includes in its ranks blacks, whites, and Latinos, but the restaurants Shiva runs past suggest Mumbai meets Shanghai.

Arms and legs pump against a frenetic, colorful backdrop. Signage and storefronts boast goods and services. Realtors and cell phone providers are joined by dollar stores and nail salons. Shiva runs past an Irish bar adorned with shamrocks and the national flag. A formal, copy shop-style banner declares, "Jack Dempsey Drank Here."

INT. BROOKLYN BOXING - DAY

Shiva takes a SHOT to the face. BOXERS, TRAINERS, and CORNERMEN watch along with DAMASCUS "CUS" BARNES (50), the gym's co-owner.

DAMASCUS

Let's go, Shiv! Come on, now!

In a nearby ring, RICH O'BRIEN (65) teaches a weekend WARRIOR. She BASHES a boxing dummy, it tips over and falls. Warrior joins Rich, who watches Shiva and FIGHTER (25).

WARRIOR

Are they pros?

RICH

Middleweights. One's got all the right tools, but none of the right moves. The other might be the most overrated fighter since Goliath himself, but he never quits.

Fighter WALLOPS Shiva. Cornerman DARNELL KING (50) turns to Damascus, who hands him a butterfly knife. Darnell WHISTLES.

Shiva heads over. He offers his wrist: It's taped to his back. Darnell SLASHES it. Boxers converge. Shiva swings big, misses.

RICH

He's a stallion. Wild horse.

WARRIOR

They need to be tamed, right?

RICH

Gelded. Crazy talented; crazy horse.

Shiva finds an opening, CLOCKS Fighter, who goes down.

RICH

See? Desire and effort will never
stand up against God-given talent.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Water rains down on Shiva's head. Blood clouds the water.

INT. GYM - DAY

Post-shower, Shiva walks across the gym, strides by Rich.

RICH

How you doin'? I'm new here.

SHIVA

Nice to meet you. I'm Shiva.

RICH

Rich O'Brien. I like your game. When
you fight from distance, you're good.
Real good. But when you get in close,
there's room for improvement.

From his wallet, he files through cards, gives one to Shiva.

RICH

You wanna improve your close-range
fighting? Stop in and see Coach K.
Coach runs a tight ship in Woodside.
Work on getting close, and focus on
your footwork.

SHIVA

I'm from Queens. Maybe I'll drop by.

RICH

Don't be obligated. Sheldon, was it?

INT. OFFICE - DAY

ENFORCER 1 and ENFORCER 2 await orders to mangle.

Damascus Barnes fiddles with a remote. He struggles to
adjust the output on a flat screen playing fight coverage.

Highlights of #1 middleweight RAHIM WHITTAKER (30) dazzle.

DAMASCUS

I asked for a state-of-the-art, gut
renovation, they give me paper thin
walls. They give me the Eames chair,
but with Rent-A-Center electronics.

ENFORCER 1

That Samsung flat screen is baller.

DAMASCUS

This Samsung flat screen is broken. South Korean electronics companies like Samsung and LG cannot compete with Japan-based outfits like Sony and Mitsubishi, and that is a fact.

ENFORCER 1

Toshiba's weak -- they're Japanese.

DAMASCUS

Toshiba? Nobody say nuttin' about no Toshiba, Virgil. We talkin' about the Mets and Yankees, you droppin' bullshit about the Quebec Nordiques.

ENFORCER 2

But why is Japan better than Korea?

DAMASCUS

By virtue of the fact that the people are Japanese. South Korea hasn't put in the work since embryonic stem cells and the 1988 O-lympic Games. Meanwhile, you know why Japanese businessmen tend to kill themselves? Because they care. The Japanese have fundamentals. Duty. Honor.
(at the TV)

Rahim Whittaker has fundamentals. When Shiva comes through all advocating for himself, that's what he needs to hear.

With a click, sports cable featuring Rahim Whittaker flips to a clear security feed playing color footage. Darnell, Shiva's cornerman, appears in the locker room. Secretly pops a locker. A wallet is stolen. Damascus turns off the TV.

DAMASCUS

Bring 'em in.

Enforcer 1 exits, gathers bodies. Soon, Shiva and his team file through: Darnell King and trainer KEITH CRIVELLO (50).

Cus lords over his desk. Shiva and boxer LAWRENCE DAY (30) sit in chairs facing him, with Darnell and Crivello nearby.

DAMASCUS

Who's been hittin' the lockers?

He swings his butterfly knife. It cuts crisp figure-eights.

DAMASCUS

Crivello: African brothas perfected the art of stealing, while Italian brothas invented it. Talk to me.

CRIVELLO

The only thing I've ever stolen was my wife's heart.

Cus looks back at Darnell. The butterfly knife swings.

DAMASCUS

Spread him out.

Enforcer 1 slams Darnell onto the table, holds him down.
Enforcer 2 pries open Darnell's mouth. Fingers pulling teeth.

Cus lowers his knife down Darnell's throat.

DAMASCUS

People say, "Damascus Barnes got soft."
They say, "Cus found Jesus. He found a wife. Once the baby was born, they moved out of the ghetto and into the suburbs faster than grandma could say, "New York City public schools."

(beat)

Get lost, Darnell. You're done here.

He raises the knife. Darnell ambles to the door, turns.

DARNELL

Are you saying I can't be his corner, or that I can't come back to the gym?

DAMASCUS

Boy, you can't come back to Brooklyn.

(beat)

How foolish is you not to grasp that? Can you come back to the gym? No, you finger-lickin', check-cashin' retard! I don't even want you in the borough!

He throws the knife, it stabs the wall. Darnell slinks out while everyone but Shiva laughs, as the r-word grates.

DAMASCUS

Back to business: Red Glove Promotions had a proposition for Bob Pollack. Bob, like any conscientious promoter, heard what Red Glove had to say. And that is why, my dearly beloved, we're gathered here today: Velvet dreams.

Damascus produces a velvet pouch. He places it on the table.

DAMASCUS

Lawrence, as fight night approaches,
you got friends and family hyped up.
They want to see you destroy Martinez,
and dude, I wanted to serve as witness.
Only Red Glove, the proposal they made?
Beluga caviar for everyone, kid. We
about to get paid. Word is, Red Glove
thinks both their boys are contenders.

LAWRENCE

And what are we?

DAMASCUS

Shiva's on the filet mignon side of a
plate, while you down in the dog bowl.
You Alpo. You Kibbles. You a Eukanuba
nigga. By contrast, Red Glove believes
that between Patterson goin' against
Shiva, and Martinez going against you,
their boys can land a title fight. So
they don't need you touching them up
on the way... We're putting you down.

LAWRENCE

I can't drop.

DAMASCUS

Ain't about you, Larry, it's about us.
It's about your family. So instead of
thinking of "me," try thinking of "we."

Cus takes two stacks of cash from the pouch: \$250,000.

LAWRENCE

I been hustlin', doin' the thing, so
I'm confused on all this... Give 500
grand to Shiva; let's talk in a year.

SHIVA

I've earned and deserve a title shot.

Cus places an index finger to his lips.

LAWRENCE

I ain't ready to lose.

DAMASCUS

Lawrence...you are a gentleman. But
you done lost 15 times in 30 fights.
For a nigga who ain't ready to lose,
you got a strange way of showin' it.
(beat)
Your job is to fall down in the 4th.

LAWRENCE

Do I got a choice?

DAMASCUS

You know you don't, or you wouldn't be crying. See how that do, soldier?

(beat)

We good?

LAWRENCE

We good.

Cus smiles through wicked teeth.

DAMASCUS

We...are great.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Cus drives Shiva in an ostentatious sports car. The city is a blur. Distressed brick and mortar, vacant steel and glass.

EXT. BATTERY PARK - DAY

The sun sets at the American Mariners' Memorial. Bronze statues shout for help as they pull a man from the ocean.

DAMASCUS

Shiva, with D off the team, Crivello don't wanna serve as trainer no more. He don't wanna start over with a new cornerman. Not this close to a fight.

SHIVA

... He won't start over with a new corner this close to the fight, but he's A-okay dropping off this close?

DAMASCUS

Crivello's at odds with how you work.

SHIVA

I work hard.

DAMASCUS

Most definitely. But trainers, they view fighters in the same way horse trainers view thoroughbreds. Even if the horse or the fighter is an elite athlete, trainers wanna feel like you is workin' their program. They need to feel like you is under their tutelage. Crivello's big-time. He a ESPN nigga. He a Twitter nigga.

(MORE)

DAMASCUS (cont'd)

You gotta genuflect with a man like that, because their egos is fragile.

SHIVA

I work really hard.

DAMASCUS

Workin' hard or trainin' hard don't mean you're studying hard. Crivello is 100%, new school analytics.

SHIVA

When I analyze, I overanalyze.

DAMASCUS

Imma field you an ace transition team so you can stay in tune for Patterson.

SHIVA

Get me Rahim, or give me a million so I can start my life. Why does Lawrence get the retirement package?

DAMASCUS

Because, you ign'ant mothafucka! That faggot never wins, and you never lose!

Shiva stands down.

DAMASCUS

19 wins and 0 losses. The only thing Shiva Singhavi knows how to do in life is win, yet the only thing he wanna do in life is lose.

SHIVA

If I'm so good, get me a title fight.

DAMASCUS

Quit asking and quit dreaming, son. Take a look in the mirror tonight, here's what that mirror's gon' say: "Sometimes you good, most times you great, but you ain't legend. Nuh-uh."

SHIVA

I thought 19 and 0 was impressive.

DAMASCUS

Look...the middleweights alone have 22 unbeaten fighters in the top 100. Even if you was one of ten, let me know when people want your business.
(beat)

(MORE)

DAMASCUS (cont'd)

Understand: America ain't ready for no Hindu boxer. Who gon' be in your fan clubs? Who gon' drop PayPal for online merchandise and fine apparel?

SHIVA

Oh, that's a cop out. Who's Whittaker even defending his title against next? If you won't give me a shot at Rahim, fine. But let me take 250K so we can own our store and I can start a life. I don't wanna graduate college at 29.

DAMASCUS

You keep winning, you'll rise in stature, and Vegas won't blink when high rollers bet on your loss. Show some faith...and have some patience.

SHIVA

I'm not 13 anymore.

DAMASCUS

Right. You're 25, and still buttin' heads with me. You've got ambition to spare but no perspective at all.

With earnest eyes, Damascus makes his appeal.

DAMASCUS

We are not mere mortals. There is a preternatural, transcendent gift that you and I have been given. It ain't from Jesus but from Genetics. This is some Charles Darwin/Gregor Mendel shit we dealin' with. Daily.

SHIVA

I gotta go.

DAMASCUS

You'll go when I'm ready to dismiss. You need money. You want a match-up with Whittaker. But you ain't takin' no PED. You ain't takin' no EPO. Singhavi, you're not trying.

He peels off ten bills from an obnoxious wad of cash.

DAMASCUS

1,000. Put five in the bank and spend the rest on your sisters. Or maybe just Sunny.

SHIVA

Sunny has a job.

DAMASCUS

Not one that pay her what she worth.

SHIVA

... Sunny has a job.

DAMASCUS

Know what else your sister has...?

Your sister's got that good hair.

(extending cash)

Don't be a hero, Singhavi. Never

let pride get in the way of dinner.

A moment, until Shiva snatches the money and walks away.

Damascus is left to consider his sunset and sinking ship.

INT. SHIVA'S APT - NIGHT

Shiva's right arm, wrapped in ice. A pot is on the stove. The water BOILS, and Shiva soaks his swollen hands.

LATER: Shiva faces a wall with framed, black-and-white, photographs of the Top 10 middleweights in the world.

He paces, a drill sergeant evaluating his platoon. Shiva stops at Rahim Whittaker. Looks him in the eye.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Eggs SIZZLE. Shiva waits with friends RON ARCENEUX (27) and HAROLD BAKER (27).

EXT. JACKSON HEIGHTS - NIGHT

They eat on the steps of a brownstone. Across the block, KABIR JAIN (40) smacks his son, ASEEM JAIN (10).

Shiva watches as matters escalate. Over silence, classical MUSIC begins. BEAT COP approaches. Both he and Shiva see Kabir Jain punch Aseem.

He motions for Harold and Ron to look. Beat Cop draws a gun. Jain sees that Beat Cop is an officer. They converge, argue.

Beat Cop strikes Jain, prompting a struggle for control of Beat Cop's gun. It goes off. Shiva, Ron, and Harold take off.

Shock on Beat Cop's face. Jain follows the sight line, sees Aseem on the sidewalk, gasping for air. Soon, Aseem Jain dies.

MUSIC fades. In the distance, an ambulance WAILS.

INT. SINGHAVI APT - MORNING

Shiva enters his family's cramped, 3BR apartment. He stops at his father's door. RAM SINGHAVI (60) cries. A marigold garland drapes a framed photograph of his late wife. Ram sees Shiva. He gets up, heads to the kitchen, Shiva follows. Soon, Ram works on a leaky sink pipe.

RAM

You don't love Vijay.

SHIVA

I do love her. I like her, too.

RAM

If they have a gun, stop.

SHIVA

The gun was effing fake.

RAM

Why do you use bad language?

SHIVA

Maybe if I were in college, they could teach me better words. Also...

RAM

College doesn't make you smart.

SHIVA

It doesn't make you stupid, either.

RAM

Studies won't teach you anything.
Boxing will teach you everything.
You have the big plan, college boy,
but sometimes you are really stoo-pid.

SHIVA

Dad, stop calling me "college boy."

RAM

This isn't India. It's a free country.

SHIVA

First of all, I don't know if you've been, but India's a free country, too. Next, you can't call me "college boy," because out of the three of us home right now? You're the only one who's actually gone to college. Twice.

RAM

... Do you love your sisters?

SHIVA

Almost as much as I love you.

RAM

Don't play games. I may speak with an accent...but I don't think with one.

Ram turns on the water. The pipe still leaks.

INT. VIJAY'S ROOM - DAY

Shiva KNOCKS, enters. Vijay reads in bed.

VIJAY

Madison Square Garden had a sale.
I got Rangers tickets... Come on.
I'm the only one of my friends
who's never been to MSG.

SHIVA

I just don't want to go to the
Garden unless I'm fighting there.
The thing is, I'll watch any team,
just not at MSG. But you're never
willing to see the Islanders.

VIJAY

That's because the Islanders are
awful and their fans are even worse.

She flips on her side. Shiva sits at her desk, produces the cash Damascus gave him. Sticks \$100 bills in her piggy bank.

SHIVA

Look: You wanna go to Madison Square
Garden cuz you're all about Stanford
White's architecture. I get it. You
wanna go to MSG and see your team play
hockey. I get it. But I am so close to
breaking out, okay? I don't want us in
the cheap seats when I'm this close.

VIJAY

The expensive seats aren't better.

SHIVA

Well, they are. They have padding.
(beat)
They also put a napkin under your
drink. It gets pretty out of hand.

VIJAY

Daddy's been crying. I don't know
what to do.

SHIVA
Just keep being a sweetie-baby.

VIJAY
I'm serious.

SHIVA
Let me ask you a question: When did all the sweetie-babies get together and decide to make you their Queen?

VIJAY
You're thoughtful; you know that?

SHIVA
I get it from my sister.

He heads out.

VIJAY
Which one?

SHIVA
You'll never know.

VIJAY
Which one?

EXT. HUDSON HEIGHTS - DAY

Nine flights of stairs connect Overlook Terrace, the highest natural point in Manhattan. Shiva runs up the stairs.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

SUNNY SINGHAVI (26), a public defender and the Coolest Girl in Queens, confers with a JUDGE. Shiv watches in the gallery.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

In the absence of their mother, Sunny fixes Shiva's salad.

SUNNY
You having fun or just training?
What have they been feeding you?

SHIVA
Complex carbohydrates, simple proteins...little bit of fruit.

SUNNY
What about Sermorelin? Are they giving you that Sermorelin shit?

SHIVA

What do you know about Sermorelin?

SUNNY

I'm having a baby; I know some things.
You should be eating lots of red meat.
Red meat and eggs yolks. You know all
that horrible Monsanto shit? Eat that.

(beat)

People want non-GMO? You need GMO-GMO.

Shiva smiles. Sunny pushes a takeout bag towards him.

SUNNY

I got you a present.

SHIVA

You know I don't like surprises.

SUNNY

I didn't say it was a surprise, dippy;
I said it was a present. It's gourmet
fried chicken.

Shiva waves her off.

SUNNY

I spent 30 dollars on it.

SHIVA

Give it to your clients.

SUNNY

Fuck my clients; this is for you.

(beat)

I don't buy takeout for just anyone.
I'm not saying 30 dollars is a lot
of money, but I could've spent some
time in Sephora instead.

SHIVA

You should've gone to Sephora.

SUNNY

I realize that now. Thank you.

(to herself)

I could've picked up a few things.

SHIVA

If it makes you feel any better,
I got a present for you, too.

He produces a stack of cash.

SUNNY

Put that away; are you crazy?

SHIVA

I want you to bet on a fight.
Carlos Martinez over Lawrence Day.

SUNNY

... Do you give money to girls?

SHIVA

What?

SUNNY

I'm curious if this is how you do it.

SHIVA

I don't like where this is going.

As if breaking attorney-client privilege, Sunny looks around.

SUNNY

When you give a girl money, when you
give me money...have a little class
and put it in a greeting card.

SHIVA

Oh, for fuck's sake.

SUNNY

We are not simple people. We may live
simply, but we are not simple people.

SHIVA

A greeting card just seems formal and
distant. What about an envelope?

SUNNY

Oh, honey, no.

SHIVA

What's wrong with an envelope?

SUNNY

"What's wrong with an envelope"?

SHIVA

You put cash inside and hand it over.

SUNNY

You're not an Irish immigrant trying
to curry favor with Tammany Hall and
fucking Boss Tweed. You're my brother.

SHIVA

So?

SUNNY

So, act as if... You need a girlfriend so you'll be relaxed in the ring. The first pretty girl you see from today on, I want you to say five words to her... "Do you have a boyfriend."

SHIVA

Too forward.

SUNNY

It's not. The minute a girl hears, "Do you have a boyfriend," this is what happens: She thinks, "Oh, my God: This guy's hitting on me." Then, three things happen: 1) She has a boyfriend, so she'll tell you. 2) She doesn't think you're cute, so she'll extract herself safely by any means necessary. 3) If she says some version of "No, I do not have a boyfriend, Mr. Gentleman Caller..." That means she's willing to give you a shot. As long as you don't say anything too cringe the rest of the way...you've got a chance at the dance.

(beat)

Do you have a boyfriend.

SHIVA

Take the money. Put it on Martinez.

SUNNY

I can't afford to bet on sports. If you can, go for it, but as a family, we can't afford to bet on sports.

SHIVA

We can't afford not to.

SUNNY

Shiva, the world is a horrible place. I've got orchestra seats, and it's a dirty Petri dish that's filled with too much Nitrogen, too much CO2, and not enough Oxygen. It's dirty, and I don't want us making it dirtier.

Shiva looks up. TV news shows smiling photos of father Kabir Jain and his late son, Aseem Jain. Then, crime scene footage.

SHIVA

If the world is a horrible place, and
it's a bacteria-filled Petri dish...
Why do you want to bring a baby into
this dirty and disgusting world?

Sunny shrugs, as if the answer is obvious.

SUNNY

So she can clean it the fuck up.

EXT. HOUSE (BRONX) - DUSK

Rich rings the BELL on a rickety home. MEG KWAN (75) appears. She looks at Rich for a moment, then closes the door. Rich sighs, then walks away. A moment, until the door opens up.

PATRICK "QUIET" KWAN (75) presents. Kwan never speaks, and his facial expression never changes. Rich ambles back up the steps.

RICH

Long time, Kwan. Can I come in...?
Bob Pollack and Damascus Barnes gave
me a job last month. It's good work.

(beat)

Maybe it's not "good" work, but it
is honest work, and now there's an
opening for a trainer. Cus has a kid
who's 19 and 0. He's ranked 25th...
Even if they give me a chance, he
needs a cutman... I need a cutman.

He looks down.

RICH

We never won the title or Vegas money,
but you may have valued my friendship.

He looks back up.

RICH

I know I treasured yours.

Kwan holds on Rich, then opens the door. Rich steps inside.

INT. SHIVA'S APT - NIGHT

Shiva watches two TVs placed side-by-side. On one, he studies #1-ranked Rahim Whittaker. On the other, he evaluates himself.

INT. GYM - MORNING

Rich, Kwan, CANDIDATES fill out forms. CUTMAN looks over.

CUTMAN

Where you from, OG?

RICH

Bay Ridge. Grew up in South Carolina.

CUTMAN

Are you Jewish...? My girl is Jewish.

RICH

Are you one of those people who thinks that every white New Yorker is Jewish?

CUTMAN

Are you?

RICH

I'm from the South.

CUTMAN

So?

RICH

I'm from Mississippi.

CUTMAN

They don't got Jews in Mississippi?

RICH

Not anymore.

Cutman looks at a frozen Kwan.

CUTMAN

Where he from?

RICH

... The Bronx.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Cus and Crivello pours over data. Shiva storms in.

CRIVELLO

I should've told you in person.

SHIVA

Fuck you, and your person.

CRIVELLO

Patterson is gonna wipe his ass with your career, and I'm not takin the L.

SHIVA

Were the ten degree Sundays worth it?
Changing my style for no good reason?

CRIVELLO

Your style is gonna get you injured.

SHIVA

That's the best you can do? Boxing is
gonna get me injured. My record is 19
and 0, and you're a huge bag of shit.

CRIVELLO

You have no passion for the sport.

Shiva picks up Cus's baseball bat, then fires it at Crivello,
standing 20 feet away. The bat SLAMS against a wall of books.
Cus wipes his brow after the bat CLANGS on his parquet floor.

CRIVELLO

I'm gonna help you find a trainer.

SHIVA

Fuck yourself; I didn't ask you to.

CRIVELLO

Damascus did. It's out of courtesy.

SHIVA

Cuz you're afraid of him?

CRIVELLO

Cuz I like you. I may not like you as
a fighter, but I like you as a person.

SHIVA

That makes me feel bad.

CRIVELLO

It shouldn't.

SHIVA

It does, cuz I don't like you as a
trainer or as a person.

CRIVELLO

... You got a lot of confidence for a
guy who won't make it out of the 4th.

SHIVA

You think I'll get to the 4th?

CRIVELLO

Not without a miracle. Maybe two.

INT. GYM - DAY

Rich and Kwan: Against a wall. Candidates line the the ring, SHOUT tips as Shiva brawls with a CRUISERWEIGHT. During a break, Shiva spots The Odd Couple, then resumes his workout.

Rich homes in on Shiva -- tired, slow legs. Cruiser is fast.

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

Shiva, Cus, and Crivello, united in front of the Candidates.

CRIVELLO

Boxing is 45% Math and 45% Physics.
Sir, you look lost. Can I help you?

RICH

... No.

CRIVELLO

Do you have a question?

RICH

... No.

CRIVELLO

I review fights with precision.

Rich raises his hand. An annoyed Crivello acknowledges him.

RICH

Why are you dressed like that?

CRIVELLO

Like what?

RICH

Like a college basketball coach.

CRIVELLO

I aim to look like a professional.

RICH

Okay... But why are you dressed like
a college basketball coach?

Scattered laughter. Shiva smiles.

CRIVELLO

You know, I used to dress like you.
Like I'd given up on life. You should
try wearing a suit to the gym one day.

RICH
I would like to. I would. I just
wouldn't want anyone mistaking me
for an asshole.

Everyone laughs but Shiva, who's intrigued by Rich and Kwan.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Rich pours himself a coffee. He turns, only to meet our boy.

SHIVA
Hey. Rich O'Brien, right?

RICH
Yes. And this terrific cutman is
Patrick Kwan. We call him Quiet Kwan.

Kwan's immovable face.

SHIVA
Why do they call you Quiet Kwan?
(to Rich)
Why do you call him Quiet Kwan?

RICH
The reason we call him Quiet Kwan...
is cuz he doesn't talk a whole lot.

Rich and Kwan lock eyes.

RICH
Kwan says you're dumber than you look.

SHIVA
Can he also critique my skill set?

RICH
I'll start. First of all, you're slow.

SHIVA
I'm slow.

RICH
From afar, I thought you were slow.
Up close? You're even slower.

SHIVA
What do you mean by "slow"?

RICH
It's pretty simple. Christ gave it
only four letters for a reason.

SHIVA

Time out. Are you saying that Jesus Christ came up with the word "slow"?

RICH

... Are you saying he didn't?

SHIVA

Jesus did not come up with "slow." You can have the burning bush, you can even have evolution, but you can't have abortion, and you can't have "slow." That is not happening.

RICH

Says who?

SHIVA

... At the Whitney Museum, there's a guard at the main desk named Frankie Knuckles you should meet.

RICH

Why is he called Frankie Knuckles?

SHIVA

I dunno. Maybe ask the guy who read me the riot act about Quiet Kwan.

(beat)

Frankie Knuckles will show you a sword from 1000 B.C. On one side it says "fast" in Greek. Guess what it says on the other side.

RICH

"Slow"?

SHIVA

In big block letters, Sir.

RICH

... Frankie Knuckles, was it?

SHIVA

He's their best security guard.

RICH

You know him and he knows you.

SHIVA

Yeah. Frankie's good people.

RICH

Well does he know that you're slow? Cuz you're slower than turtle shit.

(MORE)

RICH (cont'd)

(beat)

It's nothing to smile about. Now you
wanna explain to me how you're 19 and
0 while fighting with Plaster of Paris
in your shoes?

SHIVA

I'll work on my speed.

RICH

You're gonna have to.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Cus sits facing Shiva, Crivello. Rich and Kwan join them.

DAMASCUS

Rich O'Brien and Quiet Kwan. Damn.

(beat)

Shiva...when I first met this man,
he was so country, he thought the
S&P 500 was an auto race.

Cus and Crivello laugh. Rich and Kwan, hardly amused.

DAMASCUS

I been buggin' you to train again for
the last 20 years, now you after this
boy? Is you strugglin' with mortality
or sumpin'? You feel time is slippin'?

RICH

I'm slipping. Time is doing just fine.

DAMASCUS

Okay, let's get right into it, Rich.
What have you noticed about the kid?

RICH

First of all... He's a liberal.

DAMASCUS

... He's a liberal.

RICH

He fights like one, too.

DAMASCUS

Seriously, now. What have you noticed
about him in general? Not just today.

RICH

His footwork is sloppy. His right
hook is strong; that chin is weak.

(MORE)

RICH (cont'd)

His arms are too thick; his legs are too small. He has a combination of limited vision and poor vision. At times... What's your name again, son?

SHIVA

Shiva.

RICH

Hold out your fist, Sheldon.

He does as instructed.

RICH

You ever play rock, paper, scissors?

Shiva nods, still extending his clenched fist. Rich covers the fist with his palm. He then SLAMS it down on the desk.

RICH

See that? Hands like wet tissue paper, and slower than ten pounds of molasses in a five pound bag. That said, his right hook is no joke. Power and Speed.

DAMASCUS

Talk to me.

RICH

I think his left uppercut should be put up for legislation of some sort. Ought to be illegal in forty states.

DAMASCUS

It's that good?

RICH

It's that bad.

DAMASCUS

... What do you see in his future?

RICH

I want to be his trainer, not his teacher. Should he write down his allergies and emergency contact? Let me know if mom and dad have a different last name? What do you see?

DAMASCUS

I see ice to reduce swelling. I see a medium steak, and I see a little bit of ass, but not nearly enough, given his face and body, charisma and kindness.

RICH

Okay, fair enough. You know what I see in the boy's future...? I see boxing's history. I see Frazier's fire, Roberto Durán's aggression, the light in Ali's eye, and the chip on LaMotta's shoulder.

DAMASCUS

A minute ago you said he was slow.

RICH

He's slow in light of his ability. His hook is quicker than Joey G's.

DAMASCUS

You're comparing Shiv to Joe Gans?

RICH

Eh. He's more of a Jack Dempsey.

Cus and Crivello laugh. Rich wait for them to finish.

RICH

Dempsey got knocked out by Gene Tunney. Twice. Find someone who can knock this kid out once, I will give you my watch.

DAMASCUS

That Timex will pair well with my Patek Phillipe.

RICH

Takes a licking, keeps on ticking.

DAMASCUS

Lucky for you, we in the lickin' and tickin' business. But shit, Rich, we talkin' Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney? That's high praise from a Rich O'Brien.

RICH

Irish blood made them great.

DAMASCUS

Black blood made them champions... You ever look at Jack Dempsey's hair? Ever look at Gene Tunney's hair? Both those Irish lads were blacker than Babe Ruth.

(beat)

You really think he's better than 13?

RICH

Give the kid dysentery and a low-grade malarial fever, and he's still better.

(MORE)

RICH (cont'd)

I understand you have bigger names and younger men, but I can get him to fly.

DAMASCUS

Rich, Shiva's a top-ranked boxer who wanted to quit 20 years ago, and you a top-shelf trainer who did quit 20 years ago. So how the hell is a nigga like you gonna help a nigga like him?

RICH

Well, I figured we'd start from the fact that neither of us are n-words, and then work our way up from there.

DAMASCUS

Watch your language. If the woke police hears that, they gon' shoot pistols first and ask questions last.

RICH

That was me watching my language... Have you heard yourself talk?

DAMASCUS

Shiva's problem is that he doesn't love boxing. Fighting isn't boxing. Maybe it's an intrinsic quality he needed to be born with, but if you trained him, do you think he could develop a true love of boxing?

RICH

Oh, he's gonna love boxing... He might not like me very much, but he is gonna love boxing.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Shiva exits the gym, sees Rich at a bus stop. Approaches.

SHIVA

I was hoping you'd have a master plan. Title fight dreams, I guess.

RICH

They need to get you better venues.

SHIVA

Can you get a casino? Foxwoods?

RICH

I'm older. Don't have the contacts.

SHIVA

... I appreciate you coming out.

They shake hands, Shiva heads off. Rich calls after him.

RICH

I can't get you Foxwoods, but if you train with me, I can get you a fight in Madison Square Garden.

Given Vijay's MSG dreams, Shiva stops in his tracks.

RICH

You're not getting what you want out of Damascus. I know the drill, I get the politics... I can get you to MSG.

SHIVA

How?

RICH

Beats me. But everyone I've trained, they end up at Madison Square Garden.

SHIVA

... Were you being honest about the things you said about me?

RICH

It's just past 7. If we warm up fast, we can get dinner by 10. Your call.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

A CUSTODIAN sweeps. Rich and Shiva spar, Wisdom vs. Youth.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

A WAITER brings burgers and fries to Shiva and Rich. Rich picks up Shiva's plate, dumps the fries onto his own pile.

SHIVA

Where are you from?

RICH

Bay Ridge. Originally from Jackson, Mississippi. Where are you from?

SHIVA

India.

RICH

I mean... Where are you really from?

SHIVA

Oh. Ozone Park.

RICH

If I ask you an honest question,
will you give me an honest answer...?
Did you used to get picked on a lot
when you were little?

Shiva shakes his head. Rich holds firm.

RICH

Did you used to get picked on?
(beat)
Scale of one to ten.

SHIVA

... 9.8.

RICH

I thought so. That's how half your
fighters learn how to fight.

SHIVA

The other half learn?

RICH

Oh, you know. Their fathers beat their
mothers. Or their parents abused the
hell out of them... Was it white kids?

SHIVA

White kids, black kids... Puerto Ricans,
Asian kids... Queens is a diverse place.
But it was mainly the other Indian kids.

RICH

Why's that?

SHIVA

Easy prey. My mom died, so my dad was
always working, and I was a lone wolf.
Astray from the pack. Throw in that you
work at a c-store, and that never helps.

RICH

So, in the ring, do you ever think
about the boys who gave you trouble?

SHIVA

It's all I think about.

RICH

Lots of Indians work in stores. It's
nothing to be ashamed about.

SHIVA

Yeah, but most of us own our stores. Other kids, if their dad's a driver, you don't see them doing the work. My dad was behind a counter. Counting pennies and heating up soft pretzels.

RICH

There's nothing wrong with pretzels. I like pretzels.

SHIVA

... I like pretzels, too.

INT. SINGHAVI APT - NIGHT

Shiva enters. Sees Ram, plus two DETECTIVES in overcoats.

The silence is broken by the CRACKLE of a police radio.

DISPATCHER

Two-Four-Five, Assault with a deadly weapon. 93-10 Sutphin Boulevard.

Detective turns his radio off. This matter takes precedence.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT

Shiva and Ram on the roof. The Manhattan skyline, far away.

SHIVA

I'm telling you the same thing I told them. I didn't see anything.

RAM

They don't believe you... I don't believe you, either.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Shiva arrives at "Coach K's Corner." He peers inside, and is confused by what he sees. Steps back, checks the sign again.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

KERIANNE WATSON (25) is a black woman in charge of tiny DANCERS. Young girls in tutus and pointe shoes. Enter Shiva.

DANCER (to herself)

Lawd, thank you.

SHIVA

Hi. I'm looking for Coach K?

KERIANNE

That's me. Kerianne Watson.

SHIVA

Oh. You're "Coach" Kerianne.

KERIANNE

Dance: Ballet, Hip-hop, Salsa, mainly.
Who referred you?

SHIVA

Rich? Rich O'Brien?

KERIANNE

Oh, why didn't you say something? Any
friend of Rich is an enemy of mine...
What are we working on?

SHIVA

My footwork. Also...getting close?

Giggles from Dancers.

KERIANNE

I'll check my schedule and call Rich.
In the meantime, tell him I said "Hi."

SHIVA

Okay, cool. I'm on it.

KERIANNE

(beat)

Do you need subway directions, or...

SHIVA

Sorry.

Respectfully, he leaves.

SHIVA

Kerianne?

KERIANNE

Coach K is fine.

SHIVA

... Do you have a boyfriend?

Dancers gasp.

SHIVA

This is your place of work, and that
was inappropriate... Sorry. It's not
something I do a lot.

KERIANNE

Really. We thought you were a regular Don Juan.

Dancers laugh.

KERIANNE

Figured you were some kinda Casanova.

Dancers, louder.

KERIANNE

Maybe you were channeling Lord Byron.

SHIVA

Easy, tigress. You're ruining it now.

DANCERS

Ask her if she has plans Saturday.

KERIANNE

I do have plans Saturday. More importantly, mind your own business.

DANCER

You got no plans tonight, though. I heard you on the cell. Coach has no plans tonight, and she gon' be sittin' at home, watchin' her programs.

KERIANNE

Debbie?

DANCER

She got no plans. And if she say she do, ain't nuttin' but a flat-out lie.

KERIANNE

Debbie.

DANCER

Coach got nuttin' to do, besides waiting on yo' text messages.

KERIANNE

Debbie!

Dancers have a final laugh.

KERIANNE

Boot camp. Get serious.

SHIVA

... I'll tell Rich you said "Hi."

EXT. STREET - DAY

Earlier, Shiva ran past a bar with a banner which read, "Jack Dempsey Drank Here." KEVIN DONAHUE (40) owns the bar with his father, SHAWN (70). Shiva runs, mistakenly bumps Kevin, stops.

KEVIN

People wait on our beer line, and when you run by, they have to get out of the way.

SHIVA

I'm so sorry. But when the line's to the curb, I hit the street. We're on the same team; I work right there.

KEVIN

Yeah. Meatball sandwiches that are the most expensive in Queens.

SHIVA

Cuz ours actually have meat in them. Also, your mashed potatoes are lumpy.

KEVIN

Maybe yours were. We take care of our own. And when have you even eaten here?

SHIVA

"We take care of our own"? Classy. And I've eaten here, but never again.

KEVIN

Is that a promise?

Kevin heads into the bar. Father Shawn scowls at Shiva.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Shiva and Damascus watch the evening news. A REPORTER stands in Queens as PROTESTERS demonstrate.

REPORTER

Thank you, Dan. Police say that in disciplining his son, 37-year-old Jackson Heights father Kabir Jain crossed the line. Today, as police look to piece together the events that led to the death of 10-year-old Aseem Jain...a community wants answers.

DAMASCUS

This is a powder keg. It's a big old powder keg, and you've got the match.

SHIVA
I said I didn't see anything.

DAMASCUS
As long as it stays that way.

INT. SHIVA'S APT - MORNING

A wake-up text from Rich: Chelsea Piers! 6 a.m. God is Good!

EXT. CHELSEA PIERS - DAY

Shiva walks the promenade along the water. Enters the space. He sees a BLACK GUY (25) and a LATINO GUY (30) near lockers.

SHIVA
Are you guys here to fight?

BLACK GUY
6 o'clock.

SHIVA
It is 6 o'clock.

BLACK GUY
Behind you.

Shiva turns around, sees three WHITE GUYS (25) on a bench.

SHIVA
You guys don't look like fighters.

One smiles. Then, another TAPS a hockey stick on concrete.

EXT. RINK - DAY

MONTAGE: Shiva GRAPPLES with HOCKEY PLAYERS. Skates GRIND ice. Hoodies over heads. Punches FLY. Mouth guards BITE. Bodies DROP.

Rich watches as Shiva learns how to fight.

EXT. STREET / INT. STUDIO - DAY

Shiva enters. Seeks Kerianne cleaning the barre. Settles in.

SHIVA
Hi... I can help with that.

KERIANNE
Thanks. My girls get the barre. My boxers can look...just can't touch.

SHIVA
Okay. Boot camp. Day One.

KERIANNE

Lesson one. Sit down. Half-court.

Shiva sits in the middle of the studio. Wrists on knees.
Kerianne finishes cleaning, sits. Facing him. Same pose.
(Knees make an upside down "V.")

SHIVA

It's your house; house rules, but...
feel free to wash your hands.

KERIANNE

Of you?

SHIVA

Is it gonna be like this all week?

KERIANNE

Boot camp. The girls love it.

SHIVA

I can't afford you... I'm sorry;
I can't afford "this." Boot camp.

KERIANNE

You don't have to pay.

SHIVA

Rich can't afford you, either.

KERIANNE

Damascus can.

SHIVA

... How much does he pay?

KERIANNE

800 a week. Does that bother you?

SHIVA

No. I'm just surprised.

KERIANNE

Why?

SHIVA

I'm surprised that he pays me more
than you... And yeah, it bothers me.
It always bothers me a woman gets
paid 79 cents on the dollar. Does
it bother you?

KERIANNE

Keep sitting. Hands-off-knees.

SHIVA

How should I sit, Indian style?

KERIANNE

Crossed-legged. Indian style is offensive.

SHIVA

To who?

KERIANNE

Indians.

SHIVA

Which Indians?

KERIANNE

Yours. Like, sitting during yoga.

SHIVA

Indian-style is Indigenous people sitting around a teepee. Smoking a peace pipe after a long day trading \$24 of wampum for Manhattan Island.

KERIANNE

Anyway. Dance gives you broken toes; boxing gives you a broken nose. The reason we're sitting is to lower your center of gravity: Your punching power comes from your legs. I want you sitting and squatting, so you'll be stronger when you come out swinging.

SHIVA

I can do that.

KERIANNE

Don't do it often, but consider it. Think. Now, when we duck punches, we squat to avoid head shots. But if we don't consider squatting and ducking, we rarely think about rising up. But that's when visual sight lines change the most. Not side-to-side. Rising up.

She rises from her cross-legged position, lords over Shiva.

KERIANNE

I'm tough now, right?

SHIVA

Sure. I share a bathroom with two beautiful Indian girls, but sure.

KERIANNE

Rise up against me. Slowly.

He does as instructed. Their eyes are locked, bodies close.

KERIANNE

As your opponent, I'm not used to punching down. Or up. The visual is foreign... Who's your favorite boxer?

SHIVA

Boom Boom Mancini. Macho Camacho. Me?
(beat)

I'm not a singer; I'm an athlete. It's different. Who's your favorite dancer?

KERIANNE

Baryshnikov.

SHIVA

I don't know her.

KERIANNE

... Do you want to wash your hands?

SHIVA

Of you?

Kerianne calls back, reverses roles.

KERIANNE

Is it gonna be like this all week?

SHIVA

Boot camp. The girls love it.

INT. GYM (MONTAGE) - DAY

Shiva trains with Rich, Kwan: Heavy bag sprints. Punch mitts. The double-end bag. Speed ball. Upon finishing, he sees Rich and Kwan at a door. Rich opens it, turns, crooks a finger.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Shiva appears. Rich and Kwan are gone. AARON WHEATLEY (25) presents, shoves Shiva into trash cans. Our boxer gets to his feet; Aaron PUSHES him down. Shiva regroups, throws a hook, but having now jumped in, Rich takes the BLOW.

Aaron tends to him. Shiva's confused. Rich gingerly stands, then PUNCHES Shiva in the stomach.

INT. TRAINING ROOM - DAY

Kwan massages Shiva with magnesium oil. Rich strategizes.

RICH

Do you know what a crow-hop is...?
In baseball, when the ball's hit and
a fielder catches it, they hop in
the air so as to gain momentum. It
adds power and distance to a throw.
Kwan had our boy Wheatley toss you,
so we could see how you'd respond.

SHIVA

You could've just asked.

RICH

After you got up, you did a crow-hop.
It was out of instinct, cuz you're a
street fighter from all the bullying.
That's why your left uppercut is the
least developed of your punches.

SHIVA

Cuz of street fighting?

RICH

The uppercut is a close-range punch.
You don't box well up close, cuz in
the streets, standing too close to
your opponent can get you killed.

SHIVA

That makes sense.

RICH

So does abandoning your left.

SHIVA

Why don't we just work on it?

RICH

Cuz I can't teach you anything in a
day that'll help you on Friday night.

Rich looks at Kwan's blank face.

RICH

Kwan thinks your hook is a moneymaker.
Drop the left uppercut; stay with the
right hook. Now, if Coach K can help
with your footwork and getting close,
we'll do the left uppercut next time.

SHIVA

This isn't swimming, though. Dropping
punches can have consequences, right?

RICH

... Do you know how to swim?

SHIVA

Yeah. Why do you ask?

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ram adds Indian food to Rich's plate, as the latter eats with the family. A TV PLAYS a Bollywood film. Sitting next to Sunny is her husband, BILU MATTHEW (30).

SUNNY

A lot of Bollywood stories play out the same way. A villain lectures the hero in Hindi, but the last line is delivered in English. Bilu, show him.

BILU

Mainne pooree jindagee tumhaare jaise kachare se nipata hai. Yadi aapako lagata hai ki aap keemat chukae bina logon ke saath bura vyavahaar kar sakate hain, to phir se sochen.

(accent)

You are in for a real big surprise.

RICH

... We can memorize that. It would intimidate his opponents. Can you write that down; what does it mean?

No response. Ram kicks Bilu's chair.

BILU (no accent)

I have dealt with garbage like you my whole life. If you think you can treat people badly without paying the price, think again. You are in for a real big surprise.

Rich takes paper from his wallet, then a pen.

RICH

Write it down for me. In Indian.

Bilu smiles at Rich's gaffe, writes.

SUNNY

By the way, Mr. O'Brien, the Indian accent isn't funny to us. We love racial humor, but it's a cheap shot.

SHIVA

She's just saying the Indian accent
is super funny...but it's not funny.

RICH

What's funny about it?

SUNNY

It's cartoonish; we're aware. But you
know what's really funny? Every day I
worry. All I do is worry. But you know
what South Asians never worry about?

RICH

What?

SUNNY

The future.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Shiva washes dishes. Vijay enters, opens the fridge.

SHIVA

Can't sleep?

VIJAY

I got homework. I just need a little
pick-me-up.

SHIVA

Blueberry seltzer is a pick-me-up?

VIJAY

You want some?

Shiva grabs two glasses. Vijay pours. Raises hers.

VIJAY

Salud.

EXT. PARK - MORNING

Hanging upside down on a jungle gym, Shiva does sit-ups
with BOXERS. At rest, the fighters look like bats.

INT. GYM - DAY

Behind the reception desk, Shiva hangs out with a STAFFER.
JEN MORRIS (27) approaches them.

JEN

Hi. I'm doing a story for *The New York
Post* on Shiva Singhavi? I was told --

SHIVA

Uh, I'm Shiva.

JEN

My editor wants an interview, since you're the only ranked Indian boxer. I spoke with Damascus Barnes --

SHIVA

I don't need bulletin board material.

JEN

You have an inspiring story.

SHIVA

I was born this way. If you wanna discuss my chicken francese or my taste in outerwear? Pull up a chair.

INT. RING - DAY

Shiva trains with an MMA FIGHTER. He meets roundhouse KICKS with his gloves. Jen sits, draws the attention of ONLOOKERS.

The Fighter kicks at Shiva, who PUNCHES Fighter's foot, sending him spinning like a top and down to the canvas.

JEN

How does being an Indian boxer inform your day-to-day head space?

RICH

He's trying to make history here, so can we limit the therapy questions?

DAMASCUS

Richie Rich: We tryna make money here, so don't scare away the Fourth Estate.

JEN

Mr. O'Brien, you're trying to make history, but who's gonna record it?

SHIVA

The fact that I'm an Indian boxer is the least interesting thing about me.

JEN

That's cute. But to the public, the fact that you're an Indian boxer is the only interesting thing about you.

DAMASCUS

Cook up, twin.

JEN
You should be happy, Shiva. What comes
after pro sports that could be better?

SHIVA
A degree.

JEN
And then?

SHIVA
A 9 to 5.

JEN
After that?

SHIVA
A wife. One to three kids. Or none.

JEN
Then what?

SHIVA
Happiness.

JEN
... Will you have dinner with me?

Onlookers were cleaning gloves, filing nails, etc. With Jen's question, they look up for Shiva's reaction. One MAN finishes up with a text, then looks up as well.

INT. AQUA CENTER - DAY

Shiva and Rich are at the Asphalt Green Aqua Center. They sit in front of a swimming pool. A DIVER leaps off the board, hurtling end-over-end, before cutting the surface with hardly any splash.

SHIVA
Jesus.

RICH
Don't take the Lord's name in vain.
He won't be there when you need him.

MONTAGE: Shiva swims, Rich paces alongside him.

Shiva surfaces, struggles to breathe. Rich eyes the other end of the pool: Three SWIMMERS, as sleek and fast as mako sharks. Rich nods at them, turns to Shiva.

RICH
Practice is over. Look alive.

Swimmers dive into the water, surface ten feet out. Shiva watches in fear. Rich leaves, passes the lifeguard's station.

RICH

I need a medic on lane three.

LIFEGUARD (25) sees Swimmers take Shiva under. WHISTLES.

UNDERWATER: Shiva fends off mock drowning attempts by Swimmers. After a struggle, they lift him to the surface.

WHITE TILE: Rich watches as Lifeguard and MEDIC (35) pump Shiva's chest. Rich opens a bag of peanuts.

LATER: Shiva and Rich watch CHILDREN dive from a high board.

SHIVA

I could've died today. Swimming.

RICH

You could die any day. Boxing.

SHIVA

I assume there's a lesson here? Maybe other boxers went through that?

RICH

Plenty. Damascus... Cus is a nickname. It's a nod to Cus D'Amato, who was a father figure to José Torres. He came up with this training tactic when safety wasn't exactly a priority.

SHIVA

Cus D'Amato tried to kill José Torres?

RICH

... You might be better than I thought.

SHIVA

I'm done. I'm out.

RICH

José Torres stayed underwater for 1:10. Only two boxers before him lasted as long, and only two after him lasted as long. You stayed under for 1:23... Shoulda taped it. No one'll believe me.

SHIVA

I lasted longer than José Torres?

RICH

You lasted longer than anyone.

SHIVA

A near-drowning doesn't make me better.

RICH

You know how it's a cliché for folks in our business to say, "Boxing is 90% mental, and 10% physical..."? It's not. Boxing is 10% mental, and 90% physical.

Rich stands, walks away. Turns around, pops a peanut.

RICH

Whatever doesn't kill you.

INT. PACIFIC AQUARIUM - NIGHT

Interview. Shiva and Jen look at Manhattan's best tanks.

JEN

Isn't water so peaceful?

SHIVA

No comment.

JEN

Okay. Do your parents support you?

SHIVA

My mom isn't with us, but she was my biggest cheerleader. My dad is great. A lot of sports parents, all they do is criticize. Not for nothing, but I think I'm the most underrated athlete in New York. Pound-for-pound, I think I'm the best athlete in New York. I have to believe that so I can compete.

JEN

I'm sorry about your mom... Did that make it harder for you to be a boxer?

SHIVA

It might've made it easier. People who go blind or get paralyzed have more joy and suck the marrow out of life compared. But having legitimate talent while being held back by Cus? That makes it harder to be a boxer.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

At the corner of Walk and Don't Walk:

JEN

Do you want to come up?

SHIVA

I have a curfew.

JEN

Boxing is life; you don't do interviews.
And it's impossible to have girlfriends?

SHIVA

It's impossible to have any friends.

JEN

You're getting up at 5 o'clock on a
Saturday morning. That's more apropos
of a suburban mom than a 20-something.

SHIVA

(innocently)

What's wrong with suburban moms?

JEN

It was just a comparison.

SHIVA

What did suburban moms do to you?

JEN

I should let you go.

SHIVA

But I was just starting to have fun.

JEN

... It says your earnings online.
It says you made \$50,000 last year.

SHIVA

That's a lot of money for a fighter.

JEN

But it's not a lot of money for a man.
(beat)
I'm just being honest. I wanted a kiss,
but you're a catch for someone else.
Guys worth dating in New York are like
great apartments. As soon as they get
on the market? They get taken off.

SHIVA

I'm sorry I didn't give you a kiss.

JEN

That's okay... You gave me a quote.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Shiva takes the garbage out. He exits his family's building, is seen by BRIAN DRUJAK (45), one of the two detectives who waited to question Shiva on the night of Aseem Jain's death.

DRUJAK

Singhavi: Wow. I didn't know you were Mr. Popular with the NYPD.

SHIVA

Officer, lots of my friends are cops.

DRUJAK

Nah, buddy. Lots of my friends are cops. You, it seems, are Mr. Popular.

SHIVA

I told you: I didn't see anything.

DRUJAK

I figured you got your stories straight, but no. Harold Baker didn't see a thing. He was looking at a girl down the street, while Ron Arceneaux was checking her out, too. You, it seems, were looking at Aseem Jain.

SHIVA

If they were checking out girls, how would they know what I was looking at?

Drujak reads from a notepad.

DRUJAK

Because, cupcake: Ron said, "I didn't see anything. Harold was looking at a girl, I was looking at her, too. But Shiva was tracking Aseem."

Drujak flips a page.

DRUJAK

"Shiva tapped me with his hand. Then he said, 'Holy shit. Look.'"

SHIVA

I think I should talk to a lawyer.

Drujak smiles.

DRUJAK

I think that's a really good idea.

INT. GYM - DAY

Shiva and Rich on fire. Shiva WORKS the speed bag.

EXT. STREET / INT. STUDIO - DAY

For the third time, Shiva enters Coach K's Corner.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Shiva and Kerianne squat with weights, facing off.

KERIANNE

Good job. Sit down. Wrists on knees.

Shiva sits on his rear. Kerianne follows suit.

SHIVA

It smells good in here. What is that?

KERIANNE

Take-out. It's Belgian waffles,
bacon, and shame... Mostly shame.

SHIVA

Nice. Are we gonna do any dancing?

KERIANNE

We are dancing.

SHIVA

You know what I mean.

KERIANNE

Do you think putting you in a tutu or
pointe shoes is gonna show you the
light? Give you some magical edge?

SHIVA

I mean, yeah. Why else am I here?

KERIANNE

Would you rather be in the gym?

SHIVA

... I wasn't nervous when I asked you
out because I'm intimidated by you, I
was nervous because I never asked out
a girl while she was working.

KERIANNE

Don't ever do that again.

SHIVA

I won't.

(MORE)

SHIVA (cont'd)

(beat)

What are you up to on Saturday night?
The boxing-fight-match-thing against
Nico Patterson is Saturday night...
You want to come? I get free tickets.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

While BOXERS train outside, Cus throws down *The New York Post*.
Shiva looks at his face and quote on the back cover.

DAMASCUS

"I'm the best athlete in New York"?
Never say anything to a pretty girl
who journals. Especially a journalist!

Cus picks the paper back up, flips to Jen's article.

DAMASCUS

"... his manager and promoter Damascus
Barnes, an electric blend of Don King
and P.T. Barnum"? The fuck is she even
writing? I am the red-headed stepchild
of Jackie Robinson and Cruella De-
Fucking-Vil.

SHIVA

I said I have to believe that I'm the
best athlete in New York. But that it
was delusional to actually believe it.
(beat)

That's really fast turnaround, by the
way. I guess they stopped the presses.

DAMASCUS

The New York Post? When I'm done with
Jenny, she gon' be *The New York Ghost*.

EXT. ROOF - DAY

Rich FIRES slingshots at bottles in a vacant lot below.

RICH

Kwan ordered you 50 rolls of Title.

SHIVA

... What's the deal with him?

RICH

I don't know if he's 70 or 90... I
do know that when they rounded up the
Japanese in the 1940s, Kwan was a kid.
He did time in the internment camps.
You know about the horror of the camps?

Shiva shakes his head.

RICH

Neither did I... Don't go running your mouth, but here's what I know. Kwan's father escaped. No one ever escaped, so they brought young Kwan in to see what he might have heard. And probably to send a message.

(beat)

When Kwan didn't speak...they made sure he'd never speak again. They cut up his tongue... It's tough, but don't feel bad for him, cuz he's doing well. He's got a wife who loves him. I know they got money issues, and I hear the electricity gets turned off sometimes, but Kwan's got a job now. And that's cuz of you... All I know is that the man was always there for me. Not in word, maybe, but in deed. And when push comes to shove...he'll be there for you, too. Patrick Kwan is the best man I know.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Damascus, Shiva, and Rich watch an ESPN / First Take reunion.

RICH

They better respect you. Miss Jennifer called you...South Asian.

SHIVA

I am South Asian.

DAMASCUS

He's Punjabi.

RICH

Don't you call him outside his name.

SHIVA

But I am Punjabi... I'm from Punjab.

RICH

Don't play along with them, Sheldon.

SKIP BAYLESS and STEPHEN A. SMITH discuss Shiva.

SKIP

I've been covering sports since 1974. With that said...I've been following sports since 1955. At four years old, I was a die-hard fan of the Oklahoma Sooners. The class of the Big Twelve.

He pauses for effect.

SKIP
Never in my life.

STEPHEN A.
And nevah in mine.

Damascus SNAPS a pencil like a matchstick.

SHIVA
Relax. He's setting it up to defend me. It's classic misdirection.

DAMASCUS
Fuck you, Shiva.

RICH
Why are you using a pencil? Fuck you.

SKIP
I have but one question for you, Stephen A. Out of all the myriad of sports enigmas, here is my question.
(beat)
Who does Shiva Singhavi think he is?

SHIVA
Okay, well that's not good.

STEPHEN A.
He is the most underrated athlete in New York, Skip. Acco'din' to himself. He's also the best athlete in New York. Acco'din' to who? Himself!

SKIP
These are the sort of...bloviations we expect out of a Broadway Joe. From a Mr. October. Nico Patterson is prepping for a title fight with Rahim Whittaker. As such, Singhavi is a sacrificial lamb to be slaughtered. The nerve. The gall.

Damascus flips channels. A protest march is on the news. Shiva hangs his head as pressure builds from both sides.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

At the table, Vijay makes origami animals. Shiva enters.

SHIVA
Hey: Dad's mad. I heard he's stomping around all crazy, probably cuz I said something dumb in the interview.

(MORE)

SHIVA (cont'd)

When he gets home, you can take off.

Ram enters, back first, hauling a stack of newspapers.

SHIVA

Hi, Dad.

RAM

Stop, hi-hello. Help me, you stoo-pid.

VIJAY

How many papers did you get?

RAM

All of them.

SHIVA

You're not mad?

RAM

Mad? I have been waiting for this my whole life, and half of yours, Shiva!

Ram sets the papers down. He grabs a pot and a ladle, hands them to Vijay. He takes a set as well, heads to the window, opens it. He BANGS on the pot.

RAM

My son is not afraid of anyone! Do you understand? He will fight anyone!

Ram & Vijay continue to BANG pots and pans. The BELL RINGS.

INT. THE PARAMOUNT - NIGHT

Shiva and Patterson converge. Gloves raised, heads bobbing.

PATTERSON

Imma tear up your sister; you feel me? Imma do the little one, too.

REFEREE

Don't be a hero, Singhavi. Clean fight.

Patterson is strong, but Shiva is tough. He moves in, lands BODY BLOWS. In response, he takes defensive JABS. From there, Shiva WORKS Patterson's body and cheekbones. The latter gets ROCKED, but takes the punishment.

Shiva drives a right HOOK through Patterson's defense, catching him on the ear. Patterson goes DOWN, and the crowd REACTS.

Patterson stands. Shiva's CREW, overjoyed. However, Rich and Kwan are unimpressed. Patterson HITS Shiva with a few JABS.

Shiva absorbs them as he moves inside, then lands three brutal body PUNCHES. Patterson recoils in pain.

The Ref separates them. Upon resuming, Shiva powers forward, takes PUNCHES as he gets inside, but Patterson's out of gas. Shiva drives two LEFT UPPERCUTS into his torso.

As Patterson covers his body, Shiva delivers a straight CROSS to his head. Patterson's eyes go blank as he DROPS to the canvas. The crowd rises, EXPLODING in joy.

Shiva's Crew celebrates. Cus lights a cigar. By contrast, Rich and Kwan look sullen. Shiva sees them. Loses his smile.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Kwan cuts off wraps with pinking shears.

SHIVA

That was trash. Let's run it back.

RICH

I said to ditch the left uppercut.

SHIVA

I was so not thinking about the left uppercut, that all I was thinking about was the left uppercut... Rich, it was a 1st round upset. I'm 20-0.

Rich leaves. Shiva is left with Kwan's blank stare.

SHIVA

We've both spent our lives checking off that Asian-American box. I know you're proud of me... Maybe you shouldn't have gotten in the car, but now you're along for the ride... Let's go.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Shiva approaches a club, sees Sunny, Vijay, and Kerianne.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Shiva's FRIENDS and FAMILY dance and celebrate their win.

EXT./INT. CAR - NIGHT

Post-party, Shiva and the three girls drive to Long Beach. Vijay motions for TRUCKERS to honk. None comply.

EXT. DOCK - NIGHT

Sunny POPS champagne. In the distance, a tugboat is on Long Island Sound. Vijay tries to get it to blast its foghorn.

SHIVA

You know what's sad about nightlife? Other than the obvious? When people wanna have low-key fun with friends, that's ideal. But I hate the notion that even movers and shakers are in search of...people like us. And I'm going to be 50 one day, wishing I'd been able to simply hold on to this.

SUNNY

Why are you always worried? Drink.

SHIVA

I see a punch coming early because my brain's on edge. That's the job.

Again, Vijay crooks her arm at the tugboat.

KERIANNE

You're a winner tonight.

SHIVA

We're all winners; we're alive. Every gene pool survived a bear attack or jumped a cliff to safety. We're only on Earth cuz our ancestors worried and fought... I'm so close to being done with boxing. I'm a winner, but not special... This champagne is special.

VIJAY

It tastes like ass.

SHIVA

It takes like liquid diamonds.

SUNNY

I got you drunk.

SHIVA

I'm not drunk; I'm high.

VIJAY

On what? Can I see it?

SHIVA

No.

SUNNY

No.

Forlorn, Vijay pumps her arm. The tugboat's foghorn BLASTS.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Shiva drives. The car stalls out.

LATER: Car parked in the shoulder, Kerianne works on the engine. Vijay is with her. Shiva is in the driver's seat; Sunny in back.

KERIANNE

Try it now.

Shiva tries to start the car, but the engine won't turn over. Kerianne tries another fix. Vijay shines a light. In the car:

SHIVA

Did you talk to the precinct?

SUNNY

I didn't want to bring it up.

SHIVA

Bring it.

SUNNY

Tim Ford wants to meet you. He's the PBA President.

SHIVA

The union guy? What does he want?

SUNNY

You know when a cop screws up and it's obvious he should be prosecuted? Tim Ford's the guy who has their back.

(beat)

He's a guy people do not say "no" to.

SHIVA

I'll meet him.

SUNNY

You're gonna have to say "no" to him.

SHIVA

About what?

SUNNY

Lying for them. If you're not gonna talk about whatever happened, fine... But if you're not helping yourself, do not help them.

Kerianne nods at Shiva. He turns the key, but it won't start.

SHIVA

Maybe I should talk to Kerianne.

SUNNY

You won't talk to me about it, and I'm your sister. Is it because you don't want me implicated in things?

KERIANNE

I just feel like she should know.

SUNNY

Because she's POC? Shiva...guess what? Maybe she doesn't wanna be defined by her blackness... If it bothers you to be defined as a brown boxer, then --

SHIVA

White, black, brown? It's kinda silly.
(beat)

A lot of white people have brown skin, a lot of Latin people have white skin, a lot of Asian people have white skin, and a lot of black people...have what?

(beat)

Brown skin. While we have black skin. Indian people are blacker than black people, and need to look in a mirror.

Kerianne nods at Shiva. He turns the key, the engine GROWLS. Kerianne and Vijay climb in and fist bump.

VIJAY

That's some serious girl power.

KERIANNE

Nah, bubba-licious. It's just power.

The four BLAST OFF, music BLARING.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - MORNING

Rich and Kwan watch as Shiva faces a PITCHER throws darts.

He whiffs several times, takes the last pitch on the back.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Shiva and Ram by the store. Ram gives money to a HOMELESS MAN.

INT. C-STORE - DAY

Vijay works the line. Shiva and Ram enter, head to the counter.

SHIVA

You can't keep giving him money.

Bells CHIME on the door. Enter Murphy and Tullio.

MURPHY

There he is. The best athlete in New York, and a danger to the community.

RAM

Lock the man up.

Tullio sees Vijay handing out miniature flags from a box.

TULLIO

This line' for flags? Can I get one?

VIJAY

Most people ask for an Indian flag. But Indian people are like, "Oh, can I get that American flag?"

MURPHY

That's an Indian flag? It's like the Irish flag with a little razzle-dazzle. This is good business, Vijay.

VIJAY

Eh. I got the brains, Sunny got the looks...and Shiva got his own room.

SHIVA

I did get my own room. And I'm the boy, too. It's actually kinda sad.

VIJAY

It's tragic.

Vijay hands Murphy a flag. He waves it with joy.

TULLIO

Let me use the bathroom?

SHIVA

Use the Dunkin' bathroom.

MURPHY

It's not as nice as yours.

SHIVA

Yeah, cuz we don't let your filthy ass anywhere near it.

MURPHY

Don't make me beg. I'll let you sit shotgun tomorrow.

SHIVA

Hey, I'm actually bringing a girl.

(MORE)

SHIVA (cont'd)

It's not serious at all, but it's totally fucking serious. I'd rather have her meet you guys now and get it over with. And it's a cool club.

MURPHY

Did you tell her we're cops?

SHIVA

No. So maybe leave the guns home.

MURPHY

That's hypocritical, Shiv. If you're bringing a date, I'm bringing a date.

SHIVA

No. We always have problems.

MURPHY

Fine, no guns. What else?

SHIVA

Don't wear too much cologne.

MURPHY

I know what chicks like. And I'm not goin' out naked. You can have my gun or you can have my Tom Ford, but you can't have both. That's the law.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Shiva enters, sees TIM FORD (50), President of the PBA, dining in a coveted corner. Ford looks up, beckons.

LATER: Ford looks on as a WAITER pours wine. Once alone:

FORD

What would you say if I told you that police officers killed 1246 citizens last year, 312 of them being unarmed?

SHIVA

I'd say it's both a low number and a high number.

FORD

Interesting answer.

SHIVA

It's a politician's answer.

FORD

It's good to have you as a friend.

SHIVA

Respectfully, I'm not anyone's ally,
much less their friend.

FORD

... If you maintain neutrality --

SHIVA

Mr. Ford, I cant lie. For anyone.

FORD

I'm not asking you to lie... That
said, I have some deep pockets that
line my jacket. They're heavy, Shiva,
and I want you to help me empty them.

(beat)

Damascus Barnes is a remarkable man.

SHIVA

Do you know Cus?

FORD

... Do you?

SHIVA

Put it this way: My dad's listed in my
phone as "Pappy." When Cus calls, you
know what it says...? It says, "Father."

FORD

Hm. That's a bleak situation... I'd
do anything to have you wear a wire.

SHIVA

If it's Cus, all ya gotta do is ask.

FORD

Nah. I don't like to use the phrase
"Deep State," 'cause I'm not there yet.
But there are...let's just say "unique"
elements of the Local. And with a man
like Damascus, it'd be easier for us to
fuck him than to arrest him. No question.
That "w" in "wire" stands for "worthless."

SHIVA

Got it.

FORD

And let's be honest: This is outside
even my purview, right? Between you and
me -- and whoever you tell -- I have to
think... This isn't about us protecting
the NYPD during civil unrest. Damascus
Barnes and that fixed fight money?

(MORE)

FORD (cont'd)

That's the sauce.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Shiva does hopscotch agility ladder drills. Kerianne oversees. During a breather, Shiva produces folded paper from his pants.

SHIVA

I was researching footwork.

(beat)

"The crossover between dancing and boxing footwork is vastly overblown. As with most things, sport movements are highly specific. 'Footwork' conjures up boxing's equivalent of 'tricking,' which is to say fancy movements that are designed to show off how comfortable the boxer is that he can violate basic principles. In actuality, footwork is positioning. Ukrainian boxer and child dancer Vasiliy Lomachenko, for example, has excellent footwork. The 'Lomachenko Shuffle' is just fluff. It hasn't achieve anything, and won't."

KERIANNE

Why don't you just call up the great Vasiliy Lomachenko and tell him that?

SHIVA

I texted, but he hasn't responded... You think he's mad at me?

EXT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

Shiva and Kerianne, across from one another. An army of food.

KERIANNE

Terrible question, but where do you see yourself in five years?

SHIVA

Huh. Is this a job interview?

Kerianne sets down a fork and picks up her knife.

KERIANNE

Kind of, yeah.

SHIVA

I'll probably end up getting bludgeoned to death by a Viking in America's upcoming race war. You?

KERIANNE

Franchises. I want to get out of this one-horse town. Empower great teachers.

SHIVA

Sounds like you're on a mission.

KERIANNE

A few of 'em.

A WAITER appears, tops off their drinks. Shiva nods.

KERIANNE

Wow. A guy who acknowledges the waiter. Imagine that.

SHIVA

Yeah. A guy who gets credit for having a shred of human decency. Here we are.

(beat)

What was your last boyfriend like?
What did you like about him?

KERIANNE

You tell me. He was reckless and aimless. Not "aimless," per se, just not fulfilling his potential...
What did you like about your girl?

SHIVA

She was not "my" girl. She was "a" girl, but she was not "my" girl.

KERIANNE

But what did you like about her?

SHIVA

I mean... It wasn't one thing.

KERIANNE

I can imagine.

SHIVA

That's just it. You can't.

KERIANNE

Well. Now I feel like I have to know.

(beat)

Seriously, what'd you like about her?

SHIVA

... How much time do you have?

Kerianne picks up her drink, gently swishes the straw.

KERIANNE

Sounds like she was a special girl.

SHIVA

She was... Granted, it's New York;
they're running around everywhere.

(beat)

Can I ask you a serious question?

KERIANNE

Is there any other kind?

SHIVA

My friends and I are going out tonight.
Do you want to come?

Kerianne offers her tough shell, but changes speeds:

KERIANNE

I would like that.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

An SUV pulls up. Murphy sits shotgun, Tullio's in back. JESSE MANN (30), a cop as well, also sits in back. Shiva and Kerianne come out, approach the car. Murphy points to the back seat.

SHIVA

You promised I could sit shotgun.

TULLIO

And leave Ms. Watson in back? Nah.

LATER: Shiva and Kerianne, in the third row of the SUV. Oblivious to their cop work, Kerianne breaks a silence.

KERIANNE

Michael: Shiva tells me that y'all
have been close since fourth grade?

MURPHY

Very close. Now, Shiva tells me you
run a dance studio? That is special.

KERIANNE

It keeps me on my toes. How 'bout you?

MURPHY

I'm at NASA. It's good days and bad.

KERIANNE

That's amazing. What do you do there?

MURPHY

Astrophysics... Other kinds of physics...

KERIANNE

Do you all know each other from NASA?

TULLIO

I'm a meteorologist.

KERIANNE

For the space program?

TULLIO

I mainly freelance now. Full-time, I work for NBC News with Brian Williams.

KERIANNE

What?

TULLIO

I work for NBC News and Brian Williams.

KERIANNE

You mean Lester Holt?

TULLIO

Him, too.

KERIANNE

And Jesse, is it? You're a chef or a lawyer, right? Maybe just a pilot?

JESSE

I sell Roxies to private school kids.

KERIANNE

You don't worry about catching a case?

Jesse sees police lights in his mirror, pulls over.

MURPHY

You chuck it on that one, you chuck it on this one, you chuck it on your mother and you chuck it on your father. Nobody no give you no break. Police no give you no break. Not a soldier man give you no break. Not even your kids no give you no break. Hey Hey, bad boys, bad boys. Whatcha gonna do? Whatcha gonna do when they come for you?

Cop at Jesse's window. Taps glass.

COP

License and registration.

MURPHY

Don't open it. See what he does.

Jesse lowers the window.

JESSE

Can I see some I.D.?

COP

Why do I smell marijuana?

TULLIO

We just smoked a hell of a spliff.
Fuck, bro; you shoulda been there.

COP

Step out of the vehicle.

JESSE

That badge fake? It looks fake. I got
a fake vaccine card, so I know fake.

MURPHY

Why did you have to act so mean? Don't
you know you're a human being? Born of
a mother with the love of a father,
reflection comes, then reflections go.
Bad boys-Bad boys. Whatcha gonna do --

COP

I'm asking nicely to stop singing.

MURPHY

Are you asking nicely cuz I'm white?

COP

Sir, step out of the vehicle.

Jesse retrieves his badge. Cop places a hand on his gun.

COP

I'm not gonna ask again.

Jesse holds up his shield. Tullio and Murphy show theirs.

INT. VIP ROOM - NIGHT

Minus Kerianne, Shiva and Co. relax in a discreet lounge set
above the "Model and Bottle" CROWD. Watch via two-way mirror.

TULLIO

I don't think she was mad. Just tired.

SHIVA

No, girls are never mad when they ask
to get dropped off before dinner. And
black women are always up for fuckery.

MURPHY

She had a great time, Shiv. She got exposed to some real diversity, not Equity over Equality.

JESSE

Do you not believe in equity?

MURPHY

Do you not believe in equality?
Ending redlining...zoning laws?

TULLIO

I served my country. And I support my country. I supported Colin Kaepernick kneeling on a prayer mat if he wanted to. Shiva doesn't like white girls getting punched in the face or Asian girls getting pushed in front of the subway, so why do you...? Also...

Tullio sips his drink, stares down Shiva.

TULLIO

When we came by today, Murphy asked if you were coming out, or if you were avoiding us. That was for a reason... When push comes to shove, do you hang out with your other friends or with us?

SHIVA

My "other" friends? I don't even have time for friends. I have acquaintances.

TULLIO

You know I don't have a racist bone in my body. But tell me -- honestly, now -- what do you see in your black and brown friends that you don't see in us? Like, Jesse's half-black, half-white, all-cop. Maybe you relate to them more, but we looked out for you from day one, when no one cared about you. You and your family.

SHIVA

... Are you crying?

TULLIO

I'm serious. I just wanna know what makes them so special.

SHIVA

Nothing. They barely even call me to hang out anymore. And you only do when you can't into the hot new club.

TULLIO

Answer the question... What do you get from your black and brown friends that you don't get from us?

Shiva shrugs.

SHIVA

They let me sit shotgun.

INT. SINGHAVI APT - NIGHT

Shiva comes through the door. Vijay appears, stone-faced.

SHIVA

What's wrong?

VIJAY

... Rahim Whittaker called.

SHIVA

What?

VIJAY

He called the landline.

SHIVA

Rahim Whittaker called.

VIJAY

Yeah. About an hour ago.

SHIVA

... And?

VIJAY

He said he wants to talk to you. Man-to-man, without managers or promoters. He said he wants to fight really soon, with an 80/20 split of the money.

SHIVA

... Rahim Whittaker called our phone.

VIJAY

Yeah. But Daddy said you won't fight for anything less than a 50/50 split.

SHIVA

It's illegal for Dad to represent me.

VIJAY

Well, he just did. Daddy told Rahim, "50-50. My son is a race car driver, and he's going to win the Grand Prix."

SHIVA
What did Rahim say?

VIJAY
Buckle up.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - MORNING

Near the Loeb Boathouse, Shiva rows a boat. Ram relaxes.

SHIVA
This is tougher than boxing. Pretty sure I'm your favorite kid right now.

RAM
No. Sunny is the favorite, then you, then Vijay... I haven't known Vijay as long, so if all is equal, first comes Sunny, then Vijay, then Shiva.

SHIVA
American parents love all their kids equally. Or they at least say they do.

RAM
You ask favorite, I tell you favorite.

SHIVA
I'm just trying to bond with you, Dad. I'm trying to show you a good time.

RAM
I don't have time for a good time.

RAM
... Don't talk about American parents. You enjoy being on the television? You enjoy being recognized on the street?

Shiva stops rowing.

RAM
American parents... American parents don't let their children be boxers.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Shiva, Rich, and Kwan on a football field. From the sideline, they watch COACH (50) warming his PLAYERS up.

RICH
We're gonna run a drill. See how you stack up. Not against a 13th-ranked fighter looking ahead, but against bulldogs who play through the whistle.

SHIVA

Great. Let's run some fuckin' drills.

RICH

We're doing the five-dot drill. It transformed Tom Brady from the slowest Big Ten quarterback ever seen, into the slowest NFL quarterback ever seen.

SHIVA

Sounds like fun.

RICH

For you, maybe. But each time you mess up, they're gonna have to do drills of their own. Contact drills.

LATER: Shiva executes the drill with precision, but he periodically misses a step. Each time, two players smash bodies via 1-on-1 tackles. Shiva sees the devastating impact each hit makes, and feels Players and Coach growing upset.

LATER: As he did with Hockey Players, Shiva grapples with OFFENSIVE and DEFENSIVE LINEMEN, whose blocking tactics, unbeknownst to him, are teaching him How to Fight.

LATER: Shiva sits alone on the bench, spent. Passing Players ignore his presence, and some regard him with quiet contempt.

INT. VIDEO ROOM - DAY

Back at the gym, Shiva, Rich, and Kwan study video of Rahim.

RICH

I don't know your nicknames, but ten bucks says Rahim's is better.

Rich and Kwan exchange looks.

RICH

Spill the beans. Kwan wants to know.

SHIVA

Shiva the Serpent. Shiva is an Indian god, and there are snakes there. Tons.

Again, Rich and Kwan match eyes.

SHIVA

I didn't give it to myself. I would've gone with something more traditional.

(off Rich)

I haven't given it a lot of thought. The Boy Wonder? Smokin' Shiva Singhavi?

RICH

It sounds like you've given it a lot of thought... Tell us his nickname.

SHIVA

Rahim the Dream.

Rich and Kwan confer.

RICH

That's a good name. Simple. Clean.

SHIVA

Let's talk about Rahim's weaknesses.

RICH

We already did that.

SHIVA

So?

RICH

He doesn't have any.

SHIVA

... Back in the day, did Damascus have a nickname?

Rich looks at Kwan, who offers a shark's cold eye.

RICH

The Devil's Only Son.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Shiva drives in Scarsdale with Rich and Kwan. They pull into a palatial estate.

EXT./INT. HOUSE - DAY

MELISSA BARNES (55) welcomes the three. Melissa is Cus's blonde-haired, blue-eyed wife. Their CHILDREN greet Shiva.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Cus and Shiva stand on the bridge above a koi pond.

DAMASCUS

You're about to become a rich man.

(beat)

Here's the program, Shiva. It's time for you to drop. And for two million, cash. Other asset classes to follow.

(beat)

People are talkin' about you, playboy.

(MORE)

DAMASCUS (cont'd)
The US and the UK; India and Pakistan.

SHIVA
... I can't throw a title fight.

DAMASCUS
I knew you would gimme static on this.

SHIVA
Please talk to Bob.

Damascus fires a glass into the water. Fish scatter.

DAMASCUS
Bob's over-leveraged, and I am, too.
(beat)
Some people have McMansions in the suburbs, and the people have money. Other people have McMansions in the suburbs, and those people have debt. Nothing I own is paid for. You'll get two million, plus equities. Bob and I will split 20... Shiva, we got a bailout plan that's real.

SHIVA
Let's figure something out.

DAMASCUS
I always joke about how I was a private school kid, right? But you now that no matter how well I enunciate, no matter how often I code-switch between Ebonics and Exeter, I am who I am. On the flip side, Bob looks like the grandfather in a Norman Rockwell painting. But make no mistake: I'm straight gangsta, but Bob Pollack is a gangster... He'll kill me if you don't lose this fight. Don't get cute, or I will kill your sisters. You and your dad can live with the pain.

SHIVA
Damascus... I get it.

DAMASCUS
That's just it, Boss.
(beat)
I don't think you do.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

Shiva drives the three back to the city. WFAN on the RADIO. Miniature Indian flags wave in Queens storefronts.

CALLER (O.S.)

I don't get why Indian people have to fly the Indian flag. If this guy wants Americans supporting him, his fans should support America.

Rich turns the RADIO off.

EXT./INT. NEW YORK - DAY/NIGHT

MONTAGE: Shiva trains with Rich and Kwan. Dances with Kerianne. Plays with Vijay. Runs the city. Squats at home.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - NIGHT

Shiva with Sunny. They look out at the city and water.

SHIVA

It's crazy to think about how many lives exist in this view.

SUNNY

Wanna jump, or just think about it?
(beat)
Why am I here? What's going on?

SHIVA

Damascus said I have to take a dive. They get 20 million betting against me, and I'll get two million myself.

SUNNY

You can't throw the championship.

SHIVA

Watch me.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Shiva walks to his apartment. Sees Brian Drujak following up for more questioning. Shiva heads off; Drujak watches him go.

INT. SHIVA'S APT - MORNING

A wake-up text from Kerianne: "I was mad, but I'm over it."

"I still expect your apology on my desk." "Be ready to dance."

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Shiva, Rich, and Kwan. Shiva runs sprints. **LATER:** He sets up alley-oops for PLAYER dunks. He rebounds and passes, poorly.

EXT. CHELSEA PIERS - DAY

Shiva stands on the ice at Chelsea Piers, focusing on action in the distance. A Hockey Player eyes Rich, who nods.

Player makes a beeline for Shiva. At top speed, he checks him. Shiva falls to the ice; struggles to rise. Player 2 helps him.

PLAYER 2

Don't be a hero. Take your time.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Formally, Shiva/Kerianne dance. Hand-to-hand, hand-on-waist.

INT. SINGHAVI APT - DAY

Shiva and Kerianne come through the door.

KERIANNE

What's that? It smells great in here.

SHIVA

It's chicken vindaloo, sandalwood, and shame... Mostly chicken vindaloo.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shiva and Kerianne sit with Ram.

RAM

Kerianne, I want to ask you a question.

SHIVA

Can we not do this?

KERIANNE

Leave your dad alone.

RAM

Let's say you and I become friends. Next time I see you, I'll bring a record. My favorite jazz, from John Coltrane. Is this a good gift?

KERIANNE

Any gift is a good gift.

Ram directs a smug smile at Shiva, then produces a wrapped vinyl record. Ram then presents the record to Kerianne.

KERIANNE

Thank you so much.

RAM
Okay, Shiva. Your turn.

Shiva gives her a box. She opens it.

SHIVA
It's a Swarovski tennis necklace.
It'd be weird if they were diamonds.

RAM
It's weird that they're fake diamonds.
And Shiva? Too much; too soon.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Kerianne sees the bar owned by Kevin and Shawn Donahue.

KERIANNE
Mashed potatoes.

Shiva purses his lips.

KERIANNE
It says, "Jack Dempsey Drank Here."
How can you go wrong?

INT. BAR - DAY

The pair dine. Kevin's dour-faced father, Shawn, watches.

LATER: WAITRESS sets down the check. Kevin appears.

KEVIN
Surprise seeing you here.

SHIVA
She wanted to come.

KEVIN
For the lumpy mashed potatoes, yeah?

He picks up the check.

KEVIN
Your money's no good here.

SHIVA
Since when?

KEVIN
I told you: We take care of our own.

Shiva nods towards father Shawn.

SHIVA
What about your dad?

KEVIN
He won't ever change. And it don't matter if you win, lad. Just fight.

KERIANNE
Free jewelry and free food, huh?

SHIVA
Apparently.

KERIANNE
I'm a very fancy, cheap date.

SHIVA
It's not a date. Remember?

KERIANNE
You don't date black girls?

SHIVA
No... But I do date black women.
(beat)
In case you know anyone special.

EXT. JACKSON SQUARE - NIGHT

Shiva and Kerianne toss pennies up at the tiered levels of an active fountain. They play a makeshift game of Skee-ball.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

The next day, Shiva and Ram go for a walk.

SHIVA
If I lose... Don't think less of me.

RAM
I don't want you to think less of me, theek hai? I'm the one who made you.

SHIVA
Do we need money? Would it help?

RAM
... Does Shiva need money?

INT. HOTEL - DAY

Shiva, Damascus, Rich, Kwan, and BOB POLLACK (70).

All at the press conference for the fight. Rahim Whittaker and his TEAM are in attendance on the other end of a table.

INT./EXT. NEW YORK (INTERCUT) - DAY

All over town, people watch. Shawn Donahue, alone at the bar.

REPORTER 1

Question for Shiva: Are you feeling pressure because of the Muslim/Hindu divide, or the Pakistan/India divide, not to mention America and England?

SHIVA

Well this is America. So for me, we're South Asians who are more similar than different. He's my Muslim brother.

REPORTER 1

And Rahim: The same question for you.

Rahim's unveils his smarmy English accent:

RAHIM

That was an answer a loser gives. Forget about the two nations. I'm King Kong, and he's Curious George.

REPORTER 1

Bob Pollack: Do you have a response?

BOB

Oh, I don't know. At my age, I'm not able to roll my eyes that well.

Laughs. A sour Shawn Donahue watches, now intrigued.

REPORTER 2

Shiva, do you have a girlfriend?

BOB

You'll never know. We don't wanna be dashing any dreams the goyls may have.

REPORTER 2

Can you at least tell us his type?

BOB

This is a title fight, not the charity auction for a date with my talent. Why don't you ask me about what my type is? I say he likes 'em just like me: Fiery Italian girls with deep tans. And none of that spray-on sludge, either. We're talking mid-day sun. You gotta earn it with UV rays, gamma rays, then rub it in with some Hawaiian Tropic. It's the only way to live. Do it like we used to.

Reporters laugh, seduced by Bob's devil-may-care charm.

REPORTER 3

Shiva, what are your thoughts on the flag controversy?

SHIVA

What are your thoughts?

REPORTER 3

Is it upsetting? This questioning of your patriotism?

Shiva picks up an Indian flag.

SHIVA

Honestly? It is. Here's the thing... When people see a flag, they feel an emotion. Sometimes it's pride, and sometimes it's anger. Lately, people look at the Indian flag, and they see America not getting its due. So, I've been reading... This flag was made in China, and there's a lotta technology involved. DuPont is the French family that makes the flag, but the material is called SolarMax Invented by a guy from Poland. Also, the stick is from a polymer that was invented by an Irish schoolteacher, and the grommet is a rubber from Cuba. What I'm saying is, when some people look at this flag... all they see is India. But when I look at this flag... I see the whole world.

Cameras FLASH. At the bar, Ireland's Shawn Donahue smiles.

INT. FIELD - DUSK

Rich and Kwan watch as Shiva misses field goals attempts.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Shiva and Ram carry trash bags, heave them into a dumpster behind the store. Ram hands a dollar to Jay Kenny, the homeless man who he helped earlier. Shiva notices. **LATER:**

SHIVA

Can you stop giving him money?

RAM

You stop talking about Hindu/Muslim.

SHIVA

They asked me about it. I answered.

RAM

Why say a good thing about Muslims,
but nothing about Hindus?

SHIVA

Cuz they're persecuted like we are?

RAM

They hurt us. Muslims had Hindus as
slaves, you say there's no difference.

SHIVA

Why'd we move here, for money? Cuz it
didn't work out, did it? If it matters
so much, don't move to a country where
we're all the same to Americans... You
didn't stay in India to fight and make
India great, but all I do is literally
fight. I'm sick of it.

RAM

I'm sick of your problems.

SHIVA

I'm sick of you.

RAM

... What do you want to do? Taxes?

SHIVA

Maybe! Is putting on a tie every day
really that bad? Do you enjoy making
30 bucks an hour?

RAM

Don't talk to me like that.

SHIVA

... Do you even make that much?

RAM

Don't talk to me.

SHIVA

Do you realize why it bothers me that
you give money to the homeless? It's
not cuz I'm selfish or cruel.

RAM

Then why is it?

SHIVA

It's cuz Vijay doesn't have a phone.

RAM

She doesn't need one.

SHIVA

There are 30 other kids in her class, some with more money, some with even less. But out of those 30 kids? 29 of them have a phone.

RAM

... She doesn't tell me.

SHIVA

She doesn't wanna to hurt your feelings or make you worry... That was Mom's job.

RAM

Shut up!

SHIVA

... I'm only gonna say this once. If you think I'm gonna let Vijay spend the best years of her life in this store? Under these lights? Then you don't know anything about her, and you don't know anything about me.

RAM

You think you're too good for a store?

SHIVA

I didn't say that.

RAM

You're not too good for a store, okay?

SHIVA

I never said I was.

RAM

Vijay is my daughter before she is your sister. You're a big shot now?

SHIVA

I never said that.

RAM

But you think so. And you think Vijay is too good to work in a store?

SHIVA

I fucking know she is!

Ram stands down. After a moment, Shiva leaves.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

At the bar, Rich has a beer, Shiva drinks water.

RICH

Lemme ask you: You got a girlfriend?

SHIVA

(Indian accent)

Roses are red, violets are blue. You have arranged marriage...waiting for you... I'm kidding. I don't have a girlfriend, but I do have a prospect.

RICH

You can't let family in your head. I don't want you to have any regrets after this... Trust me when I say this: Turn your brain off, okay? No regrets.

(beat)

No. Regrets.

SHIVA

Rich, anyone who tells you that they have no regrets is also telling you that they're an asshole.

On the TV, Aseem's mom gives a tearful press conference.

RICH

You been following this?

SHIVA

Everyone has. What do you think?

RICH

Boxers don't think. Get eight hours.

Rich pays their tab, heads out.

SHIVA

Rich?

His mentor turns.

SHIVA

Thanks for being my friend... With my schedule, I don't have any.

RICH

Neither do I.

Shiva forces a smile.

RICH

"Friendships born on the field of athletic strife are the real gold of competition. Our awards shall corrode, but our friendships will live forever."

SHIVA

Jesse Owens?

RICH

Rich O'Brien.

SHIVA

... I know my dad cares, but he doesn't understand me. I just want to be happy. Not even happy. Content.

RICH

I've been to your home. I've eaten your food... I'm just as smart as you, Shiva, and we both know that I'm wiser... Most importantly...I know love when I see it.

(beat)

Your father does understand you. Better than you understand yourself. Trust him.

Shiva looks down. Looks back up, is about speak, but stops.

RICH

What's wrong?

SHIVA

... Nothing.

RICH

What's wrong?

SHIVA

Nothing.

A moment.

RICH

Tell me.

SHIVA

Nothing, it's just...

(beat)

I didn't think you knew my name.

For the very first time, Rich smiles.

RICH

Everyone's gonna know your name.

EXT./INT. CAR - NIGHT

Shiva in an Uber. Listens to MUSIC. A chance to breathe.

EXT. C-STORE - NIGHT

Ram takes out the trash. A FIGURE watches. After Ram throws a bag in the dumpster, Figure HITS him twice with a crowbar.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Shiva comes through the doors, is met head-on by Sunny.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Shiva and Sunny take it outside. Sunny lights a cigarette.

SHIVA

I didn't know you smoke.

SUNNY

You don't know a lot of things.

SHIVA

... I think Cus is sending a message.

SUNNY

Fuck off, Shiva. This is all on you.

(beat)

You're not the only one with dreams.
I watch you fight, but do you watch
me fight? The other day was a shock.

SHIVA

And that's selfish of me, but do I
ever criticize you? You could make
bank working for a white shoe firm,
but no. You go to bat for murderers.

SUNNY

Everyone deserves a defense.

SHIVA

But why does it have to be you?

SUNNY

Because if I prove myself now, one day
I can defend someone on Death Row.
Someone who isn't a murderer. You know
what it'd feel like to free a man? It's
the same legacy you want, except better.

SHIVA

Please don't cry.

SUNNY

I'm tired of being the oldest child in this family. I'm tired of having to be the disciplinarian for Vijay cuz you and dad can't be bothered to raise her.

(beat)

Why do you two get to be best friends?

SHIVA

Sunny, what are you talking about...?
You're my best friend.

He hugs her. She lets it out.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Shiva sits with Ram, who recovers in bed. Machines breathe.

RAM

I'm sorry.

SHIVA

I'm sorry... I feel resentful about mom a lot. And how you never ask what it's like to be me. That's my problem; not yours.

RAM

What is it like to be Shiva?

SHIVA

It's not about me as an individual... It was tough growing up here. For all three of us. We came so we could have a better life, but sometimes I wonder if we left a better life behind.

RAM

... How is your life? What is it like?

SHIVA

It's perfectly fine, except when it's not... I just felt like you never taught me simple things. How to shave. How to talk to girls... How to exist.

RAM

Shiva, your mother was all I knew. What do I know about girls?

SHIVA

... I dunno what'll happen with Rahim. I do know that we'll never worry about money again... Give it away to whoever needs it. I have to do better.

INT. SHIVA'S APT - NIGHT

Shiva does squats with heavy weights.

He watches tape. Not of boxing, but of the Joffrey ballet.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Shiva ransacks the fridge. He gives up, turns, sees Vijay. She's mid-pour with a cup, plus a guilty look on her face.

SHIVA

What is that?

VIJAY

Crystal Light.

SHIVA

What flavor?

VIJAY

Strawberry Kiwi.

SHIVA

Cuz you finished all the Lemon? You promised you would save me a Lemon.

VIJAY

I just wanted a nightcap.

SHIVA

Hold the phone. Yesterday you needed a pick-me-up, now you want a nightcap?

(beat)

You want a bump, too?

VIJAY

What's a bump?

Shiva, unsure whether to continue into the jungle.

SHIVA

It's a small amount of cocaine.

VIJAY

How much is a small amount?

SHIVA

Just enough to even you out.

VIJAY

Have you ever tried cocaine?

SHIVA

No. Of course not.

(MORE)

SHIVA (cont'd)

(beat)

Why, you got some?

They break out in familial laughter.

EXT. ATHLETIC FIELDS (MONTAGE) - MORNING

Shiva plays sports on a higher level than he was previously playing them at. Football, basketball, hockey, and baseball, plus swimming at the Asphalt Green Aqua Center.

EXT./INT. CAR - DAY

In the back of an Uber, Shiva pulls up to a house. He leaves waves goodbye, walks up to a home, and then RINGS a doorbell. TEEN (17) opens the door.

TEEN

Jesus. Are you here to see my dad?

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Teen takes Shiva through the house. A party is underway. Teen escorts Shiva to the basement, presents him to a man with two GIRLS sitting on each leg. Detective Brian Drujak. Confronted by Shiva on his own turf.

SHIVA

I want to talk to you.

Drujak and the Girls, looking up at Shiva.

SHIVA

Is this a bad time?

EXT. YARD - DAY

Shiva and Drujak sit on the seats of a child's swing-set.

DRUJAK

When I roll the eyewitnesses, I have a Shiva Singhavi, Ron Arceneaux, and Harold Baker. And aside from boxing, wise up. You're not like those guys.

SHIVA

I'm exactly like them.

DRUJAK

Bullshit... Black people always make everything about race. I don't hear you do that. In your interviews, you answer honestly, or you deflect. And you don't make everything about race.

SHIVA

Just so you know, they weren't the ones who made everything about race.

DRUJAK

They are always playing the race card.

SHIVA

Black people don't play the race card, Detective. The race card plays them.

DRUJAK

Even when they punch random people in the face, then get out of jail before their victims get out of the hospital?

The Girls appear, wave to Drujak on his swing. He waves back.

DRUJAK

When your kids don't get into college because of "holistic considerations," you'll sing a different tune.

SHIVA

I didn't see anything.

DRUJAK

How do I know that?

SHIVA

Because. Between me and you, Harold and Ron? I'm the only one of us who cares what happened.

DRUJAK

You're a good kid, Shiva, and this shouldn't be on your mind 24 hours before the biggest night of your life.

(beat)

I don't know what you know, but I know this... If ya keep goin' down the path you're goin' down...? The only person who's gonna pay for this crime is you.

Drujak heads to the house. Shiva sits on the swing.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Rich nears a storefront. He stops to look at a display. It features a sculpture which is labeled. The nameplate reads: Shiva the Destroyer.

INT. YOGA STUDIO - DAY

Rich enters. BLAKE SIMS (30) is in front of her yoga class.

RADHA BYAGARI (25) and a GRANDMOTHER (80) take instruction.

BLAKE

Do you guys know what chakras are?
I hope I'm not insulting anyone's
intelligence. I know you're a more
upscale crowd than my 7 o'clock.

Radha rolls her eyes. Blake notices Rich.

RICH

Hi. I saw the Shiva in the window.

BLAKE

It's not for sale.

RICH

It says, "Shiva the Destroyer." Is
it historically accurate?

BLAKE

It's pronounced "Shiva."

RICH

It's pronounced "Sir."

BLAKE

... That is art.

RICH

Okay.

BLAKE

It's modern art.

RICH

Sure. Let me put on my thinking cap
and figure out how to better explain
it... Okay. Is "Shiva the Destroyer"
real, or is it fucking make-believe?

BLAKE

... I have a class to teach.

RADHA

Sir? It's real. That's who Shiva is.

He nods, turns to Blake, then storms the beach.

RICH

Mainne pooree jindagee tumhaare jaise
kachare se nipata hai. yadi aapako
lagata hai ki aap keemat chukae bina
logon ke saath bura vyavahaar kar
sakate hain, to phir se sochen.

(MORE)

RICH (cont'd)
 (accent)
 You are in for a real big surprise.

The class ERUPTS, with Rich having memorized as planned.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Shiva jogs. He passes the bar owned by Kevin Donahue, stops, then stares. Father Shawn offers a sneer and his Irish brogue:

SHAWN
 The fook are you lookin' at?

The "Jack Dempsey Drank Here" banner is being folded up.

A new one replaces it. It proudly declares, "Shiva Singhavi Drank Here." Having won the crowd, Shiva and Shawn smile.

INT. BANK - DAY

Damascus and Shiva, surrounded by safety deposit boxes. Cus produces shrink-wrapped bricks of green. Twenty altogether.

DAMASCUS
 You're a multimillionaire.

Shiva picks up a square of cash, smells it through plastic.

SHIVA
 Did you have my dad beat up?
 (beat)
 How do you sleep at night?

DAMASCUS
 ... Soundly, and on a pillow. I sleep every night on a pillow filled with other people's dreams... If you slip, Vijay's first.

INT. CIPRIANI - NIGHT

Shiva, Kerianne, and Vijay dine. A WAITER brings wine, and indicates another table. Rahim is with his wife, ZARA (28). He raises a glass to show pre-fight respect.

Vijay casually gives him the finger. Soon, Zara heads over.

LATER, Zara bonds with Kerianne and Vijay, while Shiva sits face-to-face with Whittaker.

RAHIM
 My brother. My son. Listen: When I said I was to kill you, it wasn't personal. If it goes down, I'll be there to take care of your people.

Shiva, unmoved.

RAHIM

I want to move here. It's small across the pond, and I'm a big fish.

SHIVA

I get it. You're the best fighter in the world, but you want to be the best fighter in New York.

RAHIM

I want to be the only fighter in New York... I'm going to put you down like a dog, The world will remember you fondly.

Shiva pales. He produces a pillbox.

RAHIM

What do you have there?

SHIVA

Vessel support, metabolic clearance...

Rahim produces a gold box. Introduces Shiva to his Gods.

SHIVA

What are those?

RAHIM

ROC, oxygen-carrier. Cream & Clear...

SHIVA

You're on a program? You're already on top of the mountain... You cheat?

RAHIM

... You don't?

SHIVA

Is it all designer-drug-undetectable? And just... IBO tests don't flag you?

RAHIM

IBO? Where do you think I get my gear?

INT. SHIVA'S APT - NIGHT

At a desk, Shiva takes out his wallet, then a laminated picture of his mom. He considers it for some time.

EXT. KWAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Kwan exits, dog on a leash. Meg Kwan watches him go.

EXT. VAN CORTLAND PARK - DAY

Kwan arrives at the Canine Court dog run. NATE COYLE (55) saddles up to him. Both men release their dogs to scamper.

They stand shoulder-to-shoulder and watch animals play. After a moment, Kwan begins to speak in flawless English.

KWAN

Singhavi won't throw the left uppercut tonight... We were going to abandon it against Patterson, but he went off the reservation. Tonight? No left uppercut.

COYLE

That's not what we're paying for.

Kwan produces a marble notebook, hands it to Coyle.

COYLE

What's this?

KWAN

... Everything.

Coyle flips through Kwan's notebook, chock full of details.

KWAN

We took Shiva to Mt. Sinai for his physical. They found damage in his stomach. Internal bleeding. I give him cortisone and Toradol, but not anymore... He'll be in pain tonight.

COYLE

I'll shred this after we dial it up.

KWAN

If you fight your fight, you'll win. If you want to guarantee Rahim wins, pound Singhavi's face early, because he'll be protecting his stomach. When I point to my face...that's when he's told us that his face has had it, and he needs to start protecting it... If Rahim closes by attacking the stomach ...Singhavi will bleed out internally.

They watch their dogs. Kwan's dog wrestles a pit bull.

INT. PREP ROOM - DAY

Shiva enters, settles in, then sees two blackboards. One features complex plans, the other features simple advice:

ACT ON INSTINCT -- DON'T BE A HERO -- MIND OVER MATTER.

Rich enters, joins Shiva. Neither breaks the silence. Until:

SHIVA

Are those your quotes?

RICH

I thought you wrote them... You know why you did the other sports?

SHIVA

Cross-training.

RICH

Nah. We thought you'd be a better fighter if you knew struggle. Not personal struggle, athletic. Both you and Rahim have never lost a fight. How are you gonna react if you're down on points, and have to fight from behind? More importantly, you were shown your ass by kids who specialize in sports that you can't handle. It was hard, but now you're gonna get after it on your turf, and in your element. So compared to the other sports, this will be easy. Hopefully, it'll be fun.

(beat)

And Kerianne? Getting close? Yes, the left uppercut is soft and the street fighter aspect is the reason. But it was about getting close to people. I wanted you to learn through dancing, but I also wanted you to spend time with Kerianne, with your dad...and me.

Rich approaches a blackboard. With chalk, he crosses a line through the advice we see, and the advice we've heard... 3x.

"DON'T BE A HERO" becomes "~~DON'T~~ BE A HERO." Rich walks out.

INT. RING - DAY

Hours before the fight, Shiva and Sunny step into the ring.

They take in the grand canyon of The Garden's vacant seats.

SHIVA

I went to the Detective's house.

Sunny, incredulous.

SHIVA

I wanted to get him off me.

SUNNY

Why won't you tell me what you saw? I'm not your sister. I'm your lawyer.

SHIVA

Me, Harold, and Ron were eating on the steps of a brownstone. About 100 feet away, the length of a basketball court. I saw Kabir Jain smack his son... Not like, if an ethnic dad or a boxer dad were to smack his son... I'm talking Child Abuse Smack Your Son. The beat cop happened to be on the scene...he approaches, but doesn't say anything. Then Kabir Jain punched Aseem, twice, and it would've been more, but Aseem dropped. I motion for Harold and Ron. They watch, see the cop draw his gun. Still doesn't issue a warning. Kabir turns, sees the cop, so they square up. They struggle for the gun, it goes off, and we run... They both fucked up hard. Kabir Jain didn't need to beat his kid, and the cop should not have played God.

SUNNY

Why not tell the cops that?

SHIVA

Less is always more.

SUNNY

Tim Ford wants you to lie about what happened, so you can best protect their interests... Maybe you should lie, but in order to protect your own.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Shiva enters the MSG chapel. Religious icons, stained glass.

LATER: Shiva sits with Tim Ford in the pews. Sets up a lie:

SHIVA

I'm telling you what I saw, and it's not because I want a pay-off.

FORD

It's about truth. Pursuing justice.

SHIVA

... Your man was the aggressor. He was absolutely wrong when he reacted the way he did. He moved in on Kabir Jain like a bear protecting his cub.

(MORE)

SHIVA (cont'd)

Thing is, I see cops, and I see the job they do, in the cities they do it in, and it's a shit show. That cop was in the wrong, but he was doing his job. I know the optics are bad.

FORD

Have you told anyone about this?

SHIVA

Damascus knows everything.

(beat)

Why are you smiling?

FORD

You know exactly why I'm smiling.

Shiva looks up. The arms of Christ, nailed to the cross.

FORD

Knock 'em dead.

SHIVA

Yeah. You, too.

INT. TRAINING ROOM - NIGHT

Pre-fight rituals. Kwan manages Epinephrine and enswell. Rich reviews notes. Soon, NOISE OVERWHELMS. He looks at the ceiling. Florescent bulbs flicker on and off.

Shiva in a utility room watching the pre-fight telecast:

Flash and flair, pomp and circumstance: Rahim makes his way to the ring. An ENTOURAGE worthy of the world champ.

TAUNTS and SCREAMS spew forth from a most hostile CROWD.

A paper cup vibrates, shifts, and falls. Cool as can be and ready for war, Shiva casually puts it in the garbage.

LATER Kwan wraps Shiva's fists. Rich looks on in silence.

INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT

The three warriors walk a labyrinth. MSG EMPLOYEES watch.

INT. RING - NIGHT

Madison Square Garden is up on its feet: Thousands deep.

Rahim shadowboxes and dances, then Peacocks and prances. He climbs the ropes. Raises a fist in pre-fight victory.

Entrance MUSIC EXPLODES, and Rahim quickly turns to see:

SECURITY GUARDS in suits: BLACK MEN and WHITE MEN x ten.

They walk to the ring: Protecting Kwan, Shiva, and Rich. More Security Guards trail the three pros. No entourage.

Shiva reaches the ring, enters, disrobes. The Crowd is his.

Sitting ringside, Cus smiles. Shiva locks on him, fearless.

LATER

The REFEREE dishes introductions/instructions over MUSIC.

The fight begins, and from the start, Rahim FIRES fastballs at Shiva from every direction and arm angle. He locates his secondary PITCHES, changes SPEEDS. Rich BARKS instructions.

Both boxers periodically retreat to their corners then hop back up, deftly signaling the passage of time. Shiva goes DOWN twice, pops up fast. Later, he goes DOWN a third time, but is slow to get up. After a fourth time DOWN, Rich and Kwan exchange looks. Friends and family look on, mortified.

Before the 5th round BELL, Shiva lands his first BIG PUNCH.

In the 6th and 7th rounds, he delivers his SECOND and THIRD.

Rahim returns fire. Shiva absorbs a left CROSS and a RIGHT.

Shiva mounts a 10th round ATTACK. The bell TOLLS. He returns to his corner with nothing left.

RICH

Are you hurt are injured?

SHIVA

I can't lift my right.

RICH

Give us one punch. We have to throw in the towel if you can't fight.

SHIVA

I can't fight... But I can't quit...
He's gonna have to kill me.

Kwan seals and compresses.

RICH

One punch! Give us one punch!

SHIVA

I can't... I can't do it.

Kwan forces Rich aside.

KWAN

You can and you will. We're gonna win this fight, starting right now.

Shiva, confused.

KWAN

I met with his crew and told 'em there was damage to your stomach.

SHIVA

What?

KWAN

I told 'em that when your face is done and you're favoring it, I would signal them that it's time to hit the stomach.

SHIVA

What?

KWAN

He's going for your stomach. Now.

SHIVA

My stomach's fine.

KWAN

We fed them shit... Give us one punch.

(beat)

Hit him with the left uppercut; I told them you abandoned it. Get close; they think you're afraid, then take him out with the left uppercut... Get in close.

SHIVA

What about the camps? Your tongue.

KWAN

I'm Korean, Shiva. Nice to meet you.

Shiva grabs Kwan's face between the paws of his gloves.

SHIVA

I thought you couldn't talk.

KWAN

I thought you couldn't fight.

SHIVA

... Let's go.

KWAN

Let's go.

SHIVA

Let's go!

KWAN

Let's fucking go!

The bell RINGS. Shiva and Rahim converge. Kwan touches his face. Rahim's Crew sees.

Rahim focuses on Shiva's stomach. He caps off a flurry with a CROSS. Shiva goes DOWN. Music PLAYS as the REF counts off.

Shiva lays on the canvas. His eyes open and close with periodic blinks, like those from a dying animal.

Around the arena, young ATHLETES from the various sports he played are screaming, exhorting him to rise. The Hockey Player who said, "Don't be a hero." Boys who played football, basketball, and baseball, plus the three Swimmers.

The MUSIC shifts from resignation to hope, and Shiva begins to stand. The men fight again, and Rahim continues to POUND Shiva's stomach. However, Shiva is now in close, and slow motion reveals the beginnings of a powerful left uppercut.

It heads for Rahim's chin like a heat-sinking missile. Only Rahim snaps back, and Shiva comes up empty, missing his chance. Having swung so hard, Shiva loses balance, falling over to his right side, ending up **squatting** in a low crouch.

Potential energy turns into kinetic energy, since his power is concentrated on his right side. He now begins the mother of all right hooks, one that emerges from the depths like a shark to the surface. Kerianne's teachings bear fruit:

Rahim's head, which snapped back to avoid the left uppercut, moves back into place. But just as it does, Shiva's right hook arrives, SLAMMING Rahim's skull. As he slowly falls, he's replaced by SHOTS of scenes from Shiva's LIFETIME.

Just when warmth and nostalgia has shrouded us in comfort, it's interrupted by a meat and potatoes face. It's the Ref. He looks down at Rahim, then waves his arms emphatically, voice BREAKING the MUSIC.

REFEREE

Eight...! Nine...! Ten! That's it!
It's over! It's over!

20,789 people rise and ROAR.

EXT./INT. NEW YORK - NIGHT

Throughout the city, New Yorkers CELEBRATE. We see Shawn and Kevin Donahue in their packed bar. PATRONS CHEER.

INT. RING - NIGHT

Yet we never saw Shiva, as he was swallowed up by the crowd storming the ring. Kwan and Meg lock eyes, and Meg is crying.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and Gentlemen, the undisputed, undefeated, and new WBC, WBA, WBO, IBF, and IBO middleweight champion of the world... Shiva! The Destroyer!

Shiva rises above the crowd. He sits on Rich's shoulders with his arms raised. Rich spots Kwan, now with Ram, and he sets Shiva down. He indicates the pair, and the four men converge. Shiva and Ram hug, as do Rich and Kwan.

Damascus watches.

EXT. TRAINING ROOM - NIGHT

Post-shower, Shiva is alone in a suit. He looks at the walls and sees framed photographs of MSG boxers.

Shiva takes out his wallet, produces the laminated photo of his mom. Considers it. He then commandeers a folding chair, steps on it, and hides the picture behind a framed photo of Muhammad Ali. Shiva steps down.

A KNOCK on the door. It opens. Through SECURITY GUARDS, Kerianne emerges, approaches.

KERIANNE

I don't know I'm supposed to react.

SHIVA

Did you have fun?

KERIANNE

Did you have fun?

SHIVA

I think so.

KERIANNE

Do I hug you? I would just go for it, but you're a student, not my brother. I don't know to handle it.

SHIVA

... How would you handle it if I were your boyfriend...? I know my face is hard to look at.

After a moment, Kerianne initiates their first kiss.

INT. TOWN CAR/EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Shiva and Kerianne exit, head to his family's apartment. In the shadows across the street, Damascus lies in wait.

INT. SINGHAVI APT - NIGHT

Shiva and Kerianne come through. Lights go on.

FRIENDS

Surprise!

Greetings are exchanged. Shiva hugs Ram.

SHIVA

Where are the girls?

INT. VIJAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Shiva rushes in. GUESTS drink from Solo cups.

SHIVA

Where are my sisters?

GUEST

On the roof.

INT. HALL/STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Shiva pushes the elevator button. Sees that it's on its way down, not up. He hurries to the stairs, races up the stairs.

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

Cus at the elevator. It arrives, he enters. The door closes.

Until a hand stops it. The door opens, and Cus sees a HITMAN wearing a mask. Hitman calmly raises a gun, aims it squarely.

DAMASCUS

Let's talk.

Muffled by a silencer, two bullets take out Damascus Barnes.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT

Doors BURST open. Shiva turns the corner, then spots Vijay and Sunny at the grill. Vijay sheepishly swirls salad tongs.

VIJAY

Surprise.

Shiva closes the distance. Sunny sees his face.

SUNNY
I'm scared to touch you.

SHIVA
You should see the other guy.

He waves a hand.

SHIVA
Not a scratch on him.

VIJAY
You won.

SHIVA
I guess so.

SUNNY
You're the champion of the world.
You won.

SHIVA
... We won.

He struggles to hold off the waterworks.

VIJAY
So what do we do now?

Shiva smiles through his tears.

SHIVA
Whatever we want.

FADE OUT.

THE END