CONCUSSION

by

Peter Landesman
BASED ON A TRUE STORY
OPEN ON EXTENDED TITLES, A CUT ASSEMBLY OF HOME MOVIE AND TV FOOTAGE:

1) Rhinelander High, Wisconsin. 1970. Rockwellian Americana: football cheerleaders, full stands in tribal green & white, convoys of yellow buses. Then--

2) A teenage MIKE WEBSTER playing for the Hodags. Biggest thing on the field, an unstoppable machine. Now--

3) Mike has broken his arm, holds up his cast, big smile, proud warrior. Then--

4) Mike is 22, wearing Pittsburgh Steelers practice uni, first day in camp. Alone against the mountainous men, a hazing. Infamous “nutcracker” drill - percussive hits like car head-ons, gun-shots. Coaches screaming: “Who’s a man?! Who’s tough?! Who’s gonna hit somebody!?"

5) Webster - now 27, thicker, less joyful - wins ABC Wide World of Sports’ “Strongest Man in Football” contest. Then--

6) Footage of the interior game. Steelers vs. Somebody. Webster vs. The World. Men as big as walls, and when Webster hits his, shovel-sized hands clap his ear-holes. Lightning bolts through his body, face in paralytic shock, and now--

7) Webster showers in post-game confetti winning his fourth Super Bowl ring. Shoulder-presses the Vince Lombardi championship trophy. His countenance primal. Now--

8) Back to that hit: Webster’s helmet knocked off, left arm briefly hangs numb. Somebody’s screaming, “That’s it! Now that’s how you gotta hit him!” And now--

9) A suddenly old-looking Webster roughing it through the “nutcracker”. This time steamrolled by a new young Steelers’ bad-ass, bearded, mountain-sized. Then--

10) The hit again. Webster getting up slow. Through his haze, hears: “That’s it! Kill the head the body will die! KILL THE HEAD THE BODY WILL DIE! Now run it again!” Now we find--

11) Webster after a game, older, wandering off the field. Now--

WEBSTER (OVER)
(intoning)
This Hall of Fame class of players is a tremendous group. Tremendous people. Not perfect people--

12) Webster is 45 but looks 60. Delivering his Hall of Fame speech in Canton, OH--
WEBSTER (CONT'D)
Not people who are pretentious or whatever. Real people. And that’s what the game of football is about.

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

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

MAN SINGING (PRE-LAP)
(Debarge’s ‘I like it’)
I've been thinkin'/'bout you for quite a while/You're on my mind everyday and every night/My every thought is you, the things you do/Seems so satisfying to me/I must confess it, girl--
(voice big, melodic if not great, continuing as we come up to--)

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

TITLE: SEPTEMBER, 2002

MAN SINGING (OVER)
Ooh...and I like it/You send chills up my spine every time/I take a look at you/Ooh...and I like it--
(now we go into--)

INT./EXT. BENNET’S CAR (MOVING)/PITTSBURGH
A blue Mercedes E320 sedan and find BENNET OMALU, 35, shamelessly and sweetly singing.

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

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

BENNET (CONT’D)
Like when I’m all alone with you
You know exactly what to do--

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

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

EXT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER – PITTSBURGH

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

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

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

INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER – PITTSBURGH – MORNING


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

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

BENNET
(pausing at the party)
Gracie, may we begin, please?
(and turns into--)
INT. AUTOPSY CHAMBER - MORNING

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

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

BENNET
Good morning, Cyril--

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

BENNET (CONT’D)
(checking the clipboard)
Rachel Green first, please.

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

GRACIE
Full or partial, Dr. Omalu?

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

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

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

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

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

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

SULLIVAN
Oh here we go.
WECHT
Danny, c’mon. Let him do this thing. I hired him for a reason.
(to Bennet)
I need to talk to you. Come see me in my office when you’re done--

BENNET
Full autopsy. We’ll need the tissue dissection station.

Sullivan stops. Glares from his table. As a TRAINEE TECH, 25, rolls a trolley over.
BENNET (CONT’D)
That’s not mine--

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

GRACIE
(sidebars the trainee)
Dr. Omalu uses different stuff. He makes less of a mess--

As Bennet sets the volume on his CD player--

BENNET
Let’s undress her, please.

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

TECH #1
(measuring head to heel)

BENNET
Let’s please wash the body.

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

GRACIE
(to the trainee)
He likes to do it himself.
(as--)

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

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)
Lookin’ back over my years/I guessed, I’ve shedded some tears/ Told myself time and time again/ This time I’m gonna win--

BENNET
Bone saw, please--

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

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)
Think I’d better let it go/Looks like another love T.K.O.--

GRACIE
Liver nine-hundred fifty-two grams.

JUMP TO: he hands her another.
TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)
Takin’ the bumps and the
bruises/Of all the things of
a two-time loser--

And lifts for the bone saw.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(MORE)
INT. WECHT’S OFFICE – ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER – DAY

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

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

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

BENNET
I remind you of you.

WECHT (CONT’D)
Only less handsome. *

Wecht motions to Bennet’s collar. Something there. Bennet brushes it off. And we realize: they are in identical suits.

Except – Wecht points – to Bennet’s chest pocket--

WECHT (CONT’D)
I don’t have any. What the hell are they for, anyway? Just fill up with schmutz--

(nods at autopsy chamber)
What the hell’s going on in there?

BENNET
I’m doing my work. I’m fine.

WECHT
You’re not fine. Danny hates your guts. I’ve never seen anything like it.

(pause)
You take too much time, Bennet.

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

WECHT
Treat them however you want, but do you have to talk to them? Maybe just talk to them in your head while you’re – you know – working--

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

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

WECHT
Don’t tempt me. I’d probably 
request it.

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

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

BENNET
That’s what I told him.

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

(and looks at him)
You need a girlfriend. You have to 
touch someone alive once in a 
while. Living women are a pain in 
the ass. But occasionally they’re amazing.

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

(as he slides across a 
thick file--)

BENNET
(can’t do it--)
I have exams next week.

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

Bennet looks at him.
BENNET
How do you become a professional expert witness?

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

BENNET
You’re the best, Cyril.

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

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

INT. BENNET’S OFFICE – COUNTY CORONER – NIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CAMERA FINDS BENNET flush to a speaker, gripping a Heineken. Fastidiously dressed even here, pressed jeans, buttoned polo. Good with rhythm, willing the bass and music to wash through.
But a man apart in every way: he’s black, but no one else here is. Doesn’t notice, doesn’t care. Just grooves solo to the mathematics of the music. His eyes close, and--

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

### IT’S 3AM

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

### INT. BENNET’S CONDO – NIGHT/PRE-DAWN

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

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

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


*Back to Bennet.* At his computer. Which we see has a _Pope John Paul II screen-saver_. Pope’s watching him. Watching over--

*Bennet’s searing focus._ And then--

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

### INT. RECEPTION – LAW FIRM – DAY


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

JUMP TO SAME AN HOUR LATER. Bennet hasn’t moved. One of the PARTNERS – MR. CROCKETT – sticks his head in.
CROCKETT
(ignores Bennet)
You sure Dr. Bennet hasn’t come through? He was supposed to be here an hour ago.

BENNET
I am Dr. Bennet Omalu.

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

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

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LAW FIRM - DAY

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

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

CROCKETT
This is Dr. Bennet Omalu.

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

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

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

SCARBOROUGH
We know that.

BENNET
You may know. But I can prove it.
(and we cut, and--)
EXT. INDUSTRIAL RIVER BANK - DAY

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

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

A REAR-VIEW MIRROR.

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

INT. CHEVY PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

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

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

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


STRZELCZYK
Webby, hey man, love your digs!
(no response)
Webby, it’s Jugger!
(then)
Mike. It’s Justin.
(Webster turning his big head, no recognition)
I’ll just sit with you a minute?


WEBSTER
(awakening to where he is)
Where is this?

STRZELCZYK
This is Ohio. Off some freeway.

WEBSTER
Ohio’s got the best truck stops.
STRZELCZYK
But this ain’t even that. This is --
I don’t know what this is.

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

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

WEBSTER
Juggers.

STRZELCZYK
We’re all worried about you.

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

WEBSTER
Don’t wanna fall asleep don’t wanna
fall asleep can’t fall asleep--

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

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

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

STRZELCZYK (CONT’D)
Pam is your wife. Garrett, your boy-

WEBSTER
(announcer voice)
--was so ugly when he was born his
mamma carried him around upside
down for a week, thought he only
had one eye!
Laugh line. But no one laughs.

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

(then; afraid)
What happens when Mike Webster falls asleep?

WEBSTER
He remembers.

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

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

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

EXT. STRZELCZYK HOME - PITTSBURGH SUBURBS - DUSK

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

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

KEANA STRZELCZYK
He really sell his rings?

Strzelczyk
That wasn’t Webby. Webby’s gone. I don’t know who that was.

(and back to--)
INT. CHEVY PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

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


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


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

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

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

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

SECURITY GUARD
Mike Webster, right? Iron Mike?

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

The guard thrusts his electric bill at him.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT’D)

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

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

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

A NURSE - “Dr. Bailes” - whispers in his ear, and--
INT. OFFICE OF CHAIRMAN, DEPT OF NEUROSURGERY - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

To find Webster pacing in his manic shambles--

WEBSTER
What do I do I am freakin overwhelmed--

BAILES
We’re going to get you some help. What are you taking? *

WEBSTER (CONT'D)
Ritalin. *

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

WEBSTER (CONT'D)
Superglue. *

BAILES
Call Pam. Tell her we found him. Tell her he’s worse.

WEBSTER
You -- you were my doctor-- Team doctor, Mike. I was everybody’s doctor.

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

ASSISTANT
Tumor? *
BAILES
His scans are normal--
(and as he stares at
Webster, stumped--)

INT. COURT ROOM - PITTSBURGH - DAY
The gallery standing room only. The accused, THOMAS KIMBLE
40, hulkish in his orange jumpsuit.

CROCKETT
(to the court)
The state has asked, after a
lengthy trial, a death sentence,
and two appeals, why would we learn
something new about this case from
you?
(then)
Dr. Omalu. Do you have a medical
degree?

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

Crockett about to move in--

BENNET (CONT’D)
So sorry--
(not done)
And I am completing my MBA at
Carnegie Mellon University.

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

BENNET
Yes.
(and)
(MORE)
And, oh yes, before I arrived in America, a masters in Theory of Music from the Royal School of Music in London.

(big easy smile incongruous to where he sits, then)
To answer your question, my specialty is the science of death. I think more about why people die than I do about the way people live.

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


BENNET (CONT’D)

Now a set of male hands. Splashed in blood.

CROCKETT
Are these hands not Mr. Kimble’s?

BENNET
They are indeed Mr. Kimble’s.

CROCKETT
Doesn’t that suggest that the state has the right man?

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

(reads from notes)
“I don’t like blood. When I was a kid I had a tooth pulled and I wouldn’t stop bleeding. My parents wouldn’t let me play outside sometimes—“
And we REVERSE on the Prosecutor. On the cusp of realization--

BENNET (CONT’D)
I saw no reference to this in any trial transcript. I got curious.

CROCKETT
What about?

BENNET
Hands.

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

BENNET (CONT’D)
Mr. Kimble’s hands had the victim’s blood on them. But no bruising, or bites, or scratches.
(--)
I started to wonder if these two pairs of hands could have been in the same fight.
(--)
So my mind went somewhere new.
(--)
If Mr. Kimble’s family had a history of hemophilia. His father said no, and medical records support that. But there is a strain of hemophilia -- hemophilia A -- that is not hereditary, and almost unheard of, so never tested for. I couldn’t think of any other explanation. I ordered the test.
(and)
Mr. Kimble tested positive for hemophilia A.

Prosecutor again. The humiliation upon him.

BENNET (CONT’D)
If his hands were the murder weapon, he would have bled profusely for a long period of time. He might have even bled to death.
(and now)
Mr. Kimble’s hands may have touched the victim, to aid her, as he claims, but there is no scenario in which they killed her.
(--)
There is no question in my mind that if the state of Pennsylvania executes Thomas Kimble, it will kill an innocent man.

**INT. BENNET’S CONDO – NIGHT**

Bennet on the phone. After a long pause--

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

**BENNET’S FATHER/PHONE (OVER)**
(simply)
Have you finished your schooling?

Heavy Nigerian. Weary, perhaps with the time difference.

**BENNET**
I will have the MBA completed soon.

**BENNET’S FATHER/PHONE (OVER)**
And what are you going to do with all your degrees?

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

**BENNET’S FATHER/PHONE (OVER)**
Your clinic again (?)
(tired of this already)
A clinic requires a physician.

**BENNET**
I am a physician, papa.

**BENNET’S FATHER/PHONE**
You bury the dead.

**BENNET**
I help families understand why people die. I help the living and the dead.
(a long silence)
I am very good at what I do, Papa.
There is an art to what I do.
(even to himself he sounds plaintive, and hates it)

And now a long pause. Bennet can hear his father’s breathing.
It is time to leave the classroom, leave the books. Join the world of the living. With a wife, children. Bennet Onyemalukwube Omalu: it is time to grow up and do something—

(and the SOUND of a phone being banged down—)

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

Bennet STOPS. Turns toward that clarion female voice. African lilt. Beautiful girl. Delicate profile. Bennet stares, then--
His turn. He doesn't speak his prayer, he sings it in that big melodic heartbreaking voice--

BENNET
On the day I cried out, you answered; you strengthened my spirit. All the kings of earth will praise you, Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth. Though I walk in the midst of dangers, you guard my life when my enemies rage.

(as the congregation claps, feeding off his energy--)

EXT. ST. BENEDICT’S - PITTSBURGH - DAY

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

FATHER D’AMICO
Bennet! A moment?

We notice - but Bennet wouldn’t - two Steelers lapel pins on his frock: “10 – Stewart” & “92 – Harrison”.

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

BENNET
Of course. How much do you need?

FATHER D’AMICO
She needs shelter, Bennet, until we find her something permanent.

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

MRS. SCOTT
What about that studio you sub-let? Isn’t that open now--?

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

BENNET
Who is she?
FATHER D'AMICO
She’s a nice girl, from Nairobi, went to a British school. And she wants to work. We’re letting her tidy up around the church.

(Bennet silent, so--)
We’re asking you, because we know she’ll be safe and cared for. I feel God in you, Bennet--

MRS. SCOTT
You know how this congregation looks up to you.
(as Bennet takes her in--)
Lovely, isn’t she?
(yes she is, and we find them--)

EXT. ST. BENEDICT’S/EXT. BENNET’S CONDO

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

INT. BENNET’S CONDO – DAY

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

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

BENNET
What kind of music do you like?

PREMA
I don’t know.

BENNET
How are you for money?
(no reply)
Need is not weak. Need is need. I know where you are--
(and hands her some money – which she at first refuses)
For anything you might need. Clothes.
(she gives him a look)
You are here now. You have to be a better version of yourself.
(MORE)
BENNET (CONT'D)
If you don’t know what that is,
pick something and fake it.
She takes the money. He shows her to an autonomous efficiency within, “Usually sublet this out--“. Shows her a door. Hands her a key--

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

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

PREMA
What did you pick – to fake?

BENNET
An older bald white man.

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

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

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

INT. FURNACE/INDUSTRIAL RUINS – DAY

Webster barefoot, shirtless, awash in sweat.

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

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

Then crashes the log down. And stares. Paralytic. And now--
INT. CHEVY PICK-UP TRUCK - LATER

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

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

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

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

OMIT

INT. BENNET’S CONDO - SAME


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

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

The microscope has been moved. From table to counter.

And the TV on.

Unclear to him how much he likes any of this.

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

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

TV BROADCAST (OVER)
In recent years the dauntless Webster had abandoned his family, slipped into financial chaos and homelessness,--

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

BENNET
Look, I don’t really watch TV.
PREMA
Then why do you have one?

BENNET
One has a TV in this country.
(then)
I don’t usually eat breakfast.

PREMA
One eats breakfast in this country.
(and clasps her hands in prayer)
*Dear God thank you for the gifts you have so graciously bestowed upon me--*

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

PREMA (CONT’D)
*Please help us to continue to be deservant of our blessings.*

EXT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER – PITTSBURGH – MORNING

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

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

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

BENNET
Who’s Mike Webster?
(Sullivan pauses, disbelief, then--)

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

BENNET
What’s a center?

GRACIE
The big guy in the middle.

They tumble inside--
SULLIVAN
My kid plays because of that guy.
He wears Webster’s number.

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

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

SULLIVAN
(realizing)
You don’t know football. At all.

BENNET
I don’t need to know football.

Now clocks Gracie’s ribbons.

SULLIVAN
I freakin can’t believe it’s you.

Now Wecht arrives, joins them.

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

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

INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER

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

WECHT
I’m going to have to give a statement.

SULLIVAN
Let’s just do the external.

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

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

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

BENNET
Full autopsy, please.

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

BENNET
I can’t figure out what went wrong.

SULLIVAN
He died. Is what went wrong.

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

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

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

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

For a moment maybe even Wecht isn’t sure.

WECHT
No, I don’t. I never leave anything
alone. That’s why people hate me.
(--) 
Just don’t screw it up.
(and leaves, and as Bennet
turns to the room--)

BENNET
Let’s prepare the body, please.
INT. AUTOPSY CHAMBER - DAY

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

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

TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)
("If You Don’t Know Me By Now")
All the things that we’ve been through/You should understand me like I understand you--
Now STOP. Music stops. Bennet staring down at Webster.

BENNET
(quiet, intimate)
Mike, you need to help me. I know there’s something wrong. Help me tell the world what happened to you. I can’t do it alone.

SULLIVAN
(from his desk, over paperwork)
Heart. Attack.

Bennet performs the Y-incision.

BENNET
Bone saw please.

BENNET (CONT'D)
Heart weight 327g. Mitral valve 10.4 cm; Aortic Valve 7.1 cm; Pulmonary-
TEDDY PENDERGRASS (OVER)
I ain’t gonna do nothing to break up our happy home/Don’t get so excited--

Handing organs to Gracie one by one--

TECH #1
Right kidney 143g ... left kidney 158g--
TEDDY PENDERGRASS (CONT'D) *
If you don’t know me by now/You will never never never know me--

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

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

GRACIE
What’s wrong?

BENNET
Hold up the CT again for me, please.

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

BENNET (CONT’D)
How old are these?
GRACIE
Six months.
Bennet sets the brain down. Stares at it.

BENNET
This should be a mess. It looks completely normal.

GRACIE
(paging into the records)
Records say severe head aches, double vision. Voices.  
(Bennet looks at her)
In his head.
(--) Not seeing any documented concussions.
(--) He did complain of dizziness.

BENNET
How often?

GRACIE
Once.
(--) In eighteen years of professional football.

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

SULLIVAN
Sign the certificate. Sew him up.

BENNET
Let’s fix the brain.

SULLIVAN
You know we don’t have the budget for that.

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

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

SULLIVAN
NO!  
(and Bennet looks at him a moment, and--)

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BENNET
Danny, you are out of line--

SULLIVAN (CONT'D)
You don’t speak to me like that.
And I am the pathologist on duty! The pathologist of record!

My hands on this body. If I am wrong I am wrong.

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

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

I will write my orders for the tests I want.

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

You’re going to pay for them yourself.

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

And proceeds up the stairs--

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

INT. WECHT’S OFFICE - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER

Bennet stands in front of Wecht’s desk. Wecht, in a suit now, doing up a tie, reading Bennet’s test orders. (We get a glimpse at the list: Tau -- Beta-Amyloid -- TDP-43 protein -- Ubiquitin -- Alpha-synuclein -- silver staining -)
WECHT
In forty years, I’ve never requested a panel of tests like this. What are you looking for?

BENNET
There isn’t a case, in a book or in life, where a man that healthy, went that crazy that young, with no visible abnormalities of the brain.
(MORE)
BENNET (CONT'D)
(then)
I don’t know. What I’m looking for.

WECHT
I can tell. It’s going to cost you a fortune.
(then, relenting)
If you have to play hero, just make sure we both come out okay.

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

INT. BENNET’S CONDO – DAY

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

Studying all this. Webster. Football. America.

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

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

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

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

DAUGHTER (PRE-LAP)
Mom, dad’s sitting outside again.

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

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

KEANA STRZELCZYK
Justin you weirdo. You keep doing that--

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

SON
(coming up behind her)
Daddy made these pictures for me--
And hands Keana a stack of crayon drawings. Dark forest. Chaotic sky. Inspired, but apocalyptic. What the fuck? And--

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

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

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

INT. AUTOPSY CHAMBER - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - NIGHT

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

Clock says 1 AM. In his ear phones--

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

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

The bodies are dermal shells. Open eyes vacant.

BENNET
I apologize.

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

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

OMIT

INT. CITY BUS (MOVING) - NIGHT

Prema sits bundled in hat and scarf. One of three passengers left (one of them asleep). Near the end of the line.
EXT. STREETS AROUND BENNET’S CONDO – NIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

PREMA
What’s that?

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

INT. BENNET’S CONDO – 30 MIN LATER

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

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

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

PREMA
No, this one will be fine.

The books and journals--

BENNET
You were reading these?
She nods, Uh huh. Nonplussed. She has one of them on her lap. Occasionally glancing at football. This confuses him.

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

PREMA
I am studying.

But what she’s really doing is waiting. And giving him space. She feels his anxiety. (She feels everything about him.) His anxiety is her anxiety.
Now Bennet opens the sleeve of slides. Stares at them. Focused.

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

BENNET
I don’t know.

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

Bennet looks at her. Understands.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BENNET
(load a different slide and steps aside--)
This is what your brain looks like--
(she puts her face to the microscope and sees--)
BENNET (CONT’D)
This is Mike Webster.
(load the other, and--)

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

BENNET (CONT’D)
That brown stuff is tau. It’s a protein that moves in clumps called neurofibrillary tangles. The tangles strangle the neurons from inside out.
(how to explain)
Think of it like pouring wet concrete down kitchen pipes. That’s what it does in the brain. Chokes it.

PREMA
What does that do?

BENNET
It turns you into someone else.
Someone you don’t know.
(--) I’ve never seen a brain like this in a man this young. I’ve never heard of a brain this damaged in any man.

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

PREMA
What are you doing?

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

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

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BENNET’S CONDO - ACCELERATED TIME

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

“Multiple traumatic cerebral hemorrhages, 1924” --
“Observations on the pathology of insidious dementia following head injury, 1959”--
The sun sinks. The moon moves across the sky. The sun rises. Bennet still doesn’t move, staring at pages.

Now looks up to--

CHRIS BERMAN’S VOICE (OVER)
(play-by-play growl)
Okay, your turn, Tom Jackson!
(MORE)
CHRISS BERMAN’S VOICE (OVER) (CONT'D)
Who’s gonna get JACKED UP tonight?!
(and now WE'RE WATCHING--)

ESPN MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL PRE-GAME

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

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

The animated intro to the segment: “ESPN’S JACKED UP! ... brought to you by Texas Instruments”. Now we’re--

INSIDE QUALCOMM STADIUM, SAN DIEGO

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

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

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

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

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

BENNET’S CONDO. PREMA’S POV OF BENNET AT THE MICROSCOPE

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

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

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

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

FIND BENNET ON THE PERIPHERY OF A LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL FIELD

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

BACK IN BENNET’S LIVING ROOM - TIGHTER ON THE TV

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

BENNET AT THE LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL FIELD

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

THE LIBRARY THAT IS NOW BENNET’S CONDO


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

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

PREMA
(to Bennet somewhere else in the condo)
Oh wow--
(new fan; as she’s clearing the table)
(MORE)
PREMA (CONT’D)
You should watch this, Bennet.
(as he lifts his head to-)

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

PREMA (CONT’D)
It’s actually really beautiful!
Bennet!

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

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

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

PREMA (CONT’D)
Tommy Maddox is the most underrated quarterback in the League!
(because she’s watching)

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

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BENNET’S POV/WHAT HE’S SEEING

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

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

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

Bennet. Studying the TV. Where there’s now--
TV FOOTAGE OF VETERANS STADIUM, PHILADELPHIA

Eagles punter alone in backfield, about to kick. Two Jaguars special team backs full-sprint from pincher angles--

TOM JACKSON (OVER)
Now I really love this one. Jorge Cordova and Brian--

The backs arrive same time. Helmets into chest and throat. Punter, crushed, stiffens, as if Tasered, drops--

TOM JACKSON (OVER) (CONT’D) ALL THE ANNOUNCERS (OVER)
And Dirk Johnson-- GOT! JACKED! UP!
(then back to--)

BENNET AT THE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD

It’s been 90 seconds. Bennet is simply walking away as the turf is like a battlefield of the exhausted.

THIS WHOLE SEQUENCE STOPS NOW. We slow. We’re--

INT. AUTOPSY CHAMBER - NIGHT

Clock says 4AM. We’re DOLLYING SLOW THROUGH the autopsy chamber. Silhouettes of fresh bodies on the slabs.

Light spills out of the lab. We follow it to Bennet at a significantly bigger microscope than he has. Rubbing the back of his neck.

Prema has put a couple chairs together and is asleep under a blanket, between Bennet and the corpses. Keeping guard. Against everything. Her really astounding beauty.

Now TILT UP to Bennet standing over her. Really seeing her for the first time. Prema stirs. Eyes open huge dark almonds right up into Bennet’s face. He is clear-headed, suddenly.

As if she’s heard something. Her eyes shift to a cadaver. Its perfect stillness.

BENNET
That is not who they are.
(then; his expression)
I think I found a disease no one has ever seen. Not once. Not ever.

PREMA
Isn’t that good?
BENNET
It’s a terrible disease.

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

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

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

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

BENNET
Working.

SULLIVAN
You’re not on the schedule.

BENNET
I’m using personal time. I needed the microscope.

SULLIVAN
In here is county time.

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

SULLIVAN (CONT’D)
You banging prostitutes in here, Omalu?

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

SULLIVAN (CONT’D)
They deport you weirdos for sick shit like that.

And now we rise up to--

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


Bennet cradles the box.

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

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

HAMILTON
What did you bring me?

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

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

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

Hamilton slowly lifts his head. Pause.

HAMILTON (CONT’D)
This is a really really terrible brain.
And we SLAM to--

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

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

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

HAMILTON
Ever met the great man before?
(Bennet shakes, No)
Tough. One of the top brain guys in the world. Expect two minutes tops.

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

DEKOSKY
That him?
(Hamilton nods)
So you’re our prize graduate.

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

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

HAMILTON
Tell him.

BENNET
That is Mike Webster. The Pittsburgh Steeler--

DEKOSKY
(get to the point)
I know who Mike Webster is.

HAMILTON
Steve. He was fifty.
(and that’s the point and--)

DeKosky looks to the window, mentally shuffling through his decades of study, toil, research. The tens of thousands of hours. Then reaches for the phone--
DEKOSKY
(into phone)
Cancel the rest of my morning--
(hangs up; then)
You have my attention.

Hamilton nods, Go.

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

HAMILTON
Bennet--

BENNET
All these animals have shock
absorbers built into their bodies.
The woodpecker’s tongue comes out
the back of the mouth through the
nostril and goes around the top of
its head. Basically, it’s one big
safety belt for the brain.

(then)
Humans? Not one piece of our
anatomy protects us from those
types of collisions. A human being
will get concussed at 80 g’s. The
average head-to-head contact on a
football field? 120 g’s. God did
not intend for us to play football.

HAMILTON
Let’s keep God out of this.

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

HAMILTON (CONT’D)
What’s the ‘S’?

BENNET
The Steelers.

DEKOSKY
The ‘others’. Obviously.

BENNET
The others, yes.
DEKOSKY
Do you even watch football?

BENNET
Not at all--
(back to the board)
But I studied Mike Webster’s position. The one in the middle. The most violent on the field. The slaps and the choking, the head as a weapon on every play of every game, of every practice. From the time he was a boy, then a college man, through a professional career. The thousands and thousands of hits that weren’t concussions.

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

BENNET (CONT’D)
But these? They are the fastest.

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

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

BENNET
(distinctly not slowing)
Mike Webster played eighteen years of professional football. 90-thousand blows to the head during just his professional career, by my calculation.
(and now--)
All this triggered a cascading series of neurological events that unleashed killer protein upon Mike Webster’s brain. The tangles invading and then strangling his mind from the inside out. Leaving him unrecognizable, even to himself.
(--) And before you ask me why it’s not the same as boxers--
DEKOSKY
Dementia pugilistica--

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

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

DEKOSKY
How can you know that?

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

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

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

Dekosky sits.

DEKOSKY
Holy Christ.

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

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

BENNET
We need to tell them. Now.
HAMILTON
The NFL? What, like call them?

BENNET
Yes.

DEKOSKY
This is one case.

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

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

HAMILTON
We’ll coauthor, our names with yours.

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

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

Okay, a breath, gets it--

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

INT. BENNET’S CONDO – THAT NIGHT

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

BENNET
(awkward)
I thought you were asleep.
PREMA
How could I sleep? Did they agree?
What it is?

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

BENNET
They are going to publish with me.

PREMA (CONT’D) *
They? With you?

BENNET *
A medical journal-- With you?

PREMA (CONT’D) *
And touches his arm. So happy for him she can cry. (And maybe she does, a little.)

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

BENNET
You are going somewhere?

PREMA
Yes, with you. To celebrate.

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

INT. STATIC (DANCE CLUB) - NIGHT

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

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

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

INT. HALLWAY - BENNET’S CONDO - NIGHT

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

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

Wecht carrying two coffees, two brown bags.

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

BENNET
She’s a friend.

WECHT
You don’t have friends.

BENNET
I have a friend now.

Then--

WECHT
Sullivan made a formal complaint against you with the county.

BENNET
I was working on Webster.

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

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

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

BENNET
I wasn’t going around you. I need someone with fresh eyes.
(MORE)
BENNET (CONT'D) Someone who didn’t want it to be true or not true.
WECHT
I don’t like it. But it was the right thing to do.

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

(--) 
So what’s next?

BENNET
Publish. DeKosky wants to coauthor.

WECHT
DeKosky, and--?

BENNET
Cyril Wecht.

WECHT
I’m proud of you, kid.

(compares the two cars)
Should’ve gotten the silver. Blue shows the dirt.

(and heads in)

INT. SPORTS BAR – PITTSBURGH – DAY

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

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

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

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

And then CAMERA TWEAKS past them--

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

Where, in a SINGLE TRACKING SHOT, we pass Keana and the kids watching in Their Man’s “#73” Steelers jersey. CAMERA PULLING out of the living room, game and kids receding, as we PUSH--
Into the bedroom. Where we FIND Strzelczyk. Heavier, disheveled. Lips moving in mute dialog. Eyes clock his guitar. Grabs it, wields it like a baseball bat. CAMERA follows behind him downstairs, back into the living room--

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

STRZELCZYK
I’m getting messages. Evil Ones. Talking talking talking!

KEANA STRZELCZYK
Are you FREAKIN SERIOUS RIGHT NOW?!

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

KEANA STRZELCZYK (CONT’D)
(weeping now; terrified)
Oh my god baby what are they saying, baby, please tell me what the voices are saying--

STRZELCZYK
Kill you!
(and now--)

KEANA STRZELCZYK
GET OUT GET OUT GET THE HELL OUT!!!

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

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

KEANA STRZELCZYK
(cuddling the kids)
Baby shh I need you to call 911 right now for me baby and tell them that daddy is in pain and to come here right away baby, shh, it’s going to be okay--

And bolting out the door after Strzelczyk--
SON (O.S.)
(into phone)
My daddy’s Justin Strzelczyk the
football player, WHAT IS HAPPENING
PLEASE HURRY UP!

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

INT. STRZELCZYK’S TRUCK

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

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

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

PIXILATED TV FOOTAGE OF THE NY STATE THRUWAY SPRAYED WITH A
VAST SMOLENDERING DEBRIS FIELD

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

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

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

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD (UNIV OF LOUISVILLE) - DAY

Bennet standing in the rain/snow, watching the university
Everyone’s filthy. Pigs in shit. Looks fun. End whistle, one
player breaks away. Stampeding at us. Bennet starts to laugh.
This is AMOBI OKOYE, 19 and enormous: 6’2”/300.
OKOYE
Bennet!? Nwokem kedu?

BENNET
(big laughter)
You giant American baby! You look like a giant American dirty baby!
Kedu ka mma-mma gi meah?

BENNET (CONT’D) O noh na nke Ifeoma?

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

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

BENNET
(me and the giant--)
They sent us both to America. To see which one survives. The David and the Goliath!
(and his hands say who is who, and then--)

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

BENNET
Superman!

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

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

INT. DINER – LOUISVILLE – NIGHT

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

OKOYE
What are the chances?

BENNET
For your position? They’re good.

OKOYE
You’re not even sure of this thing.
BENNET
You’ll forget your own name. Amobi Okoye. Can you imagine not knowing that?

OKOYE
Who imagines that?

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

OKOYE
I step on the field I always know I can be hurt. More than hurt--
(and snaps his fingers. Like that.)
Maybe I play two years then I’m out. You know what’s next? Most of them get fat, bankrupt. They sell cars, insurance (sneakers), I don’t know what they do.

(--) This is my time before that time.
(then the crux of it, the arrogance returns)
They are saying I will be drafted first. The youngest player ever drafted into the NFL. I will cash a check for millions of dollars. Millions just for saying yes.

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

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

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

INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - MORNING

Bennet WALKING STRAIGHT INTO CAMERA, up the hallway. Peeling gloves, lab coat. (In b.g., the slabs, a pair of upturned feet.)
The Techs - Sullivan - no one’s saying a thing. And into--
His shitbox office. Where a warm bottle of cheap champagne sits on his desk, with a copy of Neurosurgery Journal. A post-it stuck to the neck says: "Enjoy with your new friend. Best, Cyril."

INT. BENNET’S CONDO - AFTERNOON

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

PREMA
This is very amazing. Now what happens?

BENNET
(nervous to say it)
I called them.

PREMA
Who did you call?

BENNET
The National Football League.

PREMA
What did you say?

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

PREMA
(on alert)
What did they say?

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

(SC.84 MOVED TO AFTER SC.87)

EXT. 280 PARK AVE - MANHATTAN - MORNING

A MAN carrying a stack of magazines enters a 60-story glass office tower, in the heart of midtown, between two logos: Credit Suisse, and the NFL’s shield. And into--
INT. NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE MAIN OFFICE – MANHATTAN

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

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

JONES
Get me Elliot Pellman.

INT. DOCTOR’S PRIVATE OFFICE – LONG ISLAND – DAY

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

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

JONES/PHONE (OVER)
Anything to be concerned about?

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

INT. KITCHEN – BAILES’ HOME – MORNING/SIMULTANEOUS

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

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

COLLEEN BAILES
What are you reading?

BAILES
It’s about Mike.

COLLEEN BAILES
I miss Mike.
(brain scans)
Oh god I can’t look at that.
(Bailes rubbing his face;
(MORE)
looking into the middle
distance, doing the math)
Julian, what is it?

BAILES
How could I have missed this?

COLLEEN BAILES
What are you talking about?

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

INT. AUTOPSY CHAMBER – ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER – DAY

Bennet, Sullivan, Gracie stand over 300-lbs. of heavily

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

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

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

BENNET
What other problems did he have?

SULLIVAN
Who cares?

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

SULLIVAN
I know what you’re doing.
BENNET
Drinking antifreeze is the work of a lunatic mind.
(then)
What position? What position did he play?

SULLIVAN
Offensive line.

BENNET
Same as Mike Webster. 

SULLIVAN (CONT'D)
Webby was a center. Terry played right guard.

BENNET
No recorded concussions. Nine years of professional football. As an offensive guard.
(then)
I need a full autopsy. Same tests as Webster.

SULLIVAN
You’re paying for that, too.

BENNET
Yes, Daniel. I’m paying for that, too.
(Bennet doesn’t even hear it, his eyes already focused on--)
Joseph Maroon--

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

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

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

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

89
Tau protein tangles. Seeping and strangling everything in their path. PULL BACK FULL TO REVEAL--

INT. BASEMENT LAB - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - NIGHT

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

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

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

OMIT

INT. BENNET’S CONDO - MORNING

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

MAN/PHONE (OVER)
Bennet Omalu?

BENNET
This is Dr. Bennet Omalu.

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

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

BENNET
(sarcastic)
I think they called back.

WECHT (PRE-LAP)
Did he really say you’re under-educated? Have they seen your resume?
Bennet, Wecht, Hamilton.

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

HAMILTON
(reading from a letter)
“Serious misinterpretation”. “Failure to find”. “Absence of clinical information”.
(looks to Wecht, ‘help?’)

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

BENNET
What do they want?

WECHT
Your head on a spike.

HAMILTON
They want you to retract your findings.

BENNET
I don’t know what that means.

WECHT
It means saying you made it all up.

BENNET
(confused)
Made it up??

WECHT
They’re accusing you of fraud--

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

HAMILTON
Your reputation will be destroyed.
You won’t be able to work.
Anywhere.
Good. * 

WECHT
They’re terrified of you.

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

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

BENNET
Yes! I thought they’d be grateful!

WECHT
What the hell for?

BENNET
For being told. For knowing.

Bennet paces to the window, confused.

WECHT
I get it. You think you’re being a good American.

(and looks at him; pride and sadness)

Listen to me. The city of Pittsburgh shelled out 233-million dollars to help build its beloved Steelers a glorious new stadium while it was closing schools and raising taxes.

(and snatches the envelope out of Bennet’s hand and waves it in his face)

These are not people who want to change the world.

(now waves Bennet’s article)

And this isn’t some quaint academic discovery stuck in the back of an obscure medical journal. Bennet Omalu is going to war with the manufacturer of a product that twenty-million Americans crave every Sunday the way they crave water! The NFL owns a day of the week! They’re very big!
Pause. A long pause.

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

And Heinz Field.

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

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

Bennet turns back from the window. Face set.

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

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

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

WECHT
No one’s stopping anything.

INT./EXT. BENNET’S CONDO – DAY

Prema grabs her coat and purse to go out. Pauses by the window. Where she sees Bennet sitting in his car in the parking lot, deep in thought. And we cut to--
Her outside, bundling up, crossing to him. She gets in--

INT. BENNET’S CAR – DAY

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

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

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

PREMA
Not everything.

BENNET
What you make is also for you.

PREMA
So is this.

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

EXT. PITTSBURGH/MONONGAHELA RIVER BANK – DAY

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

BENNET
When I was a boy, in Nigeria, heaven was here.
(and holds his hand over his head)
And America was here--
(just below)
It was the place where God sent all his favorite people.
(--)
I came to America because I thought here you could do anything, be anything. Americans were the manifestation of what God wanted all of us to be.
(then)
But Mike Webster goes mad and nobody asks why.
(MORE)
BENNET (CONT'D)
They make fun of him. And now they want to pretend this disease doesn’t exist? They want to bury me? It’s offensive. I’m offended. I’m the wrong person to have discovered this.

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

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

(long pause)
When I arrived, in New York, I was attacked--

(and stops)

BENNET
What happened?

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

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

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

BENNET
How did you know that?

PREMA
I called your father.
(Bennet surprised)
He was pleased to hear from me.

BENNET
Cyril said if I speak it could be dangerous.

PREMA
If you don’t speak for the dead, who will?
(MORE)
You are of the Igbo tribe, Bennet. Igbo man is bold and cannot be silenced. When you have the truth, the thing you are told you cannot do is the thing you must do. Embrace that, and nothing created by God can bring you down.

(long beat; then)
I would do anything to support that kind of man.

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

And now off his face, we cut to--

ENTRY SIGN “WELCOME TO MOON TOWNSHIP”

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

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

EXT. EMPTY LOT – MOON TOWNSHIP – CONTINUOUS

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

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

PREMA
What is this?

BENNET
This is my dream. The schools are good.

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

(MORE)
BENNETH (CONT'D)

I am sure you see good in me.

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

BENNETH
I want to marry you.

(then)
We can fall in love.

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

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

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

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

BENNET/カメラモニター
By the time he committed suicide, Terry Long’s brain was ruined. People with CTE suffer from depression, which can lead to suicide attempts. Terry Long committed suicide due to CTE, which was a result of his long-term play. The NFL is in denial--

(now we go to the live version--)

EXT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - DAY

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

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

BENNET
It is probable that a big percentage of professional football players have or will develop CTE, and will die of it. Maybe even most of them.
And on these words, we’re FINDING faces in the crowd. Most are distracted by the rain to take it all in. But one – a YOUNG REPORTER in his 30’s, leaning practically falling forward to hear everything--

BENNET (CONT’D)
I suspect we will also start finding it in and out of sports, in all activities where head impact happens--

YOUNG REPORTER
(stunned)
Holy shit.

Rain picking up. Cameramen are packing.

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

WECHT
Any questions?
(not one, because--)

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

WECHT (CONT’D)
No ignoring that. You’re going to be an American hero.

BENNET
But I am not an American.

WECHT
Even better. That’s so fucking American.

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

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

PREMA (PRE-LAP)
(above the others)
My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed--!
INT. ST. BENEDICT’S - PITTSBURGH - DAY

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

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

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

FATHER D’AMICO
Football and Dr. Bennet Omalu. Who knew?
(his smile - what is its quality?)
We saw you on the news. Quite a splash.

BENNET
It isn’t about football, Father.

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

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

FATHER D’AMICO
Well, bless you both.

And they stand there alone and untouched. And as they turn to leave--
AUTHORITATIVE VOICE/TV (PRE-LAP)
There is no so-called concussion “problem” in the NFL--
(and cut to)

INT. BREAK ROOM - ALLEGHENY COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER - DAY

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

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

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

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

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

INT. CHINATOWN INN - DAY

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

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

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

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

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

INT. BENNET’S CONDO – THAT DAY
And Bennet - just home - coat still on, leaning against the kitchen table. The home phone ringing as--

PREMA
(reading from the
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)
“--Dr. Maroon, who is also vice chairman of the neurosurgery department at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, said, of Omalu’s CTE diagnoses, that it was “fallacious reasoning.”
(and looks to the phone, keeps going)
“To go back and say Long was depressed from playing in the NFL and that led to his death 14 years later I think is purely speculative.”
(and looks up from the paper, at her man--)
It’s not easy to get what you want.

Bennet finally picks up the phone--
VOICE/PHONE (OVER)
(local, messy, possibly drunk)
This Omalu?
BENNET
This is Dr. Bennet Omalu--

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

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

BLACK SCREEN

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

INT. BEDROOM - BENNET’S CONDO - NIGHT

Bennet’s alone. Alarm clock reads 4AM.

BENNET
(picks up)
Hello? Hello?

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

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

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

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

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

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

INT. BENNET’S CONDO - 7AM

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

Prema keeps the shade drawn. A bunker in here.

Bennet on his way out. She hands him his lunch. Then--
Phone rings. Again. They both look at it as at a ticking bomb. Bennet picks up but says nothing. A voice we know--

BAILES/PHONE (OVER)
Dr. Omalu?
(yes--)
I took you to be an early riser. I didn’t want to call you at work.
(and we INTERCUT--)

INT. KITCHEN – BAILES’ HOME – SIMULTANEOUS


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

BENNET
I know who you are.

BAILES
Mike Webster was a personal friend.

BENNET
Was he.

BAILES
You’re in trouble, Dr. Omalu. But you’re not wrong.
(then)
I’d like to talk to you.

EXT. BAILES’ HOME – DAY

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

As Bennet comes up the long drive toward the massive home, he takes it all in. So this is how they live.
Bailes comes out on the porch, waiting for him. Coming from a distance, we sense in him a hostility held in reserve.

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

BENNET
Is this a good idea?

BAILES
You tell me.

INT. HOME OFFICE - BAILES’ HOME - DAY

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

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

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

CLOSE ON THE REPORTS.

BAILES (CONT’D)
What you’re looking at is the research that formed the basis for the League’s concussion guidelines. In this study, some academics put helmets on monkeys and shook them real hard. Threw dogs and pigs and human cadavers down elevator shafts.

(picks up another one)
Helmets on crash test dummies and bashed them together. Conclusion?

(reading--)
“No striking player experienced neck injury or concussion.”

Concussions are as dangerous as a hang-nail.

Bennet waits for more, then, disbelief--

BENNET
And that was it?

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

(MORE)
BAILES (CONT'D)
They put together a commission to study the studies. Dr. Elliot Pellman’s Mild Traumatic Brain Injury committee.

BENNET
Mild - before they knew. Conclusion first.
(then)
It’s the opposite of science.
(and Bailes looks at him, Exactly)

BAILES
Know who else is on that committee?

BENNET
Dr. Maroon?

BAILES
Joe, yeah, he’s on there. Plus other team doctors. An equipment manager.
(and)
And two trainers - guys who tape knees for a living.
(then)
I was more interested in studying actual human football players, who could talk about their pain.

After a moment.

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

BAILES
Do you have any idea how many Pittsburgh Steelers - just Steelers - died in the last few years? I’m not talking about older guys. I’m talking about players I knew. And just the ones I know about.
(then)
Twelve.
(--)
I don’t want to see any more of these guys vanishing in the backs of pick-up trucks.
(and we JUMP TO--)

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EXT. BACKYARD - BAILES’ HOME - CONTINUOUS

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

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

BAILES
I know them. I was them. You’re doing this wrong.

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

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

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

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

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

BENNET
A doctor.

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

BAILES
The NFL has kept everyone in the dark.
(MORE)
BAILES (CONT'D)
You have turned on the lights and
given its biggest bogeyman a name.
(leaning in)
And if they don’t get this reined-in,
everything they have,
everything they are, is vulnerable.
(then)
What’s happening now, what you
think they’re doing to you? Is
nothing. You have no idea how bad
this could get for you.

A long pause.

BENNET
I did my own research on the NFL’s
brain injury committee. You know
what Dr. Elliot Pellman is? He’s a
rheumatologist. He’s a specialist
in arthritis and joint pain. Can
you tell me what a rheumatologist
knows about the brain and brain
disease?
(and)
Corporate men like this, in this
country, come from Harvard and
Yale. But Pellman went to medical
school in Guadalajara.

BAILES
Mexico? I didn’t know that. That’s
beautiful.

And looks at him - “I like you” -

BAILES (CONT’D)
It’s unlikely I could get you in
front of them. But two cases aren’t
going to be enough. You have to
keep going.

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

BAILES
Unfortunately, I no longer see a
scenario in which that isn’t
already happening.
(and we cut to--
EXT. GATED COMMUNITY – MOON TOWNSHIP – LATER THAT DAY


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

PREMA
He’s one of them.

BENNET
He’s in pain.

PREMA
Can we trust him?

BENNET
I don’t think we have a choice.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM – NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE – MANHATTAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

And as Jones disappears we follow Duerson into the elevator–
EXT. 280 PARK AVE - MANHATTAN - AFTERNOON RUSH

Duerson spins out of the NFL building.

A VOICE (O.S.)
Dave! It’s me, man. Andre Waters.
(jaw tightening, because–)

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

DUERSON
How you doin man?
(knows all too well)

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

DUERSON
There are five other trustees. You talk to them?

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

DUERSON
File the appeal.

WATERS
You denied the appeal. You look alright--

(Duerson’s aching for daylight)
Dave, look at me, man.
(MORE)
WATERS (CONT'D)
(and gets in front of Duerson)

Jesus.

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

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

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

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

WATERS
‘Deny, deny, hope they die.’ That’s what we say about you. Your goddamn motto.

Dave, I’m sorry. Remember? When we were kids, playin is what we **lived**, for, man!
(talking to Duerson’s back because--)

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

WATERS (CONT’D)
I don’t got another play left!

Dave!

(then)

Somebody help me!

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

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

“Eagles Defensive Back Andre Waters, 44, commits suicide”--

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

WECHT

(reading to Bennet)

“--known as ‘Dirty Waters’, notable for his aggressive style of play--

(and FLASH TO--)

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

Otherwise MUTE, under--

WECHT

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

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

EXT. CEMETERY - RURAL FLORIDA - DAY

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

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

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

Hey! Get over here--!

(on top of Bennet now, breathing labored)
Why’d you do that, man?

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

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

INT. BAILES’ HOME - EVENING

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

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


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

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

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

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

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - PITTSBURGH - DAY

Bailes pulls up in his Porsche, parks. Crosses the street. Gritty industrial Pittsburgh.
A woman in the window feels him, turns: a changed Keana Strzelczyk. Thinner. Tired. As Bailes hesitates, then goes in, we go back to--

INT. WATERS FAMILY HOME - SUNNY ISLE, FL

Bennet and Mrs. Waters.

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

And reaches in her bag

WATERS’ MOTHER (CONT’D)
I’m going to read you something. The last thing he wrote me.
(reading from a letter)
“...There isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t thank God for blessing me with you as my mom. Happy Mother’s Day. Your son, Andre M. Waters.”
(then)
His signing bonus, he bought me this house. He bought all his brothers cars. He was the sun and we were planets.

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

WATERS’ MOTHER (CONT’D)
After he gave me this card, he said, “Ma, I’m ready to go.” He knew people started thinking he was crazy.

BENNET
Not crazy. He’d already become someone else--

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

WATERS’ MOTHER
Suicide. He took it out of God’s hands. He was sick.

BENNET (CONT’D)
He definitely had this disease? Because I want to believe that. Because you’re not supposed to put your own child in the ground.

(MORE)
WATERS’ MOTHER (CONT’D)
Nature’s not supposed to work that way.

(--) 
Now. You want what’s left of my son? Because Dr. Omalu, I don’t want to feel another thing I have to survive. Don’t let me feel hope, then not have this come out right. 
(and takes his hand)

BENNET
I understand, yes--

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

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

BENNET (CONT’D)
And please lead us to the truth. Soothe this family with your grace.

WATERS’ MOTHER
In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Then she abruptly stands. Drying her eyes.

WATERS’ MOTHER (CONT’d)
I’m going to get us some coffee. 
(and exits, and back to--)

122
EXT. COFFEE SHOP - PITTSBURGH

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

BAILES
You look good. How are the kids?

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

BAILES
I’m sorry I couldn’t make the funeral.

KEANA STRZELCZYK
No one made it to the funeral.

Then.
BAILES
You heard about Mike Webster.

And she just looks at him. She heard.

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

(--)
What do you really want to ask me,
Julian?

(and now a hard cut to--)

A122 OMIT

(123 & 124 ARE NOW A81 & B81)

125 BENNET WALKING IN DARKNESS

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

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

126 INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - NIGHT

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

127 INT. BASEMENT LAB - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER

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

BENNET
(introducing)
This is Dr. Wecht.

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

Bennet hands Bailes a short stack of slides.

Hands Bailes a short stack of slides.

BENNET (CONT’D)
Andre Waters.
Bailes goes to the microscope. Bows, peers in.

Now Bennet hands him--

BENNET (CONT’D)
Justin Strzelczyk.

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

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

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

WECHT
What were you thinking?

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

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

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

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

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

BENNET (CONT’D)
Three cases is the scientific burden of evidence. We have four. (MORE)
We are past what the NFL can and cannot deny. It’s bigger than they are. Now they have to listen to us.


INT. ALTIUS RESTAURANT - PITTSBURGH - NIGHT

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

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

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

BENNET
He wanted to do this two hours ago.

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

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

BENNET (CONT’D)
Would you like a drink?

MAROON
I said five minutes.

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

MAROON
Your conclusions are a total misinterpretation of facts. To say Webster and Long and Waters were killed by football is--
BENNET
Fallacious reasoning. Yes, I know.
And maybe you haven’t heard, Dr.
Maroon. But the world is not flat.

Maroon vibrates with rage.

MAROON
(to Bailes)
Where’s he going with this?

BAILES
Just hear him out--

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

MAROON
Who do you think you’re talking to?

BENNET
Excuse me?

MAROON
I was President of the Congress of
Neurological Surgeons.

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

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

(--)  
But he died. Everything broken.
Their lives ruined.

(then)
You took an oath. Tell the truth!

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

(MORE)
MAROON (CONT'D)
We ship players to war zones to entertain the troops--
(nods down at Heinz Field, and crescendoing--)
The ownership of this football club has given millions to charity. The NFL runs clinics on child obesity. You want me to go on?

BENNET
It’s not necessary--

MAROON
It is necessary. Some of our players would be what without the NFL? Where would their kids be? Do you know where most of these guys would be?

BENNET
Alive.

Maroon looks at him, exasperated.

MAROON
The NFL is the most popular sport in America because it is goddamn fantastic. You think they make people play? People want to play.
(point outside, down there, at Heinz Field, glowing)
Right there is the beating heart of this city. Not the symphony. Not the ballet. Every city the Steelers play in, it’s the same.
(--)
What do you want us to do, end it? Fold the National Football League?

BENNET
(his not even answering that question--)
Solve the problem. Solve. The Problem.

MAROON
Who are you?
(to Bailes)
He performs autopsies. He’s a pathologist--

BENNET
Yes, a mere pathologist. That is so.
Long heavy silence. Then--

**BAILES**
And what if he’s right? What if it’s true?

Maroon HOLDS Bailes in place with a glare. Then, back to Bennet--

**MAROON**
Do you understand the impact of what you’re doing?

**BENNET**
Yes--  
**MAROON (CONT’D)**
(forceful; angry again)
Do you understand the impact. Of what you are doing? (because obviously Bennet could not possibly)

**BENNET**
I said I did--

**MAROON**
Let me tell you. Because you clearly do not. (now)
If just 10-percent of mothers in America-- (and stops, gathers himself)
Did you ever play football?

**BENNET**
No.

**MAROON**
It taught me everything I know about loyalty, teamwork, endurance, sacrifice. (then, leaning in)
If 10-percent of mothers in America decide football is too dangerous for their sons to play, that’s it. It is the end of football. Kids. Colleges. Eventually, it’s just a matter of time, the professional game.

Pause, then--
BAILES
Joe. He’s not in the outcome business.

MAROON
He has no business--

BENNET
And do you know what history does to people - trained physicians - who ignore science--?

Maroon tries to interject.

BENNET (CONT’D)
SIR, I AM NOT DONE--!

Maroon shocked to silence.

BENNET (CONT’D)
History laughs!
(then)
Deny my work, the world will deny it. But men will continue to die. And families will go on being destroyed.

Maroon looks hard to Bailes, then Bennet. And his proposal--

MAROON
Are you sure you want to do this?

BENNET
I could ask you the same question.
(a pause, then--)

MAROON
I’ll get back to you.
(and fast he’s out of his seat and heading out--)

Leaving Bennet and Bailes alone. A long moment of silence.

BAILES
Well, that went well.

And the two of them are left staring down at Heinz Field rising massive like the Roman Coliseum out of the city’s beating heart. Now we START TO HEAR IN PRE-LAP--
JONES (PRE-LAP)
(reading)
--After examining the remains of former National Football League player Andre Waters, a neuropathologist in Pittsburgh, Dr. Bennet Omalu, is claiming that Mr. Waters had sustained brain damage from playing football and he says that led to his depression and ultimate death--
(continuing over--)

129

INT. COMMISSIONER’S SUITE – NFL OFFICES – DAY

Jones stands before Tagliabue, reading the paper aloud.

JONES
It gets worse.
(then)
Dr. Julian Bailes, medical director for the Center for the Study of Retired Athletes and the chairman of the department of neurosurgery at West Virginia University, said, “Unfortunately, I’m not shocked.”
(looks up--)
There’s more Omalu. More Bailes.

TAGLIABUE
Bailes. Why do I know that name?

JONES

TAGLIABUE
Oh wow.

JONES
Yeah. Wow.
(then)

131

OMIT

132

OMIT
133 **INT. BOARD ROOM – NFL HEADQUARTERS – DAY**

TRACK Tagliabue and Jones crossing from their suite to a set of heavy oak doors. The doors open, and as they enter, we GlimpSE over their shoulder a long luxurious table encircled by a dozen WHITE MEN waiting in grim silence. You can smell the privilege, the power. *Ownership*. And as the doors close us out--

134 **JONES AT A LECTERN**

JONES

--his 17 years as Commissioner of the National Football League comprised the most lucrative and stabilizing reign perhaps in the history of pro sports--

(and we PULL BACK to reveal we’re--)

135 **INT. BREAK ROOM – ALLEGHENY COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER – DAY**

Wecht, Sullivan and the Techs, all watching the TV, and a hastily arranged “press conference”.

Bennet enters.

SULLIVAN

Nice going, Bennet. You killed off the commish.

Bennet confused, elated. As, to Jones’ left we now see Tagliabue. To his right is incoming Commissioner ROGER GOODELL, 47 and sandy-haired.

TAGLIABUE/TV

Roger has worked for the NFL since he was 21.

(--) He lives football, breathes football, but he’s younger, more handsome--

(laughter, then, serious--)

(MORE)
And understands how to take
‘America’s Game’ into the future.
There is a new sheriff in town--

Upon which Wecht walks in.

As Goodell takes the lectern. Folksy, telegenic in that
Clintonesque way.

Sullivan & Wecht exchange a look.

The NFL isn’t just a sports league. It’s an entertainment product. What
I’m here to do now, my main
responsibility, is to protect the
shield, America’s Game.

--I want us to go on enjoying our
great game knowing our kids love
it, respect it, never stop having
fun--

They heard. They’re listening.

Sure. Morning in America. A new day
in the NFL.

He looks like your drinking buddy.

While, on TV, Pellman appears, glum, beside Goodell.

And there’s your buddy, Pellman,
again. The knee man from
Guadalajara.

(also leaves, as)

Roger Goodell’s been at the
forefront of every major decision
the NFL has made over the past
dozen years. His biggest challenge
now? Keeping the good times rolling
for a $6-billion a year business.

You’re screwed now.

(and walks out)
GRACIE
Julian Bailes is on the phone--

And Bennet crosses to the phone, picks up--

BAILES/PHONE (OVER)
Turn on the TV.

BENNET
(into phone)
I’m watching it right now.

BAILES/PHONE (OVER)
He’s shaking up Pellman’s brain injury committee. They’re asking for a concussion summit, a full presentation. In Chicago. Next week.

On Bennet’s face--

BAILES/PHONE (OVER) (CONT’D)
We have our chance, Bennet.

136 OMIT

137 EXT. WESTIN HOTEL - O’HARE AIRPORT - CHICAGO - NIGHT/ESTABLISHING

One of the big ones out by the airport. Constant whine of jet-wash. It’s snowing. Really starting to come down.

138 INT. LOBBY/BAR - WESTIN HOTEL - O’HARE AIRPORT - LATE NIGHT

Generic franchise room. Muzak, formica tabletops and mid-layover SALESMEN.

We find Bennet and Bailes in a corner booth doing a presentation run-through. Laptop open on Power Point. Bennet on his second drink. Bailes into maybe his third. Looking at it all as if at blueprints for D-Day. Bennet jacked. Bailes knows half his men are going to perish.

BENNET
(reciting)
“The facts speak for themselves.
(MORE)
These brains, strangled by protein unleashed by repetitive head trauma related to football, tell an irrefutable story—"
(and looks up, Good?)

BAILES
Maybe throw in some football stuff. Not medical terms. Things we say--

BENNET
Why do I need to say what they say? I thought that’s why we’re here.

BAILES
You have, what, seven degrees? Eight? You’re one of the smartest people they’ll ever meet.
(--) You know what? You’ll be fine.

Bennet takes Bailes in.

BENNET
How about you? What will you be?

Bailes fumbling with an INSERT picture of MIKE WEBSTER, bent, half-squatting, eyes tethered to the eyes of the nose-guard in his face, furiously focused. And now a TIGHT on Bailes. As we PUSH IN, his face growing in frame--

BAILES
It can be a boring, violent, stupid game. And it can be Shakespeare. The game looks like life. I know you can’t see how beautiful that all is – I don’t blame you.
(then, reverie done) But this isn’t fun for me. Everyone we’re going to see tomorrow I know personally. That feeling you get when someone you love and respect screws you over? They will have it. And there’s not a damn thing I can do about it.

We’re in on his eyes now. Maybe what he’s seeing. And out of his reverie--

BENNET
You already did that yourself.
(Bailes looks up, What?) When you picked up the phone. (MORE)
BENNET (CONT'D)
And you called me.
(now--)

BAILES
Christ. They’re here.

Bennet confused, follows Bailes’ gaze to the bar. Where a cluster of NFL officials have arrived. Pellman, Maroon, Jones, couple others. Pellman the schlubby one.

Goodell crosses and joins them for a word with Jones. Jones whispers in Goodell’s ear. Maroon pivots, turns his back, waving for the bartender. Says something to Pellman. Pellman laughs.

BAILES (CONT’D)
(under his breath)
He’s such an ass.

But opaque, tight, Bailes shuts the laptop. On his face, the violent collision of choice and consequences.

BENNET
We better get some sleep.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - WESTIN O’HARE - NIGHT

Bennet’s sitting on the bed against the wall in his clothes. We’re TIGHT on his face. A kind of nervous excitement and dread. He will not sleep tonight.

And we HEAR a firm RAP on the door, and Bennet’s head turns, and we cut to--

HIS HOTEL ROOM DOOR - MORNING

It opens. Bailes is standing in the hall in a suit. And we SWING AROUND and find Bennet in the same. Cinching his tie.

It’s the next morning. Bennet’s suit is immaculate. Pocket square. There’s an ironing board out. He’s freshly ironed everything. He’s nervous as shit.

BAILES
We need to talk.

Bailes steps in. His expression like he just bit down on something rancid.

BENNET
What’s wrong?

BAILES
There’s no easy way to say this so I’m just going to say it.
(MORE)
BAILES (CONT'D)
They aren’t going to let you speak.
They don’t even want you in the room.
(--)
I told you. They will not accept you as the face of this issue.
(--)
They want me to do it.

Pause. Bennet shocked. **Rocked.**

BENNET
One of their own.

BAILES
Yes.

BENNET                      BAILES (CONT'D)
They want to pretend-- You don’t exist.

BENNET
You said Goodell is good--

BAILES
They still have to sit there and listen.

BENNET
To you.

BAILES
Yes, me. You blew up their world.

BENNET                      BAILES (CONT'D)
And yours.               Yes. Mine.  *

BENNET
And how can an African know this subject better than them?

Bennet looks at him a long moment. Fish or fowl? Us/them?

BENNET (CONT’D)
Or better than you?

Bailes stunned. Confused. Now livid, explodes--

BAILES
(that power/hostility held in reserve surfacing--)
Wait a second ... You think this is about Bennet Omalu? I’m not here for you. I’m here because people are dying--
BENNET
You’re here for redemption! You’re here to use me to cleanse your sins!

BAILES
You self-righteous bastard! Do you have any idea what I could have, how much I could have, if I went back to my side of the ball? Just kept quiet? Everything in my world is telling me not to agree with you. Except one thing - science. So I’m here. Not down there in that audience. Up here, beside you. What do you want from me? How much more can I do?

And HOLD on them a long beat. And Bailes is right. And Bennet knows it, is ashamed. And is going to take it in the ass because it’s the only thing to do--

BENNET
You’re right, I’m sorry. Go. Take it. All of it. And you convince them, Julian--

BAILES
I’m sorry--

BENNET
Convince them, Julian--
(and as Bailes turns and marches down the hall)
Convince them!
(now cut to--)

INT. HOTEL FOYER – DAY

The huge, weird hub of three different enormous conference rooms. Empty. A MAINTENANCE PERSON is pushing a vacuum.

Bennet stands against one of those removable accordion walls. Trying not to look at his reflection in the wall of mirrors. Trying not to stare at the double doors to the conference room. Where it’s all happening.

Pacing now.

As a BEEFY PLAINCLOTHES SECURITY GUARD (NFL? Hotel?) crosses the expanse, approaching--
SECURITY
Sir, this is a private function.
You’re not supposed to be in this area.

BENNET
You’re right, I’m supposed to be in there--
(in THERE, past the big dude)

SECURITY
I’m going to have to ask you step away and return to the lobby with the other guests.
(and he’s in Bennet’s face now)

BENNET
Don’t put your hands on me! Get your hands off me!

Now the double doors push open at us. Football officialdom is on its feet in there and starts to pours out. Bennet’s POV locks on the one black man.

Duerson, vibrating with rage. Right up in Bennet’s face--

DUERSON
My father can’t remember a goddamn thing. And he never played a day of football. He was too busy working.
In a factory. You quack. You think I’m some boy you can control? Take your bullshit science, go back to Africa, and get away from our game--
(and moves on, and--)

Bennet, stunned, can see Pellman back in the conference room with Goodell and Jones--

And Jones looks up, and they HOLD a look. And we’re in SLO-MO, and Jones slowly blinks, turns away, and--

The doors swing close, leaving Bennet looking at Bailes. Bailes is sweaty. Stunned. Like he’d been punched in the face.

BAILES
Roger Goodell just said Justin Strzelczyk may have gotten his concussions swimming. In a swimming pool.
(them)
(MORE)

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BAILES (CONT'D)
It was a set-up. They needed to say they heard us. So they can goddamn bury us.

Bennet HEARS nothing but a low-grade hum. Bailes slips out of frame as Bennet floats past Bailes into--

OMIT

OMIT

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM

And stops. Because Goodell, Pellman, Maroon and Jones are setting up for a summing-up. News conference. National cameras. Background with NFL logo hung dropped behind the lectern. As Goodell takes his place, adjusts his mic--

GOODELL
This is an important day in the National Football League. We’ve had some very good dialogue, which will help us improve the care for our players.

REPORTER 1
What do you think when you hear about former NFL players who are suffering from symptoms that have only been seen in boxers or people over 80-years old? What does that say about the effect of concussions on players?

GOODELL
I’m not a doctor here. But you have to look at their entire medical history. From my standpoint, not being a doctor, that just makes logical sense. You’re seeing some great scientists and doctors, who have done terrific work in this area, sharing information. They don’t all agree. The NFL has had a committee of expert doctors and scientists going on this for 14 years. This is an evolving science and that’s okay.

We’re pushing in on Bennet, listening to all this, watching it all evaporate. Pellman jumping in--
PELLMAN
While I agree with the Commissioner, as I was discussing with other NFL medical personal, no empirically determined proof was presented today. Because there simply isn’t any. The truth is—and we will be delivering this directive to our players—that current research with professional athletes has not shown that having more than one or two concussions leads to permanent problems, if each injury is managed properly.

Bennet starts to back away, as--

REPORTER 2
Are you comfortable with the level of care for former players?

GOODELL
I don’t know about comfortable. I’m not sure I understand what you mean.

Bennet turning now, exiting as the news conference drones on--

REPORTER 1 (O.S.)
Do you think the league is currently doing enough for players, or do you think you can do more--?

And as the pile-on grows and crescendoes, and now FADES, FADING IN, in PRE-LAP--

NFL FILMS NARRATOR (PRE-LAP)
(operatic baritone)
From whistle to gun, there are enough major collisions in pro football to stock a junkyard for a century--

Bennet has left the room, gone, the doors flapping behind him--

NFL FILMS PROMO REEL (4-WALLED)
Two BALTIMORE RAVENS ready for a play by BUTTING HELMETS repeatedly. This SLO-MO, under a swelling elegaic score, as if two mythic rams. Now--

NFL FILMS NARRATOR (OVER)
Hitting is what separates player from player. One team from another. Pretender from contender. (MORE)
And chumps from champions--

to--)

A montage, MUTE - cuts of BIG HITS. Only the sound of
helmets/pads crashing, men grunting, gnashing--

NFL FILMS NARRATOR (OVER) (CONT'D)
And it is this, of course, that has
always been part of football's
appeal. Cinematic, like a war movie-

Now churning arms and legs. Punctuated by frames of receivers
and others taking devastating hits. The hit frames synched to
the rhythm of the music.

NFL FILMS NARRATOR (OVER) (CONT'D)
A league where the meek do NOT
inherit the turf. A game of
thunder! and destruction!

(now cut to--)

BERNIE GOLDBERG/NARRATING (PRELAP)
According to the NFL's own numbers,
half of all players with
concussions, were being sent back
into the same game. Including some
who were actually knocked out cold.
We asked the head of the NFL’s
committee on concussions at the
time, if that was a good idea.

((now to--)

146  OMIT

147  TV 4-WALLED - HBO'S 'REAL SPORTS' WITH BRYANT GUMBEL (ACTUAL
FOOTAGE)

And CORRESPONDENT BERNIE GOLDBERG.

BERNIE GOLDBERG
That could lead to medical
problems, no?

IRA CASSON
Returning to play when you
shouldn’t return to play? There’s
no clear evidence that has led to
medical problems, if that’s what
you’re asking me.
And a cut over to his interview: 60ish, tweedy dresser, shaggy ring of white hair. “Dr. Ira Casson, newly-appointed NFL Medical Director”.

BERNIE GOLDBERG/NARRATING
Back in 2007, Ira Casson, was head of a team of NFL doctors who had looked into the issue, and determined that the concern over head injuries, was over blown.

PREMA (O.S.)
(muttering in Swahili)
Wao wana kichaa! Kuma nina. Fala!
(and REVERSE to find)

BERNIE GOLDBERG
(addressing Casson)
Is there any evidence, as far as you’re concerned, that links multiple head injuries among pro football players with depression?

CASSON
No.

BERNIE GOLDBERG
With dementia?

CASSON
No.

BERNIE GOLDBERG
With early onset of Alzheimer's?

CASSON
No.

BERNIE GOLDBERG
(disbelief creeping in)
Is there any evidence as of today that links multiple head injuries with any long-term problem like that?

CASSON
In NFL players?

BERNIE GOLDBERG
Yeah.
CASSON

No.
(and HOLDING Goldberg’s
near-smirk, we go to--)

Bennet. Head in hands. And just when we think this cannot get
worse, we start HEARING in PRE-LAP:

GOODELL/TV (PRE-LAP)
The first pick of the Houston
Texans--!
(and cut hard to--)

149 FOOTAGE - NFL COLLEGE DRAFT - RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL, NYC

GOODELL

Amobi Okoye! Defensive lineman from
the University of Louisville--

As Goodell shakes hands with Bennet’s cousin, Amobi, sweet-
smiled mountain of a man. We watch a TIGHT of Amobi, huge
grin, holding up his new jersey, “OKOYE - 91” - as he’s being
drafted.

Then PULL BACK TO REVEAL we’re--

A149 INT. BENNET’S CONDO

Bennet watching the circus-like spectacle on his TV. Now head
in hands. Now shuts it off.

It’s late. Quiet. Bennet stops at the kitchen table. Dream
House material - floor plans, paint color charts, brochures
for brick face - spread before him.

Weary, as he taps it all into a neat pile, and in a single
TRACKING SHOT we follow him to the window. Where we take
in the back of St. Benedict illuminated high atop the church,
above us all. Now into the bedroom, where he stands watching
Prema sleep.

Then gets to his knees, his face by Prema’s belly--

BENNET

Hi. This is your father.
(what to say? so insecure)
I am in deep shit. I haven’t done
anything wrong, but I am being
punished. Your mother and I are
being tested. It might be not so
good out here when you arrive. You
are still with God.
(MORE)
BENNET (CONT'D)
Your face is still the face of God.
Please tell God to help me.
(and closes his eyes, and-)

We slide to Prema’s face. Eyes open. Awake. Listening. Then--

INT./EXT. PREMA’S CAR (MOVING)/MOON TOWNSHIP - DAY

Prema driving herself there for first time alone. More pregnant. Humming to a pop song on the radio. Clarion voice.


And it’s still keeping pace. She stops singing. She turns. It turns. She turns again. It keeps going.

She keeps going.

It reappears.

Now she’s there. In the neighborhood. Grass. Shrubbery is in. She looks over at their home. Then the rear-view. Car’s gone.

150 OMIT

151 OMIT (152-155 MOVED TO AFTER 161)

156 OMIT

157 INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - DAY

Sullivan leading Bennet upstairs. Before the top he stops them in the stairwell.

BENNET
Why does Cyril want to see me?

SULLIVAN
Hopefully to fire you.
(and they head into--)

158 INT. WECHT’S OFFICE - ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - DAY

Where Wecht is waiting with two FBI AGENTS.

BENNET
What is this?
Bennet now looking from Wecht to the Agents. Goes still, as an animal will at the scent of danger. Then--

WECHT
I am being relieved of my duties.

BENNET
I don’t understand.

AGENT
Dr. Wecht is being indicted on eighty-four Federal counts, including--

WECHT
Eighty-four Federal counts. Mail fraud, wire fraud, and related offenses arising from his use of government resources to benefit his private practice. Sending personal faxes, mileage vouchers, misusing office stationary--

BENNET
Faxes?

WECHT (CONT'D)
Faxes.

BENNET
They couldn’t come up with something that stupid in Nigeria.

AGENT
Using public property for private gain.

BENNET
You do know the man has been a public servant for decades--

AGENT 2
Have you ever performed any private services on county time?

A pause as Bennet does the math. Then realizes--

BENNET
Do you mean the death row case? I was on my time! I saved an innocent man’s life.

WECHT
Apparently we’ve both hurt the government’s feelings.
(then)
This has nothing to do with him. (meaning Bennet)
AGENT
We don’t want you, Dr. Omalu. But we can have you.

BENNET
What does that mean?

Everything all at once. Bennet’s walls crashing around him.

WECHT
They are going to want your testimony.
(and some sort of gesture tells him--)

BENNET
Against you?
(the silence says yes; turning to the agent)
Is this because his name was on my research?

AGENT 1
(dead-pan)
What research is that, Dr. Omalu?

Bennet HOLDs his look. A stare-down. A long beat, then--

BENNET
(this is bullshit--)
I’ll resign first.

AGENT 2
In which case your immigration status will be revised. Since your status requires full-time employment.

BENNET
(so absurd he actually laughs)
I’ll get another job in some other city.
(and very - too - quickly)

AGENT
That would be fine.

INT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - DAY

Sound and light as if from the bottom of a pool. Muffled. Slow. Prisms. Up the stairs into his--
INT. BENNET’S OFFICE - COUNTY CORONER - DAY

Bennet enters. Wecht trails in after him.

WECHT
I said make us both come out okay, not professional ruination.

And takes in, maybe for the first time, Bennet’s little shitbox of an office. The shitty high-school microscope.

WECHT (CONT’D)
This is a terrible goddamn chair. (looks around; the computer) You had to buy that, too?

BENNET
Everything.

WECHT
I didn’t do good enough by you.

BENNET
They won’t make me say one word against you.

WECHT
What’s there to say? Cyril Wecht’s a loud-mouth asshole? Yeah, well. I don’t care. I’m tired. My balls are low--

Then. Why he’s really here--

WECHT (CONT’D)
Look. Whoever - whatever - takes my place - everything is up for grabs now. (Bennet isn’t reading him) The CTE material - Webster, Long, Strzelczyk, Waters--

BENNET
And?

WECHT
And maybe the Allegheny County Medical Examiner suddenly develops a storage problem. And certain brain matter is suddenly taking up too much space. I won’t be able to protect it. Or you. (then) (MORE)
So I asked Sullivan where it all was. He had no idea.
BENNET
Because it’s in my coat closet.

Wecht stares at him a beat.

WECHT
You’re a goddamn renegade, you know that?
(then)
What if they get a warrant?

BENNET
On suspicion of what, science?

Wecht laughs. Then, the bottom line--

WECHT
We got screwed. You don’t deserve it.
(--) Know what the worst part is? How easy it was.

BENNET
(look at me--)
I can’t go back to Nigeria. All I am is here. My child is going to be born American.

WECHT
(don’t worry so much--)
I’ll get you a job. You can work in the prison laundry with me.
(starts to leave, then, fuck it)
Call the surgeon. We need a goddamn drink.

INT. CHINATOWN INN – PITTSBURGH – A LITTLE LATER

We’re following Bennet wobbling slightly through the narrow passage from men’s room to the bar.

It’s lunch-time. Bailes and Wecht lean waiting for him. Our guys are drunk. Bennet stares at the fish--

BAILES
I’m telling you there’s only one thing they’re thinking about now: how many more years of clean profit they can squeeze out of professional football.
Before they have to put a warning label on the sport.

BENNET
(and mimics)
“The Surgeon General Has Determined that Playing Football is Dangerous to Your Health.”
(his glass)
Johnny Walker--

BAILES
Before people stop buying team jerseys. The NFL’s already gaming this out, the merchandise, the cable deals, endorsement deals, advertising, when all that will start to skid sideways, then slide.
(then)
Did you know Tagliabue was law partner at Covington & Burling, the firm that represented the seven Big Tobacco companies?

WECHT
Of course he was.

BAILES
The law firm that now represents the National Football League.

WECHT
Of course it does.

BAILES
In my last year with the Steelers, the League moved a game from a Sunday to a Tuesday because of a blizzard. The League said it wasn’t worried about TV ratings because the NFL is immune even from acts of God.

Wecht is starting to give Bailes a dark look.

BENNET
(drinking)
And now here comes this Omalu, mere pathologist and foreigner of questionable background.

WECHT
Now highly deportable pathologist and foreigner.
BAILES
And then there is the National Football League--

BENNET
Immune from acts of god -

BAILES

Pause. They’re actually quite drunk. Wecht up-ends his bourbon. After a beat--

WECHT
Know how many people cigarettes killed since the warning label went on? 200-million. 5-million a year. But there are more smokers now than ever. People want what they want.

Pause.

BENNET
(dawning even on him)
Maybe this all makes football bigger. Maybe all this somehow means more, more money, more of everything.

Pause. Sobering--

WECHT
Because it’s the goddamn Roman Coliseum, right? And the people can’t get enough of the car crash of it all.

They drink. Contemplating that.

Wecht is staring at Bailes, as if at a traitor. Bailes can’t hold his look, turns away, as Bennet, under his breath--

BENNET
Until someone dies people give a damn about.

(then cut to--)
EXT. ALLEGHENY COUNTY CORONER - PITTSBURGH - DAY

Bennet at the cross-walk waiting for the light to change, returning from the bar.

A Police cruiser - sirens piercing - smashes by. Bennet turns to stare at it. Suddenly nervous. And instinctively turns. A pick-up truck has stopped alongside. The DRIVER - no one special - looks at him. Eyes meet. Bennet looks away. As the signal changes. And the car moves off--

Gracie’s broken away from the building, running to him, waving, as in a bad fucking dream--

GRACIE
Bennet!!
(now smash to--)

INT. EMERGENCY - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

Bennet in a scrum of EMTs and NURSES running Prema in. DOCTORS converging. Prema pale, weeping, as, on the run--

PARAMEDIC
30-year old female, G-1, P-zero, 18 weeks EGA pregnancy, heavy bleeding, suspected miscarriage--

INT. O.R. - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

Bennet’s hands on Prema’s face. DOCTOR searching with the ultrasound wand. As all eyes on the image. The space where the heart is - dark. A NURSE places a hand on Prema’s arm. A doctor says, Sorry. We SEE his mouth moving, but we’re in Bennet’s POV and he’s hearing nothing. He moves to Prema’s face, and holds it. Both of them crying.

BENNET
(to the room)
Will you please excuse us?
(and when they are alone)
I’m sorry I’m sorry. I made a mistake. This is my fault I’m sorry-

PREMA
This isn’t your fault--
(and then we--)

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INT. RECOVERY ROOM - PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

Bennet enters amidst the bouquets. “Your friends at the Coroner’s office”. He bends over Prema. Presses his forehead to hers. Sits. Takes in where they are. (All the places they are.)

BENNET
I wish I never met Mike Webster.

PREMA
Your work was beautiful. You are beautiful.

BENNET
But they destroyed us. I don’t understand why this is happening this way. What else do I have to do?

PREMA
Bennet. Look at me-- (and he does) Do you know what I chose to fake? (--) You.

By now he is crying.

BENNET
We will have this family.

PREMA
Yes, we will. (--) Just not here. (--) (It’s time to let go. And let God.)

OMIT

INT. HOME - MOON TOWNSHIP - DAY


Walks through his kids’ rooms. (There are two.) One already painted into a nursery.

His master bath. Dragging his finger along his marble.
Stops at the window. Transfixed by the McMansion across the street. Fresh shrubbery unwrapped, sod fresh. American Family in. KIDS, 7 & 11, bikes, DAD assembles a bbq, MOM’s unpacking the garage.

Now down the stairs into his lab. The space carved for his dissection table. His freezers. His.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hello? Mr. Omalu?

BENNET
(he’s so weary--)
Dr. Omalu
(and climbs to meet--)

The CONTRACTOR. Standing in his new living room.

CONTRACTOR
I just need the measurements for the flat screens.

BENNET
That isn’t going to be necessary. (and now--)

BENNET STANDING IN HIS FOYER

And closes the new raw-wood door. Grabs a 2x4. Turns looking at his walls. We don’t know what he will do. And - volcanic - he swings and--

BURES it in sheetrock. BAM! Again. And Again. BAM! Dust. Splinters. And as he swings--

We PULL outside the house, TRACKING IN REVERSE, house RECEDING IN FRAME, the perfect windows, the perfect yard, the baby foliage. GLIMPSES of Bennet in the window, swinging at the guts of the house. Then stopping. Slipping to his knees, weeping seething with rage--

As we keep going back. Rising, PULLING high and far from the cul-de-sac, the subdivision. Everything in front of us - the lots, the streets - so well designed. Such a good story. Now this.

And as we keep we--

DISSOLVE TO BLACK

And OVER BLACK SCREEN, we HEAR Bennet singing:
BENNET (PRE-LAP)
If ever you're in my arms again
This time I'll love you much better
If ever you're in my arms again
This time I'll hold you forever--

AND UP TO--

165 OMIT

166 OMIT

167 OMIT

168 INT./EXT. BENNET’S CAR/CENTRAL VALLEY — CALIFORNIA — DAY

Bennet — in a 2010 Mercedes sedan — crossing an ocean of Kansas-flat farmland. Dry and desolate. Tract after tract of arid farmland, ranch homes sticking up out of the landscape like tombstones. Mexican DAY-LABORERS and tractors.

And pulls up to--

169 EXT. SUBDIVISION — LODI, CALIFORNIA — DAY


The sun is high. The air is 105.

Bennet gets out with groceries and into--

A169 INT. BENNET’S NEW HOME — LODI, CALIFORNIA — DAY

Bennet playing with a TODDLER in the gravelly back yard. Blow-up pool. Kneeling in the dirt, putting in tomato trellises.

TIME HAS PASSED.

And Bennet looks up. He’s happy. Prema — pregnant with #2 — waves behind glass--

Then cut to--

B169 OMIT

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INT. MORGUE - LODI, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Humble pre-fab trailer. Blue-light fly zapper spilling dead bugs. The refrigerated room is bumper-cars with dead migrant laborers wrapped loosely in sheets. One poorly-trained ASSISTANT.

A single slab. Bennet rolls out his special instruments. Every death always is sacred: “Tell me how this happened, Jose.”

No one to tell him otherwise.

And begins his work. A fleck on his sleeve, and off comes his smock, and as he reaches for a fresh one--

INT. BEDROOM - BENNET’S NEW HOUSE - NIGHT

Bennet asleep next to Prema. His arm draped over her pregnant belly protectively. Their kid’s bed against the wall. Toddler calmly asleep.

DUERSON (PRE-LAP)

(manic, into phone)

My mind’s slipping, man. I can’t find the goddamn words--

The SOUNDS of footsteps shuffling on carpet. Heavy breathing. Pants. Grunts. And now UP TO--

INT. CONDO - SUNNY ISLES BEACH, FLORIDA - DAY

We find Dave Duerson pacing. On his cell. Into a mirror. Who is that? Where are you?
DUERSON
(manic, into phone)
Something seriously wrong with my head--

We SEE laid out on his kitchen table, an issue of Sports Illustrated. The cover piece says “CONCUSSIONS” (the word superimposed over Steelers linebacker JAMES HARRISON mercilessly spearing a receiver).


A portrait of himself in a Chicago Bears uniform.

DUERSON (CONT’D)
What? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Gotta do it. Give it to them. I’m sorry. I gotta I just can’t do this--

And drops the phone.

Now we see the gun in his other hand. .38 Special.

Duerson heads to his bed. Lays on top of it. Slips a clean white sheet over himself to the neck. We’re right over him. As he puts the gun muzzle to his chest. Eyes wide. Right to us: Goodbye. And--

CUT TO BLACK
Pause, then--

BANG!

OVER BLACK SCREEN
WE HEAR A PHONE RINGING. Two rings, three.

SNAP. Light comes on. Revealing--
BAILES/PHONE (OVER)
It’s Julian.
(and we INTERCUT Bailes in his robe in his kitchen–)
Dave Duerson killed himself today.

Bennet slips out of bed away from a sleeping Prema. Takes the phone into the hall.

BAILES
He shot himself in the chest,
Bennet. In the heart.

BENNET
Oh my god--

BAILES
He left a note. He said he was thinking about all NFL players. He wanted his brain donated. To be examined. He said we were right.

BENNET
He said that?

Bennet has gone to stand at a window looking out on his humble little street.

BAILES
Bennet? You there?

BENNET
For the brain’s last act to not just die, but preserve itself in the act of killing, to give an instruction to shoot into the chest – Julian, human beings don’t do that.

PUSH IN on Bennet. His grief and anger.

BAILES
Bennet. Dave Duerson killing himself – the way he killed himself – they can’t explain this one. It’s undeniable now. It’s all going to unravel.

And on Bennet blinking, trying to comprehend what Bailes is saying to him, we SMASH TO--
INT. BENNET’S NEW HOME – LODI, CALIFORNIA – DAY/EARLIER

Bennet in their modest bedroom. Before his cramped open closet. Flustered and overthinking the suits. O.S. the kid plays and laughs.

Prema enters. She’s pregnant.

Bennet pulls out a conservative gray suit.

PREMA
That is what they wear.
(and takes it from him and puts it back)

BENNET
What do I say to them?

PREMA
Who do you speak for? When you know who you speak for you know what to say and what to mean.
(pulls out a bold pin-striped suit)
Go and give them what belongs to them. Tell them what’s really happening.
(--)
Wear what you are.
(and we SMASH TO--)

BENNET’S FACE. HUGE IN FRAME. GAME FACE. SET.

WE PULL BACK TO REVEAL--

INT./EXT. LIMOUSINE (MOVING)/PALM BEACH – FLORIDA – DAY

Bennet in back. The DRIVER glancing at him in the rear-view. The phone STILL RINGING as we ADD and INTERCUT--

OUTSIDE THE LIMO, wide tree-lined streets. Expensive lawns. Golf courses. Who can Bennet be that he’s going where he’s going?--

THE LIMO PULLING UP TO THE BREAKERS HOTEL – PALM BEACH

And its turreted Versailles-like grounds. The only other non-whites move mowers and bags. If a plantation were a castle.

Sign board at entrance: “Welcome National Football League Players Association Special Concussion Summit.”

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INT. PRESIDENTIAL SUITE - BREAKERS HOTEL

With a terrace letting out on the Atlantic. A Louis XVI bed. Murals. A fountain. Bennet left alone to dust off. Standing in the center of the obscene room--

Chooses to iron his suit in his underwear. And shave.

Scraping his face, a tension surfaces. Eyes to hands. PUSH IN CLOSE on his hands. Blade bowing against his cheek. Until slicing himself.

He watches in the mirror the blood zag down his face. Then drop, and as it falls, as it splatters the sink, cut away to--

INT. GRAND BALLROOM FOYER

Bennet outside waiting against another mirrored wall. This one leafed in gold. Turns to the glass to cinch his tie.

TIGHT ON HIS COLLAR: smudge of blood. He touches it. Decides to leave it there. And turns to--

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - BREAKERS HOTEL

Bennet approaches the podium. And turns to 500 faces. Mostly players, former players, their families. But there is Jones and Pellman. NFL lawyers. Team doctors, player reps.

And the wives. We know who they are. Because they’re in their 40’s and 50’s. And because they are alone, no men beside them. Among them, Keana Strzelczyk. And her kids.

We find Bailes. He nods at Bennet, smallest nod of accomplishment.

Behind all that, toward the back: Mike Webster. Waiting, listening with intent.

Bennet takes out his speech. Glances at the pages. Then up at the audience. At Webster. In the suffocating silence.

He grips and leans into the podium. STARES out there, weighing the costs of what he’d like to say against what he might say. Capable now of anything--

BENNET
I don’t hate football. My wife has started watching it. I see the grace, the drama.
(a long pause)
(MORE)
I once said I wished I never met Mike Webster. I was wrong. He was committed, a captain, a warrior, quiet in his pain. He’s given us a gift. The gift of knowing.

In the place I come from, we take care of our warriors. And give respect to those with the power to heal them.

(his eyes stop on Mike Webster)
These men--

And stops. Looks away. Elsewhere. Finds Keana Strz, her kids. His eyes go back to Webster. And stay there.

--are not machines. Not commodity. Not video game figure. We loved them when they were heroes.

By dying they speak for the living. And I speak for them. That is all I do.

Forgive them. Forgive yourselves. Be at peace--

I thank you.

And now Bennet simply stops and walks off. Every face in the room turned his way. Here and there people have stood up. Players. Wives. As he exits.

Not Webster. As Bennet turns for the exit, he spots him sitting where he sat. We’re SLO-MO. Pulling away but hanging onto Webster. His hands on knees. Head down. Alone.

As Keana Strzelczyk, behind him, is weeping in silence. Her children, teenagers, cocooning her in their arms. They’re letting it go. Letting it all go. Bennet leaves all of them. And now--

INT. LIMOUSINE (MOVING)/PALM BEACH - FLORIDA - DAY

In the back, with the Breakers receding IN FRAME behind him.

As we HEAR, in PRE-LAP--
SENATOR JOHN CONYERS (PRE-LAP)

But what’s the answer? Is there a link between playing professional football and the likelihood of contracting a brain-related injury, dementia, CTE?

(and we cut to--)

ROGER GOODELL, PIXILATED, ON TV, HALF-HIDDEN BEHIND A WITNESS TABLE MIC

We’re in the Rayburn Building, U.S. Capitol. Behind Goodell, a packed gallery. Before him, an angry Congressional panel. And Conyers is visibly frustrated--

GOODELL
(bumbling)
We’re doing everything we possibly can for our players now.

SENATOR JOHN CONYERS
But what’s the answer?

GOODELL
The medical experts would know better than I with respect to that. But we are reinforcing our commitment--

(now ADDING--)

BENNET, IN LODI, WATCHING THIS ON HIS TV

Sitting like a pupil before the screen. Prema standing behind him like a sentry. The phone starts to RING. HOLD, then--

REP. LINDA SANCHEZ
(livid)
It reminds me of the tobacco companies sitting in this same chamber saying, ‘There is no link between smoking and damage to your health.’

A fucking Congressional warhead. Goodell flop-sweaty. And now we INTERCUT--

BAILES, watching this at his office.

WECHT, at the Chinatown Inn.

SULLIVAN and GRACIE, in the break room.
JONES, from his office.

AMOBI, on his iPhone in a football locker room.

The phone RINGING over all this, as--

REP. MAXINE WATERS
We have heard from the NFL time and time again. You are always studying. You are always trying. You are always hopeful--

And as we PUSH IN on Goodell, wearing a look of constipation. Then--

BACK TO Bennet’s home. His kid.

PREMA *
This is all because of you.
(--) *
You did this.

And as he turns now and looks out the window, at the sun-bleached street, the empty blue sky. As he looks around them at their humble digs. No dream house, this--

INT. RESTAURANT - HAY ADAMS HOTEL - WASHINGTON DC - DAY

Lunch crowd gone. Bennet sitting opposite DEPUTY MAYOR ALLAN HIRSCHORN, 50. Washingtonian conservative. A WAITER sets down a tray of coffee.

DEPUTY MAYOR
First time in Washington?

BENNET
Never had the time.

DEPUTY MAYOR
Well, we’re thrilled you accepted our invitation--

BENNET
Washington D.C. is the capital of this nation. Lodi, California is the capital of lettuce. I was curious.
(he smiles, and he does, he’s infectious--)

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DEPUTY MAYOR

(he pours herself coffee)

Chief Medical Examiner of
Washington, D.C.

(MORE)
DEPUTY MAYOR (CONT'D)
means you’d also consult with the
CIA and FBI, and any foreign
government requesting the
assistance of the United States
government.
(then)
Essentially, you’re America’s
forensic pathologist. You wouldn’t
have to put on scrubs, or perform
an autopsy. You’re beyond all that
now--
(as if that’s good news)

Bennet is looking out the window. To the Department of
Justice. The White House. Sidewalks hurrying with people in
suits who strap into the cockpits that fly the nation.

DEPUTY MAYOR (CONT'D)
Would you like to know about the
benefits package?

BENNET
I’m sure it’s fine.

The Deputy Mayor ponders him. Feels his dilemma.

DEPUTY MAYOR
We know what you did, Dr. Omalu.
You exemplify what it is to be an
American. You belong in the
nation’s capital.

And it starts to well in him, the whole road here--

DEPUTY MAYOR (CONT’D)
We’d like to offer you the job.

He is barely containing his emotions. She sees it in him,
looks away, giving him privacy, understanding--

DEPUTY MAYOR (CONT’D)
Why don’t you take a couple days
and think about it--?

B186* INT. BENNET’S NEW HOME - LODI, CALIFORNIA - NIGHT

Bennet’s overnight bag by the front door.

Bennet and Prema in the kitchen. She’s washing. He’s drying.
Their daughter at work at her doll house. Prema stops. Looks
at him. Bennet deep in thought. Until, finally--
PREMA
Are you going to tell me what you said?

BENNET
I didn’t say anything. They gave me a week to decide.

He wipes his hands. Takes in this humble house. His kids, her toys. His pregnant wife.

PREMA
It’s everything you wanted.

She’s not even sure about that. And neither is he now. And he turns. They HOLD a long look. Then--

187
INT. MORGUE - LODI, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Bennet at his work. Pauses by a body on the slab. Left hand alights on the forehead. Right on the cold gray hand.

Deep in thought. Then--

Bennet’s attention turns. Pulled from the humble autopsy chamber, we FOLLOW HIM into the hall. And REFOCUS on a TV playing on the CLERK’s desk. FADING IN--

REPORTER/TV (OVER)
--sports fans and, frankly, all Americans across the nation are stunned today by the suicide of 42-year old football Hall of Famer Junior Seau, one of football’s most beloved, revered, and feared, players, who this morning committed suicide. Seau shot himself in the heart--
(now we SEE)

Bennet. As his expression moves from shocked. To upset.
To calm. Confirmed. Now we follow him into--

**INT. BENNET’S OFFICE - LODI MORGUE - CONTINUOUS**

Bennet passes his medical degrees on the wall. All of them up there now. Framed and pretty. Plenty of room.

And changes into his shirt, and crosses through frame in extreme f.g., and recrosses, dressing, working, busy -- as we BEGIN A SLOW PUSH past him to the wall, where we find--

*Brain cases* stacked floor to ceiling.

And files, maybe a hundred: Tom McHale, 45, Tampa Bay Buccaneers...Nathan Stiles, 17, Spring Hill High School...Christopher Henry, 26, Cincinnati Bengals...Damien Nash, 25, Denver Broncos...Curtis Whitley, 39, San Diego Chargers...Greg Page, 50, boxer...Justin Levens, 28, boxer...Norman Hand, 37, New York Giants...

Bennet returns, changed into a suit, then--

**INT./EXT. BENNET’S CAR/CENTRAL VALLEY, CA - DAY**

His Mercedes cutting fast through the oceans of crops. Factories, ranches. Schools. A high school. Now - suddenly slowing--

Pulling alongside a junior varsity football practice. The kids - mostly Mexican - strapping on helmets. That nutcracker drill.

As other kids are winding down. Tossing the ball. Tossing water bottles. The adolescent knucklehead hazing of rangy leggy puppies. The game as rite of passage.

And we REVERSE ON BENNET. He forgets himself. It’s a little funny. *Kids*. Then--

Two players line up 15 yards apart, turn to face each other like bulls. And run. Bennet takes a step toward them as the kids hurtle forward erasing the space between them. *Faster.* INTERCUTTING Bennet and the blur. 5-yards and closing. 2-yards. And now--

FREEZE. A single frame before helmets collide in a devastating crow-to-crown blow. HOLD there, and over that--
Bennet Omalu turned down the Washington job offer. He remains in Lodi, California, with Prema and his two children.

Shortly after Hall of Fame linebacker, Junior Seau, shot himself in the heart, more than 4,500 retired NFL players sued the NFL for concealing the dangers of concussions.

The NFL proposed a settlement in which former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and Dr. Elliot Pellman would never be questioned under oath, and the League would never have to disclose what it knew about concussion-related brain problems, or when it knew it.

Last September, actuaries hired by the NFL concluded that 33% of all retired professional football players will suffer “serious cognitive impairment”, including CTE, in their lifetime.

All Federal charges against Dr. Cyril Wecht were eventually dropped.

TO BLACK.