



#kaepernick7



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Pomona, Calif.

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“In Record of Imprisoned Old Men: a Dissertation.”

by F.M. Reyes

>> part 16

NOTES:

A Transcription:

Yeah, that'll be fine. Thank you. [*takes a sip of water ... clears his throat*] My name is Jonathan Navarro. I'm eighty-nine years old and serving a life sentence for first-degree murder. I hereby forfeit my right to use any testimony contained herein, recorded in any form, in my own defense in past, present, or future litigation.

I have been asked, by a student of SocioCorps, to verbally recall my fondest memory prior to incarceration, to be documented as part of a collection of experiences of elderly Security Hold inmates. Before we began this interview, I was informed that I am, in fact, the oldest inmate currently on Hold.

This testimony is voluntary, and I will now speak of my own free will.

[...]

That good?

This is some business, isn't it?... [*coughs, another sip of water*] You're just a shit-prick kid. Now you wanna look-in on me? A fuck-weasel. You don't know shit yet about the scope of life, and you're just trying to cheat. Like it couldn't be *you* here, like you're *so* sure it *couldn't* be. You want vision on the field, that's something Coach told us, and vision sees the entire plane, with all of us on it—how it grows real big, bigger'n your fat-ass head, but shrinks real small sometimes too, smaller'n your prick.

Lemme tell you... I was a fucking Hawk. Best team on the West Coast, and far as I'm concerned, best in the World. The ol' national league's got nothing on the World Gridiron, the body-strain and talent are too great. And the Hawks aren't just the best American team, they're the best team *period*. *The shit*, the goddamn *shit*, you understand? Tear you up and make love on the bones. I'd give anything to watch just one more game—they don't pipe in the WGL matches here, too much distribution law, they say, and too violent— like this dungeon ain't mean, as if we ain't already condemned.

Which we are.

But this is before that.

Oh the Hawks... in my day, they were the best. And I was one of them, that's right. Drafted me in the third round, made the cut for second-string quarterback—as a rookie!—behind the great Lane Taylor, who, if you want the truth, was just another Texas queer parading around like he's some kind of gentleman.

Bullshit, I say. Fuck-weasel, just like you.

The WGL is a whole motherfucker.

Can't even get into it here, but I'm sure you've got a *team*, some *loyalty*, 'less your one of those Fantasy gam'ling whores. Prob'ly not, you don't seem like you got the stomach for even *that* action, but still, I bet you watch on Monday Night. I bet you get shit-piss drunk and scream 'til you spit at the screen on the Sunday o'the Supreme Final. But you ever been there, scrounged your dimes and paid-up for a ticket? No-way you have. 'Cause you're a broke-ass shit-weasel trying to earn credit with SocioCorps. Good luck with that, by the way. [*scoffs*] Oh boy oh man, you prob'ly can't even grasp it, kid. The *size* of it all. And you want a story? I'll

tell you about when I stood at the center of this MASSIVE spectacle; in the belly of the motherfuckin' beast, right there, center of the pitch, the sound of eruption confined to a coliseum, deafening but addictive.

It's difficult to grasp the magnitude of this thing... the sheer size of it, how *absolutely massive*. When you first walk into the stadium, that's just a preview, petty glimpse of what lies deeper; upon stepping through the Arcade and into the arena itself, the force of it strikes you—the lights are burning suns, casting a glow like noon, the din all-consuming. I can only compare the view to standing at the precipice of a great mountain range or deep-cut cliff, 'edge of the world' -type shit, shivering against some border as the wind tilts you forward so you believe that at any moment you will fall forever.

[finishes glass of water, in several gulps; motions for it to be refilled]

When I was a boy, oh I'd say about nine or ten, my daddy came home from laying roof-tile, or I should say, home from the dive *after* laying roof-tile, soused to the gills; rounded up the family—that's my mother, my two big sisters, and me—and drove eight hours, screaming drunk, swerving through the desert night to get a glimpse of the Grand Canyon. He just *had* to show us, my daddy kep' saying, had to show us what it was like. When we finally arrived the sun was just rising and that bastard father o'mine spun some awful yarns in his day, straight lied through his teeth, but about that, about that I must say, he had it right: it was the most glorious thing I'd ever seen, like God granting life right before you, all of its chaos and indecision, all the fighting and the romancing, all of it lit up at once, so you can see the totality of everything that it means to be alive in this small, forsaken world, carved blood-red&black at the bottom, golden at the surface, bursting into shades of blue beyond—the cracks of age, but so too the cut and breadth of era, suffering depicted by eroding rock. My mother cursed him the whole way, both of them high as even I'm yet to be, my sisters wailing all the while, but for just a second after the breach of dawn, everything fell silent, and we all stared at that endless display of the Lord's work.

—I'm telling you this, because the only other time I ever got that feeling, the greatest day of my shitty fuckin' life, was when I stepped into the Arena on a winter Sunday many years ago, the prime-time slot, fifty-thousand people in the stands and billions more watching at home around the world:

the SUPREME FINAL.

When this time I was swallowed by the temptation of glory. What the lights and voices appear to be, like walking up to the throne of Christ Almighty, the whole galaxy alight, the world in the stands. It's overwhelming enough as a spectator, but I'll tell you, to be on the turf, to kick the hashmarks and see the dust rise, it's a wave the size of the ocean itself. A little boy's

dreams run amok, a high I've never replicated—the crowd is a howling beast, and in His presence a primeval war unfolds... tribes clashing... families battling or neighborhoods colliding. It's all the same way. You know it is, don't look so confused, it's always been this type of tragic drama—just a roll o'the dice between love and fear, vicious and virtuous, an animal of Smart Power. Gladiator poems.

Ohhh, and with great pride I can tell you, *I* was center-stage; it was all on me, every one of those billions of eyes, if never else in all my years but for those last moments. What else could I do but bleed for them? Draw blood for them? Lane got hurt in the first half, busted his elbow something else, splintered the thing on a dirty chop, can't even remember the sonuvabitch's name that done it, but it pretty much damned our fates. Coach barely bothered with a halftime rouse. I vomited on my way out of the tunnel, and once more back at our sideline. Blew my nose on the towel tucked into my belt. Before that night I'd only ever played in one regular-season game, and that was just a run-the-clock situation. Shit, man, *I was jus' a fuckin' kid.*

They got the ball to start the third quarter, we're down twenty-eight/three at this point, and they just run until they get midfield, we get a break on a fourth-down spot and let their punter pin me waaaaay back. It's a shitty way to get it going, right outta the gates.

But Frankie Rogers finds a gap and plunges for five yards on first-down, to give me some space for a bootleg—I'm more comfor'ble outside the pocket, y'see, when I'm on the move. So I call it, scan their secondary but snap the ball before I check everyone's footing, their *lean*, like Coach taught, and after the play-fake their rightside backer crashes into me, and in a panic I throw my second interception of the game. Sonuvabitch returns it for a touchdown, and I *still* get clocked.

[*chuckles in self-pity, shakes his head*]

So after a touchback I get the ball on our own twenty, boos and curses abound, down thirty-five/three. Fucking *hopeless.*

[SUBJECT *watches the Intel as it records; glances up at INTERVIEWER then back at his surroundings; appears to find something amusing; drinks more water*]

But then the night becomes something else entirely,
by the grace of God,

and I swear to you, I swear, I felt it soon as that ball touched my fingertips from beneath the center's ass—that the moment breathed *my* same breath; that I made it so. That time was more than the digits on a screen, seconds on a timer, even

more than the years since I seen Christmas morning, like blowing up every instant soon as it bubbles to the surface—the minutes ticked as my grandmama died, the seconds while my baby girl was born, that was years before I got locked up, before the Pro League, even, that was still in high school. Oh, I was just a child. That ain't important here, but I tell you, when in space like that, time stretches to great depths, makes the sky look like snowflakes. But this time, this only time, I felt it on my fingertips; like clay.

Twenty-years ago I'd've told you it was confidence made me play that way, that it wasn't shit but grit'n'muscle. But you can see the muscle on me now: sagging like a wet rag, clinging desperately to cracked bone. Ain't nothing, I'm ashamed to say. Relics of life on an old man, little more'n that. But with age comes reflection, pride is blunted, and I'll tell you: I was terrified. Scared shitless, even, when that spirit struck; perhaps moreso because of it—how does one contend with destiny thrown in your face? I could let my team down, I could let myself down—had plenty o'times before then—but how does one live with letting down fate itself? How can I be *that* good?

Chems ain't enough, no sir. Ya'll already know about that, I'm sure it's no shock that muscle is fueled by blood, and some o' that blood streams with chemicals to defer the pain, to render obsolete the limits of our bodies. Shit, I heard of poppers that can make a desk-jockey run the 40 in less than 4-flat. We all know it and all of us dabbled, whaddyou expect? But if it mattered that much, we'd *all* do it *all* the time, and it would *always* work.

But it don't.

I ain't so stupid even though I've taken a beating;

I know the difference

between me on the field

and the suit in the box,

even if we pay the same for our steaks.

If it were just the chems then *anyone* could make it, so long as you fueled 'em up, drilled their response: they don't even need much background, just routine study with the right playbook—they draw-up numbers for all that, evolve based on each preceding season's statistics. The players are a plentiful resource. And some have tried it ... just like that, dope-'n'-go we called it in college, popping our way through film and twice as much for games; I know plenty o'coaches and G.M.s that didn't give a fuck, that would pay for the shit themselves, I even known one or two that wasn't afraid to go-ahead and pop *with* their players. Maybe somtimes it works—more than one of them won the Title. But more often than not, a soldier needs a soul, to survive and to overcome the darkest hour—and I can tell you here, when you see me squatting in this shit-brick prison, that it always hurt like hell, and like I said, I barely played on the big stage before that day. Hell, practice was plenty. It's terrifying, and these guys, these guys like me I mean, they thrive off the Fear. And this was the greatest Fear, this was Destiny outlining a path to

Glory, and I was on the scent. It caught somehow suddenly in the wind, thirteen miles an hour to the northwest. I remember soft-orange trickling over the stadium walls, falling into the stands and onto the field as the sun abdicates and the night takes reign—the best games are best under the lights: the colors brighter, shadows deeper, the whole thing more a grand opera than a child’s pick-up game.

So, sure, I probably wasn’t a-hundred percent sober— wasn’t through a good thirty years, at least. I ain’t bothered counting. But I *am* sober now, since just a little after I came into *this* fucking pen. But that don’t matter, is what I’m explaining.

[clears his throat; adjusts his seating, quick arch of his back, reset of posture]

It was above that. And I knew it the second the ball hit my hands off the snap, not on the first-down, I was actually sacked on that, the exchange fumbled and I had to grab it and drop quick and everything just collapsed on me. No, ... it was secon’ an’twelve, and Coach called a draw, the sound of defeat at the back of each word. I knew at that moment I was a fool, because no amount of chem-injections was gonna win this fucking game. But then Rogers zipped a hefty seven yards on the pointless draw. In the huddle I relay a deep-slant, let Frankie know I’ll either call for him to run an option route in the center or else have him hang back to block, if I thought they was gonna blitz. // *They was gonna blitz*, he tells me.

“One way or another you gotta see yourself tomorrow,” he says to me after we break.

“Jus’ make your mind-up quick, ‘cause I’m running to the line.”

Sure enough, I hike the ball and he takes off, an outside blitz pulling me inside— my first thought is to check it to Rogers, like he figured I would, but then right over his head I see Vyv Solomon break his man a good eight yards out—*booooy*, he was jus’ *flying*, that kid—so I fling it, praying Frankie doesn’t think it’s for him. We connect, and Solomon gets another ten yards after the catch, *just* the kinda chunk play we needed. We come back to the huddle laughing, and I don’t think anybody had smiled all goddamn day until right then. It wasn’t a joyful riot, mind you, but at least it wasn’t like being at your mother’s funeral anymore.

And it was *on*, baby. Oh it was *on*!

[SUBJECT shakes his head very slowly, as if in deep distracted thought; gurgles laughter a little bit, appears lost in recollection, going very still and grinning slightly, content in the quiet memory; suddenly and angrily slams an open palm on the table, to elicit fear]

What’s that?

You FUCKING shit-weasel. Fuck-rat.

Who d’you think you are? *[getting louder]* You weren’t there, no, nobody here *now*

was there *then*. 'cept me.

[*looking around, using his arms to beckon an imaginary army*]

Where's Frankie at these days? Vyv, *you* go call him.

Are they here today?

They'll tell you.

Oh shit! It was *on!* [*smacks the table again, and laughs*]

Hit Vyv once more on a comeback route, a first-down, then, sensing their frustration, on the next play I audible from a jumbo-set run to a halfback screen, and Frankie—*that* sonuvabitch—he takes it all the way to the house. No kidding. I run up to him, screaming and laughing, and we hug each other in the endzone like it was sugar in a salt mine, but everyone else, they weren't sold just yet. Shit, most of our fans had probably already left. But for me and Frankie right then, we both *knew*, and when Vyv jumped on our backs shaking his helmet at the crowd an' we felt like boys in the yard again, we all *knew* what was gonna happen.

I did, anyway—

[...]

—Bill Christie was an Old Man, like all the great kickers always are and forevermore will be—his leg didn't have that PUNCH like it used to, sure, but that damn ball went where the fuck his foot told it to go, and that counts for somethin'. So when Coach says to kick it onside, nobody bats an eye—nothing to lose at that point, anyway.

But when Billy recovers it *himself*, all forty-two years of him?!

Well, we all just lost our shit. You ain't ever seen a team so happy while losing so bad. [SUBJECT *wipes his eyes; he does not sob, but appears to be crying*] So that's what I mean. [*coughs up some phlegm, spits it onto the cement floor*] It was just right there, you know what I mean? You see it, too? [*snorts; straightens himself out*]

We're down thirty-five/ten, but we got the ball back and there's a chance to close the gap—yknow, I tell ya, most of us at that point were just playing for dignity, 'cause our whole year had been too tough to jus'surrender then; we didn't think there was actually a shot at winning. But I suppose that's what it's all about, y'know, really thinking you don't have a chance in the world.

But even now, boy, when I remember Uncle Bill pickin' up that bouncing ball... [*lips curl in suppressed glee*]

I think it makes sense to me all'a sudden. It was that word, 'furo.'

I've heard it before, in some old tales, but now I know—at the brink of death, you tell it, you... speak it so—a furor of mind, willing to drive forward into the abyss. The Furor, I remember thinking, how invigorating the Furor In This Game Of Motion.

[...]

Yes, of course I was angry before I started playing. Long before. The Game's got nothing to do with that. When it started, when *I* started, I was *always* angry, so I wanted to hit people, but also 'cause I was always so angry, I wanted people to hit *me*. That was it. Ain't much more difficult to understand than that: what sparked these events, all I wanted to begin with, was little more than the most basic facet of the Game, my purpose the whole time: human contact. It's a motherfucking *contact* sport. That's why I love it.

I know all your mumbo-jumbo crackpot shit. Trus' me, I've heard it all before. But sure. I dunno. Maybe that's all it was, what they were saying in the Journals... hell, d'you even read them, though? Does anybody? That doesn't matter. Don't change shit. Maybe all those aggression-analysis reports were worth a damn after all. They banned it in a few African countries, y'know, in the South Pacific Partnership, too, and Oceania was a split-vote, last I heard. Europa has protests at almost every match, so does America, even back in my day.

[SUBJECT *curls his lower lip and shakes his head dismissively*]

Doesn't matter. If I knew then what I know now, I'd do it a thousand more times.

[*either laughing to himself or beginning to cry again; regains composure*] I took the next few snaps as a different man. A better man, if only for the next few minutes, an hour tops. That just might've been the best I ever was, player or person or otherwise. [*pauses; appears distracted, tripping over short breath*] Hit our second-string tight end on a drag and he charged upfield for everything his dumbass could muster. I hit Vyv three times in a row on short gains—they had to know I was going for him every time, but it didn't matter none. He was a new man, too. On the fourth, we jus' said fuck it, and I bombed it to the rookie Villarosa, who was fast as hell but hadn't really done much except for a kick return score in week three. I overthrew that shit by what looked like *miles*, but somehow that wiry sonuvabitch dove at just the right moment, an' I swear to the Lord himself, it was as if that ball was meant to be in his hands; can't explain it any other way—he would've had to be ten feet tall to make that catch, but somehow that motherfucker did it; like distance was unreal, like the jump was dropping into sleep.

Touchdown. Seventeen to thirty-five. Their possession.

They march up to field-goal distance, but after a collision with the fuckin' Fortress himself, Pat Bowman, in the flesh—steel for bones, that guy, and a quiet terror

lurking in those eyes right before he clobbered you—the ball's fumbled, bounces this-way&that, then the Right End picks it up, I forget his name, but he takes off like his ass was on fire. Everyone was so confused, they never had a chance in hell. The crowd is crackling like fireworks, couldn't even hear our own voices—just feel the vibration in our throats. Uncle Bill split the uprights on the P.A.T.

Twenty-four/thirty-five.

I'd say that's when we *all* started to really believe, when the feeling spread. Fourth quarter was about to start. There was a commercial time-out, and together, for the first time in a while, all of us I think, we finally bothered to look up at the scoreboard. For a second I realized I had forgotten where I was, the size and scope, the magnificence of the world watching, and it all came to me then, but just for that moment, when we saw the score and thought that we could actually pull this shit off and we all believed in the same setup right then, it's one of the most beautiful things I've ever known, swear to god. // Then we were back, huddled together on the pitch or huddled together on the sideline, and the world seemed small again, and myself... I thought to myself... what if it isn't real? And it isn't, really, right? I know how you jackweasel rat-bastards are. Fucking Journal scum. But that's what you think—that it isn't real. Just images on the television. And I thought it, too, right then, I'll admit it, not like I ever admitted to anything else, (and I never will) so it set me free, and I saw for a minute what it is you must see all the time—when none of it's real; when it might as well be one of your stories. [*snorts*] When it *is* one of your stories. [*pauses... .. continues:*] I'll confess—in that moment, I felt the weight of such a conclusion, that none of it's the real deal. I see what they mean. What *you* mean.

Held them to a three'n'out, got a shitty punt in the wind, so we had good field position and all. Frankie takes it fifteen fuckin' yards on each of the next two plays, breaks through walls, defenders fallin' off'im like they're grabbing water. He brings us to decent position, there's a score on the horizon. We all saw it. We're midway through the red, play-action to Vyv on the slant and it's in the endzone just moments after I fire that shit off. Coach says convert for two, because at this point, fuck it, right?, and we run some silly-ass end-around; we all thought Coach had finally snapped when he called that one, but it worked, I kid. you. not. That shit worked! He told us after that one, while we laughed deliriously, that you gotta remember: it's just a stupid game. [*roars with laughter*] I tell you, that's exactly what he said, swear to god. And he was right, wasn't he? It's just a game, some bullshit that don't *really* matter. [*pauses, then calmly:*] None of it's real.

[...]

So it's thirty-two/thirty-five. There's been a stalemate for most of the fourth, and to be real with you, we was jus' tired. Fucking exhausted from catching up, but we got ourselves here, and like it was already written in a book, it comes to this.

Field goal ties the game.

Somehow:

on this, the gods agreed.

As this myth. Is only
such a story, but that story
is the legend,
becoming the root.

They ran it, sure. And drained the clock. We missed some passes, sure—my completion rate after the game was something like 53% because of those next two drives, and Coach forgetting I wasn't the gunslinger Lane-fucking-Taylor.

Then off some freak-ass fake screen they get it deep-out to a lone Rivers Beckham. Of course he catches that ball, he catches it eleven times out of ten. We hold 'em afterward, sure, but they get inside the forty and push it to a six-point lead by way of their kicker, some toddler motherfucker.

Villarosa muffs the return, bats it out o'bounds at our own eight yard-line. Swear to god, I love that kid, but I wanted to slit his throat right there. Let him bleed out over the crowd, fuckin' no shame or anything. The motherfucker. That sonuvabitch. So that's where we were. They drained that shit real good, too, ate it up until the two-minute warning. There's only a minute fifty-six on the clock when we take possession. Coach says, we got it boys, no timeouts even and we got it! Say what, I go? We got two timeouts left. Don't matter. Even without that, Coach says, we got all the time in the world. We ain't callin' no timeouts, he adds, stern as a bull. But I jus' don't know, right there, I think the man snapped and I'm just gonna gut myself like a fish, right'n front of all these millions o'fuckin' people. I guess that was the curse of doubt upon my faith. Tested my shit to the limit, because if I'm honest with you, when I jogged out to the huddle on first down, I wasn't really so sure we could pull it off afterall.

I didn't think *I* could pull it off.

The first play is a short pass to Frankie, jus' to get the ball rollin', and we rush it forward, 'cause Coach already told me the next play should Frankie catch it. I told you he caught it, I think. I yell out to the boys, "Action red two," but I hold up three fingers. Action just meant to look at me, so they all know what I really

mean is Red Three—with our starting formation, that meant it was a quick inside throw to the tight end, that was Vern Walker, but the receivers know the route to misdirect the linebackers to the flat and the safety and nickel to the edges. Walker gets it in his gut and tumbles another three, so the next play gets us a first down—I rush the crew and yell ‘Green eggs.’ See, Coach kept our two-minute drill simple, I’m thinking ‘cause Lane was a space-cowboy, real dumbass if y’ask me. *Red* was throw, *blue* was run, *green* was just block and let the skill players work out their business. The line knew to push up from the center and seal the edge, and ‘eggs’ was our code for an outside hitch route for the receivers; each knew their own depth, how they took the play—Frankie, see though, nobody ever needed to call shit for Frankie in a situation like that. He always jus’ knew what to do.

He blocked a hard-blitzing outside-backer on that one, musta seen some sorta tell in the dude’s stance, ‘cause I swear Rogers hit him knowing all the while where the poor sonuvabitch was gonna be, and at just what time. Because of that block, I hit Vyy while he’s on his tiptoes to stay in-bounds. Secures it like a vault, and White Cap calls for clock stoppage. We huddle-up again, ev’ryone worn as shit and panting like dogs. Minute forty-five on the clock. We got it edged up on our own thirty, and to be real, I’m just praying I can bring it past the fifty and into their territory, just hoping to god I can stake claim on a field goal.

Coach figures they’re gonna put extra cover on the sidelines, probably a zone-blitz to force me into disaster, so we call a short inside-option to Frankie, who pulls it in no problem, then hurry to the line and snap so quick they got no time for predictions—see, in that situation, human nature says they’re gonna revert to the same coverage in a panic, still tryin’ to hold them sidelines. Nope, I say, and shoot a dart down the middle to Villarosa, who somehow doesn’t fuck it up. [*snorts, amused*] It’s first down on our forty-eight—not quite midfield, but I take what I can get. Hurry to the line and spike it. Clock stops at a minute twenty-eight; those timeouts gotta be the aces in our pocket.

[*SUBJECT closes his eyes, inhales deep, holds the breath in, and after a few seconds releases it slowly; does not open his eyes for some time afterward*]

Smells like grass, but I know it isn’t, I know that, you don’t have to tell me. But I can smell it, you remember how it was—we played at Grams’ house, right? Yeah, that was you! [*SUBJECT becomes excited*] One of the, uh, what was it... the, uh... the Kip brothers, right? Yeah, that was you! Oh you remember, then. How it smelled. [*smile fades slowly*] Your teammates’ breath. Spilt beer pooling beneath the stands. You can smell it all—the butter in the popcorn, the felt-tip marker behind Coach’s ear, some backup’s nervous fart across the field. It’s all there at once. Hot rubber, medicated salves and ointments. Then, this... specific heat—you know, we were covered in carbon fiber to protect us. When we collide, there is a particular clash that occurs, and smoke rises from the point of contact. You’ve seen it, right? It’s just a feather of steam that fades in an instant, but the smell is unmistakable. That

steam's on all of us while we try settling our lungs and our guts, huddled tightly, and I get on one knee, Coach's voice crackling through my earpiece: "Hard count, get the motherfuckers to flinch! It's blue mark, zone block thirty-two, x-out, y-deep inside slant, got it? Offset strongside pistol, just like before. Got that? Just call the fucking play just like I tell it to you," and he repeats it again after that. He was talkin' fast. Could've only been about six seconds—he didn't want us on the sidelines, didn't want to talk to us himself; Coach said that removed us from the plane, some shit about *instant continuity*, he was like that, shitting rainbows like that little twat-poem. Fucking shit, right? So the play clock's running and I shake my head and Coach is just screaming at me: "Call the fucking play!" Everyone's looking at me like I'm drooling over my own filth, I musta zoned out, but I got the gist and jus' call it like you needed to know, right? We were just playing ball, that's what Coach used to say. That's all we were doing, right Eddie? Where's Vyv and Frankie at? They should be here, they know it the way Coach used to always say: It's just a stupid game. Tell 'em to come in and sit with us, why are they being so stubborn?

Anyway, I just say,

"It's a draw, Vern and Bruce, you
just get Frank some space. I'm
gonna try to make 'em jump first.
Three count."

Call break and we line up. There's only seventeen seconds on the play-clock, so I yell out "whiskey-two," which changed the hard count, but it didn't matter. No false starts, my voice was probably shakin' the whole goddamn time, no way they'd be fooled. But they bit that pass-fake like hungry trout, and Frankie, [*shakes head, wipes his eyes*] he bumps through the center and gets a few yards in daylight. They try to wrap him, but he just bounces off and churns like a beast, boy, I ain't ever seen anything like it. The whole stadium erupts, so loud I swear to god they shook the earth while he tore apart defenders, some kind of anger pulsing inside him, forged by four-hundred years—I don't know what hate that must be, this rage that forced him through everyone, carrying them on his back until, finally, pulling damn near every player on that side of the ball, he collapsed. Until that concession had trampled his rivals with immaculate conviction.

Took it to their twenty-five. A minute sixteen. Instinctively the boys all rush, but I see it from there, [*swallowing his saliva*] I kid you not. No bullshit. [*deeper breathing*] I just felt it then. Tell 'em to steady those lungs, just soak it up real quick. Some laughed like I was crazy. But I knew right then. Couldn't even hear Coach screamin' his throat raw, which they tell me he was doing, I got linemen asking me, 'what's Coach sayin', why's Coach screamin'?' they whine like pigs before the blade. But I swear, I knew it then an' there, like a sapling believes in the sun.

Minute-even on the clock. And running.

I call Red Thirty-six, Action Four. Held up my fingers and snapped quickly, but maybe the synergy... must've been the timing, we weren't synched. No one's open, and I lose track over where they're supposed to be or where they're going anyway, so I just take off running, everyone screamin' with the crowd, I can't even tell which is which, and I slide after only a couple seconds; still get whacked real good though, helmets crackin' like whips&wind, that bone-impact played out against plastic barriers. You can't imagine how fast it all happens—the spark, the run, the *hit*. Felt like I only took one breath the whole while. The crowd is cheering, so I come-to smiling with my head gone numb. But I know then, my swagger's all gone. I ain't got nothing left.

Call a timeout with forty-nine seconds in the game. Philosophy be damned, Coach waves us over like an epileptic swatting a fly.

“The fuck you doing out there, Navarro? Get it in the game, goddamn it, get your fuckin' head right,” Coach yells at me. We huddle around him, he's some scraggly old fuck, this guy, shriveled up prune, he's got the crook in his back and all. Some o'the boys loved him, but me, I just thought he was a smart-ass. But he won games, I'll give the motherfucker that. “Listen here,” he says, “we got the time. We got the time, so don't go squirtin' your load like a scrub. Alright, you hear me? Remember your position, do your fucking job. Look now, it's Red Left Slot, Sprint Right Option. But there's just Solomon, you hear me, kid?” He meant me. “If Vyv ain't open like a hooker's legs, then you just throw it away, got it? Don't cross your body—you're rollin' right, so throw it right. Got it? Three-count it. Got that? Three, then *go*. Remember your position; do your fucking job.”

Clap:

“break!”

Settle temporarily still at the line o'scrimmage. The fans calm, and I swear there's a hush sweeps the field, but maybe it was just me, just the world falling silent on my ears—'cept for that deep hum from the earth's pulse; that sound which never goes away: sometimes it's a hiss, sometimes it's a groan. It's loudest when you just want to sleep, when you fear your own dreaming, when you have just lived through something you already know you want to forget. My own voice sounds broad as a canyon, hollow like bamboo.

Alls I hear is that. [*lowers his neck and shoulders while sitting behind the desk*] You forget sometimes, all those thousands of people. All those eyes. It's only for moments, isn't it? Not the totality. Just a couple of solitary moments.

Call 'em to set. Three-count. [*hollering above imaginary ruckus*] Hut—hut—hut-hike!

[calmer still, but frantic nonetheless; jolts upright, knocking over his chair, assumes his position at quarterback, lectures while reenacting] It happens slowly from there.

Some compulsive play-action, rolling right while Frankie picks up the weak-side blitz.

[arms flail like an orchestra conductor, resets his chair and takes a seat again—he limps lightly, quietly nurtures his elbow, recovers from the strain of energy bursting]

[rocking in spite of the obvious tinge in his hip] The rush comes in quick ... mountainsides tumbling ...

...the earth slides against the edge of its orbit; the ocean becomes lava, waves roll across decades, so with every step I feel the earth break away; as this colossus attacks I hear only thunder in the stampede.

Between each second I saw the way I'd die; I saw the birth of Christ, the Demise of the Aztec; civilizations measured in minutes; galaxies melt like ice cream.

All collapsing.

Arms claw at you while these endless spirits fall, but they let go as the body twists struggling forward.

[pinches the bridge of his nose, groans as if in pain; when he sits up straight again his eyes are red, swollen; averts his gaze, will not meet INTERVIEWER'S eyes; gives pause transcendent of words, lips curling across emotion]

Ohh, god man... it was great. It was waking up from a magic dream, then smiling, then falling right back in.

I almost slip as I roll right, that little stunt, that's when it all starts falling in, that's when the Three Fates draw the curtains and the shadows stretch over, and I swear right then all I could do was play it the way it felt natural, and I'm about a yard'n'a'half from outta bounds, so I just sling it, whip it to a steep-droppin' arc and pray for the best, maybe it sails out the back and we get one more quick shot.

Then there's the crash.

[yelling, excited, as if watching the scene play out on television]

You see him? Did you see him there?! *[points at nothing in particular]* Sonuvabitch, I can't believe he pulled it off!

You did it, boys! *[claps his hands hard, to only the air around him]*

We *did* it, holy fuckin' shit, did you just see that?

[SUBJECT is erratic, excited. Stands and shakes his arms, screaming so loud he breaks into a coughing fit]

... ..

[clears his throat, succumbs to his seat]

My face in the dirt, I just see the grit in my eye, but I hear it... oh yes, I hear it. Loud as waves on the beach,

as an earthquake in the city.

Don't know much else at first, except the din.

That roar, it's unmistakable. Because the sound is trapped, you see, these mounting vibrations have nowhere to go. *[calms, suddenly]* It's there, that's what you meant to ask me, isn't it? What you want to know. Where it swells inside you so much you just want to explode, at the peak of noise, that slithering weave inflating just a hair too far.

[eyes, watering, forward:] It bursts. *[a tender smile, sniffing, wipes his eyes but they never completely dry]*

[laughs-sobbing]

Forty-two seconds on the clock at the kick-off, we're up by one. That was it.

We kick it and such'n'such, sure, but that was the game right there. You know when you win, when it's absolute, just as certain as when you finally surrender. Surely you know what it's like to win? We all know defeat. So I don't have to tell you about how we knew, but even so I certainly can't tell you about after that whistle and the lights start flashing and the confetti pours down in the same colors on our kit and thus in our blood. None o'us could. It was everything for all of us.

[... *extended silence* ...]

Yes, I think about that often.

If I could ask you for anything right now, if there were anything you might give me... would you?... just tell me your memories. Spill it before this dim light so that the glare is fierce and the shadows exaggerated.

Let us nurse from this together.

That's all it is, I know, you know it too. That's how it all starts if that's what you're asking, y'sick fuck. Get off on that, do you? My baby days? Fuckin' shit-weasel.

The rest is just what they tell you on the latenight reruns.

We take the Title, and it's a hero's parade all day every day it seems, the praise like clouds take you far 'nough so you float full of some seaside breeze. I don't have to go into that, those days. You know about those days. [*sets his elbow on the table and points at the INTERVIEWER*] Everybody knows about that shit. [*leans back again, disarms, brushes his fingers against his forehead in anxiety ... then points, again*] Don't sit here and pretend you don't fucking know. That's what you came here to ask me about. [*relaxes again, scoffs*] Everybody wants to know.

Why'd I hit Lane Taylor? Why'd I hit him?

I journeyed after that, is what they say, suckin' dick to the highest bidder. The economy behind the curtain, that's what my fourth coach called it. Or one of them, anyway.

I dunno.

Couldn't tell you anymore why I hit the sonuvabitch. I didn't like him, I can say that, and he was the first person I ever called a shit-weasel. Consider that a footnote of history.

We was probably talkin' shit. That's what it was all over the field, all the time, jus' talking shit about who an' who, that's the way it is. And maybe he heard about my shit-talkin', and yknow, he's the All-Star Number One, the campus darling, so he takes offense. Of course. Maybe he tells me to learn my place, and maybe I'm a little bit of a fuck-rat myself, so maybe I say okay and let it be where it lie.

Or maybe I fucking punch him in the back of the head.

That's all a matter of record now. You just want the soundbite? I said it, didn't I? [*shakes his head*] I'm squirming, ain't I? [*he is*] Probably doesn't matter in the long-run. I think probably it was meant to happen this way, or at least, it was likely to end up this way somehow. I've taken to prayer in my old age, like many of these old men do, and I think perhaps I'm just damned. Condemned by birth. Christ himself followed that path, did he not? His fate written by sacrifice, His destiny torched by sin.

I am nothing now.

Look at me.

Washed up. Filthy with all these, hah, [*coughs, chuckles*] burdens, they call them. Burden-Ward is how it's put on the paperwork, I've seen it same as you. [*pauses, thinking*] But I suppose that's fair. It's nothing, all of it anyway. What have I done?

It's blank behind me. That's why you're here, isn't it? Can't you tell me why this is, why it's just... this... empty pressure, behind me. You know, you... you've felt it, I know you have. Frankie? C'mon buddy, let's get outta here, you know what I mean. Heh. [*laughs*] These motherfuckers don't even know how we had to do it, how it was for us back then.

I mean, how could they understand? The whole world was at stake, all these eyes were watching us, far more than watch us now. Even with these fucking cops and their fucking guns, and the cameras on every corner like it matters what you record, even against all that, they don't know what it was like with *that many eyes*. I've never felt so small in my whole life, I woulda clung to anything if it meant I'd stay afloat in this grand, grand ocean. The size of it. The size of it imposes a great shadow. That's where I got lost, that's where Vyv ran, and Frankie ran, and that's the place we all go, but some of us tug and some of us pull, but the darkness sucks you underneath, it catches you always.

It was years later, years later I stabbed that man. My agent. He was home with his wife, so I killed her too, and the children, so then them too. Fire and lightning, that's what I remember most about that night, [*his eyes squinting*] just that, and thunder rolling like chopper blades, over and over again, and it comes crashing down in black and red. But I don't remember them, the people they say I killed. I didn't know them too good, and that I regret. That I think maybe I done wrong. [*sniffles, then sobs*] I meant to go *with* them, that's how it was supposed to be, and, of course, I fucked it up. I am sorry. I'm very sorry. Fuckin' Frankie, I'm so sorry man, please, don't look at me like that...

[reaches out, tears streaming]

[pulls his arms back, curls his hands into his chest]

[for a while he cries, nearly silent, but not completely so; his knuckles caress his own chin&cheek, he rubs his own earlobe between thumb and forefinger; his gaze flutters, mid-song of that longspan stare he stutters with his eyes, his pupils shaking while those eyes stretch wide, then pulls his lids closed like quilts, tightly, fearfully, wishing hard for the world to change, for this reality to shift; but it does not budge; after several minutes he calms quiet, his breath steadies, and as if expecting something new he looks up]

But *you* see me, don't you?

Am I yet forgotten? It must be coming soon. [*sighs deeply*] I can't be much. My presence can't be long. It must be coming soon. Weighs on me like piano-keys rain, the sound dropping hard upon my body, the soreness in my bones, the predictability of every day, the futility of the future. The imbedded memories of my misdeeds, the guilt over my own forgetfulness and those people I cut up during one o' my spells. [*staring into the emptiness above the INTERVIEWER'S head*] How I am weighs on me, this way I am is a vice upon my chest snatching at every heartbeat; just waiting, for when it catches.

Just *who you are*, they say. Just who you are just who you are just who you are, over an' over again, and again, [*slams both fists onto the table*] just where we found ourselves, right? [*scoffs, holding open his palms*] I mean, that's it. That's why you're here, it's been going on for years now, so don't act surprised I already know. I seen it always. I know who you are.

I'm not going to do it, you know. You can't make me swallow a damn thing, and I'm too fucking tired. I've had enough of the swimming. These drills are wearing me down, Coach, and I'll tell you the truth, I don't know how much steam I got left in me. I tried, sir, I really did, I mean it in my heart, I do. [*clutches his left breast*] There ain't nothin' left, Coach. That's the truth. [*arms drop, hanging at his sides while he sits*] Frankie's gone. Vyv is gone. Vern, too, the whole lot; even that little shit-weasel, Villarosa. They're all gone, aren't they? You don't have to tell me. I know why you come here. I know who you are.

So if that's what you wanna know, I'll tell you. You askin' these questions. You must want to know. [*smiles*] I get it, kid. It's a good tale, right, that Temptation of Glory. Color of those voices, the vibrations from these massive lights—when you crash into outter space, and I'll tell you if you're ready to listen. About that game of motion.

I'll tell you the story everybody wants to know. How it happened, that day of the Supreme Final, when the beacon fell *on me*. Just stay here a little with me, okay? You have to, if you wanna listen to this old rap. You will, though, I know. You'll stay and listen while I wind this yarn.

I know who you are.