

A SHOT AT FAITH

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. BUS STATION - PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

On a dark and mist-shrouded night, BETSY CRAIG, 21, spiked hair, tattooed, dials.

TWO-YEAR-OLD MITCHELL clings to her leg.

SUPER: "1999"

BETSY
(frantic)
Please...please pick up.

MITCHELL
Mommy.

BETSY
Wait.

MITCHELL
Mommy.

BETSY
Quiet!

INT. AMANDA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A flickering light illuminates piles of dirty dishes as an off-center ceiling fan loses a battle with wafts of cigarette smoke.

AMANDA, 23, southern drawl, answers.

AMANDA
What?

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

BETSY
They're after me.

AMANDA
Who is it this time?

BETSY
Can I crash there...'til this passes over?

AMANDA
I guess, but--

EXT. BUS STATION - PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

A slow moving black sedan passes. Two men stare. The car continues, then stops. Tires screech in reverse towards Betsy.

BETSY

Oh God!

The phone receiver swings as a dial tone blurts loudly.

AMANDA

Betsy!

A toddler's shoe is left behind on the sidewalk. A man exits the car. He scans in both directions, places the shoe in his pocket. The car speeds off.

FADE TO BLACK.

A horn blares.

FADE IN:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

COACH FARRAR, 50s, trim, receding hairline, thrusts his hands into the air.

SUPER: "Canaan, Kentucky 2014"

Canaan's home crowd cheers riotously. The score is 73-72.

MITCHELL, now 17, and 6'3", high-fives fellow teammate ANDRE THOMAS, 17, black.

Twelve seconds remain on the clock.

Opponent Central Catholic and Canaan head to their respective team benches.

COACH FARRAR

Listen up! Run "Clear Forty-one." Mitchell, they haven't stopped you all night. Let's go!

A referee's WHISTLE shrieks. The CROWD stands, cheers as both teams break from their huddles.

A rotund HIGH SCHOOL ANNOUNCER sits courtside. He wipes his forehead.

HIGH SCHOOL ANNOUNCER
 Folks, it's a one possession game.
 The winner goes to the state
 tournament.

The referee hands the ball to Canaan.

Andre receives the inbound pass. He dribbles to the top of
 the key.

Mitchell comes off a double screen. He is passed the ball.

Canaan's players clear out with five seconds left. Mitchell
 drives, pulls up, he shoots...

HIGH SCHOOL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Oh my! Central Catholic goes back to
 State for the second year in a row.

INT. TEAM LOCKER ROOM ENTRANCE - NIGHT

GREG HOLLIS, 30s, a towering college scout, stands outside
 Canaan's green and white locker room entrance.

Players enter.

Mitchell slinks past. Head down. Towel draped around his
 neck.

GREG HOLLIS
 Mitchell Craig?
 (extending his hand)
 Greg Hollis. Commonwealth
 University.

Mitchell slowly looks up.

GREG HOLLIS
 Sorry about the game.

Mitchell dries his face.

GREG HOLLIS
 We'd love for you to consider the
 Raiders. Here's my card.

Mitchell takes the card. He glances at it, then tries to hand
 it back.

GREG HOLLIS
 You could really help us.

MITCHELL
 But I missed.

GREG HOLLIS

Even Jordan didn't make them all.
Keep your head up son. We'll be in
touch.

INT. MITCHELL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The decor is 1970s with green shag carpet. Empty beer cans
are scattered, rabbit ears protrude from the outdated TV.

Mitchell is just coming home.

Betsy Craig, now 36, belly button ring, bleached hair,
watches television from the tattered couch.

Mitchell sets down his gym bag.

MITCHELL

We lost.

Betsy takes a swig of beer, a drag from her cigarette.

BETSY

Re-runs. I hate re-runs!

Mitchell hands Betsy an original, masterfully drawn card.

MITCHELL

It's for Mother's Day.

Betsy grabs it. Looks it over.

BETSY

Purty. Thanks.
(beat)
I need my pills.

MITCHELL

I'll get them.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Mitchell opens a cupboard door over a sink full of dirty
dishes. He retrieves a medicine bottle.

MITCHELL

It's empty.

Betsy grabs the pill bottle out of Mitchell's hand.

BETSY

Dammit!

She throws the bottle.

MITCHELL

Mom?

She glares at Mitchell.

BETSY

Don't you understand! I need my
medicine!

(beat)

Okay look, I'm sorry.

Betsy opens the fridge. Reaches for another beer. A jagged
scar covers her wrist.

MITCHELL

Can't you get more?

Betsy paces.

BETSY

Not without a prescription.

Betsy types a text message. She takes another swig of beer.
Her cell phone chirps a text alert. She reads.

BETSY

I'm goin' out.

MITCHELL

When will you be back?

Betsy grabs her purse.

BETSY

I'll let you know.

MITCHELL

I love you.

The front door slams shut.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Mitchell stares straight ahead as he walks with Andre.

Throngs of students push their way down the locker-lined
hallway before the next class period.

ANDRE

You haven't said a word.

MITCHELL

Mom took off again.

ANDRE

That sucks.

MITCHELL

I've called everyone.

ANDRE

Another binge?

Mitchell shrugs.

A hulking FOOTBALL PLAYER and several large teammates approach. They block Mitchell and Andre.

ANDRE

Come on, guys.

FOOTBALL PLAYER

Sorry about the loss.

MITCHELL

Thanks.

FOOTBALL PLAYER

The team fought real hard. Made us proud.

The other players shake their heads in agreement.

FOOTBALL PLAYER

See you at the lake this summer?

ANDRE

If I can get him out of the gym.

FOOTBALL PLAYER

Maybe you could show me that behind-the-back pass?

MITCHELL

Anytime.

The players step aside.

Mitchell and Andre continue to walk.

MITCHELL

We should have gone to State.

ANDRE

No one's blaming you. You carried us all season!

Andre stops at a water fountain. He drinks, then looks back up at Mitchell.

ANDRE

Don't worry about her. Okay?

Mitchell nods.

The hallway bell rings. Students hurry past to their next class.

INT. MITCHELL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mitchell studies at the kitchen table. A knock bounces off the door.

MITCHELL

Sergeant Perez?

SERGEANT PEREZ, late 40s, burly, military-close haircut, turns down the volume on his portable radio.

SERGEANT PEREZ

I have some bad news. It's your mother.

MITCHELL

What happened?

SERGEANT PEREZ

We locked her up again. Public intoxication and resisting arrest.

MITCHELL

Can I see her?

SERGEANT PEREZ

She's still drying out.

Mitchell leans against the kitchen counter.

SERGEANT PEREZ

Almost had to tase her.

Mitchell begins to pace.

MITCHELL

She's been drinking a lot.

SERGEANT PEREZ

My dad was a drunk until mom fired a shotgun over his head. Sobered him up real quick.

Mitchell spots his Mother's Day card lying under the kitchen table. He picks it up.

MITCHELL
It doesn't make sense.

SERGEANT PEREZ
Some people drink to forget. Others,
to kill the pain.

MITCHELL
I've tried to help her.

SERGEANT PEREZ
Your mom is stubborn. It'll take
time.

INT. COACH FARRAR'S OFFICE - DAY

Light from a small window bounces off team photos, trophies, and a banner that reads, "Defense Hurts."

Mitchell stands in the doorway. Coach Farrar sits behind a faded walnut desk. He motions for Mitchell to enter.

COACH FARRAR
Have a seat.

MITCHELL
Am I in trouble?

COACH FARRAR
Depends.

Coach Farrar pulls a large metal container out from under his desk. He opens it. Numerous scholarship offers pour out.

COACH FARRAR
These coaches are driving me nuts!

Mitchell sifts through the stack. A "who's who" of college names are seen. He pauses, then pushes the envelopes to the side.

MITCHELL
I'll probably stay here.

Coach Farrar leans back in his chair with his arms folded.

COACH FARRAR
Let me guess, your mother?

Mitchell squirms in his chair.

COACH FARRAR
It's time you thought about
yourself.

MITCHELL
But, I feel guilty about leaving
her.

COACH FARRAR
She can handle it.

Mitchell walks over to his team's regional runner-up trophy
on a corner shelf.

COACH FARRAR
It burns at you, doesn't it?

MITCHELL
We should have won!

COACH FARRAR
And you should have been triplets.
Would've made my job easier.

Mitchell spins back around.

MITCHELL
We were so close!

COACH FARRAR
You've got another chance.

Farrar picks up a random scholarship offer from the pile on
his desk.

COACH FARRAR
Most of these teams have played in
or won the national tournament.

Mitchell eyes the stack of envelopes. He looks back at the
trophy.

COACH FARRAR
Any favorites?

MITCHELL
I've always liked Louisville College
and Carolina State.

COACH FARRAR
Anyone else?

MITCHELL
Hoosier U.

Telephone buzzes.

Coach Farrar holds up a finger. He reaches for the phone.

INT. COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY - COACH DAVIES' OFFICE - DAY

COACH DAVIES, 60, thick silver hair, gruff, puffs on a pipe as he reclines in his high-back leather chair. His office is corporate, immense, with championship memorabilia scattered throughout.

COACH DAVIES

Dave! Glenn Davies.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

Coach Farrar points to the phone and mouths, "Commonwealth University!"

COACH FARRAR

Well, you're in luck. Mitchell is sitting right here.

COACH DAVIES

Has he signed yet?

COACH FARRAR

He's still undecided.

Mitchell sits back down.

COACH DAVIES

One of my scouts watched your regional final. He was very impressed.

COACH FARRAR

I'm listening.

COACH DAVIES

I'd like to offer Mitchell a full scholarship on the spot.

COACH FARRAR

I'll talk with him and see what he thinks.

COACH DAVIES

I've got a kid from Maryland that's ready to sign if Mitchell doesn't.

COACH FARRAR

We'll be in touch.

Coach Farrar hangs up, stares at Mitchell, then smiles.

MITCHELL

Well?

COACH FARRAR

Commonwealth just offered you a full scholarship.

MITCHELL

Why didn't they offer sooner?

COACH FARRAR

It doesn't matter.

Mitchell glances back over at the Regional Trophy.

MITCHELL

I'll let you know.

INT. POLICE STATION - JAIL CELL - DAY

Mitchell enters a private cell.

A FEMALE OFFICER slams the steel door shut.

Betsy lies on a cot in an orange police-issued jump suit. Her mood mirrors the cold, gray walls of the cell.

MITCHELL

Mom? I brought you some cigarettes.

Betsy slowly sits up.

MITCHELL

The salon called. I told them you were sick.

BETSY

I wouldn't be here if that cop didn't try to cuff me.

Betsy stands. She grabs the pack of cigarettes out of Mitchell's hand.

BETSY

It must suck knowing your Mother is the town drunk.

MITCHELL

What are you saying?

Betsy saunters around Mitchell, eyeing him up and down.

BETSY

(catty)

Mr. Basketball Star, honor society,
and church geek. Aren't you ashamed
of me?

MITCHELL

No, it's not like that!

Betsy lights a cigarette and takes a long drag.

BETSY

My father always told me I was weak,
never good enough. Thought the
beatings would make me tough.

Betsy stares out the steel bars.

BETSY

(cynical)

Maybe they did.

Mitchell approaches Betsy.

MITCHELL

You never told me that.

BETSY

I've got a walk-in closet full of
skeletons.

MITCHELL

There's a treatment center in
Paducah.

BETSY

Ain't nothing wrong with me that
money can't fix.

MITCHELL

Everyone makes mistakes.

BETSY

Mistakes? I'm just unlucky.

MITCHELL

We can get through this together.

Betsy spins back around.

BETSY

I don't need any help!

Mitchell pauses. He stares at the ground then looks up at Betsy.

MITCHELL
Would my father have thought I was
good enough?

BETSY
You bastard! I told you before, I
was raped!

MITCHELL
I'm going to find him.

Seething, Betsy gets right in Mitchell's face.

BETSY
One more word and I'll--

MITCHELL
What?

Betsy takes a swing at Mitchell. He catches her hand.

MITCHELL
I never understood why you beat me.

BETSY
I never touched you!

Mitchell removes his shirt. A long scar cascades down his back.

MITCHELL
I was always covering for you.
(beat)
I told my friends I fell down.

Stunned, Betsy takes another drag and flicks her cigarette butt.

BETSY
You should leave.

MITCHELL
Mom, you need help. I pray you'll
find it.

BETSY
Screw your help and screw your
prayers.
(beat)
Guard!

The female officer approaches. She unlocks the cell door.

FEMALE OFFICER

Sir. I must ask you to leave.

Mitchell stares at Betsy.

MITCHELL

I love you.

FEMALE OFFICER

Sir!

The female officer locks the cell door. Mitchell turns back to look at Betsy. A tear swells up in his eye. He quickly wipes it away.

Betsy lunges at Mitchell. He doesn't flinch.

BETSY

Get out!

INT. COACH FARRAR'S OFFICE - DAY

Mitchell places his backpack on the floor.

Coach Farrar leans back in his chair.

COACH FARRAR

Decision time. Who's it going to be?

MITCHELL

I...decided to stay home.

COACH FARRAR

You what?

MITCHELL

The grocery is hiring.

COACH FARRAR

Nonsense!

Poker faced, Mitchell reaches into his backpack. He pulls out a Hoosier U cap. He puts it on.

Coach Farrar snickers.

COACH FARRAR

You set me up good.

MITCHELL

I didn't say I was going there.

COACH FARRAR
But, you're wearing their hat.

Mitchell then raises his shirt, revealing a Louisville College t-shirt.

COACH FARRAR
Louisville?

MITCHELL
Close.

Flustered, Coach Farrar pushes back his chair.

COACH FARRAR
You're this close.

Mitchell starts laughing.

MITCHELL
I decided on Commonwealth.

COACH FARRAR
Finally! Why?

MITCHELL
It just felt right.

COACH FARRAR
Let's get Coach Davies on the phone.

INT. COACH DAVIES' OFFICE - DAY

Coach Davies watches game footage on a large HD screen. Commonwealth's fight song blares from his cell phone.

COACH DAVIES
Dave! Give me some good news.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

COACH FARRAR
Coach, I've got a young man here who would like to talk with you.

COACH DAVIES
Well, put him on!

Coach Farrar hands the phone to Mitchell.

MITCHELL
(awkward)
Hello.

COACH DAVIES
Son, are you ready to become a
Raider?

MITCHELL
Yes, Sir.

COACH DAVIES
We think you're perfect for our
program.

MITCHELL
I hope I can make you proud.

COACH DAVIES
My secretary will overnight the
"Letter of Intent." We'll see you in
August.

MITCHELL
Thank you, Sir.

Coach Farrar hangs up and leans forward.

COACH FARRAR
Does your mother know?

MITCHELL
Not yet.
(beat)
You've been so much more than a
coach to me. Thank you!

COACH FARRAR
Time to set your goals for next
season?

Mitchell retrieves his sketchpad. He tears a page out, and
hands it to Coach Farrar.

MITCHELL
Just started.

Coach Farrar leans back in his chair as he stares at a
drawing of Betsy kneeling in front of a cross. He shakes his
head.

INT. COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY CAMPUS GYM - DAY

National championship banners and retired jerseys hang from
large steel rafters above the polished wood court.

Anticipation is high. Players banter about on metal
bleachers.

DEXTER ROBERTS, 18, 6'8", dreadlocks, stretches out next to Mitchell.

From the court, Coach Davies, assistant coach DAN MYERS, 45, brawny, hard-nosed, and team academic counselor SYLVIA CARPENTER, 50, large rimmed glasses, business attire, all turn to address the team.

COACH DAVIES

I want to welcome each of you to Commonwealth. You have been chosen to continue our tradition of basketball excellence.

Dexter whispers to Mitchell.

DEXTER

I'll be starting by the first game.

COACH MYERS

Roberts! You got something to say?

DEXTER

Uh, no, coach.

COACH DAVIES

This year, with a veteran team along with our freshman class, I'm expecting another banner season.

Mitchell listens intently.

Dexter's attention wanders.

COACH DAVIES

My rules are simple. One. Don't swear.

DEXTER

(faintly)

Damn!

COACH DAVIES

Two. Keep your grades up. Three. Be on time. Coach Myers.

COACH MYERS

Our first practice is tomorrow morning at six a.m. I suggest you get plenty of rest. You're going to need it. Ms. Carpenter.

SYLVIA CARPENTER

It's imperative that you sign up for your classes early. You must pass a minimum of twelve hours each semester to remain eligible.

COACH DAVIES

Men, let's make this a special year. You're dismissed.

The players begin to leave.

Mitchell remains. He stares upward at multiple championship banners.

Dexter approaches.

DEXTER

Don't worry, I'll get us another. Girls love a winner.

MITCHELL

(subtly)
I wouldn't know.

INT. CAMPUS PRACTICE GYM - DAY

From the sidelines, Coach Davies and Coach Myers observe the upperclassmen scrimmage five on five.

Dexter, Mitchell and bearded 7'0" freshman center IVAN ZOKOFF, from the Ukraine, watch from the bench.

Team trainer, SCOTT WILKE, 40s, stands nearby with his clipboard taking notes.

DEXTER

I can score all day on these guys.

MITCHELL

You'll get your chance.

IVAN

(Ukraine accent)
I just try to make coach happy.

ON THE COURT

Senior forward LEXUS BRASWELL, a 6'7" muscular behemoth, blocks two shot attempts in a row.

RAMON HERNANDEZ, 6'11" center, picks up the loose ball, throws an outlet pass.

Lexus races past half-court, receives a perfectly timed pass, then scores with a ferocious dunk.

DEXTER

Who's that?

SCOTT

Lexus Braswell.

DEXTER

He's on our side. Right?

SCOTT

Don't cross him.

Coach Myers blows his whistle to signal a timeout. Coach Davies looks down the bench.

COACH DAVIES

Mitchell, you and Ivan are in for the white team. Dexter, you're in for the blue. Let's go!

Mitchell receives the inbound pass. He dribbles at the top of the key. He finds Lexus cutting to the basket for the score.

LEXUS

Nice pass.

MITCHELL

Anytime.

Dexter forces a shot.

Lexus clears the rebound, passes to Mitchell.

Mitchell finds another teammate racing in for a layup.

COACH MYERS

I already like the Craig kid. He's real steady.

COACH DAVIES

Hollis said he was good, but he's still a freshman.

Dexter showboats, elevates for a slam.

Ivan blocks his shot.

Mitchell grabs the loose ball. He finds a streaking teammate for an easy bucket.

COACH MYERS
Roberts, pass the ball!

A whistle blows. The players stop.

COACH DAVIES
Men, we need work. Our first game is
in eight weeks.

COACH MYERS
I want ten suicides before you hit
the showers.

COACH DAVIES
Gentlemen, welcome to college
basketball.

INT. CAMPUS STUDENT CENTER - DAY

Mitchell, dressed in jeans, sandals, and a red Louisville
College t-shirt, sits off to himself drawing.

The center is mall like with shops, snack bar, cafeteria, and
a movie theater. Students pass by. The atmosphere is hurried.

EMILY FRASER, 18, tall, blonde, shapely, stops to check a
text message. She looks up.

Mitchell catches her eye. She smirks, then approaches.

Emily stares at Mitchell's shirt. He looks down.

MITCHELL
What?

EMILY
Commonwealth fans hate Louisville.

Mitchell covers his shirt with his drawing pad.

EMILY
Stay away from wearing anything red.
Remember, blue is the preferred
color.

Emily checks her phone.

EMILY
Gotta go.

She walks away.

Mitchell shakes his head, he continues drawing.

Emily turns back to catch a glimpse of Mitchell. She disappears.

INT. AMANDA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Amanda (from the opening scene), now 38, watches Betsy at the kitchen table suck down a beer.

AMANDA
Whoa, slow down!

Betsy takes another gulp. She tosses the empty can toward the garbage can. It misses.

AMANDA
You're still on probation.

BETSY
Who cares?

AMANDA
Me. I ain't bailin' your drunk butt
outta jail again.

Betsy walks over to the kitchen sink. She stares out the window.

AMANDA
How's Mitchell?

Betsy ignores the question. She continues to stare.

AMANDA
Heard he gotta scholarship.

BETSY
He's over at Hicksville University.

AMANDA
A college basketball player. Just
like his dad. You must be proud!

Betsy takes a long drag on her cigarette. She turns back around.

BETSY
Whatever.

AMANDA
You gonna tell Bobby. He's gotta a
right to know.

BETSY
Can't take the chance.

AMANDA
He really loved you.

BETSY
I had to disappear. I'm a felon!
Remember?

AMANDA
Does Mitchell know about his dad?

Betsy shoves a kitchen chair, she moves toward Amanda.

BETSY
Stay outta my business!

AMANDA
Listen, Cuz. Back off!

Amanda removes a steaming tea kettle from the stove.

AMANDA
Still seein' your therapist?

BETSY
Off and on.

AMANDA
You think it's helpin'?

BETSY
If he'd quit tellin' me I'm bi-polar
and have anger issues.
(beat)
But the meds are great!

Amanda raises her hands towards heaven.

AMANDA
God, keep rainin' down your truth.

BESTY
Shut the hell up!

AMANDA
I see what he means.

Betsy pulls a beer out of the fridge.

BETSY
Mitchell messed everything up. I had
big plans. Having him wasn't one of
them.

AMANDA

Bobby could have raised him.

BETSY

And give up his pro dreams?

AMANDA

You don't know that. You never gave him a chance.

BETSY

(sarcastic)

Too bad, we'll never know.

AMANDA

Ever thought about goin' back?

BETSY

Sure, when you become a nun.

Betsy takes another gulp of beer.

AMANDA

You've changed.

BETSY

(drunkenly)

So the Queen of Self Righteousness thinks I need help?

AMANDA

What if Mitchell finds out?

BETSY

He'll wish he never did.

AMANDA

Meaning what?

BETSY

(devious)

Things people love can always be taken away.

AMANDA

Betsy!

BETSY

If I'm goin' down, I'm bringin' him down with me.

AMANDA

You're evil!

Betsy abruptly pushes away from the table. She staggers to the hallway.

BETSY

I gotta pee.

INT. MITCHELL'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Mitchell enters. Dexter, in dark shades lies on the far bed, ear pods pulsating.

Mitchell raises his gym bag, then lets it drop.

Dexter sits up. He lowers his shades.

DEXTER

Man, it's gettin' white in here.

The dorm room is upscale with a flat screen TV, recessed lighting, and computer workstation.

Dexter lies back down.

MITCHELL

So having a tan doesn't count?

DEXTER

Whatever.

Mitchell kicks off his sandals, stretches out on his bed. Dexter takes out his ear pods

DEXTER

Don't remember you playing in any All Star games.

MITCHELL

Didn't go to any.

DEXTER

You've been droppin' some major dimes in practice.

MITCHELL

Huh?

DEXTER

Damn! You're whiter than flour!
(beat)
You know! Settin' people up to score. Dimes are assists!

MITCHELL

I'd rather pass than score.

DEXTER
Yeah, but my 42 inch vertical is
what the fans want to see!

MITCHELL
I just want to win.

DEXTER
Westbrook is my man! Who's yours?

MITCHELL
I play my own game, and try not to
make any mistakes.

Mitchell reaches behind his bed and pulls the shade.

DEXTER
I don't plan on being here very
long.

MITCHELL
Does Coach know?

DEXTER
When the NBA comes callin' he will.
I've already picked out my Benz
color too!

MITCHELL
I plan on getting my degree.

DEXTER
When the pros and agents start
waving money at you, you'll be outta
here too!

Mitchell rolls over.

MITCHELL
We'll see.

INT. CAMPUS GYM - DAY

Mitchell shoots jumpers by himself.

Emily strolls in, basketball in hand with two other COEDS.
She sees Mitchell on the far court. They stop. Emily flips
the basketball to COED #1.

COED #1
What's up?

Emily gazes towards Mitchell.

COED #2

He's cute!

EMILY

Wait here.

Emily walks up. Mitchell continues to shoot, making every shot.

EMILY

Not bad.

Mitchell launches more three pointers.

EMILY

Hello? Remember me?

MITCHELL

Yep.

Emily glances back towards her friends.

EMILY

I heard you're on the team?

MITCHELL

Something like that.

Emily moves underneath the basket. She passes each made shot back to Mitchell.

EMILY

Am I bothering you?

Mitchell ignores her question.

Emily holds the next made shot. Mitchell crosses his arms.

EMILY

Look, I apologize. I could have been nicer.

MITCHELL

I survived.

Emily passes the ball back to Mitchell. He begins to shoot again.

EMILY

At least you're wearing blue.

MITCHELL

(sarcastic)

All of my reds are being washed.

EMILY
Like pizza?

MITCHELL
Why?

EMILY
Think of it as a peace offering.

Mitchell pauses, dribbles then shoots.

EMILY
Well?

MITCHELL
Okay.

EMILY
Okay, what?

MITCHELL
I accept your offer.

EMILY
Great! Tomorrow night at seven?

MITCHELL
Seven thirty.

EMILY
Deal!

Mitchell begins to shoot again.

Emily walks back to her friends.

COED #2
How did it go?

EMILY
He doesn't say much.

COED #1
Got a date?

EMILY
Just pizza.

INT. CAMPUS PIZZERIA - NIGHT

Emily and Mitchell face each other in a booth. A candle flickers between them.

A juke box plays. Darts and a game of pool are played behind them.

EMILY
I promise to be nice.
(beat)
Well, nicer.

MITCHELL
I hope so.

EMILY
I deserved that. I heard you looked good in practice.

MITCHELL
You got spies?

EMILY
A couple of my coaches saw you.

MITCHELL
What kind of coaches?

EMILY
I'm a forward on the women's team.

Mitchell shakes his head.

EMILY
I might surprise you.

MITCHELL
It's possible.

EMILY
Now you be nice.

Two coeds walk past Mitchell. They turn to eye him.

Emily catches their stares.

They continue walking.

EMILY
I grew up in Louisville. Mom and dad met here. What about you?

MITCHELL
I'm from Canaan.

EMILY
Israel?

MITCHELL

It's a small town in Western
Kentucky.

EMILY

Never heard of it!

MITCHELL

Coach Hollis saw one of my games,
and they offered.

EMILY

Got a major?

MITCHELL

Biophysics.

EMILY

I thought most jocks majored in
video games.

MITCHELL

The Xbox classes were full.

A WAITRESS, upper-arm tattoo, pierced lip, approaches.

WAITRESS

We've got a large three topping
special for twelve ninety five.

Mitchell waits for Emily to answer.

EMILY

That sounds good. What toppings do
you like?

MITCHELL

Pepperoni and sausage.

EMILY

Can you add pineapple?

Mitchell makes a frown.

EMILY

Okay, nix the pineapple. What?

MITCHELL

Ham.

WAITRESS

So a large three topper with
Pepperoni, sausage, and ham?
Anything to drink?

EMILY
I'll have water.

MITCHELL
Same.

The waitress disappears.

Emily leans in towards Mitchell.

EMILY
A word of advice. Our fans expect you to win the national title every year. I think they're nuts.

MITCHELL
I came here to win a championship.

EMILY
Miss home?

MITCHELL
My teammates, high school coach.

EMILY
What about your family?

MITCHELL
It's just me and my mom.

EMILY
What about your dad?

Mitchell hesitates.

MITCHELL
Never met him.
(beat)
My coach kind of filled that role.

EMILY
I've always been daddy's girl.
Wouldn't know what to do without him. My family is very close.
They'll be at all our home games.

MITCHELL
Mom has never seen me play.

EMILY
Maybe she'll surprise you?

MITCHELL
Doubt it.

The waitress brings their water. Emily removes the paper from her straw.

EMILY
Ever try to find your father?

MITCHELL
No.

Emily takes a sip. Pauses. Looks at Mitchell.

EMILY
I like you.

MITCHELL
Why so many questions?

EMILY
I need information if we start dating?

Mitchell searches Emily's eyes.

The waitress re-appears with their pizza.

WAITRESS
A large three topper. Enjoy!

INT. COMMONWEALTH ARENA - NIGHT

A sold-out crowd anticipates Commonwealth's home opener against Tennessee Poly.

On camera, TEAM ANNOUNCERS, seated, broadcast near the home-team bench.

Exuberant Raider fans dressed in blue jockey for position to get in the camera shot.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1
Bob, who are some of the new faces for the Raiders?

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2
High school All-American, Dexter "Hang-Time" Roberts comes in with the headlines, but seven-foot-tall center Ivan Zokoff and guard Mitchell Craig are each impressing the coaches.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1

We do want to mention that promising freshman Emily Fraser injured her knee in the Raiderettes' seventy-two to fifty-eight win against Kentucky Tech in our earlier matchup.

Coach Davies huddles with his players on the sidelines.

COACH DAVIES

Remember, men, help on defense and don't rush your shots. Team!

SERIES OF SHOTS - GAME TIME

-- Commonwealth controls the tip. Lexus receives the ball. He immediately scores down low.

-- The Raiders play an aggressive full-court, man-to-man defense.

-- Coach Davies stalks the sidelines, yelling instructions during each Commonwealth possession.

-- Senior point guard REGGIE SYKES drives the lane for a layup. He crashes to the floor holding his ankle. Scott Wilke rushes out.

Coach Davies looks down his bench. He signals for Mitchell to enter the game.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

Mitchell Craig will see his first action.

The referee restarts the game. Commonwealth's ball.

-- Mitchell drives past his man into the lane. He passes back out to TELLIS KILLIBREW, a slender 6'4" two-guard. Tellis shoots a three. He scores.

-- Poly tries to bring up the ball against the Raider press. Commonwealth's fluid, 6'7" forward CLAYTON HOLMES knocks it loose. Mitchell recovers. It's a two-on-one. Lexus scores.

-- Commonwealth Arena's crowd is on its feet.

-- Tennessee Poly's coach yells at his team.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)

What about Mitchell Craig!

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
Just like that the Raiders are up
twenty-three to eleven.

Coach Myers and Coach Davies confer on the bench.

COACH DAVIES
I should listen to you more often?

COACH MYERS
I'm telling you, the kid is a
throwback.

ON THE COURT

-- Mitchell thrills Commonwealth's crowd with deft ball
handling and no-look passing.

-- Commonwealth blocks shots, makes steals, and controls the
defensive boards.

-- Commonwealth continues making a barrage of shots off
steals, dunks, and offensive put-backs.

-- Mitchell dribbles out the clock.

-- Commonwealth's pep band plays, the home crowd celebrates.

-- A picture of Mitchell is shown on the giant LED scoreboard
suspended in the middle of the arena.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Commonwealth smothers Tennessee Poly
ninety-eight to fifty-four.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
Tonight we witnessed a literal
changing of the guard. Mitchell
Craig had sixteen points, thirteen
assists, and four steals. He was
everywhere!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Emily watches Commonwealth's game.

Her father, HAL FRASER, 45, athletic build, and mother MINDY
FRASER, 40, trim and attractive, also watch.

EMILY
Mitchell was awesome!

HAL
There's a little sparkle in your
eye. Something we should know about?

EMILY
Not yet, but he is cute

Mindy puts her arm around Hal's waist.

HAL
I don't trust cute.

DR. LAIRD, monotone voice, wire-rim glasses, peppered gray
hair, enters. He holds several MRI images.

MINDY
Should we sit down?

DR. LAIRD
Emily's prognosis could have been
much worse. A tear did occur, but
not as bad as we first thought.

MINDY
Honey, last year it was your ankle,
before that a concussion. It might
be time to quit.

HAL
Quit? No daughter of mine is going
to quit at anything!

MINDY
You're impossible!

EMILY
When can I start playing?

DR. LAIRD
I've scheduled surgery for next
Wednesday. You'll be in a cast for
about six weeks.

Mindy moves over to Emily's bed.

MINDY
So no permanent damage?

DR. LAIRD
Not that we can tell.

HAL
My daughter is a fighter. She'll be
back in no time.

DR. LAIRD

Folks! Emily is free to go. I'll see you next week.

MINDY

Thank you, doctor.

INT. BAYOU COLLEGE - CAMPUS ARENA - DAY

A rabid crowd jeers Commonwealth's team as they run onto the court. Bayou's pep band plays. The home team colors of purple and gold dominate.

A BAYOU FAN, 20s, with face paint, stands and points his finger at Mitchell.

BAYOU FAN

Hey, Craig! You're so weak even your father won't claim you!

Mitchell reacts from the court.

MITCHELL

That son-of-a--

LEXUS

Easy, Mitch. Take it out on their team.

Commonwealth runs layup drills on their end of the floor.

Bayou's star player, 6'4" MARCEL BOUDREAUX, cocky, tattooed, linebacker physique, stands at half-court laughing at Commonwealth's players.

Commonwealth team announcers are seated courtside amid howling, obnoxious fans.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1

Welcome to Baton Rouge for the Raiders' conference opener against the Bayou Tigers. Commonwealth comes in with an unblemished record.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2

The Tigers are led by All-American senior guard, Marcel Boudreaux.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1

We're almost set for tipoff. We'll be right back after a word from our sponsors.

MOMENTS LATER

ON THE COURT TIP OFF

Boudreaux stands next to Mitchell.

BOUDREAUX

I didn't know we were playing the girls' team. I think I'll drop about forty on you ladies.

Mitchell smiles.

SERIES OF SHOTS - GAME TIME

-- The ball goes up. Bayou controls the tip.

-- Boudreaux quickly dribbles to the Tigers' end of the court. Tellis defends.

-- Boudreaux takes a deep three. He yells at Mitchell as the ball goes in.

BOUDREAUX

Hey, Craig! You counting?

-- Mitchell brings the ball up. He passes off to Clayton on the wing.

-- Mitchell gets the ball back, drives the lane, finds Lexus on the baseline for two.

-- Bayou inbounds the ball to Boudreaux. He dribbles over half-court. Boudreaux fakes left, between his legs, behind his back and scores another three.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

Bayou College has jumped out to an early lead.

COURTSIDE

Coach Davies rips off his tie. He calls a timeout. The team huddles.

COACH DAVIES

You've got to stay in Boudreaux's face!

TELLIS

I'm trying, coach.

COACH MYERS

Maybe we should go zone.

MITCHELL

Let me guard him.

COACH DAVIES

We can't get you into foul trouble.

MITCHELL

I can stop him.

COACH DAVIES

Okay. But, if you get one foul.

ON THE COURT

-- Mitchell comes off a screen, receives the pass from Tellis. He scores two.

-- Bayou inbounds the ball to Boudreaux. Mitchell picks him up at midcourt. He strips the ball, then takes it in for an easy layup.

BOUDREAUX

Come on, ref! He's fouling me!

-- Boudreaux again receives the inbound pass.

-- Mitchell picks him up fullcourt.

MITCHELL

I'd get my other teammates involved
if I were you.

-- Mitchell causes Boudreaux to turn the ball over.

Dexter jumps up from the team bench. He waves his towel.

DEXTER

You show that playground punk!

The half-time buzzer sounds. Both teams head to their locker rooms.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)

Commonwealth is making a statement.
They lead Bayou College forty-two to
twenty-four. We'll be right back.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Betsy lies in bed.

HANK, a one-night stand, puffs on a cigarette in front of the TV. The Commonwealth-Bayou College game is on.

BETSY
Come on, baby, I'm just gettin'
warmed up.

HANK
Doesn't your boy play for
Commonwealth?

BETSY
Why does everybody care about him?
What about me?

HANK
I would care if he were my son.

BETSY
I got better things to do.

HANK
You're jokin'.

BETSY
I ended up in this lousy town
because of him. My job as a mother
is over.

HANK
Is that what you think?

BETSY
What's the big deal?

HANK
I figured you wrong.

BETSY
I ain't interested in what you
think.

Hank stands. He puts out his cigarette. He starts getting
dressed.

HANK
This was a mistake.

BETSY
I didn't come here to talk. Get in
bed!

Hank picks up Betsy's blue jeans. He throws them at her.

Betsy dresses. She approaches.

BETSY

You weren't that good anyway.

HANK

I might be unfaithful to my wife,
but at least I love my kids.

INT. BAYOU COLLEGE - CAMPUS ARENA - DAY

Mitchell sits next to Lexus on the team bench.

LEXUS

You gained their respect.

MITCHELL

Tough place to play.

LEXUS

Season doesn't get any easier.

ON THE COURT

Commonwealth holds the ball as the clock runs out.

Commonwealth players jog to their locker room. Mitchell stays
close to Lexus.

UP IN THE STANDS

A dirge-like silence hovers over the Bayou crowd as they head
for the exits.

COURTSIDE

The team announcers recap the game.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1

Commonwealth defeats Bayou College
eighty-five to sixty-eight.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2

The "Player of the Game" award goes
to Mitchell Craig for his twenty-
eight point, eleven assist, and five
steal performance.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1

Bayou's All-American, Marcel
Boudreaux, finishes with ten points
and one assist before fouling out.

EXT. COMMONWEALTH CAMPUS - DAY

Emily is on crutches.

Mitchell carries her books.

Students in sweaters head to class.

EMILY

You looked good against Bayou.

(beat)

I've also been thinking.

MITCHELL

I'm afraid to ask.

EMILY

Dad is the county attorney in
Louisville. He has lots of
connections.

(beat)

Maybe he can help you find your
father?

MITCHELL

I...don't know.

EMILY

At least talk to him. It can't hurt.

They sit on a bench. Mitchell reaches into his backpack. He
pulls out a binder, and hands it to Emily.

She flips through the pages.

MITCHELL

I started keeping this journal in
the sixth grade. I've never shown it
to anyone.

EMILY

(reading)

An oceanographer? Really?

MITCHELL

Oceans always seemed safe to me.

EMILY

All these hospital visits. You
couldn't have fallen that many
times. Your mom?

MITCHELL

I made her mad a lot. Usually, when
she was drunk or high.

EMILY

You can defend her all you want, but--

Mitchell stares at the ground.

MITCHELL
I don't want to think about the
past.

EMILY
Then what?

MITCHELL
Maybe us?

EMILY
What are you saying?

MITCHELL
I've never...

EMILY
I'm waiting.

Mitchell faces Emily.

MITCHELL
Keep reading.

Emily quickly thumbs to the back of Mitchell's journal, and reads.

EMILY
(somber)
This is what you really want?

Mitchell looks at Emily. He nods his head.

EMILY
I don't know.

Mitchell starts to rub his hands.

Emily closes the journal.

EMILY
Or maybe I do?

MITCHELL
You're confusing.

EMILY
So there's no way I can change your
mind?

MITCHELL
No.

Emily stands. Mitchell stays seated.

EMILY
I better get to class.

Emily grips the handles on her crutches.

MITCHELL
Will you be okay?

EMILY
I suppose.

MITCHELL
This never should have happened.

EMILY
Just to be sure, I want you to say
it.

MITCHELL
Which part?

EMILY
Just say it!

Mitchell hesitates, fidgets.

MITCHELL
So...would you be my...girlfriend?

Mitchell and Emily kiss as a rush of wind scatters
multicolored leaves.

INT. COACH DAVIES' OFFICE - DAY

Sylvia Carpenter sits at Coach Davies' desk. She removes a
legal sized report from her briefcase, and slides it toward
him.

Coach Myers stands off to the side.

Coach Davies takes a puff on his pipe, then reaches for the
folder.

COACH DAVIES
Don't tell me, academic problems?

SYLVIA
Your starting five is in good shape,
but I do have a concern.

COACH DAVIES
What kind?

SYLVIA
Dexter Roberts.

Coach Davies scans the report.

COACH DAVIES
I see.

SYLVIA
His G.P.A. needs to come up to stay
eligible.

Coach Davies hands the report to Coach Myers.

COACH MYERS
I thought he was seeing a tutor?

SYLVIA
It seems they were doing more than
studying.

Coach Davies reclines back in his chair.

COACH MYERS
We don't have much time. Semester
finals are coming up.

SYLVIA
Unfortunately, I'm out of tutors.

Coach Davies puts down his pipe.

COACH DAVIES
I'm starting to think we wasted a
scholarship on Roberts.

COACH MYERS
You want to redshirt him?

Sylvia stands.

SYLVIA
Gentleman, let me know what you
decide.

INT. CAMPUS STUDENT CENTER - SNACK BAR - DAY

Mitchell stretches as he and Emily sit in the back corner
studying. Laptops and snack wrappers litter the table.

EMILY
Need a break?

MITCHELL
Molecular genetics is making me see
double.

EMILY
Could you get me some more soda?

MITCHELL
(jesting)
You're awful demanding.

EMILY
When I'm with the right guy.

Mitchell grabs Emily's drink cup.

Dexter enters. He sees Mitchell.

MITCHELL
What's up?

DEXTER
(nervous)
Got a second?

MITCHELL
What's wrong?

DEXTER
I really screwed up.

MITCHELL
Slow down.

DEXTER
My grades. Coach said I can't play
until I get them back up.

MITCHELL
How bad are they?

DEXTER
I won't make the Dean's List.

MITCHELL
I charge twenty dollars an hour for
tutoring.

DEXTER
Could I pay you back?

MITCHELL
I don't work on credit.

Straight faced, Mitchell waits for Dexter to respond.

DEXTER

I can't ask my parents for money,
they'll want to know why.

MITCHELL

Are you serious about staying
eligible?

DEXTER

Of course!

MITCHELL

Maybe we can work something out.

Dexter fist-bumps Mitchell.

DEXTER

Thanks, dude.

MITCHELL

If you don't study. The deal is off.

Dexter and Mitchell exchange handshakes.

Mitchell rejoins Emily.

EMILY

What was that about?

MITCHELL

Dexter needs help on his finals.

EMILY

Sure it's not with some other coed?

Mitchell reaches for Emily's hand.

MITCHELL

I'm sure. You scared them all off.

INT. FRASER HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Mitchell, Emily, Hal and Mindy are seated. Holiday decorations are everywhere. Empty plates sit atop a silk tablecloth.

Mindy stands, walks over to Mitchell. She removes his plate.

MINDY

It's been nice having you for the
holidays.

HAL

Not to embarrass my daughter, but
you're different.

MITCHELL

I'm glad, sir.

EMILY

Daddy!

HAL

When a young man starts pursuing my
daughter, I get--

EMILY

A little crazy?

MINDY

Mitchell, what my husband is trying
to say is that you won't be followed
by an undercover cop.

Emily buries her head in her hands. She groans.

EMILY

My life is over.

MITCHELL

I don't mind.

Emily raises her head. She beams.

MINDY

So you're not embarrassed?

MITCHELL

Heck no. It's awesome that we can
talk. That never happens in my
house.

HAL

Mitchell, ever been hunting?

MITCHELL

No, sir.

HAL

Let's retreat to my study. I'll show
you some of my victims. I mean
trophies.

Mitchell looks over at Emily.

EMILY

We'll be right in if we hear any
gunshots.

HAL

(teasing)

I'd use my crossbow. It's quieter.

INT. FRASER HOME - STUDY - NIGHT

Hal lights a cigar. He reclines in his high-back leather
chair. The room depicts an English Manor theme.

Mitchell stares at a myriad of stuffed animals, sitting,
standing and mounted.

HAL

Have a seat, Mitchell.

Hal opens his desk. He produces a thick envelope.

HAL

After we spoke about finding your
father, I called a detective friend
of mine who owed me a favor.

Hal pushes the envelope across the desktop.

MITCHELL

I wasn't expecting all of this, but
thanks.

HAL

He dug up some information about
your mother. It isn't real
flattering.

Mitchell reads the enclosed documentation.

MITCHELL

This doesn't surprise me.

HAL

You knew about her drunk driving and
drug charges?

MITCHELL

I picked her up at the police
station several times.

HAL

It says she served a one-year jail
sentence as a repeat offender. Who
looked after you?

MITCHELL
Coach Farrar, my high school coach.

HAL
Did you also know that she has an
outstanding felony for kidnapping?

Mitchell sets down the envelope.

MITCHELL
(solemn)
No.

Hal stands, walks over to a large elk mounted on the wall.

HAL
I tracked this bull elk for three
days.

MITCHELL
He's huge!

HAL
I don't like giving up. I'll do my
best to find your father.

INT. TEAM BUS - DAY

Commonwealth's charter bus pulls up to the entrance of an
upscale hotel. Coach Davies stands by the driver.

COACH DAVIES
Good practice today, men. Enjoy the
city, curfew is eleven. No
exceptions.

Dexter and Mitchell exit. Other teammates disembark.

DEXTER
Feel like exploring?

MITCHELL
I'll follow you.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO BAY - WHARF - DAY

Mitchell, with his sketchpad, and Dexter walk along dockside
vendors and souvenir shops.

The bay is choppy. Small anchored boats bob. A steady breeze
whips among fellow tourists and locals.

An eye-catching girl walks past. Dexter stops, flips down his
shades.

Mitchell is oblivious.

She turns, smiles at Dexter, and continues to walk away.

Dexter turns around for one last glance.

DEXTER

Miss her, don't you?

MITCHELL

She's all I think about.

DEXTER

You're infected.

MITCHELL

Whatever you call it. I can't let it mess with my game.

A text alert comes from Mitchell's phone. The message is from Emily. He stops to read it.

DEXTER

Yep. It's love.

MITCHELL

She says she misses me, and that her family says hi.

DEXTER

Well...text the girl back!

Mitchell stares at his phone. He turns around to type a short message. He finishes, then faces Dexter.

MITCHELL

There. I did it.

Dexter shakes his head. He puts Mitchell in a playful headlock. They begin to walk again.

DEXTER

You're one shy white boy. When a brother sees a fine girl, she and everyone else will know it.

MITCHELL

I'm not that type.

Dexter looks down at Mitchell. He smiles.

DEXTER

Thanks again for helping me stay eligible.

MITCHELL
You did the studying.

DEXTER
But, you kept me focused.

Mitchell and Dexter stop. They lean against a wooden railing.

MITCHELL
You're not rushing as much in
practice.

DEXTER
Maybe my defense and passing will
get Coach's attention.

MITCHELL
So, no more "Hang-Time"?

DEXTER
No promises.

Dexter gazes out across San Francisco Bay. The sky is
overcast as he stares at Alcatraz Prison.

Mitchell takes out his sketchpad.

MITCHELL
You okay?

DEXTER
My cousin ended up in Rahway for
murder. He won't ever be comin' out.

Mitchell begins to draw. Seagulls fly overhead. Whitecaps
fill the bay.

MITCHELL
I've never lived in a city.

DEXTER
You're always lookin' over your
shoulder. People being robbed, shot.

MITCHELL
We only shoot firecrackers in my
town.

Dexter glances at Mitchell's drawing.

Alcatraz is depicted with an angel hovering over it. Dexter
appears confused.

MITCHELL

I like to think there's always hope.
 (beat)
 For me, God seems to always come
 through even when a situation looks
 hopeless?

Dexter looks back out across the bay. A sudden burst of sunlight strikes Alcatraz.

Mitchell receives a text message alert. Dexter grins.

MITCHELL

What?

DEXTER

How many texts is that in the last
 hour?

MITCHELL

Six.

DEXTER

Anything more than five means you're
 done. Seriously done.

INT. TEAM HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Coach Davies checks each team member's room for curfew. He knocks on Mitchell and Dexter's door. Mitchell answers. He steps out into the marble-floored hallway.

COACH DAVIES

Enjoying Frisco?

MITCHELL

Yes, sir. Went down to the wharf.

COACH DAVIES

Dexter here?

MITCHELL

In the bathroom.

COACH DAVIES

He might be our most improved
 player. Gives us added depth,
 especially if Lexus or Clayton goes
 down.

MITCHELL

Maybe he's playing out of position.

COACH DAVIES

I don't follow.

MITCHELL

What if you tried him out at the two?

COACH DAVIES

He's six eight!

MITCHELL

Exactly. He's a mismatch for most guards.

COACH DAVIES

Interesting. I'll think about it. Get some rest.

INT. GOLDEN GATE UNIVERSITY - ARENA - DAY

A sparse arena crowd watches pregame warmups.

On the sideline, TOURNAMENT ANNOUNCERS brief a national television audience.

TOURNAMENT ANNOUNCER #1

Ranked eighth in the latest A.P. poll, the Commonwealth Raiders are chasing at least a two seed in the upcoming national tournament.

TOURNAMENT ANNOUNCER #2

We just learned that Dexter Roberts will be starting in place of Tellis Killibrew.

INT. SANDERS LIVING ROOM - DAY

MARK SANDERS, 40s, sweatshirt, lanky, stretches out on the couch in front of the TV. He munches on a bowl of popcorn. HELEN SANDERS, 40s, petite, cute, in a pink jogging suit, checks her watch.

HELEN

Sure you don't want to jog with me?

MARK

Oregon's playing today.

HELEN

You should have been a coach.

MARK

Too late. Besides, you would have never married me.

HELEN

I should be back in half-an-hour.

Mark tunes to the television broadcast of the Golden Gate University Classic.

INT. GOLDEN GATE UNIVERSITY - ARENA - COURT - DAY

Commonwealth and Oregon College line up for the tipoff. Commonwealth controls.

Mitchell passes to Dexter who looks inside, then passes back to Mitchell. Mitchell finds Ramon who puts up a turnaround jumper.

TOURNAMENT ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

Commonwealth is first on the board with two.

Oregon inbounds the ball. Dexter pressures the ball, tips it away. Mitchell picks it up, passes it back to Dexter who streaks toward the basket. He scores.

INT. SANDERS LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mark sits up and moves closer to the edge of the couch. Game footage of Commonwealth and Oregon is seen on the large flat screen.

Mark races to a nearby bookshelf to retrieve his college yearbook. He flips to his basketball team photo.

Helen walks back in.

HELEN

I forgot my iPod.

MARK

You won't believe what I'm seeing. Look at the team photo.

HELEN

I always did like your legs.

MARK

After the timeout, watch the point guard for Commonwealth.

Helen sits down on the couch next to Mark. He clicks the remote to turn up the volume.

TOURNAMENT ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
It's another steal by the Raiders!

HELEN
What about the guard?

MARK
His name is Mitchell Craig. See if
he reminds you of anyone.

Mark and Helen are glued to the TV.

Mitchell brings the ball up. He passes inside to Lexus. Lexus
is double-teamed, but finds Mitchell for a back door pass.

HELEN
You've got to be kidding!

MARK
Do you think it's possible?

HELEN
The age is about right, and the
resemblance is amazing!

MARK
Maybe, after all these years?

HELEN
Shh! Keep watching.

INT. GOLDEN GATE UNIVERSITY - ARENA - DAY

Commonwealth has a commanding lead over Oregon College with
three minutes left in the game. Coach Davies signals a
timeout. His starters head for the bench.

COACH MYERS
Genius move, putting Roberts at the
two.

COACH DAVIES
Actually, Mitchell put the idea in
my head.

COACH MYERS
According to the stats, Roberts has
sixteen points, three steals, six
assists, and eight rebounds.

COACH DAVIES
What's Mitchell got?

COACH MYERS
 Twenty-one points, eight assists,
 four steals, and four rebounds.

COACH DAVIES
 Pretty good tandem at guard, don't
 you think?

Mitchell and Dexter celebrate on the bench along with the
 rest of team.

MITCHELL
 You were awesome!

DEXTER
 It's been a long time comin'.

LEXUS
 You did good, "Hang-Time."

MITCHELL
 I knew you could climb, but had no
 idea you could bound like that.

INT. SANDERS LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mark and Helen sit upright, motionless, staring at the
 television.

TOURNAMENT ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
 Commonwealth moves its record to
 eighteen and two while Oregon drops
 to fifteen and six. The "Player of
 the Game" goes to Mitchell Craig.

MARK
 Convinced?

HELEN
 Uh-huh.

MARK
 Ever been to Kentucky?

INT. CAMPUS GYM - DAY

Mitchell sits alone on an upper bleacher. He reads.

A custodian dust mops one end of the court.

Emily, dressed in warmups, enters, carrying a basketball. She
 limps, dribbles, shoots, then looks up.

EMILY
(waving)
Hey!

Mitchell waves back. He goes back to reading.

Emily trudges up to join him.

EMILY
That must be some letter.

MITCHELL
It's from someone who might know my
father.

Mitchell hands Emily the letter.

MITCHELL
He knows about my mother's tattoo.

EMILY
But, how did he find you?

MITCHELL
He saw us play Oregon.

Emily scans the letter.

MITCHELL
He even knows where my birthmark is!

EMILY
So this Mark person isn't your
father?

MITCHELL
I'm not sure.

Emily hands the letter back to Mitchell.

EMILY
Now what?

MITCHELL
He wants to meet me.

EMILY
Sounds like an answer to prayer.

MITCHELL
Maybe.

INT. HAIR SALON - DAY

The salon is contemporary with exposed beams, bamboo flooring, and brick interior.

Betsy dyes the hair of a 50-something FEMALE CUSTOMER. Two other patrons receive routine cuts by other stylists.

BETSY

This is a good color for you.

FEMALE CUSTOMER

I heard Mitchell is doing great at Commonwealth.

BETSY

He's made me so proud.

Middle-aged businessman TODD HARGROVE overhears the conversation.

TODD

Mitchell sure put it on Oregon College last week. M.V.P. is pretty impressive.

The hair dye applicator slips out of Betsy's hand.

BETSY

(nervous)

He didn't mention that.

TODD

He's averaging almost twenty points a game. You might have a future N.B.A. player on your hands.

BETSY

I wanna make sure he gets his degree first.

FEMALE CUSTOMER

You mean his degree?

TODD

Commonwealth plays Louisville at the end of the month. Can you get me tickets?

BETSY

Gotta check. We talk almost every night.

Betsy's cell phone rings. She ignores it.

FEMALE CUSTOMER
 Don't mind me. Go ahead and answer.
 It might be Mitchell.

Betsy hesitates, then answers.

BETSY
 Hello?

INT. MITCHELL'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Mitchell bounces a basketball as he paces.

MITCHELL
 Mom?

Betsy pretends to be excited. She talks out loud so everyone in the salon can hear.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

BETSY
 Hi, honey!

MITCHELL
 I'm sorry to bother you, but--

BETSY
 Can't talk long. I got a customer.

FEMALE CUSTOMER
 (whispering)
 Take as long as you need.

MITCHELL
 Yesterday I spoke with Mark Sanders,
 from Oregon.

Betsy turns away from her customer. She lowers her voice.

BETSY
 (uneasy)
 How do you know him?

MITCHELL
 He has information about our family.

Betsy abruptly ends the call, but continues to talk.

A loud dial tone beeps in Mitchell's ear.

MITCHELL
 Mom?

BETSY

Okay, honey. Love you too. Bye.

Betsy fumbles her phone, then drops it.

FEMALE CUSTOMER

Are you okay?

BETSY

I get emotional every time we talk.
Will you excuse me?

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

The glass-enclosed lobby is modern, tropical.

A family checks in at the front desk.

Mitchell and Emily hold hands next to a large fountain.

EMILY

Sure you don't want me to come with
you?

MITCHELL

I need to do this myself.

Mitchell and Emily hug. Mitchell heads to the elevator.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Mark Sanders straightens his shirt collar in the mirror. A
leather briefcase sits open on the bed.

A knock on the door. Mark pauses, breathes deeply, looks
heavenward. He opens the door.

MITCHELL

Mr. Sanders?

MARK

Mitchell!

Mitchell stares. Their resemblance is remarkable.

MARK

It's been a long time. Please, come
in.

Mitchell hesitates, then enters.

MITCHELL

Are you my father?

MARK

No, but let me show you something...

Mark pulls a photograph from his briefcase. He hands it to Mitchell.

Mitchell stares at an athletic, tall, 30-something man.

MITCHELL

It's you!

MARK

No. That's my twin brother. Bobby.

MITCHELL

I'm confused.

Mark bows his head, pauses, then looks back up.

MARK

Bobby died five years ago.

Mitchell closes his eyes, then starts toward the door.

MITCHELL

I can't do this.

(beat)

I've been faithful! Why is God putting me through this!

MARK

Sometimes it's hard to understand His purpose?

Mark pulls out another photograph.

MARK

Here.

Mitchell debates, then takes it.

A young man posing in a basketball uniform is seen.

MARK

It's your father at your same age. Identical huh?

MITCHELL

He played basketball?

MARK

We both played at Pacific College in Oregon.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

When I saw you on television, I
swore I was looking at Bobby.

Mitchell hands the picture back. He sits down at the table.

MITCHELL

How come he abandoned me?

MARK

Your father never abandoned you.
Betsy...your mother...she took you
when you were two.

MITCHELL

Why would she do that?

MARK

She was on probation for possession.
Bobby figured she was about to get
busted again.

MITCHELL

Did he do drugs?

MARK

No. He was pretty straight.

Mark hands Mitchell another picture.

Bobby, 21, and Betsy, 22, are holding hands.

MARK

Betsy met your father at a campus
party.

MITCHELL

That still doesn't explain why he
didn't come after me!

MARK

My brother spent every penny he had
searching for you. He died a poor
man.

Mitchell stands. He throws the photo.

MITCHELL

Well he should have tried harder!

MARK

Your mother just disappeared! We
thought she took you out of the
country.

MITCHELL
(solemn)
No, Kentucky.

Mitchell turns away from Mark.

MARK
It's not fair what your mother did.
Bobby was devastated.

MITCHELL
What's my real name?

Mark hands Mitchell a copy of his birth certificate.

The birth certificate reads: "MITCHELL ROBERT SANDERS. Born May 15, 1997. All Saints Hospital, Portland, Oregon."

MARK
I promised your father before he
died that I would continue looking
for you. He would be so pleased with
how you turned out.

Mark pulls a CD and a toddler's shoe from his briefcase. He hands them to Mitchell.

MARK
Your father wanted you to have
these.

MITCHELL
What's this?

MARK
It's your shoe. He found it right
after you disappeared. The C.D.
contains some things you need to
hear.

Mitchell and Mark stand, then hug.

MARK
We'll stay in touch.

MITCHELL
I can't thank you enough for finding
me.

MARK
A higher power was at work here. I
was just watching a basketball game.

INT. EMILY'S CAR - DAY

Emily, in the driver's seat of her late-model Volvo, smiles as Mitchell gets in.

EMILY

You okay?

MITCHELL

(stoic)

Let's head back.

Office buildings, restaurants, sightseers, and corporate suits fill the downtown backdrop.

Emily stops at a red light. Mitchell removes the CD from his jacket.

MITCHELL

It's a message from my father.

EMILY

Maybe I shouldn't hear it.

Mitchell inserts the CD. He adjusts the volume. Bobby Sanders' voice on the recording is weak, impassioned.

The light turns green.

BOBBY SANDERS (V.O.)

Dear Mitchell. I can't begin to express how much I love you and have missed being with you all these years.

Emily pauses the CD.

Mitchell presses play.

MITCHELL

It's okay.

BOBBY SANDERS (V.O.)

I record this knowing that I will never see you again. The torture of not having you near me has been devastating. Not a day has gone by that I didn't look, hope, or dream that we could somehow find each other.

Teary eyed, Emily pulls off to the side of the road.

BOBBY SANDERS (V.O.)
 The good Lord and I got close after
 you disappeared. I never stopped
 praying for you, and know you must
 be a fine young man.

Emily reaches for Mitchell's hand.

BOBBY SANDERS (V.O.)
 I've tried forgiving your mother,
 but I don't think there's enough
 time for that. Maybe you can do
 what I can't. The doctors tell me
 I've got a month. Maybe two.

Mitchell turns his head away.

BOBBY SANDERS (V.O.)
 I don't fear dying, but I'm scared
 you'll never know how much I've
 missed you. I love you. Dad.

Mitchell begins to weep. Emily embraces him.

INT. COMMONWEALTH ADMISSIONS OFFICE - DAY

Behind closed doors, Director of Admissions, LYDIA
 HUDDLESTON, 60s, refined elocution, faces off with Betsy.

LYDIA HUDDLESTON
 Mrs. Craig, this is quite unusual
 for a parent to pull their child out
 of school in the middle of a
 semester.

BETSY
 He's still seventeen, it's my right.
 Now, if you'd kindly release my son,
 I'll be on my way.

LYDIA HUDDLESTON
 Isn't there anything we can do?
 Mitchell's a four-point-oh student,
 and a valuable member of the
 basketball team.

BETSY
 Do I have to talk with the
 Chancellor? Release my son!

Ms. Huddleston opens a file, signs a form, then hands it to
 Betsy.

LYDIA HUDDLESTON
 There. Mitchell is welcome back
 anytime.

BETSY
 He won't be back.

INT. COACH DAVIES' OFFICE - DAY

Coach Myers sits at Coach Davies' desk.

COACH MYERS
 If we can guard Missouri's outside
 shooters, we should have no problem
 winning.

COACH DAVIES
 That would keep us atop the
 conference standings.

COACH MYERS
 I shouldn't say this, but I think we
 can win out.

COACH DAVIES
 You may be right.

A SECRETARY, mid-50s, peeks in.

SECRETARY
 I'm sorry, sir, but Ms. Huddleston,
 from Admissions would like to have a
 word with you. Says it's urgent.

COACH DAVIES
 Send her in.

COACH MYERS
 I'll wait in the film room until
 you're finished.

COACH DAVIES
 Ms. Huddleston, please have a seat.

MS. HUDDLESTON
 That won't be necessary. I won't be
 long.

COACH DAVIES
 Oh?

MS. HUDDLESTON
 I have some disturbing news about
 one of your players.

COACH DAVIES
I'm listening.

MS. HUDDLESTON
Mitchell Craig's mother just left my
office. She has withdrawn her son
from school.

COACH DAVIES
What for?

MS. HUDDLESTON
She wouldn't discuss her reasons
with me.

COACH DAVIES
Can't we contest this?

MS. HUDDLESTON
I'm afraid not.

Coach Davies stands.

COACH DAVIES
I'll talk with her!

MS. HUDDLESTON
She won't listen. I tried.

COACH DAVIES
Don't we have any legal options?

MS. HUDDLESTON
He's under eighteen. Mitchell needs
to vacate his dorm room. I'm sorry.

Coach Davies slumps down in his chair. Coach Myers walks back
in.

COACH MYERS
So?

COACH DAVIES
We won't go undefeated.

INT. MITCHELL'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Mitchell studies at his desk. Dexter works at the computer. A
heavy knock. Mitchell answers.

MITCHELL
Coach!

Coach Davies looks over at Dexter.

DEXTER
I'll wait in the hallway.

Coach Davies closes the door.

COACH DAVIES
Have a seat.

MITCHELL
Is something wrong?

COACH DAVIES
Your mother has taken you out of school.

MITCHELL
Why?

COACH DAVIES
You tell me.

Mitchell rises. He paces, then stops.

MITCHELL
She's angry that I talked to my Uncle Mark.

COACH DAVIES
I don't follow.

MITCHELL
She's been lying to me. I found out she abducted me when I was small.

COACH DAVIES
Have you spoken with her?

MITCHELL
I've tried, but she won't answer the phone.

COACH DAVIES
You mean a lot to this team, but unless she reconsiders--

MITCHELL
Isn't there anything I can do?

Coach Davies stands.

COACH DAVIES
Pray.

INT. HAIR SALON - DAY

Betsy sits in an empty barber chair flipping through a magazine. The salon is empty except for fellow hairstylist DEE RAMSEY, 35, short, attractive.

BETSY

I've had one customer all morning.

DEE

Maybe I'll take an early lunch. Can I bring you back something?

BETSY

A winning lottery ticket.

Betsy continues flipping through her magazine.

TERRY SIMMONS, 40s, facial scar, ripped jeans, tattooed, with bulging biceps enters.

TERRY SIMMONS

Open for business?

Betsy closes her magazine.

BETSY

(bothered)

Have a seat.

TERRY SIMMONS

Did I miss the rush?

Betsy places a large cape around him.

BETSY

You're only our third customer this morning. How you like it cut?

TERRY SIMMONS

Just a trim.

Betsy combs out his hair. She begins to clip with scissors.

TERRY SIMMONS

I'm fairly new in town.

BETSY

Not me. I been here too long.

TERRY SIMMONS

Seems like a nice place.

BETSY
Too many self righteous people
around here if you ask me.

Terry begins to snicker.

BETSY
What's so funny?

Terry raises a heavily tattooed arm. He points to a specific tattoo.

TERRY SIMMONS
Read this.

BETSY
"I'm right, ya'll are wrong."

TERRY SIMMONS
I was out of control when they inked
that one.

BETSY
How so?

TERRY SIMMONS
Lot's of drugs, girls, and
rebellion.

BETSY
What changed?

TERRY SIMMONS
Even though life kicked me to the
gutter. I realized nobody put me
there. I crawled into it myself.
God was just showing me a way out.
If I wanted it?

Betsy pauses. She looks into the salon mirror back at Terry.

BETSY
It ain't that simple.

TERRY SIMMONS
I couldn't do it on my own. And you
can't either.

Betsy continues to cut Terry's hair.

BETSY
You still look rough.

TERRY SIMMONS

Maybe on the outside, but inside I'm different.

Betsy holds up a mirror for Terry to see the back of his head.

TERRY SIMMONS

Looks good.

BETSY

When's your book comin' out?

TERRY SIMMONS

No books, just lettin' people know they have options.

Dee walks back in with lunch.

DEE

Pastor Simmons!

TERRY SIMMONS

I didn't know you worked here.

BETSY

You know each other?

DEE

I started going to his church last month.

Betsy rolls her eyes.

Terry walks over to the cash register to pay Betsy.

BETSY

That'll be twelve dollars.

TERRY SIMMONS

God loves you. Remember that.

BETSY

Whatever. I still need twelve bucks.

Terry hands Betsy a twenty dollar bill and a card.

TERRY SIMMONS

Keep the change.

BETSY

What's this?

TERRY SIMMONS
An invitation to visit our church.

Betsy scans the card.

BETSY
Don't look for me anytime soon.

INT. CAMPUS STUDENT CENTER - DAY

Mitchell and Emily brainstorm, oblivious to the students passing by.

EMILY
There's got to be a way to get you back on the team.

MITCHELL
I called Uncle Mark. He's really upset.

EMILY
You still need a place to stay. I have friends that live off campus.

MITCHELL
Maybe I'll go back to Canaan.

EMILY
Just like that?

Mitchell wraps his arms around Emily.

MITCHELL
That's not what I meant.

EMILY
Then what?

MITCHELL
I need to straighten things out with mom.

Emily stands. Mitchell follows.

He pulls Emily close.

EMILY
I'm sorry, but that woman doesn't deserve you.

MITCHELL
Mom is hurting. I know God can reach her.

(MORE)

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

(beat)
You're the best thing about
Commonwealth.

EMILY
Better than being on the basketball
team?

MITCHELL
(ribbing)
Possibly.

Emily pushes Mitchell away.

EMILY
Maybe I should just let you sleep on
a bench.

MITCHELL
You wouldn't get much rest.

EMILY
Why is that?

MITCHELL
You'd be too worried about me.

EMILY
Is that so?

Mitchell pulls Emily close again. Like a dancer, she follows his lead. She gazes into his eyes. He kisses her long and passionately. They separate.

EMILY
Mitchell Craig Sanders! I think you
just fouled me.

INT. MITCHELL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A candle dances on the kitchen table as Betsy, in a drunken stupor, sits in the dark with an open bottle of Jack Daniels. A knock at the door. Betsy yells.

BETSY
(slurring)
It's open!

A tall shadowy figure enters. It stops. Betsy squints as the candlelight reveals a familiar face.

BETSY
Bobby?

MARK

No. It's Mark.

BETSY

How did you find me?

MARK

Mitchell.

BETSY

I'm sorry, but--

Mark moves closer.

MARK

After all these years of searching.
Why?

BETSY

Desperate. Screwed up. I don't know.

MARK

I should turn you in.

BETSY

Please, don't!

MARK

Maybe prison is what you deserve!
What you did to Bobby is the same
thing you're doing to Mitchell.
It's cruel!

BETSY

I promise I'll make it right. Just
don't tell the cops.

MARK

Mitchell loves you. You've already
lost Bobby. You want to lose him
too?

BETSY

No. I just--

Betsy stumbles over to the kitchen sink.

BETSY

You tell Bobby where I am?

She splashes water on her face. She turns back around.

MARK

Bobby's gone. He died five years ago. Died without ever knowing his son. You did that to him. You crushed the life out of my brother! Now you're doing the same thing to Mitchell! Why, Betsy? Why do you hate so much?

BETSY

(stiffens)

I don't hate them no more than I hate me. I'm sorry about Bobby. Honest to God, I am. But there's too much wrong in me to set it right. Now you either call the police or get out of my house.

MARK

Bobby never forgave you, Betsy. You want Mitchell to feel the same way?

BETSY

Get out! Now!

She throws a bottle at him. It crashes at his feet. He stares at her with contempt that melts slowly into pity. It's the pity that stops her cold.

BETSY

Please, Mark... Leave me be.

Alone, in the dark. She crumples into a chair. Through her moistening eyes, she sees something glistening in the candlelight.

Terry Simmons card.

INT. CAMPUS CHAPEL - NIGHT

Mitchell holds Emily's hand as they sit facing each other in a long wooden pew.

EMILY

Dear Lord. I'm so grateful for Mitchell. I ask that somehow, someway you could help him rejoin the team.

MITCHELL

Father God.

(MORE)

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

Thank you for bringing Emily into my life, and please speak to my mother in a way that she can hear and understand. She needs you so much. Amen.

EMILY

So what happens now?

MITCHELL

We wait for God's answers.

EMILY

We need them pretty quick.

MITCHELL

His timing is perfect. Don't worry.

Mitchell and Emily hug.

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

Betsy watches from a park bench as joggers and walkers pass by. She squints into the sunlight as children play at a nearby playground. JOE, a slender gentleman, 60s approaches.

JOE

May I sit down?

Surprised, Betsy slides to one end of the bench.

BETSY

I guess so.

JOE

I try to walk here everyday. At least when the weather is nice.

Betsy stares off into the distance.

JOE

Never seen you before.

BETSY

I don't get out much.

JOE

I have a daughter about your age. I'm Joe.

Betsy avoids making eye contact.

BETSY

Betsy.

JOE

We haven't spoken for years. I really miss her.

BETSY

What happened?

JOE

It's my fault. Always wanted a son. I guess I took it out on her.

Betsy turns to face Joe.

BETSY

Did you ever tell her you loved her?

Joe bows his head.

JOE

Sadly, not that I can remember.

(beat)

I have two grandchildren I've never met.

BETSY

My father did the same thing to me. I hated him for it.

JOE

Did you two ever make things right?

BETSY

No. He died before we had the chance.

(beat)

I also hurt someone I loved very deeply.

INSERT - PHOTO

Of Bobby, 21 and Betsy, 22, holding hands.

BACK TO SCENE

BETSY

Look, I don't feel sorry for you, but at least talk to her before it's too late.

JOE

Forgiveness is hard for some people to accept. It took me a long time to forgive myself.

BETSY

In a lot of ways, that's where I'm at too. I'm learnin' I don't have all the answers. Just a lot of scars.

Joe extends his hand. Betsy hesitates, then accepts it.

JOE

Thank you for talking to me. Since he can't be here, please accept my apology for what your father did. I'm really sorry.

Betsy tears up.

BETSY

Thank you.

Betsy glances skyward.

BETSY (V.O.)

Could you really forgive me?

INT. BELIEVER'S HARVEST CHURCH - DAY

Pastor Simmons stands at the pulpit before the congregation. Betsy stands in the far back of the church. Not comfortable enough to sit down.

TERRY SIMMONS

Many of you are lonely, full of doubts and questions. God doesn't promise that life will be perfect if we accept Him. We'll stumble, but, God guarantees that he'll be there to help us climb back up again. No matter how many times we fall, he'll be there with loving arms. If you're tired of living a life of guilt and shame, I invite you to come forward now so we can pray with you. Don't wait until it's too late. Come.

SERIES OF SHOTS

-- A praise band begins to lead the congregation in worship.

-- Several in attendance approach the altar.

-- Pastor Simmons and the church Elders pray with others.

-- Betsy walks slowly down the aisle towards the front.

INT. COMMONWEALTH ARENA - DAY

Pumping music brings the sold-out crowd to their feet. The arena lights go out. Laser lights beam. The ARENA ANNOUNCER takes the microphone.

SUPER: "MIDWEST FINALS - COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY vs. KNOXVILLE UNIVERSITY"

ARENA ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Ladies and gentleman, boys and
girls, let's welcome your
Commonwealth Raiders!

SERIES OF SHOTS - PLAYER INTRODUCTIONS

-- Lexus Braswell runs out to center court.

-- Clayton Holmes runs out to center court.

-- Ramon Hernandez runs out to center court.

-- Dexter Roberts runs out to center court.

ARENA ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And starting at point guard is six-
foot-three freshman, Mitchell Craig
Sanders!

-- Mitchell runs out to center court.

The home crowd goes crazy.

COURTSIDE

The KNOXVILLE COACH, livid, berates his ASSISTANT COACH.

KNOXVILLE COACH
I thought you scouted them?

ASSISTANT COACH
I did, but the kid never played!

KNOXVILLE COACH
I don't know what Commonwealth is
pulling, but I'm playing this game
under protest.

UP IN THE STANDS

Emily, her family, Mark and Helen Sanders are on their feet, cheering.

EMILY

It's great to have Mitchell back on the team.

MARK

(slyly)

I wonder what changed Betsy's mind?

COURTSIDE

Team announcers hype the matchup.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1

While Mitchell Craig might have added Sanders to his name, he's going to need all his old moves to give this Commonwealth team a chance against a very tough Knoxville defense.

Commonwealth's cheerleaders stir up their fan base. A chant echoes throughout the stadium...

STADIUM CROWD

Raider pride! Raider pride!

ON THE COURT

SERIES OF SHOTS - GAME TIME

-- Commonwealth and Knoxville players are lined up for the opening tipoff.

-- Knoxville controls the tip. Their point guard fires it to a wide-open teammate for a three-point goal.

-- Mitchell passes inside to Ramon for the score.

-- Knoxville breaks Commonwealth's press to make a layup.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

Commonwealth is being tested early.

-- Dexter dribbles into Commonwealth's front court. He gets stripped of the ball.

-- Knoxville pushes the ball up and converts another three-point shot.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
 Knoxville is all over the Raiders
 for an eight-two lead!

COURTSIDE

Coach Davies signals a timeout. He huddles with his team.

COACH DAVIES
 Knoxville wants this game more than
 you do! You're not playing
 aggressive. I want more pressure!

ON THE COURT

-- Mitchell sets up the offense. Knoxville shows zone. He finds Clayton on the block for an easy two.

-- Dexter steals the inbound pass. He lays it in for a two-point score.

-- Knoxville tries to break Commonwealth's swarming press, but is called for a ten-second violation.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
 Knoxville is really struggling
 against the Raider press.

-- Commonwealth's press continues to give Knoxville problems.

-- Commonwealth scores at will with putbacks, slam dunks, and three pointers.

-- Mitchell's leadership is on display as he directs the Raider's offense throughout the game.

COURTSIDE

With a minute to play, Coach Davies empties his bench.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
 Commonwealth's depth and the poise
 of Mitchell Sanders were just too
 much for Knoxville as the Raiders
 win one-oh-one to eighty-two.

TEAM ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
 Commonwealth will move on next week
 to face Blue Ridge State of West
 Virginia while Bayou College takes
 on Charlotte University in
 Louisville for the national finals.

UP IN THE STANDS

Emily writes on a notepad.

EMILY

Mitchell had twenty-four points,
three steals, eight assists, and
five rebounds.

HAL

Not a bad day for being out a month.

MARK

He plays just like his dad. Doesn't
force a thing.

HELEN

I used to tolerate watching Mark
play, but Mitchell is exciting!

MARK

Thanks, dear.

INT. LOUISVILLE - FREEDOM HALL - DAY

Commonwealth's players stand in a semi-circle facing Coach
Davies and Coach Myers.

Coach Farrar observes from a nearby set of bleachers.

COACH DAVIES

Blue Ridge will be a worthy
opponent. If we start out the way
we did against Knoxville, our season
is over.

COACH MYERS

Blue Ridge likes to push the ball up
the floor. The bulk of their scoring
comes from their inside game.

COACH DAVIES

Coach Myers is going to run through
a couple of their offensive sets.

BLEACHERS

Coach Davies sits next to Coach Farrar.

COACH DAVIES

I'm glad you accepted our
invitation.

COACH FARRAR

I was surprised. Thank you.

COACH DAVIES

Before the year started, I wasn't sure if we could even make the tournament.

COACH FARRAR

You found the right combination of players.

COACH DAVIES

You had Mitchell well prepared for college.

COACH FARRAR

We worked on the basics, but he's one of those kids who would sleep in the gym if I had let him.

COACH DAVIES

(chuckling)

That hasn't changed.

Coach Davies stands up. He yells down to the court.

COACH DAVIES

Clayton! They screen to the left, not the right.

Coach Davies sits back down.

COACH DAVIES

So how would you play against Blue Ridge?

COACH FARRAR

Offensively, keep doing what got you here. Defensively I want to give them different looks with the full-court press and half-court traps.

COACH DAVIES

Pretty good game plan. No wonder I like you. Got a special play if the game is on the line?

COACH FARRAR

My favorite is called "Clear Forty-one."

COACH DAVIES

I'm listening.

Coach Farrar takes Coach Davies' clipboard. He begins to diagram the play.

COACH DAVIES
Guaranteed to work?

COACH FARRAR
If the shooter hits the basket.

COACH DAVIES
Why are you still coaching high school?

COACH FARRAR
Maybe I'm waiting for the right opportunity.

COACH DAVIES
Coach Myers has interviewed for several head coaching positions. I might be looking for another assistant.

COACH FARRAR
You got my number.

INT. FREEDOM HALL - NIGHT

A sea of crazed fans, painted and dressed in their team colors, pack the stadium. Pulsating music blares.

SUPER: "NATIONAL TOURNAMENT - SEMIFINALS - COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY vs. BLUE RIDGE STATE"

The NETWORK ANNOUNCERS broadcast from along press row.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1
Welcome to the broadcast of our second semifinal game between the Blue Ridge State Mountaineers and the Commonwealth University Raiders.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2
If you are just tuning in, Bayou College beat Charlotte University seventy-four to sixty-eight to clinch a spot in the finals.

UP IN THE STANDS

Emily holds up a "Go Raiders" poster.

COURTSIDE

Coach Farrar sits behind the team bench.

Commonwealth players huddle. Coach Davies barks out final instructions.

COACH DAVIES
We're one step closer. I want focus
and execution. Break!

Bayou's team watches in street clothes from the near sideline. Boudreaux yells to Mitchell.

BOUDREAUX
Hey, Craig! Can't decide what name
to use?

ON THE COURT

SERIES OF SHOTS - GAME TIME

-- Commonwealth controls the tip. Mitchell directs the offense. He passes over to Dexter who banks in a ten footer.

-- Commonwealth sets up in a zone press. Blue Ridge inbounds the ball, but can't make it across half court in time. Commonwealth's ball; the Raiders score again.

-- Commonwealth switches to a full court; man-to-man press. Blue Ridge is called for a ten-second violation.

-- Commonwealth continues to run and press.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
The Raiders' defense is really
confusing the Mountaineers.

COURTSIDE

Coach Davies turns around to Coach Farrar and winks.

The Blue Ridge coach throws his towel. He calls a timeout.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1
Not only is Commonwealth putting up
points, their defense has been
relentless!

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2
Unless Blue Ridge can solve the
Raiders' pressure; it's going to be
a long night for the Mountaineers.

AFTER THE TIMEOUT

ON THE COURT

-- Blue Ridge struggles as Commonwealth sticks to its man-to-man full-court defense.

-- Mitchell's court sense and passing wizardry find his teammates for easy baskets.

-- Lexus owns the offensive and defensive boards.

-- Dexter becomes a human highlight reel with individual steals, outside shots, and dunks.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Commonwealth has proven they were
the better team. This game was never
in question.

ON THE COURT

A Blue Ridge player heaves a desperation shot with no time left.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Commonwealth University has earned
another trip into the finals on
Monday night to take on conference
foe, Bayou College.

The scoreboard reads: "Commonwealth 89 Blue Ridge 63."

Commonwealth players rush off the court. Boudreaux approaches Mitchell. He gets in his face.

BOUDREAUX
I've got something special for you
Monday night.

Lexus walks up and pushes Boudreaux away.

LEXUS
Save it for the game.

Mitchell stands his ground. Boudreaux starts to back away. He yells back at Mitchell.

BOUDREAUX
You won't finish the game! You hear
me!

INT. FREEDOM HALL - NIGHT

Cheerleaders, pep bands and mascots try to out-duel each other's teams in the sold-out arena. The crowd noise is deafening. Bayou purple and gold along with Commonwealth blue and white dominate.

SUPER: "NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP - COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY vs. BAYOU COLLEGE"

IN THE STANDS

Emily holds up a sign with Mitchell's picture and jersey number.

Betsy stands, claps and cheers.

COURTSIDE

Coach Farrar sits at the end of Commonwealth's bench. Calm, collected, he studies each team's lineup.

Television cameras and photographers fill the side court. The network announcers review the matchup.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1

We've got a sellout crowd awaiting this much anticipated matchup between the Raiders and the Tigers. What should we look for?

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2

Commonwealth and Bayou split their games during the regular season. They know and dislike each other. It should be fun to watch.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1

Marcel Boudreaux for the Tigers and Commonwealth's Mitchell Sanders are exceptional.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2

Boudreaux has so many offensive weapons, while Sanders' all-around game is amazing!

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1

It has all come down to these final two. Stay tuned.

Coach Davies gives final instructions as he kneels in front of Commonwealth's bench.

COACH DAVIES

Men, we're in for a war. Play hard, play fast, and protect each other. Team!

Commonwealth's starting five check in at the official scorer's table.

ON THE COURT

Boudreaux bumps Mitchell on purpose as both teams line up for the jump ball.

BOUDREAUX
You better have insurance.

LEXUS
If you lay a hand on him, don't come
in the lane.

BOUDREAUX
Watch me.

SERIES OF SHOTS - GAME TIME

-- Commonwealth controls the tip.

-- Dexter eyes Bayou's zone. He passes in to Ramon. Ramon sees Mitchell alone in the corner. He fires a pass. Mitchell hits the three.

-- Commonwealth's press traps a Tiger's player near mid-court. He's called for an over-and-back violation.

-- Ramon gets tied up with a Tiger's player. Pushes, shoves ensues.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Ramon Hutchins has just been called
for a technical foul.

COURTSIDE

Ramon walks to the bench. Ivan checks in to replace him.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
This game could get ugly if these
referees don't maintain control.

ON THE COURT

-- Bayou College hits both free throws.

-- Mitchell sets up the Raider's offense. He hits Dexter with an alley-oop.

-- The Raider's steal another inbound pass. Mitchell hits an NBA three pointer.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Mitchell Sanders looks to take over
this game as Commonwealth sprints
out to an eleven-to-two lead!

-- Bayou breaks Commonwealth's press. Boudreaux motions that
he wants everyone to clear out.

BOUDREAUX
I'm gonna use you.

MITCHELL
Should have turned pro last year.

-- Boudreaux pulls up for a mid-range jumper, but Dexter
elevates and blocks it down the court.

-- Commonwealth runs down the loose ball, then takes it in
for the score.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
Bayou has a monumental challenge
ahead of them tonight.

-- On the inbound pass, a Bayou player looks, then makes a
long pass behind Commonwealth's defense for two.

COACH DAVIES
Come on, Ivan, guard the basket!

-- Mitchell brings the ball up against Boudreaux.

BOUDREAUX
It's gonna be sad seeing you come
out of the game.

-- Mitchell breaks free and goes up for a short jumper.
Boudreaux recovers and makes a hard foul. Mitchell is face
down on the floor.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Commonwealth can't afford to lose
Sanders.

-- Coach Davies runs out onto the court.

-- Mitchell holds his left wrist.

-- Lexus heads toward Boudreaux. He is separated by teammates
and a referee.

SCOTT
Is it your wrist?

MITCHELL
 (writhing)
 Yeah.

SCOTT
 Lets get you to your feet. We'll
 take some x-rays.

LEXUS
 Boudreaux, I told you!

BOUDREAUX
 (devilish)
 Accidents happen.

COACH DAVIES
 How bad is it?

SCOTT
 Not good.

Mitchell is helped off the court. An eerie silence fills the arena.

IN THE CROWD

Emily sits down with her head in her hands.

Betsy covers her mouth.

COURTSIDE

Coach Myers stands as Coach Davies approaches.

COACH MYERS
 Well?

COACH DAVIES
 We just became the underdog.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - RECOVERY ROOM - NIGHT

Mitchell lies motionless on an examination table. The room is more corporate than medical with cherry-wood flooring, matching furniture, and a large flat-screen TV. Scott Wilke brings in a set of x-rays.

SCOTT
 Boudreaux undercut you on purpose.

MITCHELL
 How's my wrist?

SCOTT

A hairline fracture. I'll mobilize it with this soft cast.

MITCHELL

I can still play?

SCOTT

Not tonight. You need to rest.

MITCHELL

What about the score?

SCOTT

I'll turn the game on.

Mitchell watches the game telecast.

INT. FREEDOM HALL - NIGHT

Both coaches huddle with their players on the sidelines during a timeout.

The network announcers sum up the current game situation.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1

With ten minutes left, Bayou leads Commonwealth sixty-eight to fifty-seven. Without Sanders, the Raiders have struggled.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2

We've just been told that Mitchell Sanders won't be back. He has a fractured wrist.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1

Bayou College is looking for their first national championship.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - RECOVERY ROOM - NIGHT

Mitchell slams his good hand against the examination table. He picks up the remote to mute the television. He closes his eyes.

INT. FREEDOM HALL - NIGHT

Boudreaux leads the Tigers down the floor. He drives to the basket. Lexus hammers him.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

Wow! Lexus Braswell might have a future in the N.F.L. What a hit!

Boudreaux is bloodied as he slowly gets up. Lexus stands over him.

LEXUS
I've got three more fouls.

BOUDREAUX
You're crazy!

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - RECOVERY ROOM - NIGHT

On the exam table, Mitchell stares at the ceiling. A familiar voice is heard.

COACH FARRAR
How you feel?

MITCHELL
Like I let the team down.

COACH FARRAR
Injuries happen.

Coach Farrar pulls up a chair.

COACH FARRAR
I once saw a player break his arm in the first half. Come back after halftime, and score thirty points.

MITCHELL
That's impossible.

COACH FARRAR
He also grabbed twelve rebounds.

Mitchell slowly sits up.

COACH FARRAR
I was a grad assistant working on my Masters at Pepperdine. We had the better team, but our opponent had an NBA caliber player running the point.

MITCHELL
So he was really good?

COACH FARRAR
Good? He could score on anyone. Even tell you how he would do it. His defense was even better.

MITCHELL

Who was it?

Betsy enters. She and Mitchell embrace.

BETSY

Bobby Sanders.

(beat)

Your father averaged twenty three points, ten rebounds, and eleven assists for the entire season.

COACH FARRAR

Now it all makes sense.

Mitchell stands. He paces.

MITCHELL

I want to play!

BETSY

What did the trainer say?

MITCHELL

That I was done for the night.

BETSY

I know what Bobby would do.

Coach Farrar heads for the doorway. He pauses at the TV.

COACH FARRAR

There's about two minutes left.

INT. FREEDOM HALL - NIGHT

Mitchell emerges from a darkened tunnel into the brightly lit arena. He stops, then begins to jog toward Commonwealth's bench. The crowd erupts.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2

Is Mitchell Sanders returning to the game?

Commonwealth's team and coaches stand. Mitchell approaches. Scott Wilke rushes up.

COACH DAVIES

Mitchell?

MITCHELL

I want to go in.

SCOTT
But your wrist?

MITCHELL
I'll have plenty of time to hurt
after the game.

Coach Davies looks at Scott. He shrugs his shoulders.

SCOTT
If he can deal with the pain.

Coach Davies slaps Mitchell on the butt.

COACH DAVIES
Check in.

Mitchell races to the scorer's table.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1
This kid is a warrior!

ON THE COURT

Mitchell huddles with his teammates at mid-court.

MITCHELL
Are you ready to shut this team up?

CLAYTON
Brings us home.

LEXUS
We're all with you.

DEXTER
Let's get this hood rockin'!

MITCHELL
We can do this! Team!

Boudreaux approaches Mitchell.

BOUDREAUX
So the miracle boy is back.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
This might be the story of the year
if the Raiders can pull this game
out.

SERIES OF SHOTS - GAME RESUMES

- Commonwealth inbounds the ball. Mitchell sets up the offense.
- He passes down to Lexus who finds Dexter flying in from the opposite side for a monstrous SLAM.
- Bayou tries to break Commonwealth's press.
- Commonwealth strips the ball, takes it in for two.
- Bayou inbounds the ball, gets to mid-court. Commonwealth's trap forces Boudreaux to lose the ball.
- Mitchell scoops it up, makes an easy layup.

COURTSIDE

BAYOU'S COACH signals for a timeout.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Commonwealth has stormed back with
fifty-seven seconds left.

Commonwealth's bench listens to Coach Davies' instructions.

COACH DAVIES
We're back in this thing. We have
one timeout left. Play smart.

ON THE COURT

-- Bayou inbounds a long pass to Boudreaux, who is immediately fouled.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
Boudreaux is cocky, but he has the
numbers to back it up.

-- Boudreaux hits both free throws. Bayou is up 80-74 with 51 seconds left.

-- Ivan inbounds the ball to Mitchell. He makes a quick pass downcourt to Clayton who hits a three.

-- Bayou comes down, passes to a player underneath the basket, he is fouled. Bayou goes to the line for a one-and-one.

-- The Tigers make the first free throw, but miss the second. The score is 81-77.

-- Commonwealth's bench is standing.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
 Twenty-six seconds. Sanders passes
 down to Roberts who hits another
 wide-open three! Bayou leads eighty-
 one to eighty.

-- Boudreaux brings the ball up with fifteen seconds left.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
 Boudreaux wants the last shot.

-- Sanders defends. He jabs at the ball, knocks it loose,
 grabs it, calls a timeout with six seconds left.

COURTSIDE

Coach Davies huddles with his starters. He looks down the
 bench at Coach Farrar.

COACH DAVIES
 We've got time for one play. Run
 "Clear Forty-one." Clayton you
 inbound the ball. Mitchell, make
 this shot for your dad.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
 Folks, it's come down to this. The
 entire arena is on their feet.

ON THE COURT

Clayton inbounds the ball to Dexter. Mitchell comes off a
 screen; he receives the pass. Dexter joins the Raiders'
 other starters now stacked in tandem on the far side of the
 court. It's one-on-one; Boudreaux defends.

BOUDREAUX
 You don't have a move I can't stop.

Mitchell fakes right, dribbles left, spins back into the
 lane. Boudreaux reaches, but Mitchell gets behind him.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
 Sanders explodes to the rim.

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
 Unbelievable! He slams it home!
 Commonwealth wins it, eighty-two to
 eighty-one!

NETWORK ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
 No question. Mitchell Sanders is the
 M.V.P.!

The arena is in a frenzy. Confetti flies. Fans rush the court.

Dexter and Mitchell embrace.

DEXTER
Didn't know you could jump.

MITCHELL
Only when I have to.

Emily finds Mitchell. They hug, kiss.

COURTSIDE

Coach Davies and Coach Farrar shake hands in front of Commonwealth's bench.

COACH DAVIES
That was some play you came up with.

COACH FARRAR
The team ran it perfect.

COACH DAVIES
Don't plan on being back at Canaan next year.

COACH FARRAR
Why not?

COACH DAVIES
I've got a vacant position on my staff. Interested?

COACH FARRAR
Maybe. But, first you've got a championship to enjoy.

UP IN THE STANDS

Betsy looks heavenward. She mouths "THANK YOU."

EXT. LAKE - SHORELINE - DAY

A crowd of different age groups is gathered. Emily, Coach Farrar, Sergeant Perez and Dee Ramsey are included.

IN THE WATER

Pastor Terry Simmons stands waist deep facing those assembled. A line of people wait to be baptized.

TERRY SIMMONS

(charismatic)

When God transforms you, the Bible says you become born again. Baptism is a public profession of your faith.

Pastor Simmons motions for the first person to step out into the water with him.

CHERYL WILLIAMS, a teenage girl, wades out first.

Pastor Simmons places his hand behind her back and head as she squeezes her nose.

TERRY SIMMONS

Cheryl, because you profess Jesus as your Lord and Savior, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Simmons dunks the teenager completely under the water. She comes out shouting as those on the shore rejoice and clap.

CHERYL WILLIAMS

Hallelujah!

SERIES OF SHOTS

-- Pastor Simmons baptizes a grandmotherly type who loses her wig.

-- A married couple hug after Pastor Simmons baptizes them.

-- A bearded construction-worker type lifts Pastor Simmons up into the air after his baptism.

The final two people approach. Pastor Simmons smiles broadly as he has them face the crowd.

TERRY SIMMONS

I've had the honor of seeing the miracle hand of God transform our newest member of the kingdom into a woman of beauty.

(beat)

Mitchell.

Pastor Simmons steps aside as Mitchell faces Betsy. Tears are streaming down her face. Mitchell holds both of his mother's hands.

MITCHELL

Mom, I'm so proud of you. You've been through a lot, but the Bible says in Hebrews thirteen five "That He will never leave you nor forsake you."

SHORELINE

Sergeant Perez yells.

SERGEANT PEREZ

Amen!

IN THE WATER

MITCHELL

Because you have placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Mitchell submerges Betsy, then pulls her back up. She raises her hands and shouts for joy. They embrace.

BETSY

Thank you for not giving up on me.

The crowd gathers along the shore to greet Mitchell and Betsy.

Emily flashes an ENGAGEMENT RING as she hugs Betsy.

Coach Farrar stands off to the side. He looks at Mitchell's unfolded drawing of Betsy kneeling at the cross. He shakes his head as he catches Mitchell's eye. They smile. Mitchell raises his finger to signal #1. He points it toward heaven.

FADE OUT.

THE END