

KING RICHARD

by

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OVER BLACK:

THE FOLLOWING WORDS: **This is a true story.**

FADE IN:

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA - ESTABLISHING (1988)

Mansions. Palm Trees. Bentleys in the drive. The dream.

EXT. LOS ANGELES COUNTRY CLUB - DAY (1988) VARIOUS SHOTS

A beautiful rolling golf course. Pristine tennis courts. Pools. Cocktails. Rich WHITE PEOPLE living the life.

INT. LOS ANGELES COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

Inside, UNIFORMED STAFF vacuum opulent locker rooms. They clean framed photographs lining the walls:

PRESIDENTS. CELEBRITIES. ANCIENT TENNIS GREATS who've played these courts. TILDEN. KRAMER. AUSTIN. SHRIVER. All legends. All white. All viewed by:

RICHARD WILLIAMS (45.) A tall, powerfully built black man with broken teeth, a graying beard, a black eye, and a lifetime of rejection and resentment.

TITLE CARD READS: **1988**

A WASPY RECEPTIONIST eyes him warily as he sits in the lobby in a dirty t-shirt, easily mistakable for a vagrant.

She's clearly relieved when a TENNIS PRO arrives, approaching Richard with a SHOPPING BAG.

TENNIS PRO

Sorry, Richard. Grounds crew threw out most of 'em. I got a few here but they look pretty dead.

RICHARD

That's ok. They ain't dead to me.

Richard speaks with a garbled Louisiana drawl. He looks in the bag. It's filled with RATTY OLD TENNIS BALLS.

TENNIS PRO

Go on, take this too. We had a few extras.

The Pro extends Richard a gift. An UNOPENED CAN OF BALLS. Richard takes it thankfully, and without shame.

RICHARD

Thank you.

TENNIS PRO

No problem. But gotta ask. What happened to the eye?

Richard offers only his crooked smile and --

EXT. TENNIS CLUB HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Exiting with his bounty, Richard heads to a PARKING LOT lined with LUXURY CARS. Beamers. Bentleys. Mercedes. Porsches. Richard arrives at his own.

A shit-box. A burnt-orange 1977 VOLKSWAGEN BUS. Rusting and falling apart. Richard tosses his haul in the back and --

INT. RICHARD'S VW BUS - DAY

Richard at the wheel, smoking a cigarillo, driving through postcard California. Mansions. Gardeners. Money.

Behind him, we see: *this van is a character itself.*

Part mobile tennis clinic, part mobile home, it's filled with school books, fast-food wrappers and a ridiculous accoutrement of tennis shit. Drill cones. Broken Rackets.

One of the seats has been removed to accommodate a *liberated* shopping cart filled with hundreds of collected USED BALLS. Like Richard, it's both charming and intentionally ratty.

He drives on to --

EXT. VARIOUS COUNTRY CLUB TENNIS COURTS - DAY (VARIOUS SHOTS)

-- where Richard collects USED BALLS from TENNIS PROS and GROUNDSKEEPERS. He even plucks them from the trash as ASTONISHED WHITE CLUB MEMBERS shake their heads in disbelief.

Each time, once they're gathered, Richard returns to his VAN, parked amongst the BEAMERS and tosses the balls in the cart. Off the slam of the door we CUT TO --

EXT. COMPTON CALIFORNIA - DAY

A different world. A working class neighborhood made infamous by gangs, drug wars, and NWA. Liquor Stores on the corners. Drug-dealers on the streets. Cops prowling like sharks.

It's all seen passing out the window of --

I/E. RICHARD'S VW BUS - DAY

Richard smokes at the wheel, taking it all in. He'd like to wash it all away. He drives through it as we find --

EXT. RESIDENTIAL COMPTON STREET - DAY

Two young BLACK GIRLS (7 and 8) lugging PHONE BOOKS down a rough and tumble residential street.

Both girls are adorable, in wild braids and glowing smiles. The taller one carries THREE BOOKS. Not to be out done, the little one carries FOUR, barely seeing over the top.

VENUS

Serena, what are you doing? Those books are as big as you are.

SERENA

No they're not. I can do it. I can carry more than you.

VENUS

And break your back while you're at it.

SERENA

Wanna bet?

The little one takes off running but her sister lets her win, laughing as she goes. This is VENUS AND SERENA WILLIAMS.

Venus is eight but already tall and regal and preternaturally self-possessed.

Serena is seven, both a princess and a Pit bull. Small and muscle bound, she's a ball of energy, confidence, with an insatiable need for attention. She idolizes her sister.

Winded, she reaches their neighbors' door first.

SERENA (CONT'D)

See. I told you I'd win.

VENUS

Yeah you did. Guess you're right.

They deliver a PHONE BOOK to the door of a MIDDLE-AGE BLACK WOMAN in a house-coat. MS. STRICKLAND. She pays them.

MS. STRICKLAND

Thank you girls.

VENUS AND SERENA
You're welcome, Ms. Strickland.

MS. STRICKLAND
You tell your Daddy, he's working
you too hard. That man is crazy.

RICHARD (O.S.)
That man is *what*?

They are all surprised to see Richard pull up in his VW BUS.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Girls. Get in the car.
(to Ms. Strickland)
I don't wanna tell you again. Don't
talk to them kids.

MS. STRICKLAND
They oughta be playing. Not
working. You pushing 'em too hard.

RICHARD
They work as hard as they need to
to stay off those streets. What
corner's your daughter working, Ms.
Strickland?

That shuts her up cold. She gives Richard the finger and
storms off inside, slamming the door.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Come on girls. Time to go. These
balls ain't gonna hit themselves.

I/E. RICHARD'S VW BUS - DAY (MOVING)

Richard's at the wheel. Behind him, the girls do homework in
the backseat. (*Venus: Paleontology. Serena: French.*)

VENUS
Where we practicing today, Daddy?

SERENA
Yeah. Where we practicing, *Dad*?

Richard eyes her in the rearview, unhappy with her tone.

RICHARD
At the Club. Where you think?

VENUS
Momma said not to go back to those
courts.

RICHARD

Well your momma ain't here, now is she? Y'all wanna practice or not? We behind on our plan already.

SERENA

But what if those guys are back?

RICHARD

Then I'll beat 'em off again.

The girls exchange a knowing look. Laugh.

SERENA

Daddy! Those guys beat *YOU* up.

RICHARD

Maybe. But that's part of my plan. I'm just wearing 'em down. One of these days they'll get so tired of beating old me they'll need a rest.

The girls laugh.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

See. What'd I tell ya? Musta tired 'em out already.

Richard's smiling as they arrive at --

EXT. LYNWOOD PARK, COMPTON - DAY

A small, municipal park which Richard lovingly, ironically has dubbed: EAST COMPTON HILLS COUNTRY CLUB.

Basketball Courts. Concrete Playgrounds. And two of the worst kept TENNIS COURTS you'll ever see which thankfully --

Right now, are not occupied by the BLOODS who use them as their own personal drug bazaar.

RICHARD

Who's ready to get to work?

In clown-car fashion, the Williams gang unloads their tennis gear from the van. TWO OVERSIZED TENNIS BAGS for the girls, each bigger than they are. But no matter how small they are, the girls carry their own gear. Richard's orders.

They wheel out the SHOPPING CART full of used balls from the back and like a group of tennis carnies, they approach --

THE TENNIS COURTS

These courts have since taken on legendary status but in fact they are:

TWO UNKEMPT TENNIS COURTS. Nets sagging. Surface pock-marked with gunfire, littered with crack vials and beer bottles. Homeless men asleep along the fences.

Impervious to it all, the GIRLS begin their peculiar, *let's say unorthodox*, business of warming up.

Still dressed in their jeans, they jog and throw FOOTBALLS and toss BROKEN RACKETS from the baseline as far as they can in an absurd drill Richard's concocted. It looks ridiculous.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Keep tossing 'em girls. You got it!
More arc! That's how we get great!

They keep at it while Richard goes about methodically cleaning the courts. He wakes the HOMELESS MEN and escorts them off. He sweeps the vials and bottles away with a BROOM.

He sets up CONES for drills and hangs HOMEMADE SIGNS:

*If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.
You are a winner
Be humble - Say "Thank you."*

Finally, they are ready to practice and with great fanfare, Richard presents the BRAND NEW CAN OF BALLS.

SERENA

Where'd you get those?

RICHARD

I got my ways. You don't worry. You got fans in high places.

Richard cracks the can which the girls sniff like fine wine.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

All right. Backhands first. Go on.

They race to the baseline and Richard begins to feed. Ball after ball, the girls swing their hearts out, giving it their all but -- it doesn't look like Wimbledon.

Their rackets are as big as they are. Their strokes are wonky and Richard is a goofy coach. He swings the racket like a broken old man who just picked up the sport (which really he did). It all feels like amateur hour only --

Unlike most *TENNIS DADS*, Richard has only encouragement. When Serena sails a ball over the fence, Richard applauds.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Great muscles Serena.

When Venus nearly takes off his head --

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Great aim there Venus.

Whatever they do, he instills them with exceptional confidence and we see it. There is something intangible here. Though technically raw, it's clear that even at 7 and 8, the girls' athleticism and drive is stratospheric.

After Venus booms one particularly impressive smash --

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Boom! There you go! That's Wimbledon right there. Come give me a kiss. Let's call it a day.

The girls run over, planting two on his cheek as --

EXT. COMPTON TENNIS COURTS, LYNWOOD PARK - AFTERNOON

Practice complete, Richard padlocks the SHOPPING CART to the fence and walks the girls back to the car.

RICHARD
You look great Venus, but you need to move your feet more out there. You keep that stance open like I showed. If you down on your feet flat like a 97 year-old person, you'll never win Wimbledon.

VENUS
Yes, Daddy.

RICHARD
And Meeka --
(*Serena's middle name*)
-- you need to use more topspin on your forehand, ok? That's why you keep whacking it over the fe--

Richard's stopped because they've arrived at the curb where FOUR HARD-LOOKING BLOODS are mugging outside their van.

The leader of the group is a tall, baby-faced banger with a Jeri-Curl and 49ers HAT. They call him KING.

KING

Nigga, I thought we told you. Those courts is ours. You're trespassing on our shit.

RICHARD

Well we done now, so you can have 'em. We don't need no trouble. Girls. Get in the car.

The girls hop to it. Richard's following behind only --

KING

Nigga, I ain't done with you yet.

He's stopped when King spins him around.

KING (CONT'D)

This here's my office and you fucking with my business.

RICHARD

Well maybe you oughta to get a different line of work.

KING

This motherfucker.

King laughs then *CRACKS* Richard's face, knocking him down.

SERENA

Don't you hurt my daddy!

RICHARD

Meeka, get in the goddamn car.

The GANG laughs, impressed as Richard struggles to his feet.

KING

Tough little bitch. Now I'll tell you one last time. You come here again, you ain't walking out. Training days are done.

DODGERS HAT

The fuck you gonna do with that?

A young Blood in a DODGERS HAT eyes the BROOMSTICK Richard grips in his hands. King just shakes his head.

KING

This Nigga's crazy. That's how you want it? That's the way it'll be. Yo, jack this fool, man.

Off Richard, steeling himself as they approach and --

I/E. RICHARD'S VW VAN - EVENING

Richard's driving home. SUNGLASSES on. He's black and blue underneath. Bleeding badly.

Serena eats McDonalds in the back, sees him in the rearview.

SERENA

You were right, Daddy. It took 'em awhile, but they sure got tired of beating on you.

Despite the pain, Richard can't help but smile as finally they arrive at --

EXT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOME - NIGHT

HOME. 1117 East Stockton Street. A quaint, green, stucco one story house marred by black graffiti.

Richard pulls up to see POLICE SIRENS at his neighbors' door.

The aftermath of a CRASH raid. LA'S INFAMOUS SWAT AGENTS strong arming a YOUNG BLACK MAN out the door while his PARENTS SCREAM from the porch. The whole neighborhood watches from their stoops.

MOTHER

He's a good boy! Let him go. He didn't do nothing.

CRASH AGENT

We'll see about that downtown. Let's go. Get your ass in the car.

Richard watches behind the wheel.

VENUS

What's happening, Daddy?

RICHARD

Nothing baby. Get your things.

Richard escorts his girls through the sirens to their door. MS. STRICKLAND calls out to Richard from her porch.

MS. STRICKLAND

Somebody oughta call the cops on you.

Richard just continues to his house, meeting eyes with the COP. Trouble brewing when --

BRANDI (O.S.)
 Richard Williams. Get these girls
 inside. Leave that nonsense alone.

ORACENE "BRANDI" WILLIAMS calls from the door. Brandi's 41.
 Tall. Proud. Fierce. Richard knows better than to disobey.

He leads the girls to their house, kissing his wife who takes
 one look at his glasses and immediately knows the score.

BRANDI (CONT'D)
 I told you not to go back to those
 courts, didn't I?

Off Richard, not ready to concede. He heads inside and --

INT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOME - NIGHT

Immediately, Venus and Serena are bombarded by their
 siblings. THREE HALF SISTERS. YETUNDE (Tundi) 14. A rebel.
 LYNDREA. 12. A princess. ISHA. 10. An athlete.

TUNDI
 Come on, Venus. We're about to
 start the talent show.

Serena takes off immediately running.

SERENA
 I get to go first. I know what I'm
 singing.

LYNDREA
 Let me guess.

In unison, her older sisters chime in together singing --

ALL THE SISTERS
Because the Greatest love of all --

SERENA
 What's so funny? It's a great song.

They bust out laughing as Serena chases them down the hall.

RICHARD
 Half hour. Finish your homework,
 then it's time for bed.

The girls run off. Once the parents are alone --

BRANDI
 How bad is it? Let me see.

Reluctantly, Richard lets her remove his glasses. Flinches as Brandi touches his wounds. His face is raw.

BRANDI (CONT'D)

You lucky you married a nurse. Go on and get dressed. I'll get you some ice. At least you can stop the swelling.

We follow Richard to their small bedroom, where he begins to change from his tennis outfit into a SECURITY GUARD UNIFORM.

BRANDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I told you. I don't want you practicing at those courts. It's bad enough they beat on you. What happens when it's the girls?

RICHARD

You think I'd let that happen?

BRANDI

Richard, that ain't up to you.

Brandi's returned with a FROZEN BAG OF PEAS. She slaps it on his face, roughly.

BRANDI (CONT'D)

You know what that boy was doing next door? Do you?

RICHARD

Selling rocks.

BRANDI

He was selling guns. Next door to our girls. I don't want them living like this anymore -- and don't tell me it's making them tough, cause I don't care about that. I care if they're safe.

RICHARD

Where we gonna go? This is our home.

BRANDI

Well how long can you live like this? Working all night. Coaching all day. Getting yourself beat and what for? We're still just scraping by. I can't do it anymore.

RICHARD

Baby, we can't quit now. We got a prodigy on our hands. We just getting started.

BRANDI

Richard --

RICHARD

I'm telling you. Venus is a star. She'll prove the whole world wrong.

BRANDI

Richard, she's eight-years-old. What the hell's she gotta prove? Don't make this about you.

That staggers Richard for a moment. He heads for the door.

BRANDI (CONT'D)

You wanna fight the world, you got something prove, fine, but don't do it through them. I'm not risking their lives for that.

RICHARD

Fine. Fine! We won't go back to those courts. We can get 'em a coach. Bud Collins or Vic Braden. It's time for that anyway. Venus is ready. She can practice with them.

BRANDI

(laughs)

Oh yeah? You win the lottery? How you gonna pay for that?

RICHARD

We won't gotta. They'll coach her for free. These girls're so good, they might even pay us.

BRANDI

(rolling her eyes)

Richard --

RICHARD

Don't believe me?

BRANDI

It ain't me who's gotta believe. These coaches want a blond with a pony tail. Not some little black girl from the ghetto.

RICHARD

They don't know that they want it,
but they will. You'll see. Venus
and Serena gonna shake up the
world.

BRANDI

They are? Or you?

That stops him. Stung. He puts his arms around her.

RICHARD

They are. I know it. Least they
better -- cause they ain't making
it as no singers.

He's laughing now because Serena can be heard, singing at the
top of her lungs. She's no Whitney Houston.

Brandi laughs, softening in his arms and --

BRANDI

Go tell 'em good night. I'll get
you something to eat. Can't fight
the world on an empty stomach.

They kiss. Richard heads off. Brandi watches, both inspired
and exasperated. She loves him, but he makes it hard.

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM, COMPTON HOUSE - NIGHT

The girls are performing for each other in their cramped
little bedroom when Richard appears in the door --

RICHARD

All right girls. Lights out. Time
for bed.

They dutifully comply, a few of them taking books and
flashlights along with them into bed.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

D'yall finish your journals? Write
your plans for tomorrow?

ALL THE GIRLS

Yes, Daddy. We did.

RICHARD

Cause you gotta have a plan, right.
Everyday. Else what do I say?

ALL THE GIRLS

You fail to plan. You plan to fail.

RICHARD

That's right. And we ain't failing,
are we?

ALL THE GIRLS

No, Daddy.

RICHARD

That's right. We going all the way
to the top. Now who's sleeping with
Serena?

Groans around the room. We understand why. One room. Five
girls. Four beds. It's like the Waltons.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Tundi?

TUNDI

I had her last night.

RICHARD

Isha?

ISHA

Do I have to? She snores.

SERENA

No I don't.

ISHA (CONT'D)

Yes you do.

SERENA

No I don't.

ISHA (CONT'D)

Yes you do.

Venus chimes in, silencing the fight. A pacifier.

VENUS

I'll take her, Daddy. Come on,
Serena. You can sleep with me.

Serena hoots and hollers. She's like a puppy.

RICHARD

Thank you, Venus. It ain't gonna be
like this forever. I promise. One
of these days, they'll be mansions
for all.

Then he turns out the lights and shuts the door, lingering
for a moment in the hall, listening to their laughter. Off
that we hear --

BUD COLLINS VOICE

... and that's why you want to
pronate at the point of contact.

INT. RICHARD'S VW BUS - NIGHT

Richard's driving, smoking a cigarillo. Out his windows, BLOODS lurk on stoops. Addicts wander like phantoms in the night. Richard drives through it listening to a tape.

BUD COLLINS VOICE

If you look at the biggest servers. Sampras. Lendl. Connors. You'll see the break of their wrists is like a smack. Like a high five. That's what you're looking for when you hit it. That pop.

The tape ends. Richard ejects it, riffling through the mess on the floor to find another. There's dozens down here, scrawled in Richard's chicken scratch with names like:

"Wimbledon '87." "Tracy Austin." "Zina Garrison."

Richard selects one. Sticks it in. Listens as he drives.

SAMPRAS' VOICE

... well I know a lot of guys use a western or semi-western on their forehand, but I've got a heavy stroke. I like a big runway so for me an eastern grip is just fine.

SAMPRAS'S VOICE CONTINUES OVER: A MONTAGE.

RICHARD CHECKS ON SECURITY GUARDS - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

Richard makes the rounds, checking in on SECURITY GUARDS at a handful of Compton establishments.

- A DRY CLEANER.
- A CONSTRUCTION SITE.
- A CHURCH.
- A BANK.

At each, Richard checks the alarms. Empties the trash. Wakes his sleeping employees. At turns, mundane and dangerous work, and Richard is tired of it. Montage ends as --

INT. COMPTON GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Richard enters a Compton grocery, nodding to the GUARD eating chips at the door, and heads toward the back where --

INT. GROCERY STORE OFFICE - NIGHT

Richard enters the cluttered little manager's office and plops down at the desk, exhausted.

For a moment, it looks like he might fall asleep but he fights the urge. Instead, he turns on a light, takes out his things, and gets to work.

Not billing or paperwork for his security company, but Tennis. MAGAZINES. ORDER FORMS. INSTRUCTIONAL DRILLS.

With occasional GUNFIRE rattling the windows, Richard combs through his research and begins to make a LIST:

COACHES AND STAR PUPILS: Vic Braden. Bud Collins. Nic Bolleittri. Mary Pierce. Tracy Austin. Etc.

He writes down the phone numbers and addresses for each as we pan across his desk to a COPY OF: WORLD TENNIS MAGAZINE.

AN INSTRUCTIONAL ARTICLE. A PHOTO.

JOHN McENROE and his CALIFORNIA TENNIS COACH. Imagine Elliot Gould if he had thighs like cannons and a forehand that could put you on your ass.

The legend reads: "*WINNING WAYS: McEnroe and his LA coach PAUL COHEN.*" Off Richard's list and PAUL's face --

EXT. BEL AIR COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

A sparkling California Golf and Tennis Club where we find Richard on a pay phone in the parking lot.

RICHARD

Hello? -- Yes, I'm trying to reach Paul Cohen -- Richard Williams.
Yes. I left a message last night --
All right. I can hold.

INTERCUT NOW WITH:

INT. PAUL COHEN'S HOUSE - DAY

PAUL COHEN (40), the burly tennis coach seen in the McEnroe magazine spread, now in a leisure suit, picking up the phone in the foyer of a very nice Brentwood house.

PAUL

This is Paul.

RICHARD

Paul, my name's Richard Williams. I read about you in World Tennis Magazine and I got a couple girls I think you oughta see.

PAUL

Yeah. Richard. I got your message.
My girls are champs. That was you?
How'd you get my number?

RICHARD

Ted Hodges. At Paramount sports.
He's a friend. If it's ok, I've got
a video I'd like to send you. A
video and a brochure for my girls.

PAUL

A video and what?

Paul's distracted by his ATTRACTIVE YOUNG WIFE. Suitcases at
her feet, tapping her watch indicating: *we've gotta go.*

RICHARD

A brochure. A prospectus. Of their
future earnings.

PAUL

I'm sorry. Mr. Wilson -- Williams?
This isn't a good time. We're
leaving for a tournament. Just send
me the tape. I'll try and look at
it when I'm back. Thanks.

Paul hangs up.

PAUL'S WIFE

Who was that?

PAUL

Some nutcase, I don't know.

They grab their bags, head for the door. We end on:

RICHARD, hanging up the pay phone in the parking lot. This
might be harder than he thought as we now hear --

RICHARD (PRE-LAP)

Now I know what you're thinking.
This family's from the Ghetto. How
they gonna pay old me? Well don't
worry, Bud, we ain't here to rob
ya. We're here to make you rich.

INT. BUD COLLINS'S TENNIS OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON: A HOMEMADE PAMPHLET FULL OF NUMBERS, GRAPHS, and
CHARTS. The girls' "FUTURE EARNINGS." It's in the hands of:

BUD COLLINS (60), the Bob Hope of Tennis, listening to Richard pitch his case.

RICHARD

What you're looking at there is a brochure I made with the wife. Inside you'll see future earnings potentials for both girls. One for Venus. And one for Serena.

Off Bud, flipping through it amused and --

EXT. ANOTHER FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

Richard is COURT SIDE at another FANCY CLUB showing his brochure to another INCREDULOUS PRO. On court, a HULKING JUNIOR is pulverizing tennis balls.

RICHARD

Now, Venus, she'll probably win Wimbledon. She's tall and fast and mean. But Serena -- she something like a pet bulldog. She never lets go. See they got all the talent. All they need now is the training and environment and coach.

Beat. The incredulous (white) pro gives Richard a once over.

INCREDULOUS PRO

And you want all this for free? You sure you have the right sport?

Off Richard, disrespected as we cut to:

EXT. HOSPITALITY TENT, ANOTHER FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

A swanky California country club event. CELEBRITY TENNIS TOURNAMENT underway. Richard, somehow snuck inside, has cornered ANOTHER TENNIS PRO with his pamphlet.

RICHARD

We need a club. Training. Clinics. Everything a prodigy needs to reach their potential which is number one in the world, I promise you that. There's no doubt about it.

The TENNIS PRO, eager to extract himself, shakes his head.

TENNIS PRO

If I had a dollar for every crazy parent who told me their kids'll be number one, I'd be a rich man.

RICHARD
You look pretty rich to me.

TENNIS PRO
Well, there you go.

He hands Richard back the pamphlet and hurries off as --

EXT. ANOTHER FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

--- the BEWILDERED PRO hands his pamphlet back too.

BEWILDERED PRO
You ever consider basketball?

INT. BUD COLLIN'S TENNIS OFFICE - DAY

--- and back in Bud's office, Bud shakes Richard's hand.

BUD COLLINS
I'm sorry. Good luck. You seem like
a good guy but --

INT. ANOTHER TENNIS CLUB - DAY

--- and ANOTHER COACH turns Richard down.

ANOTHER COACH
I'm sorry. This isn't a welfare
office. We don't do Pro Bono.

Off Richard, anger rising. Enthusiasm evaporating as finally --

INT. CLUB HOUSE, COTO VALLEY C.C - DAY. VARIOUS SHOTS

Richard's seated in the lobby of a tony club. Tired and defeated, looking up at the PHOTOS OF THE TENNIS GREATS lining the walls he saw earlier.

KRAMER. CONNORS. MCENROE. All white. All smiling with a JOVIAL, PORTLY COACH.

The same WASPY RECEPTIONIST hangs up the phone. Coldly --

RECEPTIONIST
Mr. Williams? Vic'll see you now.

Aware of her ire, Richard rises; one last chance as we hear --

RICHARD'S VOICE (ON TAPE)
A few more. Down the line. That's
it. Look good, Vic, don't they?

INT. VIC BRADEN'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON A TV: A video plays. Venus and Serena hit in jeans on the ratty court. Richard narrates OC operating the camera.

RICHARD'S VOICE

We have your tape - *TENNIS ALL THE WAY* - and we have been viewing it. However, the tape says, you'll be good by Friday, but guess what, Vic. We've got good by Tuesday. That's how good your tape is.

In the office, Richard mouths along with his joke on screen as VIC BRADEN (60's) the legendary Junior Tennis Coach (seen in the lobby PHOTOS) watches, speechless as the video ends.

VIC

I guess you made this yourself?

RICHARD

Yes I did, yes. When the girls were young, I had bought me a camcorder. And I would film myself in the mirror asking questions and doing things like that. And that's what I did with the girls, here. I call that their media training.

VIC

Oh I see. That's very industrious. And did you grow up around the game, Mr. Williams?

RICHARD

No I did not. Where we're from, where I grew up, tennis was not a game that peoples played.
(before Vic can weigh in)
But I'm a terrific athlete and if I'm interested in a thing, Vic, I learn it. How it works. How the best people do it. That's how I did with tennis and the girls. I made a plan for 'em before they were born.

VIC

Before they were born?

RICHARD

Yes sir. One for Venus. And one for Serena. First one was 85 pages I think. See I'm a master planner, Vic. No one gonna out plan me.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

And our plan says now it's time we come to you, so you can turn these girls into champions.

Vic's flabbergasted. He looks at Richard, at the brochure. Unfailingly nice, he wants to soften the blow but there's no need. Richard feels the hit coming. He stands up on his own.

VIC

How bout a free piece of advice?

(sure)

This deal you're asking for, all this for free, Richard, no one is going to take that bet. See tennis is a technical sport. Probably the most. If you haven't grown up around the game then --

(looking Richard over)

It's like the violin. It takes hours and hours a day, year after year, tens of thousands of dollars in precise, expert instruction just to hold the racket right, and then, even then, even for a family with unlimited financial resources, the chances of achieving the kind of mastery and success you're talking about -- *with one kid, let alone two* -- well, it's like asking someone to believe you got the next two Mozarts in your house. It's just very, very unlikely. I'm sorry. That's just my two cents. Maybe you'll prove me wrong.

Vic offers his hand. Richard takes it, gutted and --

EXT. PARKING LOT, FANCY CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Flush with defeat, Richard exits the building where he finds Venus and Serena, sitting by the courts doing homework.

They look up at him expectantly.

VENUS AND SERENA

How'd it go in there, Daddy?

Richard does his best to hide his disappointment, but the girls know the score. This isn't their first rodeo.

They grab their books and follow their father to the CAR. The lone beater in the lot. Their place in the world couldn't be clearer and --

INT. MCDONALD'S - NIGHT

The entire Williams clan, five girls, two parents, eat dinner at a booth in McDonald's. Most of the family is joking around. But we don't share their mood or hear what they say.

We're pushing in on Richard, thoughts far away, simmering with frustration and anger and resentment.

INT. RICHARD'S VW VAN - NIGHT

The family drives home. Richard distant at the wheel, taking in the neighborhood. The crime and poverty. He slows as he drives past the courts. Anger rising behind his eyes and --

Suddenly, he pulls over and gets out of the car.

BRANDI

Where you going?

He doesn't answer, just grabs his BROOM from the back and --

BRANDI (CONT'D)

Richard, what the heck are you doing?

(to the girls, herself)

I tell ya, this man.

She's shaking her head as she watches --

EXT. PARK - THAT MOMENT

-- Richard approaching the courts where he's seen HIS SHOPPING CART knocked over and crushed. His collection of BALLS scattered across the courts in every direction.

Fuming, Richard begins to pick them up when he spots:

The BLOODS who beat him up earlier, clearly responsible for this mess, gathered in the park by the courts, laughing.

Richard stares at them in fury. Enough's enough.

IN THE CAR: Brandi lights with fear as she watches --

BRANDI

Richard don't you do it.

-- Richard crossing the park toward THE BLOODS who mack on some GIRLS. King turns as Richard approaches with the BROOM.

KING

Nigga, whatchu gonna do with --

CRACK! Before he gets the rest out, Richard breaks the broomstick across his jaw. King goes down hard as Richard wails him again. *CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!* A few more shots before-

The OTHER BLOODS jump in, dropping Richard to the ground, leveling him with HAYMAKERS. Stomping him senseless as --

BRANDI

RICHARD!

Brandi comes running from the car.

BRANDI (CONT'D)

Leave him alone. Get your hands off my husband!

She pushes through the crowd to find Richard bleeding and struggling to get to his feet.

BRANDI (CONT'D)

Richard, oh my god!

She looks up at King who stands over them, fuming.

KING

I warned him. This ain't a place to play.

(leaning over Richard now)

You hear me now, motherfucker. Stay - the - fuck - away.

And then King rears back and CRACKS Richard a final time and BOOM! LIGHTS OUT. Richard drops to the ground and we --

FADE OUT.

FADE IN ON:

YOUNG WHITE FACES LOOMING ABOVE US. 13-YEAR-OLD BOYS PUNCHING AND YELLING. WE DON'T KNOW WHERE WE ARE AS WE FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A new blur of faces hovering above us. Above Richard, demolished in a HOSPITAL BED. Face like a punching bag. The blurry figures float above, warping in and out of focus.

DOCTOR

...his jaw is broken. At least five or six ribs. There's blood in his urine. We need to sedate him.

A face leans into view. Brandi comes into focus. Crying.

BRANDI

Richard. Richard. Can you hear me?
Richard, can you hear me?

But she's floating away. Richard's mind's faraway in --

EXT. WOODS - DAY (RICHARD'S FLASHBACK DREAM) - 1955

A Louisiana forest where EIGHT-YEAR-OLD RICHARD, tattered and dirty, is getting the shit kicked out of him by a gang of WHITE BOYS.

Young Richard puts up a fight but it's futile. The boys CRACK him with sticks, hit him with rocks, and scream in his face --

WHITE BOY

This is what you get when you steal
from my Daddy, boy!

A fist flies violently toward his head as --

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Adult Richard jolts at the memory, drifting in and out of consciousness. His face, black and blue. His teeth broken. He's frightened and breathless, remembering --

EXT. RICHARD'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 1955

It's dark by the time YOUNG RICHARD arrives home to a tattered three room shack in a blighted part of town where --

His mother, JULIA METCALF WILLIAMS, a cotton picker and a titanic figure, spots him from the door.

His clothes are dirty. His face is bloody. From the look in her eyes, we know they have been here before as --

INT. RICHARD'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 1955

Young Richard's mother washes his wounds from a bucket on the floor. No running water. No electricity. No father. No hope. Just his mother and FIVE SISTERS watching from the door.

RICHARD'S MOTHER

I don't know what to tell you Sonny
but you don't let go of that anger,
either this world's gonna tear you
up or you gonna tear up it.

Young Richard looks at his mother, silent and defiant. She goes on cleaning his wounds as --

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Richard final wakes to find Brandi there, watching over him.

BRANDI

You OK? It's just a dream.

But Richard's not ok. He's badly bruised, missing several teeth, simmering with a lifetime of pain.

I/E. RICHARD'S VW BUS - EVENING (A FEW NIGHTS LATER)

Brandi drives a broken Richard home through Compton. Richard's eyes fixed out the windows. A reckoning brewing as -

INT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOME - NIGHT

Gingerly, Brandi escorts him through the front door. But Richard doesn't waste any time --

As soon as he's home, he heads to the bedroom, riffling through his closet. On the very top shelf, he pulls down a SHOTGUN, loading it with shells as --

BRANDI

Richard! What are you doing?

RICHARD

Putting an end to this. I ain't getting kicked around anymore.

EXT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOUSE - NIGHT

Richard blows out his door, into his van. Tossing the shotgun beside him as he peels down the street. Brandi arrives at the front door, desperate, but too late to stop him and --

EXT. COMPTON COURTS - NIGHT

The dealership's open. The BLOODS are still here. King and his CREW holding down the courts when -- DODGERS HAT shoots King an elbow. *Look over there.* He's pointing to:

The street. Where the VW BUS pulls up. Richard getting out.

KING

This motherfucker. Nigga, you crazier than I thought. You sure you want more? You ain't got your girls to protect you this time.

They're laughing until they see the 12-GAUGE rise up in Richard's hand. *CA-CHCK!* They dive as he cocks the pump and --

KABOOM! -- Richard fires a shot that screams past the dealers, shattering a WINDSHIELD on the street.

The DEALERS scramble to their feet. Dodger's Hat pulls out his own GUN and levels it at Richard only - *it jams!*

And Richard's still coming, pumping again. *CA-CHCK!*

Holy shit. The dealers take off running. As fast as they can. Richard lumbering after them like a goddamn monster.

EXT. COMPTON STREETS - NIGHT

Escaping the park, the GANG tears through the residential streets of Compton.

Richard's on their heels, Frankenstein-style. Stalking like a killer as --

The BOYS skid into an alley, bolting between houses. They knock over trash cans that clatter in Richard's way.

They sprint toward a CHAIN LINK FENCE, all of them flipping over it as --

Richard's stopped in it's path. Too old to jump over. He makes a decision. Cuts through the alley as --

The bangers burst through a BACKYARD, coming to an intersection. They seem to have lost him, but just to be safe they split up. Three different directions. We stay with --

DODGERS HAT who runs down another darkened alley. Alone. Getting away. Feeling safe when --

A PIT BULL *leaps* in his face. He stumbles back, about to be mauled until the dog's collared by its chain.

DODGERS HAT composes, catching his breath. Almost laughing to himself. Then he turns a corner when --

CA-CHCK! He looks up to see Richard in the mouth of the alley, bearing down on him with his gun. Nowhere to run.

Richard closes in.

DODGER'S HAT

YO YO YO! Don't shoot! Don't shoot!
I'm sorry. We was playing.

RICHARD

We ain't playing now.

Richard steadies the gun. Fury in his eyes. About to jam the trigger when from somewhere in the darkness --

PTPTPTPTPTPT! A MACHINE-GUN cracks, ripping like fireworks.

A DRIVE-BY in the night. Richard jolts at the sound, listening as the BULLETS RIP and the TIRES SQUEAL AWAY and then it's silent. For a long moment until --

A SCREAM shatters the night. Grief stricken and horrible.

VOICE (O.S.)
NOOOOOOOOOOO!

It shakes Richard's core. He turns back to his target only to find -- he's gone. The alley is empty. DODGERS HAT's escaped.

On Richard, alone in the alley, catching his breath and --

EXT. COMPTON STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Richard's walking home. Concealing his weapon. Dawning with relief when he arrives upon --

THE SOURCE OF THAT SCREAM. THE AFTERMATH OF THE DRIVE-BY. A BLOODBATH ON THE STREETS.

A BODY lays lifeless on the asphalt. Families gather around as the first SIRENS arrive, swirling in the mist.

Richard watches from afar as A MOTHER pushes through the crowd and falls at the feet of the BOY, crying inconsolably.

MOTHER
NO NO NO. MY BABY. MY BABY. THEY
SHOT UP MY BABY!

And now Richard sees who it is. It's KING. Richard staggers, backing away, slowly at first, then running now, fleeing the tragedy which he was very nearly the cause of and --

INT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOME - NIGHT

The house is dark and the family's asleep. Richard creeps back in. Moving to his closet to replace his gun when --

Brandi turns on the lights. Awake and waiting.

BRANDI
What did you do? Richard --

Slowly, once the GUN's safely away, he turns.

RICHARD

Nothing. But I almost did.

Exhausted, he sits on the bed and hangs his head.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

It's over. I'm done.

He lights a cigarette as Brandi comes to his side.

BRANDI

Nothing's over, baby. We've been through this before. The cleaning company. The car wash. The cement trucks. Things fall apart, you think of something else. This time ain't no different. You're an entrepreneur. There's a million ideas.

RICHARD

Ain't no other idea. This was it.
(then)
Just once in my life, I wanted a shot. To prove once and for all Richard Williams ain't no fool.

BRANDI

Baby, you worrying about that and you letting them win. Don't.

But Richard can't hear that yet. He smokes, shaking his head.

RICHARD

I shoulda never started this in the first place. I let them girls down.

Brandi tries to console him, but Richard stands, exiting to -

INT. RICHARD'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

A small room with a desk covered with Richard's various get-rich-schemes. A car wash. A cement mixing business. His TENNIS PLANS. 10 YEARS OF IT. Magazines. Schedules. Drills.

Richard regards it with a very heavy heart. Years of work. Years of effort. Over. Richard despairs and then he notices:

A LIGHT BLINKING ON THE ANSWERING MACHINE.

Richard presses it. The voice that comes out is a life raft.

PAUL (ON TAPE)

Richard. Paul Cohen here. Sorry it's taken me a few weeks to get back to you. I've been in Wimbledon with Mac and well -- I just had a chance to look at your tape.

(beat)

It's raw. The girls need work but, looks like you might have something here. If you're still looking for a coach, I'd be interested in taking a look. You got my number. Let me know if you wanna bring 'em by.

The message ends. On Richard, floored. A second chance.

INT. RICHARD'S VW BUS - DAY

Dressed in their best tennis whites, Venus and Serena look out the windows as Richard drives through a HARD SCRABBLE NEIGHBORHOOD.

VENUS

Where is this place, Daddy? I thought we were going to play.

RICHARD

I wanna show you something first.

EXT. SKID ROW - DAY

Street life. JUNKIES. VAGRANTS. HOMELESS. HOOKERS occupying pre-cool downtown LA. It might as well be NEW JACK CITY.

Richard pulls his van over to a corner and the girls look out like they are on safari.

RICHARD

See these people here? You see how they living? You see their hair? You think this was their plan? You think they got dignity or respect?

VENUS AND SERENA

No, Daddy.

RICHARD

No. They broke down. Used drugs. Now they don't got no hope. You gonna live like that?

SERENA AND VENUS

No, Daddy!

RICHARD
That's right. Good. Now let me show
you something else.

I/E. RICHARD'S VW BUS / PARKED - LATER

Another location. Richard and the girls look out the windows.

RICHARD
Now how about this? You wanna live
like that?

Reveal that they are parked in Beverly Hills. Palm Trees
overhead. Mansions all around. LANDSCAPERS in the yards.

SERENA AND VENUS
Yes, Daddy.

RICHARD
You like these houses? Big, aren't
they? How about that one? You think
they got respect?

SERENA AND VENUS
Yeah Daddy. Real nice.

RICHARD
Well one day, you'll have it.
Beverly Hills. Hollywood Hills.
Any of these hills. You want
respect, you gonna get it, cause
you got a plan. Wanna show these
people that?

SERENA AND VENUS
Yes, Daddy.

RICHARD
Good. So what we waiting for then?
Let's go out there and show 'em.

Off the girls, spilling over with determination and --

EXT. BEL AIR SANDS HOTEL - DAY

A sprawling Bel Air Golf Resort, nestled in the hills beneath
the Getty. (*NOTE: This is now the LUXE SUNSET.*)

On Richard's van as it rolls through the gates and --

EXT. BEL AIR SANDS HOTEL - DAY

Amped with nerves, Richard and the girls approach the tennis
courts where they find:

TWO MEN sweating in the midst of a heated practice, crushing the ball with absolute fury. The Williams' slow in awe as they realize what they're watching:

JOHN MCENROE getting all he can handle from a tall, curly-haired TEENAGER with a serve like Howitzer.

The drill ends when the teen blasts an ace down the T, leaving John whiffing at the air. Paul watches close-by.

PAUL

Told ya. He's a smoker. All right.
Get some water. Take ten.

The players break as Paul approaches the Williams' family, watching with their jaws dropped.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You must be Richard. Paul Cohen. I guess these are the champs.

They all shake hands. The girls smile ear to ear.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You girls know Mac right? Young buck here's Pete Sampras. Not so bad himself.

The famous players wave from the bench.

MCENROE

(to the girls)

Paul says you're pretty good.

RICHARD

Oh they're better than good.
They'll be number one in the world.

McEnroe laughs, walking away.

MCENROE

OK. Call me in ten years. Nice to meet you girls.

(to Paul)

See you in a few.

Paul watches as Mac walks away, toward his stunner of a WIFE and their TWO YOUNG SONS by the pool. (*This is Tatum O'Neil*).

VENUS

(star-struck)

That's - that's - I know her.
She was in Bad News Bears!

PAUL

She's bad news all right. You wanna hit a few? I don't have much time.

The girls head to the court where Richard leads them through their curious routine, throwing their rackets into the sky.

RICHARD

That's great, Venus! Great!

SAMPRAS joins Paul, watching this absurdity in silence.

SAMPRAS

This guy for real?

Paul has no idea. One way to find out. He steps on the court.

PAUL

All right, Richard, that was -- interesting. Have a seat. Let's see what you girls got.

Reluctantly, Richard abides but before he does, he pulls the girls aside for one last pep talk.

RICHARD

Just go out there and have fun.
(of Mac)
Few years from now, he'll brag 'bout meeting you.

The girls smile and Richard steps off as they take the court.

PAUL

All right. Let's start off with some forehands. First one's down the line.

Paul feeds them balls and the GIRLS begin to practice. They come out smoking. *BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!* Venus cracks a heater. Serena cracks another. Venus unleashes a winner. Serena unfurls another. Again and again and again as --

All around the court, attentions begin to tune to the CANNON BLASTS exploding from these little girls.

Mac watches. Pete watches. Tatum watches. Richard watches. Paul watches as - *BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!* - the girls smash balls.

The last ones hit the fence. Paul's hopper is empty. A long silence then --

PAUL (CONT'D)

Let me ask you something girls.

The girls jog to the net, unclear of his reaction.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What do you want from all this? I know what he wants (*Richard*) but what about you?

The girls look at each other. It's Venus who speaks up.

VENUS

I wanna win Wimbledon, I guess. As many times as anyone's won it.

PAUL

And you think you can do it?

VENUS

(nods)
I know I can.

SERENA

I do too!

PAUL

I bet you do. Go pick 'em up. I'm gonna talk to your Dad.

The girls hop to it, collecting the balls as Paul approaches Richard with the verdict. His face is a mask, unreadable.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You taught 'em all this?

(Richard nods)

Well, I gotta be honest. Their strokes are a mess. Their footwork's raw. They're behind on a lot but --

(on Richard as he waits)

You're not crazy, Richard. I've seen a lot of young players and I've coached some of the best and your girls -- they're probably the best raw talent I've ever seen.

On Richard, as that lands. A flood of emotion and vindication pouring out as --

PAUL (CONT'D)

We can figure out the financials later, but if it sounds good to you, I'd love to help you turn these girls into champs.

Richard meets eyes with the girls, unable to contain his emotion, already starting to cry, as --

INT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOUSE - DAY

Brandi's cooking dinner for the older sisters when Richard and the girls arrive home.

BRANDI
Well?

RICHARD
Looks like we got a coach.

The whole room jumps up and down, exploding in celebration.

Richard and Brandi find each other and embrace. A long awaited moment of relief. Out of earshot from the kids:

BRANDI
He's gonna take 'em for free?

RICHARD
Well -- almost. There is one thing.

Off Richard, eyes falling to Serena and --

EXT. COMPTON STREETS - MORNING

A new day breaking over the quiet streets of Compton where --

EXT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOME - MORNING

Richard and Venus load their tennis gear into the van. Serena, dressed for practice too, watches sadly at the door.

SERENA
It's not fair. I wanna come too.

RICHARD
I know you do, Meeka but you just gotta wait. Mr. Cohen can't do two for free. Don't worry -- we're gonna tape everything. You'll watch 'em at home. Won't miss a thing.
(Serena is furious)
Now go on. Practice with your mom and don't forget to move your feet.

SERENA
Where we even supposed to play?

Richard yells back on his way to the car.

RICHARD

At the club! I talked to them boys.
We ain't got no problems anymore.

Serena's in disbelief as Richard joins Venus, waving in the car. They pull off. Serena watches them go as Brandi appears, wearing TENNIS ATTIRE herself. She knows how Serena feels.

BRANDI

Your sister's older. She's gonna
get things first but don't worry.
Your time'll come.
(Brandi pulls her in)
Now come on. Let's hit the courts.
We got work to do.

Off Serena, who smiles despite her frustration as we hear --

EXT. PRIVATE BRENTWOOD HOME - DAY (TO ESTABLISH)

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Cannon-like blasts echoing above --

A beautiful, Brentwood Ranch House. Richard's BUS outside.
The POUNDING STROKES and SQUEAKING SNEAKERS sound from --

THE BACKYARD COURT

-- where Paul leads Venus through grueling drills. Cones.
Suicides. Lob retrieves. Venus sweats as Paul barks orders.

PAUL

What you're going through is the
Paul Cohen First Strike Strategic
Tennis System. It's gonna make you
a killer. First time Mac tried it,
he didn't last 10 minutes.

Venus sees why -- chasing down a lob -- gasping for air as --

PAUL (CONT'D)

Come on! Don't wait! Again!

Venus looks to Richard, smoking by the courts. He nods - *you got it*. She wipes away sweat, sprinting back to the net and --

FOREHAND DRILLS

Paul's feeding Venus at the baseline. Forehand down the line.
Sprint back to the T. Forehand down the line. Sprint back to
the T. Again and again and again.

RICHARD

Keep that stance open, Venus.
Remember open stance.

PAUL
Richard - don't. My time. My rules.
If you want, maybe wait outside.

Richard puts up his hands, deferring for now.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(to Venus)
You listen to me. When you're here,
I'm the coach. Forget open stance.
Hold your head right at contact.
Now go.

He tosses the ball and Venus bolts after it and --

BACKHAND APPROACH DRILL

Paul leads Venus through a classic backhand approach shot, attack the net drill, feeding one after another.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I'm gonna turn you into the
ultimate competitor. Don't sit back
on the baseline. You're not here to
dance. Put these girls away.

And Venus does -- crashing the net -- crushing a volley and --

SERVE AND APPROACH DRILLS

Venus smashes serves from the baseline. Paul's in her ear.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You wanna be the best? You wanna be
Tracy Austin? You will. You're a
killing machine. You're a goddamn
attack dog, so bite!

Venus does, obliterating a serve. Richard watches as it scorches the line and --

RITA (O.S.)
Looking great. Hungry anyone?

RITA CORNYN, the home owner, LA PHILANTHROPIST, and Paul's friend, calls from the Pool house.

RITA (CONT'D)
I made up some sandwiches.

EXT. PRIVATE BRENTWOOD HOME - LATER

Paul, Richard and Venus have lunch by the pool. A TV in the POOL HOUSE plays a TENNIS MATCH. Richard keeps looking over --

PAUL

-- so we gotta keep hammering those forehands, right. Tracy Austin. Tracy Austin. You get a chance, end the point. These girls you'll be playing -- they play patty-cake. Don't engage. Now, have you thought about which tournaments you want to play first? I'll look at the schedule. I've got friends in the SCJ's so --

RICHARD

That's Juniors? I'm not sure we interested in that.

PAUL

Why not? You gotta play matches. Get experience. Get your ranking up. See some competition.

RICHARD

Yeah, but she's got church and school and her sisters -- they'll be time for matches when she's pro.

Long beat as Paul processes this and then --

PAUL

Well Richard -- that's just the dumbest thing I've ever heard. She doesn't play matches, she'll never get tested. She'll never get ranked. She'll never get great. It's as simple as that.

(to Venus)

You wanna just practice or you wanna go beat some girls?

VENUS

Can I play, Daddy? Please?

But Richard doesn't answer. His focus glued to the TV WHERE:

A TENNIS MATCH PLAYS. THE FRENCH OPEN JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS. A brown-haired, 12-year-old American girl is pulverizing the ball, blowing her opponent out of the water.

RICHARD

Who the heck is that?

PAUL

Jennifer Capriati. Now she's a freaking killer.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Won the Orange Bowl last year in
 San Diego. US 18 and Under -- she
 was twelve.

That gets Richard's attention. They all watch in awe for a moment as Jennifer destroys the other girl on the court. Her BOX cheers in the stands. Among them --

PAUL (CONT'D)
 That's her coach, Rick Macchi. He's
 in Florida. Nice guy. Not as dumb
 as the rest.

On screen, RICK MACCI jumps up and down. Rick's 35, with a mustache and a bowl cut and the demeanor of a Labrador Retriever. He's seated next to STEFANO CAPRIATI. The opposite. Tennis Dad numero uno. A villain.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Word is she's joining the tour next
 year, but she already signed a big
 deal with Diadora. Two Million
 bucks. Without a single pro match.
 (beat, pointed)
 She played Juniors.

Off Richard, point taken. Hard to argue with that as we're --

EXT. LOS ANGELES HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

CLOSE ON A BANNER announcing:

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA JUNIOR OPEN TENNIS TOURNAMENT

It flaps above an LA HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT packed with --

RICH WHITE TENNIS PARENTS escorting little PRODIGIES toward the courts where a TOURNAMENT is underway. A few of them gawking in curiosity as they pass --

A growling VW BUS, idling loudly beside the luxury sedans.

I/E. RICHARD'S VW VAN - SAME

Inside, the entire Williams family, looks out nervously at their surroundings. Venus, dressed in her best tennis outfit, listens stoically to her father at the wheel.

RICHARD
 Now don't be surprised if people be
 staring. They ain't used to being
 around good looking people like us
 and they sure ain't seen no little
 girl with a backhand like you.
 (MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 Just keep your head high and your
 feet on the move. Let them worry
 bout the rest. Y'all wanna show
 them what's what?

Venus nods, steeling her nerves. *Here goes nothing as --*

EXT. LA HIGH SCHOOL TENNIS COURTS, JUNIOR TOURNAMENT - DAY

Richard and the ENTIRE WILLIAMS CLAN approach the HIGH SCHOOL TENNIS COURTS where a JUNIOR TENNIS TOURNAMENT is under way and as Richard predicted -- *the record scratches.*

TENNIS PARENTS and their TENNIS KIDS stop dead at the sight of the Williamses. The only black faces in the crowd.

Richard, undeterred, leads his family to the SIGN IN TABLE.

RICHARD
 Richard Williams. This is my
 daughter, Venus. She's playing her
 first match here today.

The TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR double takes at the family. Recovers.

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR
 Well, welcome Venus. Good to meet
 you. Let's find your draw.

The director flips through files as Richard cops the scene:

Stern parents. Serious kids. Not youthful fun, but high stakes, high pressure competition. Richard takes note.

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
 All right Venus, you're all set.
 You're on Court 4. It should be
 open if you wanna warm up.

Venus smiles thanks and the family heads off through the still staring crowds toward Venus's court. When they arrive --

BRANDI
 Good luck, honey. Just go out and
 have fun.

SERENA
 Kick her butt.

Venus smiles and enters the court as Serena remains behind with her family, flashing with envy as --

EXT. TENNIS TOURNAMENT TENNIS COURT - DAY

Venus enters the court where her opponent, STACEY, a TALL TEN-YEAR-OLD BLOND, in high-end TENNIS GEAR unpacks a racket from her pricey tennis bag that holds six identical others.

Venus unpacks her secondhand bag and beat-up racket on the bench. She's clearly intimidated.

Richard beckons her over to the fence where he's set up.

RICHARD

Don't you be scared. You just go out there and have fun. You Venus Williams. You gonna win Wimbledon. These people got nothing on you.

He blows her a kiss and then joins Brandi, sitting with the other parents in the bleachers. Both of them nervous as --

A LINE JUDGE approaches the players with a new can of BALLS.

JUDGE

All right, girls. Meet at the net.
(as the girls arrive)
Once more to go over the rules.
Best of 3 sets. I'm covering three courts, so keep your own score and call your own shots. Other than that, just have fun and good luck.

The Judge departs leaving Venus and Stacey at the net.

STACEY

Ok. Up or down?

VENUS

What?

TRACY

(the racket you idiot)
Up or down?

VENUS

Oh. Up, I guess.

Tracy spins the racket. Probably cheats.

TRACY

Down. I choose. You can serve.

She hands Venus the balls and heads to her side of the net, already playing head games. Venus takes it personally.

She heads to the baseline, mad, trying to gather herself. The noise of the MATCHES on the neighboring courts is deafening. The eyes of white parents, intimidating. It appears that --

STACEY'S DAD

She's nervous Stacey. Take a step up. Probably doesn't have much of a serve.

Richard glares at STACEY'S DAD, a COUNTRY CLUB A-HOLE, goading from the stands. Brandi puts a hand on her husband. Don't. Richard restrains. For now.

RICHARD

Have fun out there V. That's why we're here.

Venus breathes deep. This is what she's been training for. Finally ready, she steps up the baseline, tosses a serve and --

BANG! She unleashes an ace that nails the corner so fast Stacey barely even sees it. She doesn't even swing.

Richard cheers in the stands.

Venus smiles in relief, stepping back up to the line where --

She uncorks another, ripping an ace passed Stacey so fast it nearly scares her to death. *Who is this girl?*

The whole crowd is stunned. Stacey's father included. He looks over at the Williamses cheering to see --

Richard, meeting his eyes. A shit-eating grin on his face --

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Maybe she oughta take a few more steps up.

This time, Stacey's father says nothing. He shrinks away as Richard turns back to the court, smiling proudly at Venus.

No denying it now. A star has arrived.

She steps up to the line, full of confidence and swagger, about to blow the ball off the court as we *smash into:*

A MONTAGE OF JUNIOR TENNIS TOURNAMENTS

-- where Venus storms the Southern California Junior Tennis Circuit, kicking LILY WHITE ASSES up and down the coast.

-- She plays a PRETTY BRUNETTE who's got feet like cement. Venus drop shots her savagely and takes the match.

-- She plays a STOCKY REDHEAD who chases balls like a terrier. Venus wrong foots her cleverly, taking the match.

-- She hits forehands, backhands, overheads, volleys, destroying all comers with an all court game that is complete and annihilating and has --

-- Venus raising trophies at tournaments after tournament. UCLA. USC. Palas Verdes. San Diego. At each and every stop, her family's there for the ride.

-- They cheer from the stands among ever-growing crowds.

-- They ride through the night like a traveling band, sleeping little, doing homework, eating McDonalds, rolling eyes as Richard sings Motown at the wheel.

-- They celebrate as a family as the victories rack up but --

-- It isn't all gravy. As the season goes on, Serena grows angry. Hitting solo on walls, impatient for her chance to compete and --

-- As the competition toughens and the pressure increases, Richard grows unsettled with the world they have entered and the parents around them. Hyper-engaged maniacs who live or die with each point.

-- They chart matches. Pace nervously. Share hand signals. Wear the same tennis outfits as their children and exert excruciating pressure.

-- When their kids shank a ball --

TENNIS DAD

Pull your head out your ass, Brett!

-- When their kids hit a winner --

TENNIS MOM

Don't stop! Cut her throat!

-- When their rivals make calls --

TENNIS DAD #2

He's cheating again, Sammy! Call the lines judge next time.

-- We feel the stakes on the court where Venus's 10-year-old opponents play with an *everything's-on-the-line, I'm-fucked-if-I-don't-win* anxiety.

-- They CRY, CURSE, SMASH rackets and SCREAM at themselves.

10-YEAR-OLD OPPONENT
You're so fucking stupid!

-- They fidget at the changeovers with ticks and superstitions, already on the verge of burning out and --

Richard watches it all with growing unease as we --

END OUR MONTAGE AT: The premiere junior tennis event in the state. The SC JUNIOR SECTIONAL 10 and UNDER Championships.

THE CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH AT THE PALAS VERDES COUNTRY CLUB.

-- where Venus is locked in an endless rally with a strong TOWERING BLOND (Jamie) who looks like she's 17-years-old.

The CROWD hangs on every stoke, finally exploding when --

Jamie shanks a forehand wide, gifting away the game, the match, and the tournament.

Venus jumps up and down, shakes her hand at the net, and raises the trophy to the applause of the crowd.

Richard cheers with his family. He couldn't be prouder or more confident of his goal but when his eyes fall on --

Jamie, crying on the bench, berating herself furiously --

Richard's unease is clear. This isn't how it should be and --

EXT. PALAS VEDRES COUNTRY CLUB PARKING LOT - LATER

Venus is carrying the CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY as the Williams family walks back to the van. Everyone is excited only --

Richard is unsettled. Unsettled by this place. Unsettled when he alone spies:

Jamie and her tennis-suited FATHER arguing by their car.

FATHER

If you're not gonna try, then why the hell are we here? You think you're gonna get into college like that?

JAMIE

I was trying, Dad.

FATHER

Really? Well you coulda fooled me.

That brings the tears. Jamie gets in the car, slamming the door. Her father's left outside, exasperated. Full of regret.

Richard watches as he moves to his car, deeply troubled and -

INT. RICHARD'S VW BUS - DAY

Still uneasy, Richard drives home. His family is piled in the back, passing around the trophy, giddy for Venus.

SERENA

Were you nervous out there?

VENUS

No! That last girl was probably 18 and I still whooped her anyway. Why'd I be nervous?

Most of the family laughs. Richard does not.

RICHARD

Winning's enough. You don't gotta brag.

VENUS

I'm not bragging, Daddy, it's the truth. Want the proof?

She shows him the TROPHY, dancing around. The girls laugh.

RICHARD

Yeah, you won. She lost. We were there. Now it's over. Important thing is, you done your best. Same as her. Now I don't wanna hear another thing about it, understand?

VENUS

Yes, Daddy. OK. I just --
(can't help herself)
If that was her best, she needs to practice some more.

That gets a few laughs. Even a *ha-ha* from Richard who spots a 7-11 ahead and pulls into the lot.

RICHARD

All right, big shot. Here's 10 bucks. Go practice getting your sisters something to drink.

The girls shout out their orders and Venus takes the money and runs off. As soon as she's out of the car, Richard throws the van in reverse, backs out, and starts to drive away.

BRANDI
Richard. What are you doing?

RICHARD
She wants to brag, let her brag how she walked home three miles. We don't do that in this family.

Brandi shakes her head.

BRANDI
Richard. RICHARD!

Finally he stops the car, still seething.

BRANDI (CONT'D)
What's the matter with you?

Richard's not ready to say. Running after them, Venus finally catches up with the car and climbs inside.

VENUS
Where you going? I thought you were leaving without me.

RICHARD
I tried. Thank your mom. Don't be bragging again. Now give me my Coke and my change.

She does. Richard pulls out. Brandi watches him, concerned.

INT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOME - NIGHT

It's night by the time the VAN arrives home. The Family's unloading when a car pulls up behind. THE POLICE.

OFFICER 1
Richard Williams.

Richard turns as TWO LAPD OFFICERS approach from their car.

OFFICER 1 (CONT'D)
Can we talk to you a minute?

RICHARD
(to Brandi)
Go on, take the girls inside.

OFFICER 2
Actually, ma'am. We need to speak to them too. Might be better if we all go in together.

Aware of the NEIGHBORS now watching from their porches.

RICHARD

Whatever it is, you can speak to us here. We got nothing to hide.

The OFFICERS share a look. *Whatever you want.*

OFFICER 1

We got a call that there's some trouble in this house. That you've been rough with these kids. We've come to take a look.

RICHARD

Gotta call from who?

OFFICER

I'm not at liberty to say.

But Richard already knows. The OFFICER eyes the rackets.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Little late for practice, isn't it?

BRANDI

We're coming from a tournament.

OFFICER

What about school?

RICHARD

What about it? Girls, tell these men how you doing in school? *You can brag about that.*

VENUS

I get all A's.

RICHARD

And what about you?

SERENA

I get all A's too.

RICHARD

And what are you are gonna be when you grow up?

OFFICER

Mr. Williams --

RICHARD

Go on. Tell these nice Police Officer's whatchu gon be.

OFFICER

Mr. Williams -- that's not the --

SERENA

I'm gonna be a Veterinarian. Or maybe teach French.

VENUS

I'll be an Astronaut or Paleontologist, I guess.

OFFICER 2

A Paleo-what?

RICHARD

Thank you girls. A Paleontologist. The scientists who dig up those dinosaur bones. Now I know you gotta do your job, even if some crazy ass neighbor calls you, so I don't mind you coming over here and telling me I'm tough on them kids, cause I am. That's my job. To keep them off the street. You wanna come here and arrest me for that - fine. What's not gonna happen is you coming here one day to tell me you're sorry you had to blow my daughters' damn heads off because they was on drugs or running around stealing cars or hanging with them hoodlums. Now you wanna talk to these girls, talk to them, but you won't ever tell me that.

Off the Officers, slowed in their tracks and --

EXT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOME - NIGHT

A short time later, Richard and Brandi are on their porch watching the Cops pull away. As soon as they are gone --

Richard bounds across the street to his neighbors' house and pounds on the door. Ms. Strickland (the lady in the house coat from earlier) opens up to find Richard fuming.

RICHARD

Try that nonsense again, I'll kill ya. I mean it. Those are my kids.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 You keep your goddamn mouth shut or
 I'll knock off your head.

And Richard storms off, leaving Ms. Strickland shaking.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 Ain't no one gonna tell me how to
 raise my kids.

Brandi watches as he slams inside. She's shaken as well so --

INT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOME - CONTINUOUS

-- when Richard enters, Brandi follows, hot on his heels.

BRANDI
 What's the matter with you? You
 can't talk to people like that.

RICHARD
 What's the matter with me?

BRANDI
 You're acting crazy! Threatening
 our neighbors. Driving off without
 our daughter. You're angry that she
 won --

RICHARD
 I ain't angry that she won. I'm
 angry she was bragging.

BRANDI
 Well where you think she gets that?
 You're out there telling everyone
 who will listen that she's the
 world's greatest. Gonna make a
 million dollars. How you think
 she's gonna act?

Richard doesn't respond, just heads to the bedroom to change
 into his security guard uniform. Brandi follows, still hot.

BRANDI (CONT'D)
 Richard, I don't understand you.
 This is what you said you wanted.

RICHARD
 I never said like this. You can see
 it out there? At these tournaments?
 Call the cops on me? Those tennis
 parents oughta be locked up.
 Screaming at their kids.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Tearing 'em down. She don't need
all that pressure.

BRANDI
And what you're doing is better?

RICHARD
I ain't living through my kids.

Brandi bites her tongue. A long beat.

BRANDI
I know you're trying to do it
different this time but --

RICHARD
(immediately, angry)
That ain't what it's about.

BRANDI
-- picking fights with everyone
don't win you votes for world's
greatest father.

Richard cuts her a look. He does not like this subject.

BRANDI (CONT'D)
Richard. What happened with Betty
and those kids -- you don't have to
prove to us that you're a different
man now.

Richard shrinks. This wound is raw.

BRANDI (CONT'D)
I know you're trying to be there
for them. But you keep acting like
that and they might not be there
for you.

Richard considers that solemnly, and then heads off to work
leaving Brandi behind in his wake as --

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM, COMPTON HOUSE - NIGHT

The girls are all in their beds, but no one's asleep. They've
heard the whole thing. Hold on Serena, distressed and --

EXT. COMPTON COURTS, LYNWOOD PARK - DAY

A short time later, Brandi practices with Serena on the
courts. (*Occasionally, the Bloods now cheer her on.*) But
Serena's in a surly mood. Slapping at balls. Knocking them
over the fence. Brandi just stops.

BRANDI
You gonna fetch that?

Serena folds her arms. Immovable.

BRANDI (CONT'D)
Ok. Then you gonna tell me what's wrong or you just gonna pout?

SERENA
(after a long beat)
It isn't fair. Venus gets to do everything. Train with Paul. Play in tournaments.

BRANDI
Baby, Venus is older. She's always gonna do things first. You're gonna have your turn.

SERENA
But I'm ready now.

BRANDI
I know you feel that way but your father has a plan. You might not like it. Sometimes I don't like it either. Sometimes I think he's lost his mind but I know he's trying to do you right.

After a long beat, Serena musters her courage and --

SERENA
What happened with Daddy and his family before us? You all never talk about that.

BRANDI
Well, it ain't easy for him.
(takes a beat)
Your daddy was young when he had those kids. He wasn't ready to be a father, but now he is.

SERENA
He left them?

Brandi takes a minute with this one.

BRANDI
He's not proud of it. But, the way he grew up -- he didn't know how to be a father.
(MORE)

BRANDI (CONT'D)

Never had one around to show him
what it meant. Never had much hope.
Never had much of anything.
Whatever he's doing now, however
much you don't like it, he's trying
to do better this time. In his
heart it's all to give you and your
sisters better. I know one thing,
he may be crazy, but he won't ever
leave you.

Serena softens but isn't appeased. Brandi knows Serena well.
When her teeth are set, she doesn't let go.

BRANDI (CONT'D)

You really think you're ready?
(of course she does)
Well your Daddy may be stubborn,
but he'll change if he's wrong. You
know you're ready, then show him.

Serena smiles. Brandi's already walking back to the net.

BRANDI (CONT'D)

Now go get those balls. Don't make
me ask twice.

Serena smiles and takes off running and --

INT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOME - NIGHT

Richard and the family are watching a Tennis Match on TV.

RICHARD

You see how deep she's hitting it?
See how she's moving her around the
court. Can't do that with a closed
stance. Open, right? Like a dancer.

Venus nods. Serena's biding her time, sensing her moment and -

SERENA

Is it OK if I go to the bathroom?

Brandi nods of course. Richard's preoccupied as we follow --

Serena, out of the room and creeping down the hall. She
passes a collection of VENUS'S TROPHIES, growing larger by
the day as she reaches --

HER FATHER'S STUDY. Forbidden territory. You get a whooping
if you're caught in here but Serena steels herself. Enters.

Stealthily, she moves to her father's desk, flipping through his business and tennis files until she finds:

A SCTA ENTRY FORM. 10 and Under. Filled out for Venus. Beneath it, Serena finds another form. BLANK.

She looks to the door, steeling herself and --

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM, COMPTON HOUSE - NIGHT

While her sisters sleep, Serena works by the light of a flashlight, filling out the FORM. Printing out her name and --

EXT. ANOTHER LA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Another tournament. Richard is checking in with Venus at the registration table. Serena is milling about behind them.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL

All right, Venus. You're all set.
Court Four. Good luck out there.

VENUS

Thank you.

Richard and Venus start to head off. Serena lingers.

RICHARD

You coming or what?

SERENA

I'm gonna hit against a wall or something. I'll find you later.
(to Venus)
Good luck.

But as soon as her family is gone, Serena approaches the sign-in table. The OFFICIAL looks up.

SERENA (CONT'D)

Serena Williams. Ten and Under. I'm signing in.

The OFFICIAL looks at her curiously.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL

Let me just find your form.

EXT. TENNIS COURT, ANOTHER LA HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

ON COURT: Venus is mid-match, trouncing a GIRL (as expected). She drills a winner, putting her opponent out of her misery.

Richard claps in the stands.

RICHARD
Great shot, Venus. Great decision.

Another FATHER approaches Richard.

FATHER
Girl looks good out there.

RICHARD
A little tight but not bad.

FATHER
I don't mean Venus. I mean your
little one. Looks like a champ too.
(off Richard's confusion)
You coulda warned us man. I didn't
know you had two.

Off Richard, realization and anger beginning to surface as --

EXT. ANOTHER TENNIS COURT - MOMENTS LATER

Richard hurries through the grounds to another COURT where a small crowd has begun to gather. He can't see it yet, but the POP coming off the balls doesn't sound normal. Not at this age. It's FEROCIOUS. He arrives as the crowd APPLAUDS to see:

Serena, playing a match. Richard's first instinct at being disobeyed is to physically pull her off the court but Brandi, watching at the fence, stops him.

BRANDI
May as well let her finish.

Richard's slowed for a moment as -- he watches Serena race around the court, finally let off the leash.

She CRACKS overheads. Chases every ball. Plays every angle.

The racket's as big as her, but she's a natural in her element, and there's magic here that even Richard can't deny.

Serena ends a beautiful point at the net, then spots her father in the crowd and -- the music stops. The magic, over. Believing she's in trouble, Serena starts off the court when -

RICHARD
Where you think you're going?
(as Serena pauses)
You're out there now. Go ahead and
finish. We'll talk about it later.

Surprised, Serena smiles, hustling back to the court. Richard turns to his wife.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Did you know about this?

BRANDI
No. Not exactly.

RICHARD
I don't even know I want Venus out
here no more. Now we got 'em both?

BRANDI
Don't look at me. You're the man
with the plan.

Off Richard, watching as Serena tosses the ball and...*CRACK*.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB CAFE - LATER

Venus and the family are celebrating with ICE CREAM. Serena, holding a small SILVER TROPHY of her own, eyes Venus's towering GOLD TROPHY enviously. Venus sees.

VENUS
You want it? -- we can swap. I like
silver better anyway.

Serena beams, swapping the trophies before her sister can change her mind. Venus is all smiles as --

WOMAN'S VOICE
Excuse me. Mr. Williams. Venus.

The family turns to see a young, studious NEW YORK WOMAN (30) approaching with a note-pad.

REPORTER
My name's Robin Finn. I'm a
reporter with the New York Times.
I've been following your season.
It's been really remarkable. I was
wondering if I could ask you some
questions?

Venus lights up. She looks to her parents for approval.

RICHARD
You wanna talk to this white lady,
talk. She ain't here to see me.

A beat as Venus considers, then eagerly nods as --

INT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOUSE - DAY

Several weeks later. WIMBLEDON (1990) is on TV. Venus is on the couch with a copy of the NY TIMES, reading from the article aloud. The headline reads:

TENNIS; STATUS: UNDEFEATED. FUTURE: ROSY. AGE: 10.

VENUS

(reading)

"At a time when tennis prodigies seem to be surfacing every week, the latest hot prospect is a 10-year-old Californian, Venus Williams. Last weekend, Williams captured her 17th singles title in less than a year by winning the age-10-or-under Southern California junior sectional championships."

TUNDI

Listen to this.

Reveal the whole family is here, each with their own copy of the paper, marveling over the article.

TUNDI (CONT'D)

"Her game had everything. She was fast, she had a spin serve, she ran to the net -- boy, did she wax me." That's from Dorothy Cheney.

ISHA

Dang, Venus. You're famous.

RICHARD

All right. One step at a time.

SERENA

(reading in a huff)

This doesn't even mention me once.

Serena scowls in disbelief as the PHONE RINGS.

SERENA (CONT'D)

I'll get it.

She stomps off to the KITCHEN and picks up the phone.

SERENA (CONT'D)

Williams' residence. Under-appreciated tennis star speaking.

(Serena listens, then calls out to her dad.)

(MORE)

SERENA (CONT'D)

Dad, phone's for you. Guy says he's from IMG.

Richard gives Brandi a troubled look.

BRANDI

What? Isn't this what we've been waiting for?

It was, but now Richard's not so sure as --

EXT. PRIVATE BRENTWOOD HOME - DAY

Richard and Venus exit the van, heading toward the Cornyn residence with their gear as Paul greets them at the door.

PAUL

I swear. It wasn't me.

Off Richard's displeasure --

EXT. TENNIS COURT, BRENTWOOD HOME - DAY

Richard and Venus approach the court to find Rita sipping iced tea with a smarmy suited HUCKSTER who can only be --

RITA

Richard, this is my friend, Laird Stabler. He's an Agent at Pro Serve. He read about you two in the paper and wanted to meet.

Laird sticks out his hand.

LAIRD

Great to meet you, Richard. You got quite a girl on your hands. I'd like to talk to you about taking her to the next level.

Off Richard and Venus, as the sharks begin to circle and --

EXT. OUTDOOR WEST HOLLYWOOD RESTAURANT - DAY

Richard, Brandi, and Venus have lunch at a posh OUTDOOR spot with a EUROPEAN AGENT from ADVANTAGE.

ADVANTAGE AGENT

I'm not advocating she goes pro at 12 or 13 -- unless that's something you want to talk about. What's important right now is that she maximizes her potential. It's time to ramp it up. Practice. Coaching.

(MORE)

ADVANTAGE AGENT (CONT'D)
Tournaments. If you sign with Advantage, we can take care of all that and make sure there's a fat deal at the end of it when she's ready to turn pro.

EXT. ANOTHER PRIVATE TENNIS COURT - DAY

Venus plays on a distant court with ZINA GARRISON, while in the foreground, Richard speaks to NIC BOLLETTIERI and a REPRESENTATIVE from Adidas.

ADIDAS
Clothing. Bags. Shirts. Sneakers. Anything you need, we can provide it for free, in the hopes, of course that in a year or two, when Venus is ready to go pro, you'll remember the investments we've made.

Richard's eyes are on his daughter on the court.

RICHARD
You mean when she's twelve?

The REP nods, *why not?* Richard's disapproval is clear.

NICK
Pretty special thing to hit with Zina, right? That's the kind of experiences these relationships can provide. I mean, the sporting gods have smiled on you, Richard. You're going to be a rich man. But if you wanna cash in, it's time to put your foot on the gas.

Off Richard, not liking what he's hearing --

EXT. SOUL FOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The entire Williams family sits in a well-known LOS ANGELES restaurant with DON KING who's giving them the hard sell.

DON KING
Now you think I don't know tennis, but I'll tell ya the truth. That don't matter one bit. This is America. Land of the brave. Home of the free. What matters here is this--
(producing a wad of bills)
(MORE)

DON KING (CONT'D)

-- and I know more about it than Arthur-fucking-Ashe and this pretty girl here's gonna make a truck-load of it. So what do you say? You want me to make you rich, or you gonna let some white guy from who-knows-where put his hand in your pocket?

Off Richard, who knows a bullshitter when he sees one and --

EXT. RIVIERA COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

A BANNER FLAPS BY THE BAND STAND: "JUST SAY NO TO DRUGS."

A CHARITY TENNIS EVENT underway in the posh Pacific Palisades Tennis Club. Celebrities. Pros. Even PRESIDENT REAGAN is here in support of his wife NANCY'S EVENT.

On the courts: Venus and Serena play an exhibition match against TWO NOTABLE PROS.

Watching from the crowd is tennis legend JACK KRAMER. He's speaking with an AGENT we'll meet in a moment.

AGENT

What do you think?

KRAMER

She's quick. Serves a goddamn rocket. I'd say for 14, she's about the best I've ever seen.

AGENT

She's ten.

KRAMER

Ten. Oh. Geez. Then...

Off that, as Venus smashes another across the net --

NANCY REAGAN (PRE-LAP)

This slogan -- "just say no." That wasn't something we just sat down and dreamed up, that came about by accident.

LATER

The Banquet. The guests are mingling. Photo-Opping. Nancy Regan is on stage, thanking her donors.

NANCY REAGAN (CONT'D)

I was at a clinic in Oakland when a young girl asked me, 'But what do we do when our friends pressure us to do drugs?' and, without thinking, I said, 'Just say no!'

LAND ON RICHARD

-- who's seated at a table with that same BLUE BLOOD AGENT, JOHN (Everett) and a sixty year-old named MARK (McCormack), the head of his agency, who looks and dresses like a Kennedy.

JOHN

Richard. Thanks for coming. You know Mark, the head of our agency, right? Can we get you a drink?

RICHARD

Sure. Coke-a-cola be fine. Thanks.

MARK

It's nice to meet you, Richard. What do you think of the club?

RICHARD

It's great. Real nice of everyone to take off their hoods before we came in.

(Richard enjoys watching them freeze then --)

I'm kidding. Everyone's very nice. We've been here many times.

John and Mark exchange a look -- *this guy is nuts.*

JOHN

Well Richard, first, we just wanna congratulate you on the great job you've done with these girls so far. With your resources and experience, honestly, it's astonishing. We'd like to help you with what's next.

MARK

Now I'm sure you know, but John here is the best. He signed Capriati when she was 12. Mary Jo Fernandez. And we believe Venus can be bigger than both. With her talent. Her length. Her --

RICHARD

Race.

(that stops them)

It's OK. We get it. Poor black girl in an all white sport is a pretty good story. Ghetto Cinderella. Why you think we picked it?

(they laugh nervously)

You know my momma used to say, Richard, you are not a negro. You're not a nigger. You're just a man. And as far as you nationa-you-know-what-nality, she would say, I don't know what the hell you are. Times going through life, black people been a little bit of everything. Used to call colored. Then used to call boy. Then African. Now they call 'em African American. Be honest with you, we don't know what in the hell we are. All we know is -- we are.

Feigning understanding, the white men nod. Mark's starting to grasp what he's up against. A huckster and a master.

MARK

Well -- Richard, that's exactly what we're talking about. We think Venus could be very inspirational to a whole group of people, who frankly, as an industry, we have not done enough to reach. Venus could open a lot of doors and we'd like to help her do it.

RICHARD

(cutting to the chase)

So what are you offering?

JOHN

Whatever you need. Shoes. Coaches. Rackets --

RICHARD

They got rackets don't they? That's how you heard about 'em, ain't it?

JOHN

What are you looking for then? Money? A new house? A car?

RICHARD

I'm wondering why should we sign with any of you? Venus is 10. She can't go pro or get a sponsorship for a couple years anyway.

JOHN

There's ways around that. We did it with Jennifer. Venus can go pro as young as you want.

RICHARD

You all think we care about youngest. Buddy, we interested in longest. I don't want these girls to burn out at sixteen with no education. No idea how to handle their money. You all are talking 'bout putting her foot on the gas. I'm out here thinking we need to pump the breaks.

JOHN

Richard, that's a bad idea. Now is not the time to slow down.

RICHARD

What about school and their childhood?

JOHN

I made deals for Jennifer when she was twelve that'll pay for ten colleges. Leave that down the road. Don't you wanna make a million dollars?

RICHARD

Oh, I've made a million dollars. Couple times before. Know how I know? I've seen the mansions of the white people I was working for when I made it for 'em.

(seen all their cards)

You think I'm just some nigger from the Ghetto, don't you? Gonna hand over my kids to the first fool with a Cadillac. I'm trying to give these girls a lifetime, not a moment.

John throws up his hands. Mark now steps in.

MARK

We understand that, Richard and we are too. Now can I be frank?

RICHARD

You can be whoever the hell you want.

MARK

Slowing down now would be a catastrophic mistake. You've done an amazing job but there's a long way to go and if you pull back right now, you risk losing everything.

(beat)

Success like Jennifer's, that doesn't happen by chance. That talent's gotta be nurtured. You need the right training. Coaches. Hitting partners. You gotta play the right tournaments. Get the right exposure to sponsors. These next few years are crucial. Hingis. Kournikova. These other prospects Venus's age, they are turning up the heat. You pull Venus back now, she won't just fall behind. She won't develop at all.

(once that lands)

Between John, myself, our company -- we are this sport. We have a hundred years of experience. We've taken dozens of players to the top. Let us do that for you. Let us make this a sure thing. You don't wanna risk all that, do you?

Off Richard, condescended and steaming and --

EXT. RIVIERA COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

Storming through the event, Richard's looking for the girls. Making a bit of a scene. Finally he spots them:

BY THE POOL -- eating hamburgers and french fries with a few WASPY GIRLS from the club, having the time of their life.

Richard arrives with a head full of steam.

VENUS

Hey, Daddy! How you doing?

RICHARD
Where'd you get all this food?

SERENA
You want something, Daddy? You can
put it on my tab.

The girls laugh. Richard does not. He boils, grabbing the girls, pulling them away.

VENUS
But I'm not done eating.

RICHARD
You can eat the lunch I packed. And
don't ever let me hear this "it's
on my tab" crap again.

SERENA
It was just a joke, Dad. It's free.

ANOTHER GIRL
She's right, Mr. Williams. They're
just handing it out.

RICHARD
Ain't nothing for free. Somebody's
paying for it. I promise. Now I
said let's go. Now.

Embarrassed, the girls comply, leaving their friends and following their father who's caused quite a scene and --

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

They get back to the van. Everyone's silent. Serena, furious.

SERENA
It was just a joke. It's not fair.

RICHARD
Don't talk back to me, Serena. I'm
not in the mood. Just get in the
goddamn car.

They do as Richard gets behind the wheel in a fury. He tries to start the car, but it stalls. He tries again but still nothing. Again. Nothing. He pounds the wheel.

Fighting back tears, Richard puts down the keys. Humiliated. Underestimated. The story of his life.

The girls watch him in back, confused and afraid, as we hear:

NEWS REPORTER (PRE-LAP)

The three police officers facing felony criminal charges were among a group of 15 who stopped a 25-year-old black man last Saturday Night then beat him, kicked him, and clubbed him, unaware that an amateur photographer was recording the incident on videotape.

EXT. COMPTON STREETS - NIGHT / VARIOUS SHOTS

A city on the brink. Police on patrol. Young men on their stoops. A powder keg about to be lit as --

NEWS REPORTER (PRE-LAP)

Los Angeles Police Chief Darrell Gates looked at the tape and said he thinks, assault with a deadly weapon will be one of the charges.

INT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOUSE - NIGHTS

Richard, Brandi, and a young, well-dressed, African American man - KEVEN DAVIS (35), watch the notorious assault on TV.

BRANDI

My lord. It's unbelievable.

There's a KNOCK ON THE DOOR. Crying, Brandi answers it and Paul Cohen enters, taking stock of the somber faces.

PAUL

What's going on?

RICHARD

Didn't see this in Brentwood?

He gestures to the television where the NEWS BROADCAST PLAYS:

RODNEY KING. The infamous beating at the hands of the LAPD. It's ferociously violent. Paul is stunned.

PAUL

Jesus.

KEVEN

Terrible, right?

RICHARD

Paul, this is Keven Davis. He's a lawyer. A family friend. He's been helping with these agents.

They shake hands, but everyone's eyes are on the screen.

BRANDI

We need to leave this place --
before we don't have a choice.

Hold on Richard as he watches, rage still simmering as --

EXT. WILLIAMS'S COMPTON HOUSE - EVENING

Venus and Serena are playing dress-up with their DOG in the backyard where Richard smokes a cigarette, sitting with Paul, Brandi, and Keven. All of them solemn.

BRANDI

Richard says you're moving?

PAUL

Yeah. We're having a baby. My
wife's got some family up north so -

KEVEN

What about McEnroe?

PAUL

He's done. Tatum's not behind
another run for number one. It
takes too much outta everyone. And
I'm not interested in less.

BRANDI

What will you do?

PAUL

(serious)

I'm thinking about arm wrestling.
There's a guy up there, he's like
the Agassi of arm wrestling. I can
take him to the top. There's
nothing I can't coach.

(turning to Richard)

Question's what're you going to do?

Richard takes a long pull of his cigarette. A big decision.

RICHARD

We ain't signing with these agents.
I want these girls to be kids and
we sign, that's all over. They'll
push her fast as they can and I
don't want her to peak at 12 just
to fall to pieces at 15.

PAUL

I get it but it's risky. You're leaving money on the table.

KEVEN

They are. But if she turns out to be as good as we think, in four, five years, the deal they sign will be a lot bigger.

PAUL

That's a big if. Lot of things have to go right. What's your plan?

A long beat, cause Richard knows how this will land.

RICHARD

I'm pulling 'em out of juniors.

PAUL

What?!

RICHARD

I heard all the risks, but I made up my mind. The junior circuit's worse than the ghetto. Kids cracking-up. Burning out. Their parents oughta to be shot.

PAUL

Richard, what are you talking about? Your girls are fine.

RICHARD

Yeah. Sure, they fine now. Playing these jokers, but as they move on -- nationals. Internationals. It's just like the pros. That competition and pressure - it ain't good at their age. No, we're doing it different. We're going to Florida. Getting a coach where they can train, go to school and be kids.

Paul's incredulous. It's hard to overstate how big a bomb Richard's just dropped.

PAUL

Richard, you'll ruin them. You hold out for some payday, it won't be there. No coach is gonna take 'em for free if they aren't playing juniors. They'll never get paid.

RICHARD
They will when they see her.

PAUL
Does Venus know about this?

RICHARD
Of course. She's on board.

But we see Venus eavesdropping from afar, not looking sold.

PAUL
(in disbelief)
Every American player who's ever done anything got good playing juniors. Mac. Traci. Sampras. Agassi. Capriati. Those just are the facts. You've got a stallion but, she's doesn't play juniors, she'll die on the vine.

RICHARD
I appreciate your help and all your advice, Paul but I've made up my mind. I know what I'm doing.

PAUL
You have no fucking idea. You're talking outta your ass cause some people insulted you and now you're gonna fuck all this up.

It's a stalemate. Paul folds first, throwing up his hands.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I swear to god, you're the most stubborn person I ever met in my life. You're really doing this, aren't you?
(of course he is)
Well if you're going to go to Florida, at least don't go to Nick's. He's a hack. Talk to Macci. He's a little nuts but he's good. But, Richard, you tell him you're not playing juniors, I really don't know if he'll say yes.

RICHARD
Who says we gotta tell him?

Paul laughs in disbelief, looking at the girls fondly. Sadly.

PAUL

I hope you don't fuck this up.

That's it. The end of an era. Time now for another. CUT TO:

EXT. RICK MACCI'S TENNIS ACADEMY - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

Grenelefe Country Club. A golf and tennis resort situated in the swamps of Haines City, Florida. A steaming, athletic paradise where:

A JUNIOR TENNIS TOURNAMENT is underway in a 1700 seat sunken court. TWO ELITE 17-YEAR-OLDS belt it out in the burning sun until one of them snaps a backhand like a firecracker screaming down the line and we meet:

RICK MACCI, the boyish, bowl-cut Tennis coach, whooping it up in the stands like a kid!

MACCI

Sherman Williams, baby! Paint those lines!

The crowd all cheers as we CUT TO:

LATER AT THE GRILL

A post-tournament reception. Rick's mingling with the PARENTS when an ASSISTANT approaches.

MACCI (CONT'D)

No way! He's too soft. He's a marshmallow. You know what happens to those, right? They get roasted.

ASSISTANT

(waiting through laughter)
Rick. Sorry to interrupt. You got another call. Richard Williams. He said it's urgent.

MACCI

Richard who?

ASSISTANT

That father out in California. He's been calling. Got those girls.

Macci's drawing a blank.

ADVANTAGE AGENT

You haven't heard of Venus Williams? I'd take that call if I were you.

Reveal the European ADVANTAGE AGENT we met before in CA.

ADVANTAGE AGENT (CONT'D)

Venus is the real deal. Good as Hingis. She's 63-0. Hasn't lost a match. She won the SC Sectionals last month without dropping a set. Her sister's not bad either.

MACCI

63-0? These girls are so good, why've I never heard of them?

ADVANTAGE AGENT

They're from Compton.

(then)

Word of warning, put your guard up. Their father's a tough one.

RICK

Controlling?

ADVANTAGE AGENCY

That's not the half of it. He makes Stefano look like a push-over. Watch your back.

Off Macci, both wary and intrigued.

INT. RICK MACCI'S OFFICE, GRENELEFE GOLF & TENNIS CLUB - DAY

THE SOUND OF A PHONE DIALING as we see Tennis kitsch on the walls. Trophies. Rick's photos with Capriati. Tommy Ho. Trump. Rick sits on his desk on the phone as finally --

MACCI

Mr. Williams? Hi, this is Rick Macci. I heard you've got a heck of a player out there. I thought maybe I'd come take a look.

EXT. COMPTON HOTEL - DAY

PAN DOWN from a California sky and California Palm trees to the facade of a budget Compton hotel where --

Macci waits outside with his Tennis Bag, failing to hide his shock as Richard's VW pulls up beneath the carriage port.

RICHARD

(through the window)

Mr. Macci? Richard Williams. Toss that stuff in the back. Let's take you to see the club.

Off Macchi's surprise. *What the hell did I get in to?* He climbs in the car. Sees the girls in the back.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Girls. Say hi to Mr. Macchi.

VENUS AND SERENA
Hi, Mr. Macchi.

MACCI
Nice to meet you girls. Call me Rick. Now which one of you's who?

INT. RICHARD'S VAN - MOVING - MORNING

Macchi sits shotgun beside Richard, watching rough Compton streets pass-by out the windows. In the car --

Macchi recoils. Seats covered in dirt. Tennis balls. Coke bottles. Fast food wrappers line the floor. Macchi jolts uncomfortably as --

RICHARD
Watch out for those springs. They're lose. Might poke ya.

Macchi shifts, pulling a wadded t-shirt from the cushion.

MACCI
You sleep in here?

RICHARD
Sometimes. Depends on the wife.

Richard winks. Macchi soaks it all in. Venus and Serena crammed in the back doing homework in their tennis skirts.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Here we are. East Compton Hills Country Club.

They've arrived at the Compton Courts. Macchi's taken aback.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Don't worry. I'll make sure you don't get shot.

EXT. COMPTON TENNIS COURTS - DAY

Macchi watches the whole strange procedure as Richard and the girls unload their tennis crap from the car. He follows them to the courts where --

THE BLOODS wait like bouncers at the gate, welcoming the family in like celebrities.

DODGER'S HAT
Here he is. King Richard.

They smile at the girls but stop Macchi at the door.

DODGER'S HAT (CONT'D)
Where the fuck you think you're going, McEnroe?

MACCI
Excuse me?

DODGER'S HAT
Richard -- this Jimmy Connors looking motherfucker with you?

RICHARD
(inside the court)
Yeah, let him in. White boy's with us.

The Bloods step aside allowing Macchi to pass.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
See. What'd I tell ya. Promised you wouldn't get shot.

Macchi's just speechless as the girls take the ratty courts, throwing footballs, tossing rackets, while Richard sweeps up broken glass and crack vials. *What a freaking joke.*

As they begin to warm up, Macchi watches Richard hit, thinking he's made the biggest mistake of his life. Out of expedience more than anything --

MACCI
(taking the court)
Do you mind if I hit? I'll get a better feel.

RICHARD
You're the boss. Have at it. I've got some business calls anyway.

Richard steps off with his CELLPHONE, taking a FAKE CALL.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
(into the phone)
Richard Williams here. World's greatest.

Macci shakes his head, then begins to drill with the girls. His skill and professionalism couldn't be more different.

MACCI

Ok, Venus. Let's start off with some backhands. Cross court. Serena, you hit em down the line. Let's do 20.

Macci feeds them balls. The girls whacking from the baseline. Richard yells encouragement from the sidelines.

RICHARD

Great shot, Serena. Lotta power. Move those feet, Venus, there you go.

ANOTHER DRILL. Macci watching the girls serve. Pop. Pop. Pop.

ANOTHER DRILL. Macci feeds the girls volleys. He feeds them overheads. He feeds them lobs. Macci's reaction is hard to read. When he's finally had enough --

MACCI

All right. Nice work. Take a break.

Macci watches, considering, as the girls run over to Richard.

VENUS

Daddy, can I use the bathroom?

RICHARD

Course you can, Venus.

SERENA

Me too, Daddy?

RICHARD

Go on. Hurry up.

He kisses the girls and they run off the courts. Richard heads over to Macci, who's watching them go.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Well -- what do you think, Rick? They better than Capriati or what?

But Macci doesn't answer. His attention still tuned to Venus, walking through the park to the bathroom -- *ON HER HANDS*.

She walks ten yards like that - like it's nothing - then she goes another ten doing HANDSPRINGS like she's SIMONE BILES.

Macci's slack jawed. He turns to their father.

MACCI

How tall are you, Richard?

RICHARD

Me? I'm six-four.

MACCI

And your wife?

RICHARD

Brandi. She's bout six one. She was a college athlete too you know.

MACCI

Really? Well Richard -- let me tell you. Forget Capriati. She gets as big as that, I think you might have the next Michael Jordan on your hands.

Richard just puts his arm around Macci and smiles.

RICHARD

No brother man. I got the next two.

In the distance, Macci finds Serena joining her sister, walking upside down like the laws of gravity don't apply. Macci can hardly believe his luck.

MACCI

How the heck'd this happen?

RICHARD

Well. I'll tell you. I had a plan.
(pre-lap now)
It was 1977. I was watching TV.

INT. MCDONALDS - LATER

Buzzing with excitement, Macci sits with Richard and the girls in a booth. The family eats hungrily. Macci hasn't touched his. Too excited to eat as --

RICHARD

I don't remember who was changing the channels for me but a tennis match came on and I said, hold it right there cause a man, I didn't know him at the time - but it was Bud Collins, he was handing this girl a check and he said, "That's not bad.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Forty Thousand Dollars for four days work" and I said, that little girl never done that before had she?

The girls just smile and eat. They know this story by heart.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

So the next day, it woulda been a Monday, I went out and got a newspaper and looked in the back and it was true. So I went to the wife and said -- we gotta make two more kids.

(eats his burger)

That night, I wrote up a plan. One for Venus. One for Serena. Covered it all. Their tennis. Educations. Language studies. Media training. All of it and that's how we're sitting here with you.

Macci still has his burger in his hand, untouched.

MACCI

And you never played tennis before?

RICHARD

Nope. I'm a terrific athlete. Lotta people said the best ever came out of Louisiana but tennis --

(beat)

Mostly I just watched some tapes.

Richard takes a big bite. Off Macci, in utter disbelief as --

INT. MACCI'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Macci's sitting on a bed in a towel, still wet from the shower, talking to his assistant on the phone.

MACCI

I know it sounds crazy. It's insane, but this girl -- I mean she's built like Olive Oyl, just all arms and legs, but their athleticism, both of em. I mean, fasten your seat belts, these girls are fast. They get in the system, juniors, coaching, the sky is the limit.

ASSISTANT

How's the dad? Crazy as they say?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. GRENELEFE TENNIS CLUB - NIGHT

Macci's assistant, on the phone in the steamy Florida night.

MACCI

Worse. But I like him. He's self-taught. Self-made. Kinda like me. I can work with him.

ASSISTANT

All right. Just be careful. Don't want another Stefano on your hands.

Off Macci, considering that omen and then --

INT. WILLIAMS' COMPTON HOUSE - DAY

Rick's sitting in the living room, across from the entire Williams' family. Richard's in the center, a lion with his cubs as Macci presents them with a PAPER. His offer.

MACCI

That's my standard agreement. Same one I made with Jennifer. Basically it says - you sign with me as your coach, I'll assume all the costs. Instruction. Housing. Food. Education. You won't pay for a thing. Tickets to Disney World, which is right down the road. But mostly my personal time, which I promise is what you'll get. When you train at Rick Macci, you train with Rick. That's not how it works with my competitors.

BRANDI

Sounds expensive. What's in it for you?

MACCI

Well, a lot I hope but it's all about trust. I like your family. I believe in your daughters. I think they can be champions and I'm willing to take that risk. In exchange, my fee is 15% of their future earnings. If you make nothing, I make nothing. We're in it together, but I promise, we're not gonna make nothing.

Macci's excited. Everyone's impressed. Everyone but Richard.

RICHARD

What do you know about Nick Bollettieri? He's been calling too.

MACCI

Nick? Well -- Nick's a good coach. He's had a lot of success. But you go to Bradenton, you won't get him, you'll get whatever hitting coach he's got available. You'll get a factory. You come to me, I'm your coach. One on one er -- one on two, as it were.

RICHARD

Lotta people say Nick's the best.

MACCI

I'd ask Andre what he'd say about that? Lotta people say he's not the happiest guy in the world. Doesn't love it on the court. I think you gotta love it. Kids gotta drive this thing. If it's their dream to be a champ, there's a chance. If it's yours -- either they're gonna lose, or you'll lose them. Maybe both. But look -- if you wanna go with Nick then --

RICHARD

No. We want to go with you. We just wanted to hear that first.

Macci sighs relief as Richard extends a paper of his own.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

That's our standard agreement. You take these girls, you take us all. We ain't breaking this family up.

MACCI

You all want to come to Florida?

RICHARD

(nods, re: his contract)
And we'll need the rest of that too. A house. The best school. A job at your academy. A --

MACCI
 (reading)
 -- mobile home?

RICHARD
 Gotta get there don't we? You
 believe in these girls or what?

Despite their crazy father, Macci does. Here goes nothing. He extends his hand for Richard to shake it and we -- CUT TO:

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

A RIBBON OF HIGHWAY cutting through the Arizona desert where a brand new MOTORHOME speeds down the road. Behind the wheel:

I/E. BRAND NEW MOTORHOME - DAY AND NIGHT / VARIOUS SHOTS

Richard Williams drives, moving his family cross country.

They pass the GRAND CANYON. The TEXAS PLAINS. They stop at Truck stops and Diners. Richard smokes. Serena sleeps. Venus, focused as ever, watches the country pass by out her windows, more clear than ever about where she's headed as --

INT. BRAND NEW MOTORHOME - NIGHT

Richard's at the wheel on a Louisiana Highway. Everyone else asleep when a FREEWAY SIGN grows in his window: SHREVEPORT.

Richard blooms with emotion, moving toward an exit and --

EXT. SHREVEPORT - DAWN

The Williams's motorhome sweeps through poor, urban streets. Deep south poverty. Compton, minus the palm trees.

Richard drives through it like in a dream, taking in his past. Brandi wakes beside him, looking at the city.

BRANDI
 Where are we?

RICHARD
 Home.

Richard's emotional as the girls begin to stir awake and --

EXT. RICHARD'S CHILDHOOD HOME - MORNING

We've been here before. In Richard's memories. The Motorhome is parked in a blighted, rural neighborhood. The family watches Richard walk the yard of the small clapboard house showing years of neglect. The poverty is striking.

Richard's saddened by the condition.

SERENA

This is where you grew up?

VENUS

Where'd you go the bathroom? Didn't you have running water?

RICHARD

Venus, we didn't have nothing. Lotta bad happened here. All we had was Momma.

The girls are young and they struggle to grasp what this means to him, why their father is crying and --

EXT. SHREVEPORT CEMETERY - DAY

Brandi and the girls wait at a respectful distance as Richard visits the grave of his mother -- MS. JULIA METCALF WILLIAMS.

He's silent for a long, reverent time. Finally --

RICHARD

I miss you Momma. You with me everyday, in these girls. Everyday. I wish you could see what they gonna do. I hope I'm doing them right. I hope we making you proud.

Richard wipes his eyes, tries to compose, then returns to his family, heading for the car.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

All right. Time's a wasting. Let's get this show on the road.

With a last look back, they follow him into the car and --

EXT. HAINES CITY, FLORIDA - ESTABLISHING

Soaring over Central Florida swamp lands until we arrive at --

EXT. GRENELEFE COUNTRY CLUB -- ESTABLISHING

The beautiful home of the Rick Macchi Tennis Academy. Golf courses, pools, and tennis courts as far as the eye can see.

The MOTORHOME pulls through the gates and parks in the lot. Rick greets the family as they step out the doors.

MACCI

Here they are. How was the trip?

But everyone's just staring mouth agape at the club.

MACCI (CONT'D)
Not too shabby, huh? Wanna take a
look around?

Off their excitement.

EXT. AND INT. GRENELEFE COUNTRY CLUB - VARIOUS SHOTS / DAY

Moving at his naturally quick, puppy-dog clip, Macchi gives the family a tour of the facilities, showing off:

A BEAUTIFUL GOLF COURSE.

MACCI
Here's the Golf Course. Richard,
you got a membership. Cart included
of course. Hear you're pretty good.

A SPARKLING POOL.

MACCI (CONT'D)
You'll wanna live in here. It's a
hundred most days. Just watch out
for the gators.

THE CAFETERIA, where a dozen young TENNIS PLAYERS eat.

MACCI (CONT'D)
Cafeteria's all you can eat.
Seafood buffet every Friday.

THE WORKOUT FACILITY

MACCI (CONT'D)
Here's the gym, weight center,
locker room and finally --

EXT. TENNIS VILLAGE, GRENELEFE COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

-- they arrive at last at Macchi's headquarters.

MACCI
Here's the tennis village. That's a
1700-seat stadium and thirteen
pristine practice courts that
you're going to get to know very,
very well.

It's just as impressive as he says. Thirteen immaculate courts filled with OTHER TEENAGE HOPEFULS drilling away, all aware and jealous of Macchi's new arrivals. The buzz in the air is electric and envious.

MACCI (CONT'D)

Now, this won't happen everyday,
but by chance since she's here - I
thought you might like to hit. Jen!
Come on over.

The girls turn in instant recognition to see 15-YEAR-OLD, #6
in the world, JENNIFER CAPRIATI jogging over.

CAPRIATI

Hey girls. Nice to meet you. Rick
says you're really good. Wanna hit?

Venus and Serena look at Richard, smiles bursting.

RICHARD

Have fun. Just go easy on her.

The girls follow Jennifer to a court and begin to play. We
stay with Richard and Macci, watching from a far.

MACCI

That's the model right there. We
follow Jennifer's path. We got some
work to do before the Easter bowl.

RICHARD

That's fine. She ain't playing the
Easter Bowl.

MACCI

You got another tournament in mind?

RICHARD

No. They're done playing Juniors.
No more matches till they're pro.

Macci laughs.

MACCI

You're kidding? And when's that?

RICHARD

When I say they're ready. We ain't
rushing this thing, Rick.

Macci realizes Richard's serious. He's not laughing anymore.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

What the heck do you think they're
gonna do for the next couple years?

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Go to school. Go to church. And
practice with you.

MACCI
Richard, the whole thing is
juniors. Competition. Adversity.
That's where they learn to compete.

RICHARD
They know how to compete. These
girls'll run over broken glass to
get a ball. You don't worry about
that. What they need is to be kids.

MACCI
To be kids? Richard, you're nuts. I
can't mold 'em like that.

RICHARD
Sure you can, you're the best.
Ain't nothing you can't do. But if
you want us to talk to Nic then --

Macci is furious, realizing he's been played. Venus,
distracted from her match, watches the argument with concern.

MACCI
I guess you don't wanna talk about
sponsorship either?

RICHARD
That's just more pressure. We take
it slow. We get 'em smart. We let
'em be kids, and these girls'll be
playing when your old ass and me is
in the grave. I guarantee.

MACCI
(livid)
You might have mentioned all this
in Compton.

RICHARD
I might have I guess.

For Richard, the conversation is over. He starts to head off.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Excited to be here, Rick. Thanks
for Jennifer. That's a treat.

He walks over to his girls, leaving Macci in the wake of the
bomb he just dropped. Barry, the hitting coach comes over.

BARRY
No tournaments?

MACCI
He'll come around. We got time.

BARRY
Hope so. Pretty big bet you made.

Off Macci. Only day one and already behind the eight ball as the first beats of KENDRICK LAMAR'S KING KUNTA take us into:

A MONTAGE: THE GRENELEFE YEARS

- NEWS FOOTAGE SHOWS: an ESPN REPORTER outside Macci's club.

ESPN REPORTER (PRE-LAP)
Richard Williams, the outspoken father of two of junior tennis' top prospects, is no stranger to controversy.

- Richard's interviewed by a REPORTER for the NY TIMES.

RICHARD
Next time you see a 14-year-old go professional, someone should shoot the parents.

- Richard's interviewed on camera by a EUROPEAN NEWS CREW.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
How good can they be? They'll be the greatest players ever cause they got the greatest coach. Me.

- THE ESPN REPORTER continues, strolling Grenelefe's grounds.

ESPN REPORTER
His unorthodox coaching and bombastic claims have raised quite a few eyebrows, but nothing compared to what he's saying now.

- Richard's interviewed on NIGHTLINE by TED KOPPLE.

RICHARD
When somebody come to me and tell me how good my daughter is, the only reason they see good is cause they see money that could go in their pocket.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I've been broke all my life, and Venus doesn't want to be poor, but nobody going to push our daughter into anything.

- THE ESPN REPORTER now strolls across Macci's tennis courts.

ESPN REPORTER

Despite having no tennis background himself, Richard's ignored the advice of experts and taken the extraordinary step of pulling his talented kids out of junior tournament tennis, which is the normal conduit to tennis' big time. So while other top prospects like Martina Hingis and Anna Kournikova rack up experience on the sport's most prestigious stages --

- 13-year-old Swiss prodigy MARTINA HINGIS raises the trophies at JUNIOR WIMBLEDON and the JUNIOR FRENCH OPEN and --

- 12-year-old ANNA KOURNIKOVA, tennis' Lolita, destroys opponents in the EUROPEAN JUNIORS --

ESPN REPORTER (V.O.)

-- and sign lucrative endorsement deals --

- Hingis hocks Yonex. Tacchini. Kournikova, Adidas.

ESPN REPORTER (V.O.)

Richard Williams' daughters practice here, in isolation, at the Rick Macci Academy.

- 40 hours a week. 52 weeks a year. For three long years. Venus and Serena hone their skills in seclusion at Grenelefe.

- They work their volleys on court while Macci barks orders.

MACCI

Get low or you're gonna get tattooed.

- They throw their rackets over the net like footballs as Richard applauds. Capriati watches them, dying with laughter.

- They hula hoop, kick box, and spar in a sand pit with SWEET PEA COWART, Florida's welter weight champ.

- They practice on clay and on grass but never play a match.

ESPN REPORTER (V.O.)

And while his coaching ideas have pros shaking their heads, Richard remains adamant that he alone knows what's best, putting church, education, and childhood first.

- They attend church as a family.
- They do homework at Grenelefe with Brandi at lunch as --

ESPN REPORTER (V.O.)

The real question remains, is Richard William's right?

- Richard's interviewed at Grenelefe by an o.s. REPORTER.

ESPN REPORTER (O.S.)

You think these kids will make a million dollars?

RICHARD

There's no question about it. They'll make one million look small. They'll both be number one in the world. I don't see anything that can stop 'em.

- The Reporter wraps his package up back where he began.

ESPN REPORTER

The words of a proud father, or a shrewd hype-man building a myth? For now, no one knows. But sooner or later, it's not Richard, but his girl's who'll have to answer that question on the court.

KENDRICK'S SONG ENDS as we close the MONTAGE ON:

- Venus, serving at the line, with Macci at her side, like Ivan Drago, pounding balls like they're the faces of her detractors. Chomping at the bit like an angry, caged animal.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Again and again and again until we --

CUT TO:

14 YEAR-OLD VENUS SMASHING A SERVE OUT OF THE SKY AS --

EXT. TENNIS COURTS, GRENELEFE COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

Now it's three years later. Venus is three years older. A foot taller. Muscled. Lean. Her braids are gone, replaced with BEADS and BRACES as she blows the ball of the court.

TITLE CARD READS: **THREE YEARS LATER**

Macci stands at her side at the service line, handing her balls, still sporting the same puppy-dog energy and style.

MACCI

Nice one. Nice one. Now high five the giant and get to the net and remember stay low unless you wanna get tattooed.

Venus laughs then crushes the serve, crashing the net, putting away a volley that nearly takes off her head.

MACCI (CONT'D)

What'd I tell you. Almost had a PENN 1 tattoo on your forehead. That's one way to get sponsored.

Venus laughs as Macci gives her a high five. It turns into a hug. In the time that's passed, these two have grown close.

As they walk off the court, Venus becomes aware of --

A buzz in the air. MEDIA, AGENTS, OTHER KIDS at the academy all moving toward the large stadium court. A MATCH UNDER WAY.

VENUS

What's going on?

MACCI

Big junior tournament. Continental Cup. Kournikova's here.

That gets her attention. She hurries to the match to see --

VENUS

She's so little in person. I would killer her.

She's eyeing 12-year-old Anna Kournikova, preening around the court. Venus brims with envy.

VENUS (CONT'D)

You know she's going pro next month at a Fed Cup event in Russia? Hingis announced too. That oughta be me.

MACCI

You wanna go to Russia?

VENUS

I'm serious. How long I gotta wait?

MACCI

Hey, you know what I think. You're preaching to the choir. I know you're ready.

VENUS

Will you talk to him again? He won't listen to me.

Macci nods, but knows it won't be easy as --

EXT. LOW INCOME FLORIDA COURT - ANOTHER DAY

REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS swarm a low income TENNIS COURT where Venus and 12-YEAR-OLD SERENA (still small and bulldog-ish) are running a TENNIS CLINIC for inner-city kids.

Macci watches from the fence as Richard speaks to a REPORTER.

RICHARD

-- and that's why we ain't rushing. With no education, as good as they are, they won't keep their money. They'll be broke by 18 and have 50 more years to live like a fool. Now if you'll excuse me, I got a meeting.

Richard heads off to meet Macci. The Reporter is speechless.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

How we doing there, Rick? You come to help out?

MACCI

Maybe later. We gotta talk. I've been chatting again with Venus and --

Richard turns away - *here we go again.*

RICHARD

Rick, I told you before. I'm not having this conversation again.

MACCI

(following)

Richard, she's ready. Time to let her off the leash.

(MORE)

MACCI (CONT'D)

I talked to the organizer, there's a tournament in LA in September and they'll give her a wild card if she --

RICHARD

You talked to who? You don't tell me when it's time.

MACCI

Richard, she's already fourteen. Hingis is gone. Kournikova's going soon. Jennifer'd already been playing a year by now.

RICHARD

You mean Jennifer who just dropped off the tour?

MACCI

She didn't drop off. She's taking a break.

RICHARD

That's not what I hear. I hear she's burnt out. Now, that's what I've been saying. You have these girls in juniors, you push 'em too fast and they all fall apart --

MACCI

Richard, Jennifer's fine. Stop making excuses. We've been playing these games for three years.

RICHARD

These *games*?

Macci shoots him a look - *are you serious?*

MACCI

You pull 'em out of juniors. You pull 'em out of practice for music lessons or homework or church or --

RICHARD

They gotta get A's if they wanna play tennis. That's the rules.

MACCI

-- or you pull 'em out to train with other coaches behind my back --

RICHARD

They needed work on their volleys.

MACCI

I'M WORKING ON THEIR VOLLEYS! I'm their goddamn coach. Stop jerking me around!

RICHARD

I'm just rounding out their game, Rick. They ain't gonna get there doing drills that ever junior in America is doing. I'm sorry. I'm just looking out for my kids.

Macci just shakes his head. Unbelievable.

MACCI

You're not looking out for them. You're looking out for yourself. Wanna talk about pressure, what do you think you call that?

Macci's pointing to the reporters crowding the courts.

MACCI (CONT'D)

Everyday, on TV, know what I see? The Richard Williams show. A *million dollars. Number one. The greatest ever.* You don't think that's pressure?

RICHARD

It's confidence.

MACCI

It's bullshit. And it's about you.

Pissed, Richard starts off. Macci stops him.

MACCI (CONT'D)

Goddamn it, Richard. Wait. You wanna jerk my chain around, fine. I don't understand it, but don't do it with them. She's worked too hard. It's her life, and you don't let her play, you could lose her.
(beat)
She's ready. Think about it. Please.

Richard's left with a lot to consider as Macci heads off, passing Venus on the court, waiting eagerly for an answer.

Macci shoots her a thumbs up - *we got this. Don't worry.* He thinks he's got through to him only a few days later --

NEWS BROADCASTER (PRE-LAP)

At 14 years-old, Jennifer Capriatti was America's rising superstar but four years later, Capriati's life appears to have changed dramatically.

EXT. WILLIAMS'S HAINES CITY HOUSE - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

A FOUR STORY, TWO BEDROOM HOUSE on a wide Florida lawn. Courtesy of Rick Macci where --

INT. WILLIAMS'S HAINES CITY HOUSE - NIGHT

A NEWS REPORT IS ON TV. Richard watches it through cigarette smoke, his dentures resting on a little dish on the table.

ON SCREEN: Police lights swirl outside THE GABLES INN. A \$50 a night fleabag motel in Southern Florida.

NEWS BROADCASTER

Capriati was arrested and charged with possession of marijuana while two of her companions faced more serious legal consequences relating to crack cocaine and heroin. It was the second arrest for the troubled tennis star in only six months.

Capriati's infamous MUGSHOT fills the screen. A troubled 18-year-old kid, lost and screaming for help.

Richard views it through smoke, decisions forming and --

EXT. TENNIS COURTS, GRENELEFE COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

Arriving for practice, Macci walks on the court to find his assistant serving balls by himself.

MACCI

Where are they?

ASSISTANT

(reluctantly revealing)
Disney World. Richard said they needed a break.

Macci hangs his head in disbelief. *This fucking guy.*

EXT. WILLIAMS'S HAINES CITY HOUSE - DAY

Macci leans against the hood of his car, parked outside, waiting as -- A BRAND NEW RED CADILLAC pulls up the drive.

Richard, Brandi, Venus, and Serena get out of the car. The girls wear MICKEY MOUSE EARS.

MACCI
Everyone have fun?

SERENA
I rode on Magic Mountain.

MACCI
That's great. Richard, a minute.

BRANDI
Come on girls. Let's finish your homework.

Brandi leads the girls away leaving Richard with Rick.

MACCI
Disney World? Richard --

RICHARD
I made up my mind. She's not playing that tournament.

VENUS
What?! Daddy, but you said --

RICHARD
I know. And I'm sorry. But I'm your father and I ain't burning you out like he did with Capriati.

MACCI
Like I did?

RICHARD
You coached her didn't you? That's all you been saying. Look at Jennifer. Look at Jennifer. Well look at her now. Robbery. Arrested. Venus ain't ending up smoking crack in some alley with her mugshot on TV. That's what happens when they don't get to be kids.

Boiling with anger, Venus turns and storms off, not wanting her father to see her cry.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Venus! -- Venus!

But there's no stopping her. Richard's left with Macchi.

MACCI
I'll tell you what, man. You gotta better curve ball than Greg Maddox. I told you this would happen.

RICHARD
Nothing personal, Rick. Just gotta keep 'em off balance.

MACCI
Not your teammates, you don't.

Macchi heads off passing Richard's new Cadillac on the way.

MACCI (CONT'D)
Nice car. Who's paying for that?

Macchi gets in his car. SLAMS the door. Peels out, leaving Richard alone in the shadow of his home.

INT. VENUS AND SERENA'S ROOM, WILLIAMS'S FLORIDA HOME - NIGHT

Brandi is braiding Venus' hair, consoling her as she cries in her bed, surrounded by dolls, looking very much like a kid.

VENUS
It's not fair. It's my life.

BRANDI
You don't need to tell me that your father's a hard man. I married him.

VENUS
Why?

Brandi and Serena, sitting on her bed, laugh as Richard arrives in the door. They turn on him immediately.

VENUS (CONT'D)
You're not fair. Why'd you start this in the first place if you weren't gonna let me play?

RICHARD
Maybe I shouldn't have. Maybe it was a mistake.

VENUS

Why? Because you think I'm not ready?

RICHARD

Cause I think y'all are kids and you go pro, that's all over. The pressure. The reporters. That'll all be on you.

VENUS

You mean instead of on you?

RICHARD

Watch it girl.

Richard looks like he might snap.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I'm still you're father. Long as you live in my house, you gonna respect what I say.

VENUS

Maybe I don't wanna live in this house no more. Least then I'd have a life of my own.

Venus storms out of the room. Serena lingers a beat, then follows her sister, leaving Richard and Brandi alone.

After a long silent moment --

BRANDI

You know that she's right. This can't be about you.

RICHARD

I ain't changing my mind. I'm done talking about this.

BRANDI

You may be done talking, but you sure ain't done listening. You know your problem Richard? For all your ego, and bragging, I think you're just scared. All these years being broke, people cutting you down and beating you up, saying you nothing, now I think you believe 'em.

Richard laughs, just shaking his head only --

BRANDI (CONT'D)

You think I don't see it? You maybe fooling those people on TV with your hype and your anger and your *Richard know best* but you're not fooling me. You got a chip on your shoulder so big, I could see it from space but you gotta let that go. How you gonna prove the world wrong, you don't believe in yourself?

Richard slows, his target struck.

BRANDI (CONT'D)

I know you love those girls and you wanna protect 'em but you don't figure that out, you're just gonna hurt 'em.

(beat)

You scared of the world and the only thing you're doing by telling her no is saying she should be too and I won't have it.

(beat, both emotional)

Now, I didn't want this for her in the first place and I don't want to let them go either but we raised these girls to think for themselves and be proud and at some point, Richard, you're gonna have to let 'em, cause you don't, then Macci is right -- you're gonna lose 'em.

With that Brandi goes, leaving Richard alone, grappling with unfamiliar feelings. Uncertainty.

INT. RICHARD'S STUDY, WILLIAMS'S HAINES CITY HOUSE - LATER

Alone with his doubts and his lifetime of wounds, Richard enters his study just steaming with anger.

Like many years before, he finds his desk littered in decades of tennis research and plans and clippings about his girls.

Quite distraught, Richard smokes, flipping through it. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. The NY TIMES ARTICLE. Then something stops him.

Hidden among the clutter and fast food wrappers -- is a VHS. Richard considers it, heavy with emotion as:

MOMENTS LATER

Richard smokes in the flicker of the TV as the video starts. We recognize it immediately.

RICHARD'S VOICE (O.S.)
Hi Vic Braden. This two girls that
you see in the picture here is er --

ON A TV: 8-year-old Venus and 7-year-old Serena, bubbly and free, wave at the camera from Lynwood park.

RICHARD'S VOICE (CONT'D)
Serena Williams. Raise your hand
Serena. Venus Williams. Serena is 7-
years-old. Venus is 8-years-old.

They couldn't be more adorable or carefree as they play in the park.

Richard watches, overcome at the sight them. Little girls. Unafraid. In love with their Daddy. A long time ago.

His eyes mist as they hug him on screen, remembering the past, afraid of the future, but time to let go as --

INT. GRENELEFE COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

Bathed in sweat, Macchi finishes a run. *He looks like William Hurt in Body Heat.* His assistant is waiting for him.

ASSISTANT
Rick. Just got a fax from Anne
Worchester at the WTA. Think you're
gonna wanna see this.

MACCI
(catching his breath)
What's it say?

EXT. WILLIAMS'S HAINES CITY HOUSE - DAY

Macchi is seated with Venus, Brandi, Richard, and Serena at a picnic table outside their house. He's showing them the FAX.

MACCI
They're calling it "The Capriati
Rule."

He waits a minute to acknowledge Richard's eye roll.

MACCI (CONT'D)
Basically it says a player can no
longer turn pro at 14.

Richard is delighted only --

MACCI (CONT'D)

Not so fast. For this one time only, they're offering waivers to Hingis, Anna, and Venus. If they turn pro this year, the new rules don't apply. If they don't --

Richard now sees what's coming.

MACCI (CONT'D)

-- the WTA will limit when, where, and how much you can play for the next four years. Until you turn 18, Venus, they'll be in control. Martina and Anna won't have those limitations.

The weight of that hits Venus hard. It hits all of 'em.

SERENA

What's it mean for me?

MACCI

Unfortunately, for you, there's no way around it. By the time you're ready, those will be the rules.

Serena scowls as Macchi returns to the matter at hand. Venus.

MACCI (CONT'D)

Now I know it's ironic, but if you don't want them telling you what you can and can not do, you need to do what they want.

(that hangs there a bit)

Four years is a long time. You don't know what could happen.

INT. VENUS'S BEDROOM, WILLIAMS'S FLORIDA HOME - NIGHT

Venus is on her bed, playing with her DOLLS when Richard appears in the doorway. He watches her for a moment, taken with her innocence, before announcing his presence.

VENUS

Why don't you believe in me?

RICHARD

Is that what you think?

VENUS

I don't see any other reason you don't want me to play.

RICHARD

I thought I raised you smarter than that, girl.

Richard takes a seat beside her.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Move over. Make room for your old dad.

(after she does)

Venus, I don't want you to rush this now because I do believe in you. Four years. Ten years. It doesn't matter. Whenever you start, you are gonna win.

VENUS

It's not cause you think I'm gonna let you down?

RICHARD

You could never let me down, not if you never swing another tennis racket again in your life. The girl you are now, that's what I'm proud of. That's all I'm trying to protect. It's hard enough out there for these other girls and they don't have one tenth of the weight on their shoulders as you. Part of that's my fault, but part is who you are. Truth is, because you're black, you don't just represent yourself. You gonna represent all of us, all the hopes of those little girls whose doors you gonna open. That's a lot of pressure.

VENUS

You don't think I can handle it?

RICHARD

Truth -- I don't know if I can. But it ain't gonna be me on the court.

(beat)

V, you know how I feel, but if it's what you want, I ain't gonna stand in your way. This ain't about me anymore.

Venus starts to cry, overcome with gratitude.

VENUS

Daddy, I'm ready. You taught us to
be strong and believe in ourselves.
I'm not gonna let you down.

Richard considers his daughter. Confident and strong.
Everything he wants to be as we hear --

ESPN REPORTER (PRE-LAP)

And at long last, the wait is
finally over.

INSERT NEWS FOOTAGE:

AN ESPN ANCHOR REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE MACCI'S ACADEMY.

ESPN REPORTER (CONT'D)

Venus Williams, the 14-year-old
tennis prodigy who hasn't played a
competitive match since leaving
Compton, California three years ago
will make her professional debut at
the end of this month in Oakland,
California, at the \$400,000 Bank of
the West Classic.

FOOTAGE CUTS TO AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD.

RICHARD (ON SCREEN)

She wants to test the waters and
see where she is on a professional
level. It's my feeling that a 14-
year-old shouldn't play, but this
is her decision, so she's going to
turn professional on her home
ground in California. We'll see you
there soon!

EXT. WILLIAMS'S HAINES CITY HOME - DAY

A car horn honking. Macchi's outside, laying on the horn of
his car. Looking at his watch as --

INT. WILLIAMS'S HAINES CITY HOME - DAY

Richard's moving through the house, rounding up the troops,
shepherding everyone to the door with their LUGGAGE.

RICHARD

Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Gravy
train won't wait.

He arrives at Venus's room to find her packing her bags.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 Make sure you don't forget nothing
 now. Won't be me out there playing
 naked if you do.

Venus laughs, just shaking her head.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 You seen your sister? She gotta
 pack too.

Off Venus's knowing look we hear:

EXT. GRENELEFE, TENNIS COURTS - DAY

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Balls exploding with a fury off of --

Serena's racket as she crushes backhands down the line, alone
 on the court, taking out her problems on the ball machine.

Richard approaches as she obliterates the last ball with an
 anger he should find familiar. She kneels over, steaming and
 exhausted.

RICHARD
 Looking good. Where's your bag?
 We're gonna miss the flight.

Serena shoots him daggers, then begins refilling the machine.

SERENA
 I gotta practice. I'm not going.

RICHARD
 Oh, you're not? Well OK. I hope you
 know how to cook for yourself cause
 there ain't gonna be no one here.

Bluffing, Richard starts to walk off.

SERENA
 You would leave me here, wouldn't
 you? Like anyone would notice. You
 left those other kids.

That stops Richard cold.

RICHARD
 Is that what this is about? You
 think I'm leaving you?

Serena doesn't answer, just lets that simmer.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I ain't proud, but you right. I made a mistake with that family. I've made a lot. You wanna judge me for that, I can't stop you, but I hope you'll remember I done a bit of good too.

SERENA

Like what?

RICHARD

Like you.

SERENA

Yeah, right. All anyone cares about is Venus.

She returns to baseline to keep hitting. Richard understands.

RICHARD

What? You think you're ready too?

(of course she does)

And you feel like no one's listening? No one's watching? No one cares? Is that right?

(it is of course)

I know you love your sister, but it's hard being in someone's shadow, ain't it. Specially hers. Means you gotta work a little harder, don't it. Be a little tougher. Fight a little longer just to make yourself seen. Almost, makes you want it even badder, don't it?

Serena nods, maybe starting to realize what he's up to.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Serena, what's the one thing I been telling you all your life?

SERENA

I gotta move my feet.

RICHARD

(smiles)

What else? -- You fail to plan --

SERENA

-- "you plan to fail." So?

RICHARD

You ever know me to get out planned?

(no)

Your sister will be number one in the world. There's no doubt about it. But you -- you gonna be the best there ever was. The greatest of all time. And you know how I know? Cause I planned for it. You've been in Venus shadow on purpose, cause I knew you were tough. Cause I knew it would make you a fighter and look at you now.

Serena is smiling and fighting back tears.

SERENA

That really what you been doing?

RICHARD

(nods)

I might tell a lot of tales, but I don't tell 'em to you.

(she believes)

Whatever I do, I will never leave you. Now go on and grab your bag. Your sister's got a match. It's time to go home.

Off Serena, seeing the plan. Seeing her future and --

EXT. CALIFORNIA SKY - DAY

A PLANE unzips a crystal blue sky above Oakland, California where two enormous SPORTING ARENAS hover like spaceships.

THE OAKLAND COLOSSEUM and the OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA.

EXT. THE OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - DAY

The ARENA looms above an absolutely packed parking lot. FANS, MEDIA, and PRESS are everywhere.

Venus, Richard, Brandi, Serena, and Macci step out of a CAB into the heart of the spectacle. Venus is wide-eyed.

VENUS

Don't tell me all this is for me?

Brandi laughs.

BRANDI

Easy honey. You're not a Rock Star yet.

She directs Venus's eyes to a big BUDWEISER SIGN flashing overhead. It reads: ROLLING STONES - TONIGHT - 7PM

BANK OF THE WEST TENNIS CLASSIC flashes a distant second.

The family laughs. Venus's brought down to earth. Not for long as --

INT. THE OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - DAY

Venus and her team enter the basketball arena which has been transformed into an indoor tennis cathedral.

20,000 seats ring a blue-floored hard court where PRESS, TV CREWS and PLAYERS mill prepare for the upcoming event. Their heads all turning as the Williams family arrives.

Venus and Serena look up in awe at the size of their stage. A young, Madonna-esque BLEACHED HAired WTA OFFICIAL approaches. (*This is ANNE PERSON WORCESTER - CEO WTA TOUR.*)

ANNE WORCESTER

Hi there! Hi Rick.
(then to the family)
I'm Anne. We spoke on the phone.

She shakes hands with the Williamses. Ending on Venus.

VENUS

Hi Anne, I'm Venus.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL

Of course you are, honey. We've been expecting you. I think they have been too.

She gestures behind her, where a hush has fallen over the crowd, all eyes trained on Venus, who perhaps only now realizes just how big her spotlight is.

EXT. OUTDOOR PRACTICE COURT - DAY

THREE HUNDRED PEOPLE (Fans, Press, Sponsors, and Agents - a few we've met before) surround the fence of the tournament's PRACTICE COURTS, getting their first look in three years at VENUS AND SERENA IN ACTION.

And they are putting on a show, hitting the ball like a fucking sledge hammer, covering the court like gazelles.

Venus's blue-beaded-braids CLICKING and SWINGING beneath a LA RAIDERS HAT as she SMASHES a lob out of the air like Jordan, just fucking dunking on people.

We see it on the faces of the crowd. She looks like nothing else on the tour. A lion finally let out of her cage.

Angle on Macci, Richard, and Keven Davis watching giddily.

MACCI

Last year they gave out 24 media credentials. This year, over 200.

KEVEN

And this is all for her?

MACCI

(looking at Richard)
Guy knows how to start a fire.

They return to watching Venus and Serena ooh and ah the crowds when two POLO SHIRTED MEN approach.

GIACCO

Richard. Bill Giacco from ProServe.
We've spoke on the phone. Good to see you.

(Shaking Richard's hand)
I wanted to introduce you to a friend. Mike Williams. He's with Nike. He was hoping you might have a minute to talk.

Off Richard, who can practically see their mouths watering.

EXT. OAKLAND HOTEL - NIGHT, ESTABLISHING

A simple business hotel by the stadium lit up in the night.

NIKE REP (PRE-LAP)

I hope it's clear from what you're reading, how highly we regard your daughter. We'd like to take her off the table right now.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Richard, Venus, Macci, Brandi, and Keven Davis are seated across from MIKE WILLIAMS, the NIKE REP. They've just been handed an offer.

MIKE WILLIAMS

That's THREE MILLION DOLLARS and the promise to create a signature line, a signature shoe -- to build our women's brand around Venus and make her a marquee player. How does that sound to you?

The Rep looks for an answer from Richard, but he defers.

RICHARD

I don't know why you're looking at me. She's the one you're pitching.

Mike's shook. He recalibrates. Turns to Venus.

MIKE WILLIAMS

What do you think, Venus? That's a generous deal. That's one million more than Capriati got before she went pro, plus a real commitment to invest in all the charity and outreach programs I know you and your family support. We believe you are going to have a tremendous career and we'd like to help you start building it today.

This sounds pretty good. Venus is silent, but Mike thinks he's got her. Macchi chimes in.

MACCI

That's a good looking deal, V. Very fair. You want my two-cents, I think you should sign.

But Venus isn't jumping. A long beat. Keven turns to the rep.

KEVEN

Maybe give us a minute.

NIKE REP

Of course. Think it over. You got my number, but just so we're clear. That deal's for tonight only. It's off the table tomorrow.

The rep shakes hands and leaves. Once he's gone --

MACCI

Am I missing something here? What's the problem? This is it. Sign the deal. Take the money.

VENUS

They haven't even seen me play.

MACCI

Exactly. They don't need to.
Richard, I thought you were crazy,
but you did it. You've already won.

VENUS

But it's just the first offer. They
want me to cash out before they've
even seen what I can do.

Macci looks at Richard, sending him daggers.

MACCI

Venus. Listen --

VENUS

I understand. It's a good offer for
never having played but --

MACCI

It's an unbelievable offer.

VENUS

-- but if I win, it'll be higher
won't it? Won't it?

MACCI

(conceding)

Yes. If you win, it might be
higher. But this is money in your
pocket that can change your life no
matter what. Don't risk that.

For the first time, Venus waivers. She turns to Richard who
does not.

RICHARD

You're asking this girl to take all
the hard work she done did for ten
years and take the first damn offer
they give her? That ain't right and
you know it. She wants a chance to
compete.

KEVEN

Richard --

MACCI

The draw's not even out yet. We
don't know who she's playing!

RICHARD
It ain't about that.
(to Venus)
You care who you play?

VENUS
No, Daddy.

RICHARD
You gonna beat whoever it is?

VENUS
Yes, Daddy.

RICHARD
Do you wanna take this deal right here?

VENUS
No, Daddy.

RICHARD
(to the others)
Well that's it. She ain't signing.

Off Macchi, left absolutely speechless as --

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Richard, Brandi and Venus head out of the room. Macchi follows them into the hall.

MACCI
Richard. Hold on. Wait.

Richard stops. Macchi waits till Venus is out of earshot then -

MACCI (CONT'D)
I know we've had our disagreements, but that's all in the past. Forget my deal. Take this money. You can change their lives tonight.

RICHARD
You don't think she's good enough?

MACCI
I do. You know that. But the truth is, it's been three years -- when she gets on the court, in a real match against a pro, with all the cameras and pressure -- you just don't know what's going to happen.

RICHARD

She ain't other players. She'll be fine.

MACCI

You don't know that. That's why you play juniors. That's why you get tested.

(Richard turns away)

Listen to me, damn it. You are a good father, but you've put her in a spot. You've spent the last three years building this myth -- all the Wimbledon. All the titles. The greatest ever -- you set the bar so high that if she goes out there and does anything less than set the goddamn world on fire, she's gonna be a disappointment.

That gets Richard's attention.

MACCI (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. It's true.

(now quieter)

And if she goes out there and gets tight and can't keep the ball on the court or gets the yips, that bubble you built is gonna pop very fast and that deal won't just go down, it will go away all together. They all will. You will lose everything. And it won't be *her* fault. It will be yours. You always talk about pressure, take it off her now and sign the fucking deal.

With that, Macci goes. Leaving Richard in the hall, the weight of the world on his shoulders.

He joins Brandi and his daughter at elevator, feigning calm.

RICHARD

You've got nothing to worry about. Tomorrow's just a game.

But this time, no one is buying that as we -- DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GYMNASIUM, CASTLEMONT HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A HUNDRED BLACK TEENAGERS filling the bleachers, listening with a mix of inspiration and confusion to --

Venus, standing behind a mic at center court, holding a tennis racket as a prop, addressing them with quiet poise.

VENUS

-- I guess I'm younger than a lot of you but if I could give one piece of advice I guess it would be, make a plan. Plan for your life and be the best you can be and -- that's it, I guess. Thanks for not talking and laughing when I talk. Because, a lot of people do that.

The KIDS applaud. Shooting their hands up for questions. The first one that comes is --

FEMALE STUDENT

Who you playing tomorrow Venus?

EXT. CASTLEMONT HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Venus signs a last few autographs as the Williams's entourage exits the large OAKLAND PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL and heads to --

THE PARKING LOT where they find Macchi waiting by their CAR.

MACCI

Am I getting daffy or did you have a different car yesterday?

RICHARD

I switched, case we being followed. Gotta keep 'em guessing.

MACCI

Well we don't have to guess anymore. I got the draw.
(to Venus)
You got Shaun Stafford in the First Round. She's a real player. 58 in the world. Won the NCAA Title a few years ago from Florida. She's tough, but so are you.

VENUS

And who I play next?

MACCI

Easy killer. One match at a time.

Venus heads to the car, heart pounding so loud we can hear it. Richard remains with Macchi and the draw.

RICHARD
She wins, who she get?

MACCI
Arantxa Sanchez Vicario.

KEVEN
She's number two in the world.

MACCI
Number one when the new rankings
come out. You wanna shock the
world, here's your chance.

Off Richard, his stage is finally set as --

TENNIS ANNOUNCER (PRE-LAP)
Just under the wire, 14-year-old
Venus Williams will take the court
tonight in what's certainly the
most anticipated tennis debut in
years.

EXT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Crowds begin to stream toward the night's main events. At the outdoor COLOSSEUM - THE ROLLING STONES. At the indoor ARENA - the MARQUEE READS:

BANK OF THE WEST CLASSIC - FIRST ROUND - OCTOBER 31st, 1994

TENNIS ANNOUNCER (PRE-LAP)
Shrouded in mystery like the
distant planet that bares her name,
crowds have come in force to see
the herald phenom from Compton,
California play her first match at
any level in over three years.

INT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT (VARIOUS SHOTS)

The FANS are taking their seats. The PRESS are primed in their boxes as high above the court --

THE TV REPORTERS broadcast from the booth --

TENNIS ANNOUNCER
It was their father, Richard
Williams, who made the
controversial decision to pull his
daughters out of competition, a
move he's defended with an us-
against the world abrasiveness that
has earned him few fans.

Back stage behind the courts, Richard, Venus, Brandi, Serena, and Macci, arrive in the tunnels --

TENNIS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Dogged by allegations of abuse,
he's been called everything from a
genius to a villain to an
overbearing tennis parent in love
with the spotlight. Well, tonight,
we'll finally see. Is his dream all
hype or is this family, in fact,
what tennis has been waiting for?

Head up and defiant, Richard leads Venus to the locker room, like she's Muhammed Ali, flashbulbs exploding all around her.

This moment is iconic.

INT. LOCKERROOM OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Like Rocky before a fight, Venus bounces in place, spinning her racket. Head full of nerves. She wears a plain pink t-shirt. A pleated floral skirt. Her racket has no stencils.

The rooms silent when Macci enters.

MACCI

It's time V, you ready?
(she is)
Is that what you're wearing?

All smiles, Venus spins to present it.

VENUS

Do you like it? My mom sewed the
skirt herself.

MACCI

You look great.
(sotto Richard)
Why don't you just put a for sale
sign on her?
(back to Venus)
I'll see you out there. You're
gonna kill. Have fun. Don't forget
to bend your knees.

Macci goes. We remain with Venus and her family. The moment they've all been waiting for. Ten years in the making. The magnitude isn't lost on anyone. They're all holding hands as -

ANNOUNCER (PRE-LAP)
 Returning to her native California
 tonight to play in her first ever
 professional match --

INT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Venus bounces in the mouth of the tunnel beside her 25-year-old opponent, SHAUN STAFFORD, waiting to take the court.

ANNOUNCER (FILTERED)
 Please give a warm, Bay Area
 welcome to Venus Williams.

The CROWD applauds as Venus steps into the spotlight, hit by a wall of sound and light. She waves as she heads to the court, unpacking her bag, trying to contain her emotion as --

IN THE STANDS: Serena and Brandi take their seats with Macchi and Keven.

SERENA
 Oh my god, look. There's
 Navratilova!

And she is. MARTINA. PAM SHRIVER. MARY JO FERNANDEZ. All the stars and top seeds of the tournament have come out to watch. Even ARANTXA SANCHEZ VICARIO, the Mexican Superstar and presumptive favorite, is lounging in street clothes as --

Venus and Stafford warm-up ON COURT. Stafford looks strong.

KEVEN
 Does she have a chance?

MACCI
 It's gonna be tough.

Richard meanwhile, is found SMOKING in a doorway, full of nerves and excitement. A REPORTER sees him and approaches.

REPORTER
 Mr. Williams. Can I get you on
 Camera? Can I ask you how you're
 feeling?

For the first time, Richard, in the eye of the camera is nakedly frazzled.

RICHARD
 You start the day shaking. Nervous.
 You've been working for this day
 for nine long hard years and you be
 saying, well, we gonna get there.
 (MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

We gonna get there and finally you
get there like tonight and you find
out - WOW! - we don't belongs here.
We belongs someplace else. We
belongs back in the ghetto!

BACK IN THE STANDS

The match is about to begin. Macchi turns to Brandi.

MACCI

Where's Richard?

BRANDI

He's watching on a TV. He didn't
want Venus to see his nerves.

Macchi shakes his head in disbelief. Across the arena, he
spots MIKE WILLIAMS, the NIKE REP, watching in the stands. He
shoots Macchi a smug, knowing smile.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Time!

The players take the court. The crowd erupts. Venus to serve
first. Her moment's finally here.

INT. STAGING ROOM, OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Alone in a small room, Richard chain smokes, watching his
daughter on a small TV. Venus steps up the line.

INTERCUT BETWEEN RICHARD AND THE COURT WHERE --

INT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Venus steadies her breath in the flash of the cameras, tosses
the ball and BOOM! - she cracks her first serve. LONG. She
sets up again - WHACK! Into the net. Double fault. LOVE-15.

HER TEAM REACTS. Just nerves. THE CROWD REACTS. Oh no.

RICHARD lights another cigarette as --

Venus sets up again - serves - BOOM! - she cracks a giant but
Stafford returns it. Venus shanks an error. LOVE-30.

Now Venus is tight. She pushes a serve. Stafford hammers it
wide, moving Venus off the court, putting her away at the
net. LOVE-40.

VENUS LOOKS TO HER TEAM. They shout encouragement but --

When she serves again, STAFFORD cranks off a WINNER and just like that, Venus is down a break. 0-1.

She can hear the crowds murmur as she goes to the changeover. She looks to her TEAM. Her FATHER'S NOT THERE. THE NIKE REP'S shaking his head. The OTHER PROS whispering.

PRO

What is she doing?

Because Stafford is drinking water in her seat, while Venus is standing, bouncing at the sidelines like a boxer in the ring. Stafford, the Agents, the whole place thinks she nuts.

KEVEN

Why isn't she sitting?

MACCI

Never been in a match. Richard doesn't let her sit down during practice.

Venus can feel all their eyes on her, already writing her off. Already ruling her a bust. It's not making her nervous. It's making her mad.

INT. STAGING ROOM, OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Richard can see it too. He's angry. He's stuffs out his cigarette and --

INT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Venus is bouncing on the sidelines, trying to calm her thoughts when she spots --

Richard, weaving through the crowd, arriving at the seats.

He meets eyes with Venus who she knows feels the same. They hold each others gaze. On the same page. *Fuck that.*

Venus retakes the court and in four quick points - FOREHAND RETURN WINNER. BACK HAND RETURN WINNER. VOLLEY. SMASH. - Venus breaks Stafford right back and notice is served.

To Stafford. To Nike. To everyone here. This girl is for real. And now we:

MONTAGE THROUGH THE MATCH:

Venus going 100 the whole time. Running like Bambi. Smashing serves. Crashing the net. Putting away a tough volley.

Stafford grinding at the baseline, moving Venus around, drop-shotting her at net.

Venus smacks her head, sailing a forehand long. Stafford hangs her head, shanking another double fault. Venus rips a backhand winner. Unleashes a 115 MPH serve. Stafford puts away an overhand at the net.

The CROWDS APPLAUSE. THE WILLIAMSES CHEER. THE OTHER PROS, nonchalantly impressed. *Maybe they under-estimated her.*

It's hard fought and evenly matched until 4-3 in the first. Stafford is serving at 30-30.

She kicks a serve out wide which Venus just gets her racket on - slicing a return - Stafford tears a backhand screaming toward the other alley. To everyone in the crowd this looks like a winner only --

Venus is freak. She covers the court like a cheetah, reaching the ball, stabbing it back for a winner that leaves Stafford speechless. No one else on the tour makes that shot.

And now Stafford's shook. 30-40. Shaun bends in a serve. Venus returns, gets to the net where Stafford hits a cannon, trying to knock Venus over but instead --

Venus surprises everyone with a deft backhand drop volley that dies at Stafford's feet. Broken.

The crowd and Stafford are stunned. Venus serves out the set with an ACE and heads to the chair.

CHAIR UMPIRE

First set to Miss Williams. She leads One Set to None.

Stafford takes her seat, dumbfounded, watching this 14-year-old kid, bouncing on the sidelines with out taking a rest. Stafford's face says what the rest of the crowd is feeling.

HOLY FUCKING SHIT

Venus looks to her box. Their excitement's infectious and --

WE'RE NOW IN THE SECOND SET

Much like the first, it's hard-fought. 1-2. 2-2. 2-3. 3 All.

Stafford's not quitting and Venus is showing no nerves. Chasing down impossible balls. Skying off the ground for overheads. Playing aggressive, open stance, full court tennis and then finally --

It's 4-4. 30-40. Stafford's serving. They're locked in a long rally, but Venus takes charge and ends it, roping an unconscious backhand down the line for a winner!

Stafford hangs her head. Venus pumps her fist. HER TEAM EXPLODES. She's serving for the match and there's no little girl here. She goes for fucking broke.

First point - BANG! Ace down the T. Second point - BANG! Ace in the corner. Third point - BANG! Body shot. 115 right in Stafford's grill. She barely gets her racket up to defend herself and --

Just like that, it's Match Point. 40-LOVE. Venus won't be slowed. She steps up to the line and BOOMS a serve.

Down the T. Stafford gets her racket on it but sends it flying long and just like that -- it's over.

Venus is running to the net. Jumping up and down. Shaking Stafford's hand as the CROWD GOES NUTS. No one more than --

Her family, hugging through tears in the stands.

Vicario just gets up and leaves, smiles incredulously at --

Venus, her next opponent, signing autographs and tennis balls for starry-eyed kids like she's already a champ. Vicario's look says -- *we'll see.*

Venus's family joins her on the court. She hugs Brandi and Serena and Macci and Keven and finally --

She finds her father and Richard and Venus embrace. A celebration a decade in the making. Huge smiles and tears. Uncontainable joy. All caught by the cameras and -

INT. TUNNELS, OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

A gauntlet of TV REPORTERS catch the STARS as they exit. Right now, they've caught PAM SHRIVER in the lens.

PAM SHRIVER

I was impressed. For a first match, there were some green parts to her for sure, but she's 14. What do you want?

Pam moves off as the REPORTERS spot Vicario heading out.

REPORTER

Arxantas! Wait! Any thoughts? You play her next. What did you think?

Vicario, wishing she'd escaped, stops in front of the camera.

VICARIO

I think, you know, she a big girl
and she hit the ball, you know,
pretty strong. I guess tomorrow
I'll see.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM, OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

A PRESS CONFERENCE under way. Venus makes her way to the stage, hugging Richard, shaking hands as she goes.

She takes her seat at the mic.

REPORTER (O.S.)

You were great tonight Venus. How'd
you handle your nerves?

VENUS

I really wasn't sure how I was
gonna do. I knew I was gonna go out
there and play the best I could.
And play as hard as I could. And --
it turned out really good.

Venus can't help herself. She breaks out a giddy smile.

ANOTHER REPORTER (O.S.)

Why didn't you sit down during the
change-overs? We're you trying to
send a message?

VENUS

A message. No? I didn't know I was
allowed. At the academy you can't.
I wasn't sure who that chair was
for.

The reporters LAUGH. Eating her up. Then it turns serious.

ANOTHER REPORTER (O.S.)

Venus, tomorrow you play the number
one seed. A three time Grand Slam
champ. How do you think you'll hold
up?

VENUS

I think I have the game to beat
anyone out there. I just have to
play it.

ANGLE ON RICHARD - watching proudly from the wings. He's
taught her well. Macci approaches.

MACCI

We gotta talk. Nike called again. They're upping their offer. Five Million. I think you should take it.

RICHARD

Venus don't wanna sign. She wants to play this thing out.

MACCI

Richard -- she can't beat Vicario. Cash in now while she's perfect.

RICHARD

Nah, she can beat her. We'll keep our money on the table.

Richard leaves, passing Bud Collins (*the Bob Hope of Tennis who Richard pitched many years ago.*)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Nice to see you again, Bud. Told you so.

It takes a minute after Richard's gone for Bud to remember. *Holy Shit.* That was him. Off Bud's shock.

MACCI

You know him?

BUD

Rick. If that girl beats Vicario -- I mean a 14-year-old who's never played a match just walks off the street and beats the top player on the planet -- forget Ali-Frazier. It'll be the greatest upset in the history of sports.

Macci smiles, just laughing at the thought of it and -

INT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Pan down from the rafters to a PACKED HOUSE. TITLES READS:

**BANK OF THE WEST CLASSIC
ROUND TWO
VENUS WILLIAMS VS. #1 ARANTXA SANCHEZ VICARIO
NOV. 2, 1994**

The court is empty. The anticipation is electric.

INT. TUNNELS, OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Venus and Richard make their way through the tunnel. When it's time to part, Richard gives her a hug and a kiss.

RICHARD

I love you, Venus. Have fun out there tonight.

VENUS

I love you too, Daddy.

Richard heads off to his seat, passing Vicario waiting in the mouth of the tunnel.

RICHARD

Good luck tonight. I hope you win.

Vicario is stupefied.

VICARIO

Thank you - I guess.

Richard goes. Venus arrives at her side. They acknowledge each other politely and then --

BANG! CLOSE ON VENUS SMASHING AN OVERHEAD AND WE'RE --

INT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

INTO THE MATCH. And Venus shows no signs of slowing down.

She pounds a SERVE for an ACE, leaving VICARIO whiffing. Venus pumps her fist to her box. SCORE READS: 1-0.

With Vicario serving down 15-40, Venus waits five feet inside the baseline for the return, saying WHAT DO YOU GOT.

Then she sizzles a backhand return down the line for a winner. Vicario's stunned. 2-0.

At the end of a rally, Vicario tries to get clever with a slick little drop shot but Venus gets to the net on long legs in two strides and puts it away. Vicario throws up her hands. 3-0.

The rest of the first set continues the same. Venus blistering Vicario with an aggressive, open stance, full court game, covering the lines like an animal. Vicario's left flat footed. Before she knows it --

It's 4-2. Venus's serving. Ace. Ace. Ace. Winner! She holds serve at Love. The CROWD EXPLODES. 5-2.

Vicario serves to stay in the set but she's down 30-40. She's moving Venus side to side, cornering forehands but Venus gets to everything. Vicario's got no answers. She forces her next shot, going for a winner but sends a backhand sailing long, handing Venus the set.

The Players head to the chairs. The CROWD is ROARING. The Williams's Box, Serena mostly, is jumping out of their seats.

Vicario sits, searching for answers in her towel while Venus once again, just bounces at the line like a Heavy Weight Champ who can't wait for the toll of the bell. Here it is.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Time!

And they're back at it. And to Vicario's dismay, it's more of the same. Venus serves - ACE! 1-0. Vicario barely holds serve when Venus' forehand just misses the line. 1-1. Venus serves, crashes the net, overhead volley - WINNER! 2-1.

Vicario's serving, drop-shotting Venus's return. V races to the net and digs out a BACKHAND VOLLEY down the line. WINNER! 3-1. The CROWD GOES FUCKING NUTS.

Richard and his family explode. Venus is on the brink, up a set and a break on the number one player in the world, three games away from the biggest upset in the history of the sport.

Bud Collins looks to Macci. *Holy shit, she's gonna do it.*

And that's when it happens. Vicario speaks to the umpire and disappears into the tunnel, leaving Venus confused, bouncing on the court by herself.

Serena turns to her mother.

SERENA

Where'd did she go?

BRANDI

Bathroom, I guess.

But Richard knows better.

RICHARD

Oh, that's some sleazy shit.

MACCI

That's some professional shit.

SERENA

What?

RICHARD
She's icing her.

And she is. Venus hops up and down, alone on the court, with nothing but her thoughts for what seems like an eternity. A lifetime to consider and to start getting tight.

Venus looks at the CLOCK on the scoreboard. 8. 9. 10 Minutes pass until finally --

Vicario races out of the tunnel and back onto the court, feigning apologies.

CHAIR UMPIRE
Time! Let's go.

Venus readies to serve, but it's clear that she's tight. She pockets the first one into the net, and carves in a slow second which --

BOOM! -- Vicario blasts it off the court for a winner. A message shot. Venus gets it. So does the crowd. The air goes right out the building. Richard and Macci feel it.

Venus steps back up to the line, preparing to serve, to regain her composure but her mojo is gone. Vicario's taken it. She's waiting on the other side of the net with a scowl.

Venus tosses her serve, smacks it clean but Vicario's there -- winding up, salivating, ready to knock the cover off the ball and --

WE CAN FREEZE RIGHT THERE. Because Venus doesn't win another game for the rest of the match.

In what feels like no time - the score reads: 6-2. 3-6. 0-5. Venus is serving but it's match point Vicario. After the return, Venus sails a forehand long and like that it's done.

She's walking to the net, shaking Vicario's hands, the rug pulled right out. It feels like a dream. Venus has no idea what's just happened.

The crowd's all applauding but the bubble's been burst. For our team, the defeats feels enormous. They bet the house and they lost.

Land on Richard, clapping stoically, applauding his daughter, but knowing her hurt and --

INT. TUNNELS, OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Richard, Serena, and Brandi, escort Venus through the tunnels to the locker room, through a swell of silent faces.

REPORTER

Venus! Venus! What happened out there? How's this compare to your other losses? Any tougher?

SERENA

How should she know? She never lost before.

It takes everything Venus has to hold it together and then --

INT. LOCKERROOM OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Once she's inside and the door is closed, she's lets go and cries, like a 14-year-old kid.

VENUS

I'm sorry. I couldn't do it. I wasn't good enough. I let you down.

BRANDI

What you did out there, Venus, you could never let us down.

VENUS

But the deal? The respect? You were counting on me and --

RICHARD

Don't you worry about those deals. I bet outside out that door, the whole hallway is full of fools fighting just to hand you a check but that ain't what's important.

(beat)

You wanna talk about respect -- if after what you did tonight, you don't got it for yourself, you ain't never gonna have it. You a champion, Venus and now the whole world knows it. Walk out there with your head up. You'll see.

Venus smiles for her father sake, but she can't hold it long. Pretty soon, the tears return and she's crying her heart out.

Richard, Brandi, and Serena surround her, holding her close.

A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Dressed in street clothes, Venus returns from the dressing room and joins her family and Macci waiting to leave.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

You ready?

Venus nods, shouldering her bag as they open the door to find-

INT. TUNNELS, OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

The tunnels are empty. No sponsors wait with her deal. No fans wait for her autographs. No cameras for her picture.

It's as if the whole circus has packed up and left and all that remains in this family. Venus is crushed.

Richard cloaks her in his arms and leads his family down the hall to the exit where they open the arena doors to discover -

EXT. PLAYERS EXIT, OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

A MASSIVE CROWD OF FANS, many of them YOUNG BLACK GIRLS are waiting outside just for a chance to see VENUS. They explode in applause as she appears, chanting her name.

CROWD

VENUS! VENUS! VENUS! VENUS!
 (and then seeing --)
 SERENA! SERENA! SERENA!

Venus is moved to tears at the sight of it. Serena is too.

RICHARD

What did I tell you? Looks like they know. Don't keep 'em waiting.

Full of gratitude, Venus kisses her father and heads out to meet her fans. Serena follows too.

Richard and Brandi watch in amazement as their little girls shake hands, sign autographs and inspire.

They are moved to tears themselves. And to cap it all off, Keven Davis appears, flushed with excitement.

KEVEN

Phone's ringing off the hook. I got Nike on the line.
 (long beat)
 They doubled their offer. Puma called too. Reebok's in for sure. They all wanna meet and they wanna meet first. What do you want to do?

But Richard's not in a hurry. He watches his daughters, swelling with pride, everything he's predicted's come true.

RICHARD

You tell 'em to wait. There's more where that came from. They ain't seen nothing yet.

FREEZE ON RICHARD as the following words appear on screen.

Nine months later, Venus signed a contract with Reebok for twelve million dollars. She was 14 years-old.

CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL VIDEO FOOTAGE: VENUS WILLIAMS SIGNING EVENT

Venus and Serena, decked out in fly 90's REEBOK GEAR, in the heart of NEW YORK CITY, hitting balls at a promotional event.

THE FOLLOWING WORDS OVER BLACK

Serena joined her on the tour two years later and with Richard as their coach, continuing to place patience, family, and education above early success, nearly everything he predicted for his daughters back in Compton came true.

CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE OF THE SISTERS ON CENTRE COURT AT WIMBLEDON

Two black girls in white braids taking the court before an all white crowd, curtsying to the QUEEN of ENGLAND.

CUT TO:

THE FOLLOWING WORDS OVER BLACK

And while Capriati, Hingis, Kournikova, and the rest of the junior tennis stars of their era retired from injuries and fatigue years ago, Venus and Serena remain at the pinnacle of the sport today, still competing for Grand Slams Titles 25 years later.

Venus is 38. Serena is 37 and considered by many to be the Greatest Female Player in the History of the Sport. Just like Richard predicted.

FADE OUT ON ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE OF THE "REAL" RICHARD WILLIAMS

He cheers in the stands at the 1999 Lipton Open holding up a homemade sign that simply reads: "I TOLD YOU SO."

THE END