

OCTAGON

By

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FADE IN:

INT. A BAR - FIGHT ARENA - DAY

RICARDO RODRIGUEZ (21), a fighter - fit, sweaty, bloodied face - stands in the middle of an MMA octagon located in the center of a rowdy bar.

It is worn and rough, fences and faded pads - a fight club space. Various boos and cheers come from the drunk and riled up CROWD.

Ricardo's opponent, TAYLOR LOCKE (31) - muscular, sweaty, nearly as bloody - dances around taunting the exhausted Ricardo.

TAYLOR
(mouth guard in)
Come on! Right here! Right here!

He points at Ricardo's face then points at his own begging Ricardo to try to hit him.

IN THE CROWD, we find Ricardo's cheering section:

COACH BOBBY SCHMIDT (50's), large, a former fighter himself.

EDDIE (25) thin, twitchy, chain smoker, a bit rough around the edges, and Ricardo's older brother and

JASON HARPER (30's), fit, but not a fighter, assistant coach.

They are all cheering him on at the top of their lungs.

Ricardo is exhausted. Taylor shrugs and rushes at him - unleashes a vicious round house kick, hitting Ricardo square in the temple. Ricardo falls.

The crowd BOOS and CHEERS as Taylor pounces on top of Ricardo and start hammer-punching the back of his head.

Ricardo manages to put his hands up. Taylor is punching Ricardo's head, back, ribs, wherever he can land a punch.

The FAT REFEREE watches the action closely.

Ricardo, Taylor still unloading on him, takes a deep breath. He shuts his eyes from a few seconds, trying to regain composure.

THE WORLD SLOWS AND THE CROWD DROWNS AWAY...

Ricardo's eyes SNAP open, a new purpose in his eyes.

He flips to his back. Taylor continues to unload punches, exhausting himself. Ricardo blocks one after another.

Taylor is slowing down, and in that split second, the fight turns. Ricardo takes charge.

He grabs Taylor and rolls on the ground, gaining top position.

The crowd goes absolutely berserk.

Ricardo begins unloading vicious punches to Taylor's body. Taylor tries his hardest to keep his hands up to protect his face, but his body is wide open.

Ricardo attacks the body with a flurry of rib cracking punches. Taylor moves his right hand down to protect himself. Leaving the left side of his face wide open and all Ricardo needs to end this fight.

POW!

He puts a vicious left hook right into Taylor's temple, and the lights go out. Taylor goes down.

The crowd goes louder than ever.

The ref waves his hand indicating the match is over and pushes Ricardo off of Taylor.

FAT REFEREE

That's it! That's the match!

Wearily, Ricardo puts his hand up acknowledging the crowd.

The crowd now 100% turns to Ricardo's side and cheer. He waves and smiles, showing blood seeping out through his mouthpiece.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo sits unwrapping his wrists in a dingy locker room with chipped wooden benches, stained floors, and rusty lockers.

From the hall, loud, boisterous voices grow louder and louder, until--

Bobby, Eddie, and Jason walk excitedly in.

BOBBY

Ricardo! My man! How you feelin'?

RICARDO

(smiling, exhausted)

Good, Bobby. Real good. That was a damn good fight.

BOBBY

Yeah. You really turned the tables at the end there. You had me worried for a second.

RICARDO

I know. I could hear you screaming from the corner. Were you crying at one point?

Bobby laughs and slaps Ricardo's shoulder.

JASON

Doctor should be in any minute, Ricardo.

RICARDO

Thanks, Jason. I don't think I'm too bad this time.

JASON

No, you look good. Great job.

BOBBY

Good win today, kid.

RICARDO

Thanks, Coach.

BOBBY

Okay, we gotta go. See you back at the gym in a couple days?

RICARDO

I'll be there.

Jason and Bobby wave as they leave. Ricardo waves back. Eddie walks up and takes a seat next to his little brother on the locker room bench.

EDDIE

(proudly)

Good shit man. Good shit. I swear to god, that guy didn't stand a chance!

RICARDO

Thanks, bro.

They fist bump.

The door opens again. DR. CLARKE walks in.

DR. CLARKE

Mr. Rodriguez. I'm Doctor Clarke.

RICARDO

Hey, Doc.

DR. CLARKE

I'll be quick.

Dr. Clarke kneels in front of Ricardo and begins examining his face. He takes some supplies out of his medical kit.

DR. CLARKE (CONT'D)

I'm just going to cover a few of these cuts. I'll stitch the one on your forehead. That caused most of the bleeding.

EDDIE

Yeah, that was a brutal elbow. I'd check that guy for a metal plate or something put under the skin.

The locker room door opens again. Taylor walks in. Ricardo glances at him through Doc Clarke's busy hands.

Taylor walks to his locker and begins cleaning himself.

TAYLOR

Good fight, bro.

RICARDO

Thanks for fighting on such short notice. Respect, man.

TAYLOR

You can really take a punch.

RICARDO

You can really give one.

TAYLOR

(complimented)

You keep working, I can see you fighting in the UFC in no time.

RICARDO

You think so?

TAYLOR

Fo sho, man. Fo sho. Way you rang my bell? Coming back like that. I mean shit I thought you were down. Legit.

RICARDO

UFC's still a long way away.

Taylor laughs.

TAYLOR

You're a nice kid. Humble.

RICARDO

(re: he and Eddie)

You can credit our mom for that.

TAYLOR

Most kids coming up like you, they try to build some persona out of the ring. You just keep it in the ring. I respect that.

RICARDO

That's where the fight is. That's where I keep it. I just don't wanna get in any trouble.

TAYLOR

Smart.

Dr. Clarke finishes stitching up Ricardo.

DR. CLARKE

You should be good to go. Just ice those bruises, and give the cuts a few days to heal.

RICARDO

Thanks, Doc.

Dr. Clarke packs his things and heads over to Taylor. He looks him in the face, but Taylor waves him off.

TAYLOR

I'm good, Doc.

DR. CLARKE

Alright, if you say so.

The Doc shakes his head and leaves the locker room. Taylor is done cleaning up. He walks to Ricardo.

TAYLOR
Well, it was nice fighting you.

Taylor reaches out his hand. Ricardo shakes it.

RICARDO
Good match.

TAYLOR
I'll keep an eye out for your pay-per-view.

RICARDO
(smiling)
Hell yeah.

TAYLOR
Stay safe out there.

RICARDO
See you, bro.

Taylor walks further into the locker room, takes a left, and disappears.

EDDIE
Cool guy.

RICARDO
Yeah.

EDDIE
You still kicked his ass though.

Ricardo laughs and tosses a towel at his brother. Eddie swats it away and get up.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I'll go grab a smoke and the car. You finish up in here.

Ricardo nods.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Meet you out front.

INT. RICARDO'S MINIVAN - NIGHT

Eddie drives in the middle of a dimly lit highway. Ricardo sits next to him, sleeping like a baby.

Eddie looks over momentarily at his sleeping brother. Then looks back out at the road. He rubs his eyes in exhaustion.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A crap motel just off the highway.

Ricardo lies on the bed, awake, with an ice pack over his face. Eddie lies on the ground, using the extra pillows as a leg and head rest. He eats a bag of potato chips.

EDDIE

Did the money come in yet?

RICARDO

(worried)

I didn't check. We're still going to be ten thousand short.

EDDIE

Do you think you can fight in three weeks?

RICARDO

You know I will be.

EDDIE

I'll call Paul. See if I can get you a good gig. Your name has been bouncing around.

RICARDO

(scoffing)

A ten thousand dollar fight? Yeah right. Be real man.

EDDIE

I'll make it happen. Gotta make it happen. Doctors ain't cheap, dude, and we can't keep doing these penny fights.

Ricardo sighs.

RICARDO

I'm exhausted dude. Can you stop chewing so loud. I wanna sleep.

Ricardo winces as he reaches over to turn off the light. Eddie looks at Ricky with a mix of pride and worry.

EDDIE
Night, little brother.

RICARDO
Night.

INT. MINIVAN - DAWN

The brothers are back on the highway, the sun only just broken over the horizon and illuminating the thick fog clinging to the fields whipping by the window.

Ricardo looks out the window bleary eyed and thoughtful.

RICARDO
What time will we get there?

EDDIE
About noon, just in time for lunch.

RICARDO
Good.

That's as far as the conversation goes. Eddie turns on the RADIO - MUSIC PLAYS.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

YENNY RODRIGUEZ (50's) lies on a hospital bed watching TV. She's bald and frail. Her cheek bones jut out of her face. She's a living skeleton -- a HEART CONDITION is taking her.

On the nightstand is a FRAMED PHOTO of Eddie, Ricardo, and a much healthier Yenny.

The door opens to her room opens and Ricardo and Eddie walk in. Eddie is holding some flowers. She sees her boys and a big smile stretches over her face, some life enters her eyes.

YENNY
Are those my babies?

RICARDO
Hi, mom.

YENNY
Come here! Come closer.

EDDIE

Hi, mom.

Ricardo and Eddie walk to the bed and give their mother a hug. For a moment, the family holds one another, Yenny joyful, the two boys smiling but sad.

Yenny pulls back and places her hands tenderly on Ricardo's face.

YENNY

Oh look at you, baby. Sit down. Tell me about your fight. Did you win?

RICARDO

I did. Knock-out, but he beat me up pretty good too.

YENNY

I can see that. You look worse than me.

GLORIA (O.C.)

Are those your boys, Yenny?

YENNY

(rolling her eyes)
Of course they are, Gloria!

The curtain dividing the room slides open. GLORIA (70's) - a wrinkled, kindly old grandmother - looks over from her own bed, smiling.

YENNY (CONT'D)

Boys, this is Gloria, my new roommate.

EDDIE

(politely)
Hello, ma'am.

GLORIA

Your mother's told me all about you two. Nothing but good stuff. Which one of you is the boxer?

YENNY

(a little louder)
Not a boxer, a mixed martial artist, Gloria.

GLORIA

Oh, yes, yes I remember now. Punching and kicking. Which one of you is that?

RICARDO

That would me, ma'am.

GLORIA

Oh you are very handsome. You shouldn't let yourself be hit so much in the face. Your poor mother worries.

RICARDO

I'll do my best in the future, ma'am.

GLORIA

"Ma'am." Listen to them, Yenny.

YENNY

Gloria if you don't mind? Why don't you get back to your word search.

GLORIA

(getting the hint)

Of course. Of course.

Gloria presses a button, and the curtain closes slowly.

EDDIE

Nice meeting you, Gloria.

Ricardo holds his mom's hands.

RICARDO

Mom, listen. One more fight and we should be able to pay for your surgery.

YENNY

Just one more?

RICARDO

And that's it. You'll have what you need, and I can go back to school.

YENNY

(skeptical)

You think so, huh?

RICARDO

I'm serious. I don't want to fight,
mom. We're doing it for you.

Yenny squeezes his hands and smiles. She doesn't believe him, though she appreciates it and loves him dearly. She turns and smiles at Eddie.

EDDIE

How's everything?

YENNY

Getting by. Day by day.

EDDIE

Bet you're looking forward to going
home.

YENNY

That would be nice, but I try not to
think about that. I just enjoy my
shows and pray I make it to the
surgery.

EDDIE

Oh c'mon, mom. Don't talk like that.
You'll be okay. We'll be okay.

YENNY

I love you boys so much.

RICARDO

We love you too, mom.

YENNY

Come here.

Ricardo and Eddie come in for another loving group hug.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATER

Ricardo and Eddie walk towards the elevator, both tired,
emotionally drained from staying positive for their mother.

RICARDO

I hate seeing her like that.

EDDIE

She'll be better soon. We're almost
there.

RICARDO

I hope so.

They enter the elevator and the doors close.

INT. MINIVAN - AFTERNOON

The sky is crisp with no clouds. The minivan streaks down a country highway. Eddie is behind the wheel.

EDDIE

I'm not gonna miss all this driving,
I can tell you that.

RICARDO

I couldn't have done it without you
in my corner.

EDDIE

Anytime, man.

RICARDO

Have you given any thought to what
you'll do when it's over?

EDDIE

I don't know. Get a job. I don't
know. My buddy A.J. has an opening at
his shop. Mechanic wouldn't be a shit
gig.

RICARDO

Is that in San Antonio or back in
Austin?

EDDIE

San Antonio. I want to stay around
for Mom. I ain't gonna bolt or
nothing.

Ricardo nods, there's history in this...

RICARDO

You heard from him at all?

EDDIE

No. Nothing. Son of a bitch.

RICARDO

He'll pop up eventually.

EDDIE
You think so?

RICARDO
Maybe.

EDDIE
You should beat the holy shit out of
him if he does.

Ricardo doesn't respond to that.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I'll do it then.

RICARDO
I don't know if you're serious or
not.

Eddie shrugs, eyes forward.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - DAY

The door opens on a small, one bedroom apartment with very few amenities - a couch, a table with a TV on it, a computer desk, a lamp.

It is not a dump. There is a certain sweetness to it. Ricardo enters and turns on the lights.

RICARDO
Maria? You here, babe?

No reply. Ricardo walks into the KITCHEN and spots a note on the fridge: "**Out for groceries. Will be home at 4.**"

Ricardo reads the note, pulls it down, and throws it away.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Ricardo lies on the couch, asleep, with an open book on his chest.

The front door opens and a woman enter - MARIA (21) walks in holding paper grocery bags.

She tosses her keys onto a shelf and sees Ric on the couch. She walks to him and reaches down to touch his face. His EYE flutter open.

MARIA
Jesus Christ. Your face.

RICARDO
Yeah. This one was pretty bad.

MARIA
At least you won.

She pets his hair softly. She heads to the kitchen. He rises to follow and help put away groceries.

RICARDO
Yeah.

MARIA
I really can't wait until all this
shit is over.

RICARDO
Me too.

MARIA
It freaks me out.

RICARDO
I know, babe.

Ricardo opens his arms for Maria to hug him.

RICARDO (CONT'D)
I missed you.

Maria hugs him.

MARIA
I missed you too.

Ricardo goes in for a kiss but Maria puts her hand in the way.

MARIA (CONT'D)
You know I can't kiss you like this.

Ricardo groans. They hug again.

INT. GYM - DAY

Ricardo, face mostly healed, sweating profusely as he goes to town on a punching bag that Jason is holding from behind for him.

Bobby watches over him, monitoring his form. It's perfect.

The rest of the GYM is moderately full, with various fighters doing drills, jumping ropes, sparring, etc.

Eddie charges into the gym from the main entrance. He is excited as hell.

EDDIE

I did it! I did it! Woooo!

Ricardo punches the bag one final time then turns to his brother.

RICARDO

No shit?

EDDIE

Twelve days. Kansas City. Seven thousand if you lose, Twelve thousand if you win. And you're featuring the card.

RICARDO

Jesus. How did you manage that?

BOBBY

Great job, Eddie!

EDDIE

The manager heard about your Taylor match, and he asked around. He knows all about you, dude. Somebody showed him the tape from the other night and he was blown away by that comeback.

RICARDO

Hell yeah. Nicely done, Eddie!

EDDIE

(beaming)

Home stretch bro!

The two smile and hug.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

I gotta get the word out. You keep this boy moving. Bobby!

BOBBY

(grinning)

No rest for the wicked.

Eddie throws up his hand and hurries out.

JASON

He didn't even tell us who we're fighting.

Ricardo laughs, gets in his stance, and continues punching the bag.

RICARDO (V.O.)

Sun Yang Gyu.

WHAM!

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo sits up in bed, browsing on his old PC computer. Maria sits up next to him, studying from a History textbook.

RICARDO

He's from South Korea. Three title defenses. twenty-two, four, and one.
(impressed)

Damn.

MARIA

Wow. This is a really big event, huh?

RICARDO

I have no idea how Eddie did it, but yeah. It's huge. I gotta win though. Or else we'll be three k short.

MARIA

You'll win. You're sixteen and 0.

RICARDO

I've never fought on a stage this big before. It's a legit arena. Not one of those fight club things.

MARIA

You'll be fine, baby. I believe in you.

RICARDO

Shit. He's six-foot-one.

MARIA

Jesus.

RICARDO

He has a four inch reach on me.

Maria looks over at Ricardo's laptop screen.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

And he specializes in judo. My ground game is horrible.

MARIA

You'll figure it out. I'm sure of it.

Ricardo is less certain. He stares at the screen, in his mind, he is already running scenarios.

Maria returns to her studying.

INT. GYM - DAY

WHAM - Ricardo hits the mat with his sparring partner in an arm bar - he quickly taps out. Bobby applauds from outside the ropes. Jason watches as well.

BOBBY

Beautiful! Beautiful!

Ricardo stands up, helps his six foot one, lanky sparring partner up.

RICARDO

You good?

SPARRING PARTNER

Yeah.

BOBBY

I'm loving the speed, Ricardo.

RICARDO

I'm just trying to get the W coach.

BOBBY

And you'll get it. Take ten.

Ricardo takes off his protective headgear and walks out of the octagon. Bobby puts his arm around him.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

How's your mom?

RICARDO

She's good, thanks. Fighting.

BOBBY
You get your fight from her.

RICARDO
Damn straight.

BOBBY
You're picking this up quick. You got this one. You fight your fight. Make him come to you. POW!

Ricardo smiles. He's still not sure, but he's determined.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
(shouting)
Jason, get me another victim for our boy!

Bobby marches back to the mat leaving Ricardo in thought.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

A much more well kept and cleaner locker room than the opening fight.

SUPER: THREE WEEKS LATER

Ricardo takes equipment out of his bag and places them on a bench.

SUN YANG (O.C.)
Hey, big boy.

Ricardo looks back to SUN YANG GYU (25), the six-foot-one giant who definitely doesn't belong in the welterweight division.

He stalks to Ricardo with a fire in his dark eyes.

RICARDO
How's it going?

SUN YANG
You ready for an ass whopping?

Ricardo ignores the ribbing and keeps unpacking.

RICARDO
Let's keep it in the ring, alright?

SUN YANG
What, you scared?

Sun knocks all of Ricardo's stuff off the bench. Ricardo stands sharply and faces the giant.

Bobby walks in, sees the face-off, and hurries over to them separating them from one another.

BOBBY

Whoa! Hey! Hey! Back off.

Sun Yang stares Ricardo down.

SUN YANG

You won't even be able to recognize yourself when I'm done with you, little bitch.

Sun Yang leaves. Ricardo doesn't say anything. Bobby turns to him.

BOBBY

You're gonna wipe that dickhead's shit eating grin right off his face. You good?

RICARDO

(adrenaline still
pumping)

Yeah... Yeah, I'm good. The fight's in the octagon right?

BOBBY

It's only in the octagon. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. All that "getting in your opponents head" before the match is bullshit. You get in your opponents head by beating the living shit out of him. He wants to talk shit? You send him to me. I'll give him an ear full of it.

RICARDO

(smiling)

Thanks, coach.

BOBBY

Two more fights. Then you're up.

Bobby slaps Ricardo on the back.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

You got this, kid.

Bobby stands up and leaves. Ricardo stares at his locker with an introspective look.

DISTANTLY, the sounds of the CROWD begin to spill into the moment, louder... louder...

PROMOTER (V.O)

And now, fighting out of San Antonio, Texas, standing in the blue corner, at five-foot-eight inches and weighing in at one hundred and forty-five pounds with a record of sixteen wins and zero losses...

INT. THE OCTAGON - FIGHT ARENA - NIGHT

Ricardo stands in his corner. His team of Eddie, Bobby, and Jason stand behind him.

The PROMOTER stands in the center of the ring with his mic. This arena is much larger. About a three thousand person capacity. Every seat is filled.

PROMOTER

--RICARDO "THE ROCKET" RODRIGUEZ!

The crowd cheers.

PROMOTER (CONT'D)

And fighting out of South Korea, standing in the red corner at six-foot-one inches tall and weighing in at one hundred and forty-seven pounds, with a record of twenty-two wins, four losses, and a single draw... SUN YANG TANG GYU.

Mild cheers. Mostly boos. Ricardo is the home town favorite.

AUDIENCE

USA! USA! USA!

The promoter leaves the stage. Ricardo and Sun Yang walk towards the center where a REFEREE meets them.

REFEREE

Gentlemen, we went through the rules in the locker room. Touch gloves if you want to make it official.

Ricardo puts his gloves out. Sun Yang turns around and walks away without touching gloves.

Ricardo rolls his eyes, he walks back to his corner. His team meets him.

JASON

You got this, Ricardo. It's all you, baby.

BOBBY

Let him come to you. Focus and don't dick around out there. Attack the leg! Attack the leg!

Eddie touches his little brother's shoulder.

EDDIE

For mom.

RICARDO

For mom.

Ricardo opens his mouth. Bobby puts the mouth guard in. Ricardo bangs his fists together and turns around.

The sound drowns away, and all we HEAR is Ricardo's BREATHING. He stares at Sun who glares back wickedly.

All the sound rushes back and --

DING! The opening round bell rings and the two fighters move to the center of the octagon.

Ricardo lands a leg kick to Sun Yang's right leg. Sun swings and narrowly misses Ricardo.

The Korean's reach is suddenly very real. Ricardo kicks Sun Yang's leg again. Sun Yang goes in for a tackle but Ricardo pushes him off.

Ricardo lands some more leg kicks to Sun Yang's bruising leg.

BOBBY

There you go! Wear him down!

Sun Yang tries moving forward, but limps slightly, allowing Ricardo to move back. Ricardo kicks - it's a rib crunching blow.

Sun Yang moves his hand down to cover his body. Ricardo takes this split second to leap forward with a superman punch!

WHAM! The punch hits Sun Yang square on the nose as he stumbles back. Ricardo moves in and starts viciously punching the body and face of Sun Yang.

The crowd cheers wildly.

AUDIENCE

USA! USA! USA!

Sun Yang tries all he can to block, but the punches are too fast. He's pretty much defenseless. He throws himself on Ricardo - a clinch.

Both take labored breaths. The Referee breaks them up.

REFEREE

Get back. Keep fighting.

Sun Yang takes one deep breath then releases from the clinch. He charges at Ricardo's knees, grabs them, picks him up and throws him on the ground!

He gets top position and tries putting Ricardo in a choke hold, but Ricardo blocks the attempt.

Sun Yang hammer punches the back of Ricardo's head. Ricardo blocks.

Ricardo squeezes out of the uncomfortable position and grabs Sun Yang's arm.

BOBBY

ARM BAR! ARM BAR!

Ricardo moves like a snake underneath Sun Yang's body and locks his arm between his arm and leg and presses it back.

Sun Yang's arm is about to snap. Ricardo pulls and pulls. The crowd is on its feet. Sun grits his teeth and then--

--pounds his free hand on the ground, TAPPING OUT.

REFEREE

That's it!

The Referee waves his arms. Fight over. The crowd goes wild.

Ricardo immediately loosens his grab. He stands up and offers to help Sun Yang up.

SUN YANG

Fuck off.

Ricardo goes back to his corner and hugs Bobby, Jason, and Eddie.

EDDIE
You did it, bro! You did it!

The crowd is deafening, and Ricardo beams with pride and joy.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Maria sleeps. The door opens slowly and quietly. Ricardo walks in. He quietly lies down, trying not to wake Maria.

She shifts a little but doesn't wake. Ricardo puts his arm around her and closes his exhausted eyes, almost immediately falling asleep.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - DINING AREA - DAY

SUPER: TWO WEEKS LATER

Ricardo and Maria eat a bowl of cereal in silence. Ricardo's phone rings. He looks over. "Unidentified number". He groans then answers it.

RICARDO
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH--

INT. RORY DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

RORY DEAN, the President of UFC (buff, 40's) sits at his luxurious desk with his phone on speaker.

RORY
Ricardo Rodriguez? Is that you, man?

RICARDO
Yeah. Who's calling?

RORY
It's Rory Dean.

Ricardo chokes on his food and stands up. Maria looks at him.

RICARDO
Rory Dean? The President of the UFC?

RORY
That's me.

RICARDO

What... what can I do for you? Why are you calling me?

RORY

Watched a video of your fight in Kansas City. You're incredible. That speed. The wrestling game and the boxing game. It's absolutely amazing.

RICARDO

Uh, thank you. That - I mean, coming from you? That's - that means a lot.

RORY

I was calling about putting you on our next card.

Ricardo goes weak in the knees.

RORY (CONT'D)

Now, I want you to keep this between you and me, though I'm sure it's going to be announced any day now, but Hercules Smith is making a UFC comeback, and I want to put you on the main card with him.

RICARDO

Holy shit. I mean, a main card? Holy shit. I...

(beat)

No offense but who's Hercules Smith? I actually don't really follow... the sport...

RORY

You don't watch much WWE either then, do you?

RICARDO

No. Sorry.

RORY

Well he's the biggest WWE fighter right now apart from John Cena.

RICARDO

Well--

RORY

And I want to put you on the main card with him.

Ricardo leans against the kitchen counter. He lets the rush subside and shakes his head.

RICARDO
I'm sorry but--

RORY
We're gonna introduce you to the world. Ricky the Rocket Rodriguez.

Ricardo cringes a little. He doesn't like to be called "Ricky".

RICARDO
Mister Dean--

RORY
Please, just Rory.

RICARDO
Okay. Um, Rory. This is amazing ,and I can't tell you how flattered I am, but... I'm done fighting. I'm going back to school.

Rory laughs, thinking it's a joke.

RORY
You serious?

RICARDO
Yeah. My mother's sick, I have to take care of her.

RORY
You need money to take care of a sick mother? Ricky, do you know how much money you're looking at coming and fighting for us? Your mother will be able to get everything she needs! You could go to TEN schools!

RICARDO
I've taken care of it. I really appreciate the offer, sir, but... I'm done fighting.

RORY
(stunned)
Well... I honestly don't know how to react to this, kid...

RICARDO

Thank you, Mister Dean. You have a good day.

Ricardo hangs up. He stares at the floor. Maria comes to him.

MARIA

I'm proud of you, baby.

Ricardo smiles. Maria smiles back, and they hug.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - DAY

Eddie and Ricardo sit, nervously, tapping their feet. Eddie's very twitchy, leg bouncing.

SUPER: 2 WEEKS LATER

EDDIE

They should've been done by now.

RICARDO

I'm sure it's nothing. They're probably just making sure everything's okay.

EDDIE

I can't take this.

RICARDO

It's okay, bro. She'll be fine.

DOCTOR ZHANG (30s) walks out. He is stony faced, unreadable. Ricardo and Eddie stands up.

EDDIE

How is she?

ZHANG

There were some complications in the surgery.

RICARDO

Complications? What complications?

ZHANG

(directly)

We found a ninety-nine percent blockage of the coronary artery.

RICARDO

Jesus Christ. Is she alive?

ZHANG

Yes. She's alive for now. But things being as they are, we may be looking at heart bypass surgery.

RICARDO

(shaken, relieved)
Okay. Okay, whatever it takes.

EDDIE

(anger flaring)
Fuck.

Eddie turns and kicks a garbage can HARD. Ricardo turns to calm him.

RICARDO

Eddie, it's okay.

Eddie takes a deep breath.

ZHANG

I can understand why this would be tough news for you to hear.

RICARDO

When can we see her?

ZHANG

Sedation will wear off in about an hour. You can see her then.

RICARDO

Thanks doc.

Doctor Zhang nods then walks off. Eddie has angry tears.

EDDIE

Fuck!

Ricardo stares into the middle distance in deep thought...

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo eats dinner alone, staring at an old TV playing Sportcenter.

ON TV: AN ANCHOR ADDRESSES THE CAMERA

ESPN ANCHOR

In the world of MMA, big news today from UFC's Rory Dean on the
(MORE)

ESPN ANCHOR (CONT'D)
 announcement made today that B.B "The
 Kid" Young will be facing off against
 Hercules Smith in one of the most
 anticipated fight cards of all time.
 The WWE superstar is making his
 comeback mixed martial arts to prove
 that he's still got it...

Ricardo stares at the TV. Emotionless, he takes another bite
 of dinner.

EXT. MECHANIC GARAGE - DAY

Cars lifted overhead, hoods open and grease everywhere -
 MECHANICS, mostly Hispanic, work on various types of cars.

Ricardo walks in and approaches GEORGE (50s, Mexican) the
 manager who is working on an expensive looking car.

RICARDO
 Hey, George.

George turns, a gruff look that turns to a large smile.

GEORGE
 Ricardo! Long time no see. How's the
 fighting?

RICARDO
 I'm back in school. No more fighting.

GEORGE
 Good. Good. I'm glad. And your ma? I
 heard she was sick?

RICARDO
 Yeah... Yeah...
 (hesitant)
 That's actually what I came to talk
 to you about. I was wondering if I
 could get my old job back.

GEORGE
 Oh, Ricardo. I'm so sorry, man. I
 already got enough people. I've even
 taking a pay-cut myself. Economy's
 shit. We're losing money here, and I
 just... I'm sorry.

RICARDO
 I understand.

GEORGE

I'm really sorry. If there was a way,
I would make it happen. You know
that.

Ricardo nods.

RICARDO

It's okay. I understand.

GEORGE

I really am sorry.

Ricardo lowers his head and begins to back off.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I hope you can figure something out.
And I'm praying for your mother.

RICARDO

Thanks, George.

With that, Ricardo turns and leaves.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo lays in bed while Maria studies next to him. He is
struggling with his thoughts, but he knows what he has to do.

RICARDO

Maria.

Maria keeps studying.

MARIA

What?

RICARDO

I have to go back.

Maria looks at him.

MARIA

Back? Like back to fighting? You're
kidding right?

RICARDO

The money, Maria--

She looks at her book, not reading it but not wanting to look
at Ricardo.

MARIA

You said you would stop.

RICARDO

I know. But I didn't know my mother would need more surgery.

MARIA

(quietly)

I know, baby, I know. I thought you might, but I hoped you wouldn't... It's just so hard seeing what it does to you... Seeing you get your face smashed in over and over...

RICARDO

I don't like it. I don't. But if it can get me the money...

MARIA

I know.

She shifts and sits with her back to him. He knows she's hurt by this. Ricardo gets out of bed.

RICARDO

I'm sorry, Maria.

He leaves the room. Maria lowers her head, a tear rolls down her cheek.

INT. RICARDO'S MINIVAN - NIGHT

Ricardo drives in the night. He slams his hand on the steering wheel in frustration.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX HALLWAY - NIGHT

A total shit hole apartment complex. Ricardo walks down the filthy hallway. He stops at number "237" and raises his hand to knock but stops...

The door opens. A hooker - HOLLY (30's) rail thin and strung out walks out. She looks down at Ricardo.

HOLLY

The fuck you looking at?

She turns away and walks. Ricardo peaks inside.

Eddie is sitting on his couch shirtless. He sees Ricardo and quickly sweeps up some DRUGS - crushed pills - off the coffee table.

He jumps up and walks to the door.

RICARDO

Eddie?

EDDIE

Hey, Ricardo? That you, bro? The fuck you doing here?

RICARDO

Nice friend you got there.

EDDIE

Who, Holly? Shit, she's just a thing. Don't worry about it.

He is worried.

RICARDO

Can I come in?

EDDIE

Of course. Come in. Come in.

Ricardo walks into--

INT. EDDIE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie's place is a mess. The walls are cracked and thin, the caret stained, furniture duct tapped together. Eddie hands Ricardo a beet. He declines.

EDDIE

You gonna try to call Rory Dean?

RICARDO

I don't know if I'll be able to reach him directly. Do you think Paul can do something about it?

EDDIE

I'll call him. You didn't have to come here to ask me that.

RICARDO

Can I spend the night?

EDDIE
Yeah, sure. What's wrong?

RICARDO
Maria... she's upset about me fighting.

EDDIE
Fuck her, dude. Entitled bitch.

RICARDO
(admonishing him)
Hey. No.

EDDIE
Sorry. You can take the couch.

Ricardo walks over to the couch.

RICARDO
There better not be anything gross on here.

EDDIE
I don't know what you're talking about.

Eddie smiles.

INT. GYM - DAY

UFC wannabes train hard. Ricardo walks in.

At the sparring area, Bobby coaches a YOUNG TALENT as he dances his way around his partner.

RICARDO
Hey, coach.

Bobby turns around and smiles.

BOBBY
Ayyee. Ricardo! I thought you were done. What bring you around?

RICARDO
It's my mom, Bobby.

BOBBY
(smile fading)
Shit. I'm so sorry, kid.

YOUNG TALENT
Hey Coach, you watching this?

BOBBY
Take five, Jimmy.

The young talent and his SPARRING PARTNER walk out of the practice ring.

RICARDO
I need you, Bobby.

Bobby nods. He thinks for a moment.

BOBBY
Jason should be around here somewhere. I'm gonna finish up with this Jimmy kid.

RICARDO
Sounds good.

Ricardo and Bobby fist bump.

INT. GYM - LATER

Ricardo's FIST hits a bag HARD. He is in workout clothes, sweating, huffing and puffing.

Jason can barely hold the bag steady. Ricardo has a fire in his eyes, he's furious - angry at life. WHAM - WHAM - WHAM--

INT. YENNY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Yenny lies on her bed, weak. Her eyes open and find--

RICARDO
Hey, mom.

Yenny musters up what little strength she has to smile.

YENNY
My baby.

Ricardo holds up the box of chocolates.

RICARDO
I bought you some chocolate.

YENNY

I'm not sure Doctor Zhang would approve.

He sets them on her nightstand and looks at her.

RICARDO

I'm going to fight again, mom.

She looks sadly at him. They stare into each other's eyes.

YENNY

I want you to go to school, Ricardo. It's time to let me go.

RICARDO

No, don't say that. You have to keep fighting.

YENNY

I've fought, and so have you. We don't have to keep fighting. It's okay, baby.

RICARDO

Don't say that.

YENNY

It's true.

RICARDO

No... I... I love fighting.

YENNY

(smiling)
Oh, no you don't.

RICARDO

I love fighting for you.

Yenny forces a smile.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

And I'm not done fighting for you. Not yet. Not ever.

Ricardo hugs his mom, his head falls to her lap like a child being comforted. She touches his head lovingly.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Eddie walks down the sidewalk, his phone in one hand, groceries in the other.

EDDIE

Paul?

(listens)

You did what?

Eddie stops in his tracks.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You're the best. I'll let him know right away.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ricardo walks in. He looks around then flicks on the light. Footsteps approach as Maria walks in. She stands some distance away.

MARIA

I didn't think you'd come back.

RICARDO

I wasn't sure you wanted me to.

She doesn't say anything. Silence.

MARIA

You're training again?

RICARDO

Yeah.

Silence.

MARIA

School?

RICARDO

I gotta focus on training for now.

MARIA

I know you have to do this, but...

RICARDO

But?

Maria is grappling with her thoughts and feelings.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Eddie is at the edge of an alley buying a bag of drugs from a sketchy dealer.

The dealer nods. Eddie dips out onto the sidewalk while the dealer goes the other way.

Eddie's hustling down the sidewalk. He is practically hopping with glee as he pulls out his phone and makes a call.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - SAME

Still the awkward silence.

Before either of them can speak, Ricardo's phone rings. He reaches into his pocket and pulls it out.

RICARDO
(into phone)
Hello?

INTERCUT BETWEEN THE TWO BROTHERS

EDDIE
Dude! Great news.

RICARDO
What?

EDDIE
You got your UFC spot back for the card. The dude tore his Achilles or some shit during practice.

Ricardo's eyes go wide.

RICARDO
Really?

Maria looks over and stands up.

EDDIE
Yeah, man. Get hyped!

RICARDO
That's... that's great.

EDDIE
Dude! I thought you'd be through the fucking roof! You okay there, bro?

RICARDO

Yeah. I'm fine. Just... stunned. Say thanks to Paul for me.

EDDIE

Oh I definitely will. We gotta amp it up in the gym! I'm gonna call Bobby! Woo! Yeah, boy!

RICARDO

Bye, Eddie.

EDDIE

Bye.

Ricardo hangs up and looks to the hall. Maria is standing there. She knows this is end. This seals it.

She lifts her fists and poses weakly.

MARIA

You got this, Rocket Rodriguez.

He smiles thankfully at her thought he knows she's hurting.

INT. GYM - DAY

Ricardo furiously punches the punching bag. He swiftly moves his feet laterally, throwing in some kicks to his routine.

Bobby watches and encourages him. Jason is quietly next to him.

BOBBY

There he is!

Ricardo throws one more MASSIVE hit and stops, breathing very hard. Jason tosses him some water.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

WE gotta take you to the edge, kid. Push you further than you've been pushed before. Film, training, strategy. All of it.

RICARDO

This is beyond anything we've done. You ever trained a UFC fighter before, coach?

BOBBY

MMA is MMA, boy. Don't you doubt me now! I've been around twenty years. And on top of that, you're my prodigy. I never known no one with your kind of raw talent. We train. Simple as that! Put that water down and hit that shit! Now!

Ricardo tosses the bottle back to Jason and whips around spin-kicking the bag -- WHAM!

BEGIN TRAINING SEQUENCE:

INT. BOBBY'S OFFICE - DAY

Bobby and Ricardo stare at a computer screen.

They're watching a WWE match with HERCULES SMITH (early 30s) extremely buff and toned, much bigger than Ricardo.

They don't even seem like they should be in the same weight class.

BOBBY

Look at his speed. Quickness. Tendencies.

RICARDO

(skeptical)
It's all scripted though.

BOBBY

Just trust me on this.

RICARDO

Goddamn, he's so big.

BOBBY

You're taller. He's just got a lot of muscle. You're much leaner, much quicker and more elusive. But, yeah, he's got the strength advantage on you.

RICARDO

So I should probably try taking things to the ground then.

BOBBY

It depends. You've got one helluva punch. If you can wear him out I think you can take him standing up.

RICARDO

It's not worth the risk is it though? I mean he's still a wrestler, he must have some ground game.

BOBBY

It's all flashy and glorified. I don't trust these WWE fighter's actual ground game. They don't spend hours on end practicing their ground skills. They practice their fancy stunt.

RICARDO

But if he gets top position, he'll crush me. I can't overturn him.

BOBBY

(contemplating)

We gotta get you a sparring partner.

Hercules slams his opponent to the ground.

INT. GYM - DAY

In the practice octagon, Ricardo trade's punches with a SPARRING PARTNER who resembles a similar build to Hercules Smith.

BOBBY

Take him to the ground!

Ricardo tries tackling his sparring partner who pushes him aside like he's a feather.

Bobby laughs in the background.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Go lower on the legs.

Ricardo complies, undercutting his sparring partner.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Mount! Mount!

Ricardo gains top position on his sparring partner.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

There ya go! There ya go!

Ricardo starts unleashing hammer punches.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Late at night, Ricardo stays up watching incredibly old Hercules Smith UFC fights. The quality is video is poor.

ON SCREEN: Hercules Smith puts his opponent in a vicious guillotine. Ricardo winces.

INT. GYM - DAY

Jason punches Ricardo in the stomach as he does some sit-ups, raising a medicine ball above his head as he crunches up.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ricardo sizzles a steak on the stove. A gallon of water rests on the counter beside him.

INT. GYM - DAY

In the practice octagon, Ricardo moves his feet at lightning speed, eluding punches from the sparring partner.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo browses on his laptop. UFC articles with headlines about him. **Ricky The Rocket Rodriguez: The New Kid on the Block.**

INT. YENNY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Ricardo and Eddie sit quietly as Yenny peacefully sleeps in her bed.

END MONTAGE

INT. GYM - DAY

Ricardo practices on a punching bag. Jason is nearby.

A REPORTING CREW comprised of a PRODUCER, MERRITT WEAVER (Female, 20s), CAMERAMAN, and BOOM OPERATOR walk in.

All eyes turn to them. Bobby notices them and turns shaking his head--

BOBBY
Hey, no, no, no. Take it outside,
fellas. No interviews.

PRODUCER
Are you the legendary Bobby Samuels?

BOBBY
Legend? Fuck off.

PRODUCER
We would just like a few words with
Ricky.

BOBBY
His name is Ricardo.

PRODUCER
Would it be okay if we ask him a few
questions?

Ricardo approaches them.

RICARDO
It's fine coach. I can handle them.

Bobby eyes them and then nods.

BOBBY
(to Ricardo)
Just don't say anything stupid.

RICARDO
You know me better than that.

Bobby pats Ricardo on the shoulder and steps aside. The cameraman, boom operator and interviewer all get set up.

Ricardo waits patiently as the cameraman focuses.

PRODUCER
We all good?

CAMERAMAN
Good.

BOOM OPERATOR

Good.

PRODUCER

You ready, Merritt?

Merritt gives a thumb up.

CAMERAMAN

Rolling.

Merritt stands besides Ricardo.

PRODUCER

Go in five, four, three.

He finishes silently, Two. One. Merritt puts on a smile.

MERRITT

(to camera)

Merritt Weaver for FOX Sports News.
I'm here with Ricky the Rocket
Rodriguez.

(to Ricardo)

Ricky, in a few short weeks you will
participate in your first ever UFC
match against the notorious Hercules
Smith who is making his jump from WWE
to MMA. How do you feel being a part
of arguably the most popular combat
sport in the world at the moment
about to fight in one of the most
high profile matches to date?

RICARDO

It's an honor. I'm glad to have the
opportunity.

MERRITT

Do you feel any added pressure having
to fight against one of the most
prominent and iconic figures in the
fighting world?

Ricardo shrugs.

RICARDO

We're all one in the ring. I'm just
going to do my thing. He's going to
do his. We'll see what happens.

MERRITT

How confident are you coming into this fight?

RICARDO

I'm preparing as hard as I can. I'm sure he's doing the same. That's all I can do on my end.

MERRITT

A lot of people don't quite know who you are. What are a few things you want to tell the people about Ricky Rodriguez before your big fight?

RICARDO

Well, I like to be called Ricardo. Not Ricky, and I'm doing this for my mom. She's really sick right now. God has blessed me with this opportunity and skill to be able to literally fight for my mother's life.

MERRITT

That's incredible. Thank you for taking a moment from your training for us, Ricardo.

(to camera)

I'm Merritt Weaver from Fox Sports here with the humble Ricky Rodriguez just weeks before the biggest fight of his career. That's all from San Antonio, we'll see you at the big fight at the T-Mobile arena in Las Vegas in just three short weeks.

Merritt smiles for a few more seconds as the cameraman stops recording.

CAMERAMAN

Clear.

PRODUCER

That's a wrap.

MERRITT

(shaking hands)

Thanks, Ricardo.

RICARDO

(annoyed)

You called me Ricky in the end.

MERRITT

I'm sorry. I really am, but it was a direct request from Rory Dean. He wants you to be Ricky. Catchier.

RICARDO

I hate it.

MERRITT

(genuine)

I'm sorry, man.

RICARDO

(resigned)

Whatever.

He turns to return to the bag. Merritt clears her throat.

MERRITT

Hey... uh... Do you mind if I stick around. Watch you train?

Ricardo looks at her. Considers it. Merritt smiles timidly

RICARDO

Sure. Just stay out of the way.

MERRITT

Hey, Cody. Am I done for the day?

PRODUCER

Yeah.

MERRITT

Okay. I'll catch you at the hotel later, then? I'm going to hang around here some more.

PRODUCER

Sounds good.

The producer, cameraman, and boom operator leave. Merritt is all smiles. She's like a little kid.

MERRITT

Thanks, man. Hey, maybe we can grab something to eat after. It's on me.

RICARDO

I can't say no to that. Wait... off the record, right?

Merritt laughs then nods.

MERRITT

Yes... off the record.

The two smile at each other.

BOBBY

Alright, Ricardo. Fun time's over.
Can we get back to work here?

RICARDO

(to Merritt)

I gotta go.

Ricardo turns and runs towards the practice octagon. Merritt stares at him as he begins practicing with the sparring partner.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Ricardo and Merritt eat across each other. Ricardo is shoveling his food while Merritt is taking her time and talking Ricardo's ear off.

MERRITT

And if you win, all eyes will be on you. It's going to be insane.

RICARDO

I'm done after this fight.

MERRITT

I heard you said that after your last fight.

RICARDO

My mother had some complications in her surgery. I'm only fighting for the money. I'm going to quit when I can.

MERRITT

(unsure)

I see...

RICARDO

What?

MERRITT

It's Rory. He's... he's a salesman. He's going to hype you up.

RICARDO

That's fine.

MERRITT

He'll want you to be a part of it.

Ricardo shrugs.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

I'm trying to warn you here, Ricardo.
It's not just a sport, it's a
business. Rory has to sell tickets
and pay-per views.

RICARDO

I can handle myself.

Ricardo keeps eating. Merritt watches him a moment and sighs.
Merritt knows what sort of world Ricardo is entering...

INT. MINIVAN - DAY

Eddie drives. Ricardo rests in the passenger seat reading one
of his old textbooks.

EDDIE

You should get a twitter.

RICARDO

What? Why?

EDDIE

You're basically famous, bro. You
have to start doing famous people
things. Like tweeting jokes and shit.

RICARDO

Don't get ahead of yourself, Eddie.
I'm fighting the famous guy. No one
remembers Peter McNeeley.

EDDIE

Who?

RICARDO

Exactly.

EDDIE

Look, you're the next big thing.

RICARDO

You know we're done after this.

EDDIE
You say that every damn time.

RICARDO
Forreal this time bro.

EDDIE
We'll see.

RICARDO
No. We won't see. This is it.

EDDIE
Alright man.

The car falls quiet.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
So how's that reporter? Merritt or
whatever?

RICARDO
Fine.

EDDIE
Are you guys... ya know?

RICARDO
What?

EDDIE
Fucking?

RICARDO
What! No!

EDDIE
Damn bro. Can I take her then?

RICARDO
(smirking)
I'm not sure she'd fall for your ugly
ass.

EDDIE
Ho ho! I see how it is! But if you
break her heart, she will. I always
pick up your scraps.

RICARDO
You just pick up scraps in general.

EDDIE
OH! Ow! Ow! Fucking asshole.

The two brothers laugh and begin slap fighting while Eddie keeps one hand on the wheel.

EXT. LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

The minivan approaches the beautiful neon skyline of Las Vegas. It makes an exit to turn onto the strip.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A moderately sized hotel room. Not small but not suite sized.

Eddie and Ricardo enter with all their luggage. Eddie immediately walks to the large window and is mesmerized by the lights and skyline.

EDDIE
Look at this view, bro.

Ricardo tosses his luggage aside and walks up next to his brother, also mesmerized by the view.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Great isn't it?

RICARDO
Yeah.

Eddie turns from the window and head for the door.

EDDIE
Well I'm gonna go find some whores.

RICARDO
(sotto)
Jesus Christ.
(calling after him)
Don't wake me up.

EXT. VEGAS STRIP - DAY

Ricardo walks down the street, looking around the people and buildings. He stops to take a picture.

INT. CORPORATE BUILDING - DAY

Eddie walks into a well polished, contemporary office building. A RECEPTIONIST immediately notices him.

RECEPTIONIST

Ah, Mister Rodriguez. Rory has been expecting you. I'll let him know you are here. Take a seat. It shouldn't be too long.

Ricardo politely nods and takes a seat. He looks around at the polished decor.

Rory walks out. Ricardo stands up as they shake hands.

RORY

Ricky!!! How's it goin' my man? Great to finally meet you in person.

RICARDO

Nice to meet you too, sir.

RORY

Please, it's Rory. Enough of that sir junk. Come into my office. Let's have a little talk.

INT. RORY'S OFFICE - DAY

PAUL (40s) is already seated in a chair as Ricardo and Rory walk in. He stands up to greet Ricardo.

PAUL

Hey, Ricardo.

RICARDO

Hey Paul. I haven't seen your face in forever. Thanks for everything you've done for us. Seriously, thank you.

PAUL

My pleasure.

RORY

Take a seat Ricky.

RICARDO

I've told you before, but I actually prefer Ricardo, not Ricky.

RORY

You gotta get used to Ricky. It's a name that'll sell.

RICARDO

I--

PAUL

Whatever you say, Rory.

Ricardo shoots Paul a glare.

RORY

Fantastic. Now, let's just go over some particulars and schedule for the next couple days just so you can prepare for what's going happen. I wouldn't want you to be caught off guard.

Rory gives Ricardo a smile who nods.

INT. RICARDO'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Ricardo crashes on the sofa, exhausted. He switches on the TV and changes the channel past ESPN to a lifetime movie.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

The place is absolutely packed with reporters. A loud buzz reverberates throughout the room. Ricardo is on the right side of the long table with his brother, Bobby, and Jason.

On the other side of the table is HERCULES SMITH, an absolute BEAST of a man.

His arms and pecs bulge through his tight shirt. It is hard to see how he and Ricardo could be in the same weight category.

Hercules is surrounded by his team of TRAINERS and COACHES.

REPORTER

Ricky, how are you going to make up for the size difference between you and Hercules?

RICARDO

I'm just going to fight my fight. I'm confident in my ability.

REPORTER

Hercules?

HERCULES

I'm going to pounce this puny excuse
for a fighter.

A buzz throughout the press. Cameras click.

HERCULES (CONT'D)

He's weak. He's small. He's no match.

REPORTER

Ricardo, do you want to respond?

RICARDO

No comment.

Hercules stands up.

HERCULES

You don't want none of this!

Hercules starts pounding his chest like a gorilla.

HERCULES (CONT'D)

I'll stomp you! I'll crush you!

BOBBY

(in Ricardo's ear)

Leave it for the ring, buddy.

Hercules points at Ricardo's table.

HERCULES

You'll get the beat down you deserve.

Hercules turns to the masses.

HERCULES (CONT'D)

I'm going to crush him like a snail.
Tomorrow night, this bottle rocket
ain't going nowhere!

Hercules roars, and the cameras snap wildly.

INT. YENNY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Yenny watches the press conference from her iPad with a mean
look in her eyes as a NURSE adjusts her IV.

YENNY
What a horrible man.

NURSE
We'll be rooting for your son, Yenny.

YENNY
He'll win... I know it.

INT. RICARDO'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo crashes on the couch. Eddie grabs two beers from the fridge.

EDDIE
Jesus Christ. That fucking guy.

RICARDO
Yeah. No shit.

EDDIE
You should've beaten the shit outta
him there.

Eddie hands Ricardo a beer.

RICARDO
Do you ever listen to anything Bobby
has to say?

Eddie shrugs and drinks the beer himself, now holding two.

RICARDO (CONT'D)
Tomorrow man. C'mon.

EDDIE
Alright bro. Just offering.

Ricardo stands up.

RICARDO
I'm gonna get an early night.

EDDIE
You're not gonna call mom?

RICARDO
I'll do it after the fight tomorrow.
Under less intense circumstances.

Ricardo walks over to his bed.

EDDIE
I'm gonna head out. I'll try not to
wake you.

Eddie grabs his hotel room key then leaves. Ricardo takes a deep breath then closes his eyes.

CUT TO BLACK.

The EPIC MUSIC from the UFC hype videos starts playing.

INSERT HYPE VIDEO: VARIOUS DRAMATIC SHOTS OF HERCULES AND RICARDO TRAINING. SWEAT DRIPPING FROM THEIR FACES. JUMP ROPING.

DRAMATIC NARRATOR (V.O.)
The young gun. Ricky Rodriguez.
Coming from obscurity. Looking to
make a name for himself. And there is
no better place to do it than here
against this veteran opponent.
Hercules Smith.

INSERT SHOT OF HERCULES FROM THE PRESS CONFERENCE.

HERCULES
I'm going to crush him like a snail!

DRAMATIC NARRATOR (V.O.)
Tensions are running high in the
battle between brute force and
deceptive strength.

INSERT SHOTS OF HERCULES FROM PREVIOUS UFC FIGHTS KNOCKING OPPONENTS OUT WITH ONE PUNCH.

INSERT SHOTS OF RICARDO GOING BERSERK ON SUN YANG.

DRAMATIC NARRATOR (V.O.)
Will we see a new face of the sport?
Or will we see an epic comeback for
the former champ? Find out next on
Hercules versus Rodriguez.

INT. YENNY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Yenny watches on her iPad. A YOUNG NURSE walks in with a tray.

YOUNG NURSE
How long until the fight?

The Young Nurse rests the tray on a table and hands Yenny some pills and water.

YENNY

Soon.

Yenny takes the pills and swallows.

YOUNG NURSE

I'll be right back with your food.

YENNY

Thank you.

The Young Nurse leaves. Yenny takes a laboring breath then clutches her chest. She coughs, wincing as she does.

Yenny groans. She loses her grip on the iPad. She reaches over and presses a button, calling for the nurse.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo paces around the locker room. Jason, Bobby and Eddie surround him.

BOBBY

You got the game plan down. Just tire him out. Keep the hands up. He's got a helluva punch. But you got the leverage. Use it.

Ricardo punches the air, warming up.

EDDIE

You got this bro. It's all you.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A loud state of panic. DOCTORS and NURSES surround Yenny as her heartbeat skyrockets.

Her breaths become short and labored. A nurse puts an oxygen mask over her face.

But it's too late. The heart monitor flatlines as Yenny's body comes to rest.

DOCTOR

Crash cart!

A nurse grabs the defibrillator from the wall and hands it to the doctor who begins setting it up.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo, Eddie, Jason and Bobby stand in a circle holding hands and praying.

An EVENT MANAGER walks in.

EVENT MANAGER

Two minutes guys. I'll be standing at the end of the hall.

Bobby nods. Eddie puts a hand on Ricardo's neck and looks him in the eyes.

EDDIE

You ready, little bro?

Ricardo nods. Bobby pats Ricardo on the back.

BOBBY

Let's get it.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

The doctors and nurses tower over Yenny.

DOCTOR

Clear!

He presses down on the defibrillator as the shock charge runs through Yenny's lifeless body.

No response.

He tries again...

And again...

The doctor stares, sorrowfully. They step back.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Time of death, nine forty-seven PM.
Julie, notify the family.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo stands with his team at the entrance to the locker room. The jeers from the arena are deafening. The event manager stands close, his headset on.

Eddie's phone ring. Eddie fumbles as he pulls it out of his pocket.

BOBBY

I told you to turn that shit off.

EDDIE

Shit. Hold on.

(loud)

Hello!

Eddie covers his open ear to drown out the sound.

EVENT MANAGER

Queue music.

Eddie's face falls, clearly receiving news about his mother.

A CLASSIC ROCK SONG begins playing.

Two CAMERAMEN walk in. One makes his way in front of Ricardo and points the camera straight in his face. The other lags back and tracks him from behind.

EVENT MANAGER (CONT'D)

Go.

Ricardo walks out, lightly jumping as he makes his way--

INT. THE ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Eddie, shook, catches up behind them. He starts rubbing Ricardo's shoulders.

EDDIE

It's all you, little brother. You got this.

Ricardo steps inside the RING and puts his hands in the air. The crowd CHEERS, with a few BOOS displaced here and there. Ricardo does some footwork warm ups inside the octagon as--

GANGSTER RAP MUSIC blasts through the speaker system as Hercules walks through the arena.

The crowd absolutely adores him. They go wild. He raises his hands in the air and the crowd gets even louder.

Hercules acknowledges the crowd much more than Ricardo did as he makes his way inside the octagon.

The UFC PROMOTER walks on. He grabs a mic.

PROMOTER

Ladiesssss annnnnd genltelmennnn.
It's tiiiime for one of the most
anticipated events of the evening...
Fighting out of the blue corner, from
San Antonio, Texas. Standing at five-
foot-eight inches tall and weighing
in at one hundred and forty-five
pounds. With a record of seventeen
wins, zero loses, zero draws... Ricky
"The Rocket" Roooooodriguez.

The crowd cheers one more time.

PROMOTER (CONT'D)

And out of the red corner. Hailing
from Los Angeles, California.
Standing at five-foot-eleven inches
tall and weighing in at one hundred
and fifty-four pounds. A record of
twenty-one and four. Herculessssss
Smitthhhhhhhhhhh.

The crowd cheers louder.

PROMOTER (CONT'D)

Our referee for the night is Lance
Richardson.

LANCE RICHARDSON walks to the center of the ring.

PROMOTER (CONT'D)

Fighters make your way to the middle
of the ring.

Hercules and Ricardo comply.

LANCE

You both know the rules. No funny
business. I want a clean fight. You
can bump gloves if you want.

Hercules doesn't. He turns and walks to his corner.

LANCE (CONT'D)
Good luck, fighters.

Ricardo walks back to his corner. He punches the air.

JASON
You got this, Rocket!

BOBBY
Stick to the game plan.

Ricardo stares at his brother.

RICARDO
For mom.

Eddie's face twitches but he tries to keep upbeat.

EDDIE
... For mom.

Ricardo turns, and the SOUND drowns away. The world is the octagon, and all that exists in the ring is the fight...

DING!

Ricardo turns around, he stares at Hercules across the octagon. The crowd cheers Hercules' name.

Ricardo, quick on his feet, dances, a safe distance away from Hercules who pumps his fists together, staring Ricardo down with a menacing stare. They're both sizing each other up.

Hercules charges at Ricardo first, trying to wrap him around by the waist, but Ricardo dodges left as Hercules stumbles forward.

Ricardo's already quick foot speed gets even faster as he keeps moving from side to side continuing to look up at Hercules, almost daring him to attack.

Hercules moves forward and attempts a jab which is blocked. Ricardo strikes Hercules in the leg with a kick.

Hercules jabs, Ricardo dodges again and again.

Hercules stares down Ricardo.

HERCULES
C'mon. Pussy.

Ricardo doesn't take the bait. The crowd grows antsy as neither man is being aggressive.

Hercules charges again, like a gorilla. Ricardo tries to laterally get out the way but Hercules gets a grip and tackles Ricardo to the ground.

The crowd goes crazy.

Hercules tries to gain top position but Ricardo manages to squirm and untangle his limbs out of Hercules' huge grasp.

BOBBY

Roll outta there!

Hercules attempts to hammer punch Ricardo in the back of the head. Ricardo finally manages to escape as he rolls onto his feet.

Ricardo slams his fist together.

RICARDO

Let's go.

Ricardo moves forward and kicks Hercules in the leg again.

BOBBY

Wear him out!

HERCULES' COACH

Ground and pound! Ground and pound!

BOBBY

Attack the body!

Ricardo kicks Hercules again, this time higher in the side. Hercules manages to mostly block the kick.

Hercules tries a kick of his own but it's blocked. Ricardo immediately counters with a jab. Hercules moves back just in time.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Use your speed!

HERCULES' COACH

Power him!

Hercules throws a punch which is blocked and Ricardo quickly counters with a jab which lands.

Hercules' head jerks back slightly. Hercules grunts like an animal.

He tries to tackle Ricardo again but Ricardo throws him back.

HERCULES

C'mon, momma's boy! You gotta save her, ya little bitch! She gonna curl up and croak if you don't take me down. Come on now!

Hercules taunts Ricardo, the crowd likes it.

BOBBY (O.S.)

Stay focused! Wear him out!

Ricardo's eyes narrow, he locks into Hercules, plotting his move.

But just as he's about to pounce, Hercules quickly moves inside and stuns Ricardo with a jab to the face.

Ricardo stumbles back, the crowd rises in enthusiasm.

As Ricardo tries to regain his footing, Hercules is already pouncing on him, unleashing punches to the body and face.

Ricardo's quickness ends up blocking most of the blows.

Hercules attempts a spinning kick which is masterfully blocked by Ricardo who then uses the opportunity to throw an off hand jab, striking Hercules straight in the nose.

Hercules' nose starts bleeding. He smiles.

Ricardo is back to shuffling his feet like a dancer. He's running circles around Hercules, keeping a safe distance away from any attack.

Blood dripping from Hercules' nose, he's losing steam.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Hold it! Hold it!

Ricardo's eyes narrow once more. He's locked in.

He takes two big steps forward and flies into Hercules with a flying knee that strikes Hercules right in the solar, knocking the wind out of him.

Ricardo attacks the weakened Hercules - unloads punches, trying to land one on the right temple, but Hercules does a good job of blocking.

Ricardo kicks out again with his right leg, pushing Hercules back - round house kick with his left leg, hitting Hercules straight on the left side of the head.

WHAM! The lights go out on Hercules. He hits the mat like a ton of bricks - out fucking cold.

Lance, the referee, immediately jumps in and waves his hands.

The crowd goes INSANE.

Ricardo raises his hands, relieved.

Hercules' people rush to him. Bloodied in the face, he struggles to stand.

Bobby and Jason hurry into the octagon to celebrate with Ricardo. Eddie lags behind.

Hercules and his team make his way lateral to Ricardo as the Referee stands between them, grabbing each of the fighter's wrist.

PROMOTER

Ladies and gentleman, referee Lance Richardson has called for a stop to this contest at two minutes and fourteen seconds of round number one. Declaring the winner, by knockout, Rrrrrickkkkyyyyyy Rrrrrrodrrrruigezzz!

The Referee raises Ricardo's arm as the crowd continues to cheer.

The Referee releases his grip as a BUFF ANNOUNCER makes his way to Ricardo. A CAMERAMAN gets up close to them.

BUFF ANNOUNCER

(shouting)

Ricky, you really wore him down there. How important was it for you to keep this fight standing?

RICARDO

(winded)

Yeah man, it was critical. I mean, obviously Hercules is great at submissions. He's a big, strong dude. But, you know, I just played my game and it worked out. Shout out to my coach Bobby. Greatest in the world. Love you my man.

BUFF ANNOUNCER

Obviously this must be a moving victory for you. You've been very
(MORE)

BUFF ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
open about your mother's health and
how you're just fighting for her.

Ricardo begins tearing up.

Hanging a bit behind Ricardo is Eddie and the team. Eddie leans into Bobby.

 EDDIE
I'm gonna head back to the locker
room. I'll see you in there.

 BOBBY
You okay?

Eddie walks off.

 RICARDO
Yeah. I mean... this one's for you
mom. The best. I know how much you
love to watch me fight, I do it for
you. And you're gonna get healthy. I
hope ya'll pray for her health. She's
fighting. She's fighting hard, better
than anybody who's ever stepped
inside here has. God is good and I
know you'll get healthy soon, mom.
I'm coming back home for ya.

 BUFF ANNOUNCER
Thanks a lot, Ricky. Enjoy the
victory. We're all praying for your
mother.

 RICARDO
Thanks, man.

The Buff Announcer pats Ricardo on the back as he walks off.

Ricardo starts walking off with Bobby and Jason. He puts his arms around them, lovingly. The CROWD is still going nuts.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie stands against a wall in a lonely corner. He's on the verge of tears, but tries to keep himself together until. He has a JOINT in his lips, and he goes to light it, but instead-

He bursts into a rage. YELLING and smashing his forearm against the wall.

RICARDO

Eddie?

Eddie turns around to see Bobby, Jason, and Ricardo, who looks at him, concerned.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

We did it bro. It's over.

Eddie shakes his head.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

What's goin' on?

Eddie opens his mouth twice to speak, but no words come out.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

You're freaking me out here.

EDDIE

I... I got a call. Before the fight.

RICARDO

(realizing)

A call. Eddie. What call?

Eddie shakes his head.

EDDIE

I... I can't.

Ricardo grabs Eddie by the collar and pushes him against the wall.

RICARDO

What fucking call!? Fucking tell me!

Ricardo lets go of Eddie and steps back. He takes a breath then turns the other way.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

Say it. I have to hear it from you.
Fucking say it.

EDDIE

(sobbing)

I can't.

RICARDO

Say it.

EDDIE

Don't make me do--

RICARDO

SAY IT!

EDDIE

Mom! She fucking... she's dead.

Bobby and Jason stay against the wall, stunned. Ricardo paces like an animal.

RICARDO

When?

EDDIE

I dunno. I got the call before the fight.

RICARDO

Why didn't you tell me?

EDDIE

Ricardo...

RICARDO

Why didn't you fucking tell me?

EDDIE

I didn't wanna distract you from--

RICARDO

Who cares about the fucking fight?

EDDIE

C'mon, bro. Don't do this. We're in this together, right?

RICARDO

Why didn't you tell me before the fight? I deserved to know.

EDDIE

Of course you do.

RICARDO

Then why didn't you fucking tell me!?

EDDIE

I didn't wanna mess with your head!
You were in a zone!

Ricardo waves Eddie off.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Just... you have to understand where I'm coming from, man. I couldn't do that to you.

RICARDO

She was fucking dead the entire time I was giving that stupid fucking interview. "God is good. Pray for her." Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

BOBBY

Ricardo...

RICARDO

Get the fuck outta here.

Bobby steps back. He looks at Ricardo but knows there's nothing he can do. He and Jason step into the hall. Eddie slowly nods.

EDDIE

Just... I'll give you some space... lemme know when you wanna talk.

Eddie walks off.

Ricardo collapses to the floor.

INT. ENTRANCE OF LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eddie, solemn, head down, opens the door, when Merritt, immediately bumps into him.

They both flinch back in surprise.

MERRITT

Oh. Sorry there.

EDDIE

It's okay.

Eddie walks past. Merritt looks back, recognizing, and holds the door open.

MERRITT

Hey.

Eddie keeps walking.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Hey!

Eddie stops, and looks back.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
You're Eddie, right? Ricardo's
brother.

EDDIE
Yeah.

MERRITT
I'm Merritt. Ricardo might have told
you about--

EDDIE
Oh. Yeah. Right. Nice to meet you.

MERRITT
Yeah... you too.

EDDIE
Take it easy on Ricardo.

MERRITT
Easy?

Eddie turns back around and walks off.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
Good win out there!

Merritt takes an uncertain moment before she walks further
into the locker room.

She turns a corner, then pauses... noticing the sound of soft
weeping.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She turns another corner to spot Ricardo, still on the floor,
his head buried in his arm.

MERRITT
Ricardo?

Ricardo looks up.

RICARDO
What're you doing here?

MERRITT
I'm still a reporter. You okay?

RICARDO
Yeah... fine.

MERRITT
You sure? You--

RICARDO
Just leave. Please.

MERRITT
We can talk about things, you know.

RICARDO
No. We can't.

MERRITT
Ricardo--

RICARDO
Now's not the time, Merritt!

MERRITT
I'm not trying to interview you.
Everything's off the record, I--

RICARDO
For fuck's sake.

Ricardo stares at Merritt with his wet eyes. He stands up.

MERRITT
Ricardo...

Ricardo walks off, Merritt doesn't follow.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
Ricardo, wait.

No response. Merritt stands there alone, the echoes of the arena still spill down the corridor.

INT. RICARDO'S MINIVAN - DAY

It's dead silent. Eddie drives, as Ricardo blankly stares out the window, resting his head on the glass. Eddie adjusts his grip on the steering wheel anxiously, then clears his throat.

EDDIE
We have to talk.

No response.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Ricardo, bro, don't do this to me. We have to talk. We gotta figure out, you know, what's next. What we do moving forward.

RICARDO

What's there to move forward with? I'll just use the money to go back to school, get an actual career. I'm done with this shit.

EDDIE

My phone was going crazy yesterday. Paul was getting endorsement and advertisement requests left and right.

RICARDO

No.

EDDIE

Spalding. Fucking Reebok. You're a sensation now.

RICARDO

Tell them to fuck off.

EDDIE

I think you're making a big mistake here.

RICARDO

Like you're the king of making the right decision.

EDDIE

You have to consider it.

RICARDO

For what? For you? So you can freeload while I get the shit beaten outta me once a month and sweat my ass off every day in the gym?

EDDIE

Hey, I work for you, man. Who gave you your first fights, huh? Who got you an agent? You like to think all I do is just sit on my ass all day, but guess what? I put in work too.

RICARDO

Any junkie off the street could do what you do.

EDDIE

So you calling me a junkie now?

RICARDO

Yeah, and I'm done with fucking fighting and that's it.

EDDIE

What would mom have wanted?

RICARDO

Don't you dare use her as an excuse to get what you want. You think she wanted YOU using?

EDDIE (CONT'D)

She loved watching you fight. She was proud of you being a fighter. And don't act like you don't like it too!

RICARDO

You're a fucking asshole.

EDDIE

Think about your legacy. Her legacy. You can be one of the greats!

RICARDO

It was for her. Not for me.

EDDIE

You're already on the right path. You'll be the face of the sport in no time. You'll have the house, the cars the--

RICARDO

You know I don't care about that.

EDDIE

--you can retire when your thirty, already set for life, and then go off and do you. You can go to college then. Who gives a shit.

Ricardo doesn't respond.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

You have a golden opportunity here, little bro. I don't want you to waste it.

Ricardo stares out the window, pondering. They drive in SILENCE for some time. Finally--

RICARDO
What are we going to do about the funeral?

EDDIE
I'll handle all of that. Don't worry. Let me do it.

RICARDO
Let you handle it?

EDDIE
(challenging)
Yeah.

RICARDO
... I'll think about it.

Eddie looks at his brother to start arguing again and sees that Ricardo was actually attempting, weakly, to be funny. Eddie smiles weakly back.

EDDIE
Thanks, bro. It means a lot. Really.

RICARDO
Yeah.

They drive on into the day...

EXT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

It's a cool night. The sky is clear, stars filling the void above. Ricardo exits the minivan with his bags.

EDDIE
You sure you don't wanna come?

RICARDO
Yeah... I'm sure.

EDDIE
Alright, bro. Ice up.

Ricardo forces a grin then waves as Eddie drives off.

Ricardo takes a deep breath of the night. He holds the breath and slowly lets it out. He stares up at the sky.

The stars twinkle at him.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ricardo crashes on the couch. He places an ice pack on his face and leans back, closing his eyes.

His phone BUZZES. Ricardo groans.

He slowly and groggily reaches out for the buzzing device, finally grabbing it. He answers the call.

RICARDO

Hello.

RORY (V.O.)

Riccckkkyy! My man! It's Rory. Great shit last night. I heard you're already back in San Antonio.

RICARDO

Yeah... something came up... I had to take care of stuff.

RORY (V.O.)

Well, that's alright. I got big things planned for you, Ricky, big--

RICARDO

Hey, Rory, can we talk about this some other time, or maybe send the message to Paul.

RORY (V.O.)

One win on the big stage and you think you're a hot shot, huh?

RICARDO

No, no, it's not that, it's--

RORY (V.O.)

Ahh, I'm just messin' with ya. Sure thing, pal. Just lemme know whenever you wanna talk. The future's bright kid. Get some shades, speaking of which, we're actually close to closing a deal with Oakley, you might wanna get in on that.

RICARDO

I'll give you a call later.

RORY (V.O.)

Right, go through my secretary. Rest up, Ricky. Talk to you soon.

Ricardo hangs up, then exhales and closes his eyes again.

INT. MORGUE - DAY

Eddie stands alone in the cold room. He is over the pale body of her mother. He stares... and stares and stares.

EDDIE

(softly)

I...

Eddie chuckles.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

I know I'm just talkin' to myself here but... I dunno. You... you kept us together and... and I hope you weren't disappointed in me. I know I didn't turn out like Ricardo but... I just... I hope I didn't disappoint you. I'm trying. I'm trying to be a good brother. And I'm trying to stay clean... I'm cutting back. Really... You were all we had and... we'll miss you. We really will.

Eddie sighs. His phone RINGS.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Shit.

Eddie fumbles in his pockets as he pulls out his phone. He looks at the display.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ricardo's crashed on the couch. His ice pack, which has lost all structure, is still flopped on his face. His eyes flutter open as his phone buzzes from under his shoulder.

He reaches for it then checks his home screen. A barrage of text messages and missed calls from Eddie. The most recent one reading: **Call me. ASAP.**

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Paul, looking dapper in a nice suit, sits besides Eddie and Ricardo wearing cheap suits. Piles of papers rest in front of them. Two clean shaved BUSINESSMEN sit across from them.

RICARDO

You sure we shouldn't get a lawyer to look this over?

PAUL

I've read it all through. It's good.

BUSINESSMAN 1

No funny business here. Just a simple guarantee plus bonus deal. Lasts for one year.

PAUL

You should have a championship match up by then as well. If you stay undefeated.

RICARDO

Fifty thousand guaranteed?

PAUL

Guaranteed.

RICARDO

Two hundred thousand if I stay undefeated?

Paul nods.

Ricardo looks at Eddie then slowly nods.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

Yeah... okay.

One of the businessman reaches over and hands Ricardo a pen. He grabs it, then slowly clicks it.

He shuffles the contract in his hand, hesitating as the pen hovers over the signature line. He looks back at Eddie again who gives him a confirming stare then a solidifying nod.

Ricardo presses the pen down on the paper and signs.

The Businessmen smile. They reach their hands over and shake.

BUSINESSMAN 2

Looking forward to doing business.
We'll keep in touch.

EXT. DOWNTOWN OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Eddie smokes a joint as Ricardo stands against the side of the building. Eddie takes a long drag. He offers it to Ricardo, but he declines.

EDDIE

How ya holdin' up?

RICARDO

Fine... you?

EDDIE

Fine. It's... I don't know. It's hard, man. We got the funeral next week but we out here signin' contracts this week.

RICARDO

Yeah... well.

EDDIE

When you gonna get back to trainin'?

RICARDO

I dunno. Probably after the funeral.

EDDIE

Paul's working on gettin' you your next fight.

RICARDO

Already?

EDDIE

Gotta keep up with the momentum.

RICARDO

I'm tired, bro.

EDDIE

I know. I know. It's only for this year. Until you're champ.

RICARDO

I dunno, bro. I mean, all of these contracts are guaranteed, right?

EDDIE

Yeah. So what?

RICARDO

So, we'd both be set, even if I didn't fight anymore.

Eddie instantly realizes what Ricardo is insinuating.

EDDIE

Ohh. Well... I mean, that's up to you.

RICARDO

I can give you half of--

EDDIE

No, no. We agree to twenty-five. That's fair.

RICARDO

We agreed on the assumption that I was going to fight.

EDDIE

So you're not going to?

RICARDO

I haven't decided.

Eddie tosses his cigarette butt.

EDDIE

Shit, man.

Ricardo's phone buzzes. He pulls it out.

A TEXT from Merritt: **Can we meet? - Strictly Professional.**

Ricardo sighs.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Ricardo sits alone at a table. He anxiously looks around. Seconds later, Merritt rushes in and sits across Ricardo.

MERRITT

Shit. I'm so sorry I'm late.

RICARDO

It's alright--

MERRITT
My producer and then traffic and--

RICARDO
It's okay.

MERRITT
Right. Yeah.

An awkward silence.

RICARDO
You heard about my mom didn't you?

MERRITT
Yeah...

RICARDO
Who told you?

MERRITT
I--

RICARDO
Was it Eddie?

MERRITT
It--

RICARDO
(muttering)
Idiot.

MERRITT
Don't be mad. I pushed him. It wasn't
fair. I feel shitty about it.

RICARDO
Don't. It's... It's fine.

MERRITT
I'm sorry for your loss.

RICARDO
Thank you.

She looks at him. He is broken. The fire that drove him is gone. She can see he's at the end of his rope.

MERRITT
Ricardo. I want to tell your story.

He looks at her in return.

RICARDO

What if I don't want my story told?

MERRITT

It's a beautiful story. You built yourself up from nothing all for the love of family. You fought for a noble purpose, not money or fame. You have a heart like no one I've ever known. The hope it could bring others? You could do so much good.

RICARDO

Yeah... well, that's not me.

MERRITT

Who are you, Ricardo?

RICARDO

What do you mean? Who am I?

MERRITT

Where did that fire come from? That drive? Was it all for your mother? I think there's something deeper in there. I want to know it.

RICARDO

I think you're looking too deep. It was just for the money. For my mom.

MERRITT

No, I don't believe that.

RICARDO

This is extremely insensitive.

MERRITT

You could just walk away from this, but you're not. You've signed contracts. You're going to keep fighting. It was your mother before. You loved her. You fought for her, literally. What are you fighting for now?

RICARDO

Nothing. I'm retiring.

MERRITT

That's bullshit. You just signed with Spalding, blah, blah, blah and you have Adidas knocking on your door.

RICARDO

So what?

MERRITT

You're probably the most humble athlete I've ever covered. Why all this? Why now?

RICARDO

Are you a reporter or a therapist?

MERRITT

I'm just trying to gauge your motives.

RICARDO

All the motive I had went away when my mother died.

MERRITT

So why are you continuing to fight?

RICARDO

I don't know, okay? Maybe I can't think of anything better to do. Maybe I'm just lazy. Maybe I'm a pushover. Maybe I like the fame, the fortune that's right in front of me. It's hard to turn it down. Maybe I want to keep punching and kicking everything I can as hard as I can until something knocks me down. I'm fighting so I don't have to think or do anything else. When I'm fighting, there's only the octagon, and all this shit just goes away.

Merritt smiles.

MERRITT

There we go... there's that fire.

Ricardo laughs awkwardly, easing up. Thankful.

RICARDO

Thanks for this.

MERRITT

Yeah... no problem.

A WAITRESS walks up to the table.

WAITRESS

Can I get ya'll anything to drink to start off?

MERRITT

Just water.

RICARDO

Water for me too, thanks.

They look at one another a long moment. Merritt smiles. Ricardo allows a small smile in return.

INT. EDDIE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie sits on the dirty, old couch next to Holly. He smokes some weed.

He is talking lazily, a bit stunned from Ricardo's offer to split all his winnings 50/50.

EDDIE

He looks out for me, y'know? And it's weird, 'cause I'm supposed to look out for him. But, shit, half of what he makes? Shit.

HOLLY

You're gonna be rolling deep, baby. I think we need to celebrate.

EDDIE

(raising his eyebrows)

Oh yeah? What you thinking?

Eddie assumed sex, but she takes out a bag of cocaine from her purse. Eddie looks over at it.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Oh shit.

She opens it up then pours some on the table. Eddie takes another hit of his joint as she makes lines.

HOLLY

Come on, baby.

EDDIE

I dunno... I kinda gotta get clean, you know?

She snorts. Eddie stares longingly.

HOLLY
It's good shit.

Eddie hesitates.

EDDIE
Ahh. Fuck it.

She passes Eddie the rolled up bill as Eddie bends down to snort a line of coke.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

MUSIC: SOFT, PEACEFUL MUSIC PLAYS OVER THE SCENE

A relatively small gathering outside of Yenny's gravesite. Ricardo stands ahead of it, about to give a speech.

The others attending are Eddie, Jason, Bobby, Merritt, and a couple of YENNY'S SIBLINGS.

From a distance, we watch. Ricardo begins his eulogy. We do not hear it. The trees sway and the grass ripples.

EXT. CEMETERY PARKING LOT - DAY

Ricardo stands staring out at the headstones. There's a beauty in the place. Eddie walks up. He's a little more worn out - lack of sleep, access of drugs.

EDDIE
Hey, little brother. I just got a text from Paul...

RICARDO
Not now, Eddie.

EDDIE
A lot of people are interested in fighting--

RICARDO
Not now.

EDDIE
Then when? Things move fast, Ricardo. We have to be decisive.

Ricardo lowers his head and then looks at his brother.

RICARDO
You decide. I trust you.

EDDIE
What?

RICARDO
You decide.

Ricardo walks off. Eddie doesn't follow.

INT. GYM - DAY

The gym is alive with FIGHTERS training and sweating buckets.

Bags being hit, bodies hitting mats. It's a hard working environment.

Jason is helping some kids learn punching technique.

Bobby stands next to a clear HEAVYWEIGHT as he pounds a punching bag.

BOBBY
Footwork... footwork.

The Heavyweight bounces lighter on his feet.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Good... good.

The door creaks open. Jason looks over as Ricardo walks in with a bag and bottle. He's ready to train.

JASON
(calling over)
Bob.

BOBBY
(turning, seeing
Ricardo)
Ayy. Will you look who it is.

RICARDO
Hey coach.

BOBBY
(to the Heavyweight)
Take five, champ.

HEAVYWEIGHT
Yes, coach.

The Heavyweight, sweating profusely, grabs a towel and wipes down. Bobby makes his way to Ricardo.

BOBBY
How's the recovery goin'?

RICARDO
Good. Good, I feel good.

BOBBY
Good enough to get back at it?

RICARDO
Ready.

Bobby grins. He's ready too - been ready.

BOBBY
That's what I like to hear, champ! My man! Any idea who you'll be fighting next?

RICARDO
Not yet.

BOBBY
(kindly)
Ricardo, I know how shitty it's been. Believe me, I know. But you gotta use that pain and anger and everything ya got, and put it all out there in the ring. I want you to use that fire ya got in you.

RICARDO
I've been hearing that a lot lately. Thanks, coach.

BOBBY
You betcha. Get taped up, will ya now?

RICARDO
Yes coach.

BOBBY
Jason, clear out the ring. I'm gonna be using it.

Jason grins. Bobby stands proud and ready to rock and roll.

INT. ORGANIC GROCERY STORE - DAY

Eddie, in sunglasses looking haggard, places his groceries on the slide.

Various organic meat products along with a variety of fruit and veggies with a couple kegs of weigh protein. The diet of a fighter.

Eddie's phone buzzes in his pocket.

He takes it out and answers as the CASHIER begins swiping the items.

EDDIE

Hey. Paul. Any update? ... Shit! Yes! Perfect! How long? ... Three months? ... Yeah, yeah, he'll be ready. Don't worry about that... you're the fucking best man. Good shit.

The Cashier clicks on the keyboard.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

I'll let him know ASAP. Bye.

CASHIER

Fifty eight ninety three.

EDDIE

Shit.

Eddie pulls out his wallet.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Fucking organic food am I right?

No response from the Cashier. He hands her his cash.

INT. GYM - DAY

Ricardo spars with a PARTNER. He dodges a variety of attacks. Hooks, jabs, kicks. He's untouchable. Bobby watches on smiling.

BOBBY

You look fresh! I like it!

Ricardo starts to counter. He hits his partner with a combination of cross jabs.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
 Good! Good! That's good!

Ricardo stops.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
 Take a break. Take a break, you two.

Ricardo takes off his protective gear and steps out of the octagon. He walks over to a bench then takes a big chug of water. His phone buzzes. It's Eddie.

Ricardo answers.

RICARDO
 Yo.

EXT. STREET - SAME

Eddie has groceries and is walking and talking once again.

EDDIE
 You sitting down, little bro?

INTERCUT BETWEEN THE BROTHERS

RICARDO
 Strangely enough, yeah, I am.

EDDIE
 Got a call from Paul, baby. You got three months.

RICARDO
 Three months? ... Yeah, yeah, I'll be ready. Tell Paul thanks.

Ricardo hangs up then walks over to a punching bag. He starts unloading powerful punches. WHAM-WHAM-

INT. ARENA - THE OCTAGON - NIGHT

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

WHAM! - Ricardo gets smacked in the nose with a punch, causing him to stumble backwards towards his own corner where Bobby, Jason and Eddie are cheering him on.

The gathered crowd of several hundred CHEERS wildly!

BOBBY

Keep your balance! Keep your balance!

But Ricardo looks beat. He's covered in sweat and blood, barely able to stand on his two feet.

His opponent, RONNIE THOMAS, has a fierce look of determination in his eyes as he charges forward, but Ricardo makes a move, a big desperation dodge to his right, causing him to stumble again, almost falling over to the floor.

DING.

Saved by the bell.

The exhausted Ricardo slowly makes his way to his corner. He crashes on his stool. Immediately, Jason begins squirting water over his face and into his mouth.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

You gotta find that second gear.

EDDIE

You got this, Ricardo.

RICARDO

I'm fucking tired... I don't think I've ever gone the distance before.

EDDIE

Who gives a fuck about that? You train hard, you work hard, the extra mile for this. Hit the fucking body. He's tired too. You got the knockout in you.

Bobby shoves Eddie away, annoyed. Wanting to focus Ricardo.

BOBBY

Patience, Ricardo, patience. Play your game. Don't get ahead of yourself. Take it to the ground if you have to. You're an all around fighter now. You can do anything. Take a moment.

RICARDO

I ain't got moments to spare.

BOBBY

Hey, look at me. Take a fucking moment.

Ricardo nods. He stands up and faces the ring. He takes a breath, and the SOUND of the world all drains away.

He breathes, blinks, and with a RUSH, sound comes back with the

DING.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Go get 'em slugger.

EDDIE
It's all you!

Ricardo claps his hands together and gets into his fighting position.

Ronnie immediately starts moving forward, he doesn't look to be slowing down any time soon.

He goes in for a kick. Ricardo knocks it down. He tries again. Another block. He punches with the right, but Ricardo dodges the punch.

Ricardo's footwork starts speeding up, he's finding that extra gear.

RONNIE
You're beat. You're beat.

Ricardo ducks his head down as Ronnie goes in with a jab. Ricardo counters with an uppercut, hitting Ronnie in the chin, causing him to fall back a bit.

The crowd ROARS.

Ricardo has a renewed sense of energy - his fire. He starts going on the offensive, unloading punches, most of them being blocked, and the rest barely grazing Ronnie.

BOBBY
Pace! Pace! Patience!

The barrage of punches takes its toll in Ricardo. He starts taking deep breaths as Ronnie recovers and regains his footing.

He lunges into Ricardo, trying to tackle him to the crowd, but Ricardo eludes his grip. He kicks up, trying to strike Ronnie as he stands upright, but his kick misses.

There's a pause in the action as Ricardo and Ronnie stare each other down. Ricardo throws a jab - blocked.

Ronnie smiles, wickedly.

RONNIE
You got nothing, boy!

Out of nowhere, Ricardo unleashes a monster kick, striking Ronnie straight in the mid section, knocking the wind out of him, and leaving him stunned in place.

The crowd goes berserk.

Ricardo immediately pounces and kicks Ronnie in the temple. The REFEREE doesn't stop the match yet. Ricardo unloads a vicious left hook, finally knocking Ronnie out.

The crowd cheers as loud as possible as the Referee waves his arms in the air. A hyped up Ricardo begins jumping.

RICARDO
YEAH! FUCK YEAH!

He gestures to the crowd who are all on their feet jumping in excitement. Eddie joins in on the celebration, jumping all around Ricardo. Bobby and Jason smile in delight.

RICARDO (CONT'D)
LET'S GO! LET'S FUCKING GO!

RONNIE'S TEAM helps him up as they line up next to Ricardo, the Referee standing in between them, grabbing each of their wrists.

The familiar Promoter steps inside the octagon. As does the Buff Announcer, who's ready for the interview.

PROMOTER
Ladies and gentleman, referee Boris Cross has called for a stop to this contest at one minute and fifty-three seconds of round number three
Declaring the winner, by knockout,
Rrrrrickkkyyyyyy Rrrrrrodrrrruigezzz!

The Referee holds Ricardo's arm in the air. The Buff Announcer moves closer to him.

BUFF ANNOUNCER
Ricky, another fight in the octagon, another win. You were really struggling there for a round or two. Where did you find that energy?

RICARDO

(edgy)

It's that fire, man. That fire just burning me up. You think I'm done, but I come right back at you. I'm never done. I'm never out.

BUFF ANNOUNCER

Ricky, obviously it must be an emotional win, your first fight after the death of your mother. How much does this mean to you?

RICARDO

It means everything man.

Ricardo points at the ceiling.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

I know she's watching. I know she's proud. This one's for you, ma. Also, my brother. Where is he?

Ricardo looks behind him.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

My fucking brother. This guy is a powerhouse man. So loyal. I wouldn't be here without him, that's a fact.

BUFF ANNOUNCER

There's been a lot of rumors going around about you possibly fighting the champ, Orion Chaconas, what are your thoughts on that? Are you up for the challenge?

RICARDO

Man, I'll fight him right now. Where is he? I know he's in the audience somewhere. I'll fight him right now.

The Buff Announcer laughs.

BUFF ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, we're finally getting some personality out of Ricky Rodriguez, and I love it. Good win tonight, champ!

RICARDO

Let's go! Wooo!

The crowd applauds as the ring begins to clear out.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

A DOCTOR finishes stitching up Ricardo's lacerations.

DOCTOR
That should do it. Good win out there.

RICARDO
Thanks, Doc.

The Doctor nods, packs up his gear, then leaves.

Eddie sits besides Ricardo.

EDDIE
That interview was fucking mad, bro.

RICARDO
Yeah... I don't... I don't know.

EDDIE
You got caught up in the moment, man. Good shit. Good shit. People are gonna notice you now. That shit'll show up on people's facebook feeds and everything.

RICARDO
Yeah... well.

A FIGHTER calls out from the distance.

FIGHTER
YO RICKY! MAN!

Ricardo looks up at the fighter, he waves.

FIGHTER (CONT'D)
Good shit! I saw the fight! You're gonna take down Orion one day. Dude's a fucking asshole.

Ricardo politely smiles then waves again.

RICARDO
Good luck out there!

FIGHTER

Thanks man. Maybe I'll take a page
outta your playbook.

Ricardo chuckles.

EDDIE

See. You're a champ, man. It's just
not official yet.

RICARDO

Let's pack up.

EDDIE

Oh, I got that. You worry about you.
And you alone. It's gonna be a crazy
year, brotha.

Eddie stands up and leaves he raises his arms like Rocky.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Wooo!

Ricardo smiles. The crowd roars on, and he basks in it. There
has been a change in him. That fire is burning differently...

MONTAGE: THE NEXT YEAR

*FIGHTS, training, and life begin. Ricardo becoming more and
more aggressive. Bobby coaching him, Eddie cheering, Jason
sensing the change. Ricardo is getting more and more fired up
and wild. He sweet nature is diminishing with each passing
month...*

BEING MONTAGE:

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ricardo paces the room while on his phone. On the TV behind
him, a SPORTS ANCHOR is reporting, the headline reads: "**Ricky
Rodriguez rising in ranking**".

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Ricardo signs a contract. Eddie and Paul sit beside him.
Ricardo shakes hands with the BUSINESSMEN.

INT. GYM - DAY

Ricardo, lacerations healed, trains on the punching bag. Merritt and her Producer stand at a distance, watching. The Cameraman records.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo and Merritt make out on his bed.

Merritt gets on top of Ricardo and begins undressing.

INT. EDDIE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie snorts cocaine with the Holly.

INT. CLOTHING SHOP - DAY

Eddie sits on a bench. Ricardo exits the changing room wearing a dapper navy suit. Eddie nods, approvingly.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Eddie and Ricardo, now dressed in fancy suits, sit across from more BUSINESS PEOPLE. Ricardo signs a contract.

INT. MERRITT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Late at night, Merritt types into her laptop.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

A photo shoot set up. Lights and cameras everywhere. In front of a green screen is Ricardo. Dressed in his UFC attire, just the shorts and the gloves. He poses for the camera.

CAMERAS FLASH

INSERT SHOT: A UFC MAGAZINE. RICARDO IS ON THE COVER. ON THE SIDE IT READS: "THE RISE OF RICKY RODRIGUEZ" BY Merritt Weaver, pg. 8.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Ricardo and Eddie sit in the front row of the airplane. They look at each other and smile. They stretch their legs out.

INT. ARENA - THE OCTAGON - DAY

Ricardo's about to end the fight.

He does so swiftly with a vicious round house kick knocking out his OPPONENT. He's barely been touched in this fight. Ricardo raises his hands in victory.

INT. GYM - DAY

More training. Ricardo spars with a partner. Several MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA have gathered to watch.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo and Merritt have sex.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Another photo-shoot. Ricardo stands in front of the green screen, wearing fancy attire. He holds out a SPORTS DRINK and smiles.

INT. ARENA - THE OCTAGON - NIGHT

Ricardo's finishing off yet ANOTHER FIGHTER.

The Fighter taps out. Ricardo jolts up to his feet and wildly celebrates, jumping in the air and waving his arms like a madman.

RICARDO

I WANT THE CHAMP! I WANT THE FUCKING
CHAMP! LET'S FUCKING GO!

INSERT SHOT: UFC COMMENTATORS SITTING AT A ROUND TABLE. THE HEADLINE READING: RICKY RODRIGUEZ TO FIGHT CHAMPION ORION CHACONAS.

From an arena, surrounded by the roar of a crowd, two commentators speak loudly over the noise.

COMMENTATOR 1

With that, the Rocket has set his sights directly on the championship bout. And I give him a shot, Mike. I think he has a real good shot.

COMMENTATOR 2

Look, Jackson, the kid's a rising star, but Orion's been on top for two years. Ricky's a stud, don't get me wrong, but I don't think he's got it in him. He's still too raw.

COMMENTATOR 1

Well, ready or not, here comes the Rocket!

Ricky is pumping his fists at the crowd from the ring.

INT. GYM - DAY

Ricardo trains hard. Sweat pours down as he viciously practices combos on the punching bag.

INT. EDDIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Eddie is buying some coke when RED AND BLUE LIGHTS come whipping around the corner.

It's a BUST! Eddie bolts! Runs as fast as he can as the cops chase him. The COPS tackle the dealer, and Eddie keeps running for his life.

INT. RICARDO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ricardo is boxing some of his belongings. Merritt helps. He's moving to--

EXT. MANSION - DAY

Outside the door of a mansion, Ricardo signs a contract. Eddie's beside him, joyous. The REAL ESTATE AGENT nods and smiles.

THE MONTAGE ENDS as the two brothers strut into their new home..

INT. EMPTY MANSION - DAY

Ricardo and Eddie sit up against a wall in an empty, polished wooden floor, living room. MOVERS bring boxes and furniture in and out, as they set things up.

Eddie is jittery, and constantly sniffing. He's suffering from withdrawal.

EDDIE

Thanks for letting me stay here,
Ricky.

RICARDO

Yeah no problem, man. You know I got
you.

EDDIE

I mean, I want to clean up, you know?
I've been partying too hard, and I
want to clean up.

RICARDO

You'll be fine. You'll get through
it.

EDDIE

Sorry if I'm distracting you, I don't
mean--

RICARDO

No, no. It's alright.

Eddie looks back at one of the Movers.

EDDIE

Hey, how long until the bed is set
up?

MOVER

We're setting it up now. Just a
couple more minutes.

EDDIE

(to Ricardo)

I gotta sleep. Take a nap, something.
Do you have any Valium or...?

RICARDO

I dunno. I tossed most of the pills
out. I was gonna get new--

EDDIE

It's okay. I'll just force myself to
sleep. It's not a big deal.

RICARDO

I can go get--

EDDIE

No, no, seriously it's not a big deal.

Merritt walks through the open front door. Ricardo's eyes light up at the sight.

RICARDO

Hey you.

MERRITT

Hey.

Merritt marvels at the house.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Nice new place you got.

RICARDO

It's pretty awesome, right?

Eddie stands up.

EDDIE

I'll, uh... I'll leave you two alone. Check in on the bed.

RICARDO

Power through. It'll be over eventually.

Eddie hustles up the stairs.

MERRITT

Is he okay?

RICARDO

He will be. I think he's cut back or something on whatever he's been taking. Withdrawals. It's good though. He's cleaning up.

MERRITT

Oh. Wow. Well... I hope he recovers.

RICARDO

Thanks.

MERRITT

Did you think about rehab?

RICARDO

Nah. I don't think it's that bad.
I'll let him handle it.

He looks up the stairs and sighs. Merritt takes his hand and Ricardo's focus goes to her.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

So, what's up?

MERRITT

Your story is really coming together. Evelyn says she's considering you for the cover story next month! The cover, baby. I've never had a cover story before.

RICARDO

Oh yeah? Heh. Well that doesn't add any more pressure.

MERRITT

One more month.

RICARDO

Then can we move in together?

Merritt sighs. It's a conversation they've had before.

MERRITT

Ricky... It's just. Not professional.

RICARDO

I don't think what's going on now is professional anyway.

MERRITT

Yeah, but my producers and publishers don't know about this.

Ricardo sighs, annoyed.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

It's a conflict of interest, and it could ruin my career. Dating the subject of my reporting? My credibility would come into question on everything I've done.

RICARDO

Well, I doubt they would fire--

MERRITT

If they didn't fire me, I wouldn't be allow to cover you anymore, and with the way you travel, I would probably only be able to see you two or three times a year. All of this will be over.

RICARDO

So what do we do moving forward then?

MERRITT

I don't know... I was thinking of maybe writing a book. I have publishers already interested, and if I did that, I could leave the network.

RICARDO

Write a book? On me?

MERRITT

Yeah, is that a--

RICARDO

We never talked about this.

MERRITT

Is it a problem?

RICARDO

I mean, how much of a say do I get in what goes in it? I don't want you to slander me or anything.

MERRITT

I'm not gonna slander you, Ricky.

RICARDO

Plus, do people even care enough?

MERRITT

Of course. And now, while you're on top, people will want to know your journey. You do a book now, while you're where you're at, not when you're on your way down or washed up.

Ricardo takes offense to that comment.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Sorry, that was harsh.

RICARDO

No, no. It's--

MERRITT

I'm just saying that I think people will appreciate the transparency. Especially with all you've been through this past year. You've really changed. People love this new edgy Ricky.

RICARDO

I know.

MERRITT

You're more of a household name than Orion. That means a lot for a challenger. People will want to read about the journey. How a humble college kid became the loudmouth, edgy face of the UFC.

RICARDO

You think I'm a loudmouth?

MERRITT

I think you've grown to get people's attention, and because of that, the world will be watching.

Ricardo smiles. Merritt puts her hands out painting a wide picture in the air before them.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

(dramatically)

Ricardo Rodriguez, the kid from the streets. He rose from humble beginnings and launched himself into the stratosphere to become the most undefeated MMA superstar of all time - the single greatest fighter the world had ever known. From the streets to the stars... The Rocket!

RICARDO

Sounds like a good book.

Merritt pumps her fist.

MERRITT

So, is that a yes?

Ricardo laughs.

RICARDO

Yeah. Yeah.

Merritt jumps into Ricardo's arm kissing him.

MERRITT

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I love you.

RICARDO

I love you too.

INT. MEDIA ROOM - DAY

A packed event. All different kinds of MEDIA PERSONALITIES are present.

PHOTOGRAPHERS snap pictures. CAMERAMEN focus their lenses. JOURNALISTS take notes as some REPORTERS fire questions at--

ORION CHACONAS, the twenty-seven year old reigning champ with an extremely similar build to Ricardo sits at his table with his TEAM. He holds his belt.

At the adjacent table sits Ricardo, Eddie, Bobby and Jason.

FEMALE REPORTER

Orion, what advantage do you think you have to Ricky, considering you both have extremely similar fighting styles.

ORION

(strong Greek accent)

I have every advantage. I do everything. Ricky does everything. But I do everything better than Ricky does. No contest.

FEMALE REPORTER

Ricky?

Ricardo chuckles.

RICARDO

Next question.

FEMALE REPORTER

What advantage do you--

RICARDO

I have every advantage. Orion doesn't know what an all round fighter is. But he'll be finding out tomorrow when I beat his cocky lil' Greek ass.

Orion's table reacts with scoffs. Orion slams his fist on the table. Bobby closes his eyes and rubs his eyelids.

ORION

I'll end your career!

RICARDO

You'll try. You'll fail.

A buzz reverberates through the audience. Orion laughs.

ORION

(scoffing)

Ha-ha-ha! Look at this pup. A year in the UFC and you think you're hot shit, huh? You haven't faced a real fighter yet.

RICARDO

(defensively)

I've faced every one you have! All that's left is to see who's the champ and who's going back to Greece without his belt!

Orion rises to his feet in a fury. Ricardo rises too. Both tables are on their feet, the reporters shouting and popping off photos.

INT. EMPTY ARENA - NIGHT

Merritt stands in front of a TV CREW in the octagon. They are the only people in the whole giant space.

MERRITT

Temperatures were high during the press conference between champion Orion Chaconas and challenger Ricky Rodriguez earlier today.

EXT. STAGE - DAY

A massive gathering for the weigh-ins. Orion and Ricky stand almost nose to nose with each other, staring intensely.

Orion smiles and taps Ricardo on the shoulder.

MERRITT (V.O.)

The tension remained during the weigh in, which ended with a scuffle.

Ricardo immediately fires back with a two handed push. The crowd gets riled up as Rory Dean jumps in the middle to break things up.

Orion and Ricardo point at each other, as their teams hold them back.

RICARDO

You're going down! You're going down! It's going to be a massacre!

ORION

I'm the champ! I'm the champ! Not you! The belt's mine!

INT. EMPTY ARENA - NIGHT

Merritt finishes her segment.

MERRITT

No matter the result of tomorrow night's fight, there is a clear rivalry brewing here. Merritt Weaver reporting from Las Vegas.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

Ricardo and Merritt kiss on the couch. The glorious neon Las Vegas strip illuminates behind them. Merritt pulls back.

MERRITT

It's getting late. You should get some rest.

RICARDO

I'll be okay.

Merritt stands up. Ricardo playfully pulls her back.

MERRITT

I should get back to my room anyway.

RICARDO

C'mon. I could use some last minute motivation.

Merritt laughs.

MERRITT

I'll see you tomorrow. Champ.

Merritt turns, picks up her bag, and walks out the door. Ricardo sighs, then stands up...

PRE-LAP: HARDCORE GANGSTER RAP MUSIC STARTS PLAYING. LOUD CHEERS FROM THE CROWD.

...as Ricardo walks into his...

HOTEL SUITE BEDROOM

...and crashes on the bed. His eyes close.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

Ricardo, absolutely hyped and carrying an American flag, walks to the octagon. Eddie fist bumps to the crowd as Bobby and Jason keep their heads down.

THE OCTAGON

Ricardo shows off his foot speed, much to the liking of the audience, who cheer even louder.

The lights go out again. The GREECE NATIONAL ANTHEM starts playing. A mix of cheers and boos. Several Greece flags pop up around the arena.

The light shines on Orion as he enters holding a giant Greek flag over his head. His shorts are also the flag of Greece.

Entering the octagon, he gives Ricardo a death stare. Ricardo shoots it right back. The familiar Promoter steps into the octagon. He grabs his microphone.

PROMOTER

Ladiesssss annnnd genltelmennnn.
It's tiiiime for the main event.
Fighting out of the blue corner, from
San Antonio, Texas. Standing at five-
foot-eight inches tall and weighing
in at one hundred and forty-five
pounds. Undefeated at twenty-seven
wins, zero losses, zero draws, Ricky
"The Rocket" Rodriguez!!!

The crowd cheers.

PROMOTER (CONT'D)

And fighting out of the blue corner, from Mykonos, Greece, also standing at five-foot-eight inches tall and weighing in at one hundred and forty-five pounds. The lightweight champion of the World, with a record of thirty-five wins, one loss, and one draw, Orion "The Prophet" Chaconas!

The crowd cheers, but not as loudly as for Ricardo.

PROMOTER (CONT'D)

Referee Michael Levinson will be moderating this event.

Referee MICHAEL LEVINSON waves to the camera then makes his way to the center of the octagon.

Orion and Ricardo walk towards each other, they're ready to fight now, but Michael is in their way.

MICHAEL

Fighters, you know the rules. I want a clean fight. You can bump gloves if you want to.

Orion grunts at Ricardo, who grunts back, a fire in his eyes.

They both turn and walk to their respective corners. Eddie, Bobby, and Jason shout encouragement!

EDDIE

(pumped)

You fucking got this, bro. You're a fucking a champ. He's got nothing on you.

BOBBY

Be confident, kid. Get in his head. You're better than him.

Ricardo nods. He turns and stares at Orion. He closes his eyes, and the sound drifts away. There is only the beating of his heart and his breath. He quietly whispers a prayer.

RICARDO

Mom, I hope you're watching. I feel the fire.

RING.

Ricardo's eyes SNAP open, and he immediately rushes towards Orion, who's slightly taken aback by the quick offense.

Even the crowd reacts at the suddenness. Ricardo unleashes a flurry of punches. Orion, however, is quick with his hands and feet and blocks most of the vicious attacks.

After the immediate onslaught, things settle down. Orion and Ricardo make their way to the center of the ring and move around each other.

It's two fighters at their peak. They're both confident. They're both evenly matched. It's going to be a long fight. And both of them know it.

They feel each other out, tossing a kick and a jab here and there. Orion bobs his head, and constantly switches stances, but Ricardo keeps focus, blocking all the shots Orion attempts.

It's a defensive battle for this first round. No big hits, not cuts, no blood, no bruising.

The 10 second warning mark hits.

Orion goes on the offensive this time, attempting a wild flying knee which somehow strikes Ricardo right in the solar, he bends forward, allowing Orion to hammer punch the back of his head.

Referee Michael looks at the fight closely, but Ricardo gets back up to his feet quickly. Just as he's about to retaliate, the first round ends.

Michael gets in between the fighters, and they both turn around and walk back to their corners.

Ricardo crashes on his wooden stool, breathing heavily.

EDDIE

You good, bro?

Ricardo nods.

Jason squirts water into Ricardo's mouth.

BOBBY

Stay focused. Keep the pace.

Ricardo nods his head.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

This could be a long fight. Don't
tire out.

Ricardo shakes his head. He stands up, ready to fight again.

The second round bell RINGS and Ricardo rushes forward.

MONTAGE: THE NEXT 3 ROUNDS

- Ricardo and Orion dance around the ring.
- Orion attempts a round house kick, to no avail.
- Ricardo takes Orion down to the ground. He gains top position and tries putting Orion in a guillotine. Orion gets out of it.
- The two fighters are back standing. Ricardo lands a vicious right hook on Orion's temple. But it doesn't knock him out.
- Ricardo sits at the bench.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Good! Good! Keep that up! Wait for
the opportunity!

- Orion dominates this round.
- He lands a hard hook, a kick, taking Ricardo to the ground.
- Orion almost puts a bloodied Ricardo in an arm bar, but Ricardo squeezes his way out of it.
- Ricardo downs a big gulp of water.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

It's okay. It's okay. Breathe.
Breathe. Recover. Pacing.

- Orion dominates and takes Ricardo to the ground again.
- He lands a vicious uppercut, nearly ending the fight.

EDDIE

C'mon Ricky!

The bell RINGS as Orion almost submits Ricardo.

MICHAEL

Break it up. Break it up.

END MONTAGE.

Ricardo sits in his corner. It is the most exhausted we've ever seen him. He is bleeding and beaten. It's bad.

RICARDO
(completely winded)
He's not slowing down.

JASON
He's gonna win in a decision. You
gotta knock him out.

BOBBY
You've done this before, kid. Back
against the wall.

EDDIE
You're the comeback king.

JASON
You got this, Ricky.

Michael walks over to the corner.

MICHAEL
Good?

Ricardo gives Michael a wavering thumbs up. He stands and
bangs his gloves together, waiting for the bell.

He takes a deep breath, trying to gather some energy.

Orion's on the other end, doing a similar routine.

The bell rings and both fighters make their way to the
middle.

They're careful and meticulous with their movement. One slip
up and it could mean the fight.

Orion jabs. Ricardo blocks. Ricardo counters, Orion dodges.
Ricardo gives Orion a kick to the leg.

BOBBY
Patience! Patience!

Orion attempts a jab, cross, uppercut combo but all the
punches are blocked and the uppercut dodged as Ricardo steps
back and in with a side kick to Orion's chest, but it's
blocked.

EDDIE
C'mon! Let's fucking go!

Ricardo points to the ground. Orion smiles. Ricardo moves in
and attempts a few punches to no avail.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
C'mon you fucking pussy.

Orion keeps his composure and steady movement until--

He CHARGES at Ricardo, trying to bring him to the ground, but Ricardo shoves Orion off.

RICARDO
Nuh uh. Not this round.

Ricardo loads up for a hook shot, but is stunned by an Orion jab to the nose.

Ricardo falls back. Orion charges forward trying to take advantage of the opportunity, but Ricardo masterfully fends him off.

Ricardo and Orion both take composing breaths and move in towards each other.

ORION
(taunting)
You're mine! You're fucking mine!

RICARDO
This is fucking it.

Ricardo starts throwing wild punches. Crosses and hooks, with no target in mind.

The crowd goes crazy.

Some punches hit air, some strike Orion's gloves, some get through and hit Orion in the cheek. Orion gathers himself. His face is extremely bloodied.

Ricardo takes another deep breath. He's emptied the tank.

Orion grins and moves in, but Ricardo immediately spins and loads up for a roundhouse kick.

Orion sees it coming.

He puts his gloves up, but--

WHAM!

The kick SLAMS into Orion's head, and the lights go out of his eyes as he falls to the ground.

The crowd goes ape shit.

Ricardo pounces on top of Orion and gives two more final punches before Michael frantically stops the match.

Eddie, Bobby and Jason storm the octagon. Ricardo falls to his knees, exhausted.

He lies out on the octagon and starts doing snow angels. Eddie leans over him and starts slapping his chest.

EDDIE

You fucking did it! You fucking did it!
You're the fucking champ!

Ricardo fist bumps in the air, victorious.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

A Vegas club, full of grinding bodies. Pulsing music BLASTS throughout the club.

Strobe lights FLASH. Ricardo, stitched up and holding his lightweight belt in the air as he jives with the music.

Eddie celebrates next to him, downing liquor straight out of the bottle.

INT. STRIP CLUB - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie gets a lap dance.

On the opposite end of the room, Ricardo drinks out of the bottle while getting a lap dance from TWO STRIPPERS.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

Ricardo and Eddie both stumble into the room. Merritt is waiting on the couch.

MERRITT

Jesus Christ.

Merritt stands up and helps to stabilize the wavering Ricardo.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Crazy night?

Ricardo mumbles. Merritt looks around.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
Where's your belt?

RICARDO
Huh?

Ricardo looks around too, incredibly drunk, then starts laughing.

RICARDO (CONT'D)
Musta left it at the club.

Ricardo continues to laugh.

RICARDO (CONT'D)
Hey Eddie. I left the belt at the club.

Eddie laughs too.

MERRITT
Alright. Let's get you guys to bed.

Merritt helps Ricardo towards the bedroom. Eddie stumbles and falls to the floor.

Merritt shakes her head in disappointment, unimpressed by the display of drunken immaturity.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
(gently to Ricardo)
Ricardo, your brother is becoming...

Ricky begins to snore. Merritt sighs and flips off the light.

INT. RICARDO'S MANSION - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ricardo, Eddie and Paul sit around a glass table. Eddie's leg is bouncing.

RICARDO
I want to get back in the octagon.

PAUL
You're the champ now, Ricky. You've done a dozen fights in the last eighteen months. It's time to take a break. You have nothing to prove.

Eddie shakes his head.

EDDIE

Fuck that. Rematch. Three months.

PAUL

I highly advise against that.

RICARDO

Call Orion. I'm sure he'll be game.

EDDIE

Of course he'll be game. The dickhead will be itching like a junkie to get that belt back! And he can try. POW!

Eddie stands up. Ricardo waves him down.

RICARDO

Sit down, dude.

(to Paul)

Call Orion. He might want to.

PAUL

He will, but that's not the point. The money is going to be pouring in, that's not a problem--

RICARDO

I want to fight. I don't give a fuck about the money.

PAUL

I don't think you're thinking this through, Ricky.

RICARDO

I know what I want, Paul. You should want me to fight. Get your ten percent.

PAUL

I want you to be durable. I have other clients now too, you know.

RICARDO

Well good for you.

EDDIE

(snapping)

Hey! Get him a fight, Paul.

Paul sighs. He looks at Ricardo and sees that he is more than serious. Paul shakes his head.

PAUL
Fine. I'll make a few calls.

EDDIE
There you go!

RICARDO
Thanks, Paul.

PAUL
Yeah, whatever.

Paul stands up and heads out to make some calls.

Ricardo leans back.

EDDIE
That's what I'm talking about. Hey,
you seem tense though. You wanna
smoke?

Ricardo is hesitant.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
C'mon, you got tested yesterday. They
won't be coming back any time soon.
And I seen it. You're all edgy. You
need to relax a little. I don't know
if that girl of yours isn't putting
out enough, or if you got some
anxiety or whatever, but you need a
hit or a bump or both, little bro.

Ricardo lowers his gaze and shakes his head. He's reached the
end of his tolerance for his brother's shit.

RICARDO
What're you still doing here, man?

EDDIE
What do you mean?

RICARDO
I mean, I gave you your share. You
can go buy your own place. Do your
own thing.

EDDIE
Yeah... well... I like it here.

RICARDO
I get that man, but I mean, c'mon.

EDDIE
What?

RICARDO
I...

EDDIE
You want me to leave?

RICARDO
I think it would be best if we give each other some space.

EDDIE
After all--

RICARDO
No, no, it's not like that. You're still on the team. I wouldn't do that. I'm just sayin' you don't have to live here anymore. You're obviously on something, and I don't need that around--

EDDIE
(snapping)
I ain't using!

RICARDO
(scoffing)
Eddie, come on.

Eddie stands up, pissed.

EDDIE
I ain't fucking using again!

RICARDO
Fine! You're not using. Go get yourself a girlfriend, settle down, I dunno. It's gonna be a long road and you don't have to stay here for it.

EDDIE
That bitch Merritt's moving in, isn't she?

RICARDO
What does that matter?

EDDIE
Don't bullshit me. You think I'm gonna get in the way.

RICARDO

Oh, please. Don't be full of yourself.

EDDIE

You're embarrassed having me around.

RICARDO

C'mon, Eddie. Don't be fucking stupid.

EDDIE

It's fine, bro. You don't want me around, fine.

Ricardo sighs.

RICARDO

I'm not telling you to leave right now. You can stay here until you find yourself a new place.

EDDIE

You're fucking kicking me out now? It's not even a choice? This is a big fucking house, Ricardo.

RICARDO

I know. I know, man. I just... Look, it's not personal, okay? I just don't want Merritt to feel uncomfortable. It has nothing to do with me.

Eddie stands up. He's hurt.

EDDIE

I can't fucking believe this.

RICARDO

Eddie--

Eddie storms off.

EDDIE

So much for fucking family.

RICARDO

Eddie! Eddie, come on, man!

But he's gone. Ricardo is disappointed, but part of him is also relieved.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo and Merritt lie close to each other in bed.

Merritt strokes Ricardo's face.

MERRITT

I'm sorry it happened that way.

RICARDO

It's fine. He'll get over it.

MERRITT

You should still keep an eye on him,
you know...

RICARDO

Yeah. I'll check in.

Merritt leans over and kisses him. Her phone buzzes.

MERRITT

(sighing)

It never ends...

Merritt reaches over and checks her phone.

RICARDO

Another job offer?

MERRITT

Yep.

RICARDO

Do you miss it? Being in front of the
camera?

MERRITT

No, not really. Right now, all I'm
focused on is the book. It's gonna be
a best seller. I'll tour it-- we'll
tour it, and then I'll consider some
of these calls and go back to
broadcasting. For now, I'm perfectly
happy.

RICARDO

I'm really excited for you.

MERRITT

I'm excited for you. Are you sure
you'll be ready? Three months is a
(MORE)

MERRITT (CONT'D)
short recovery time, especially for a
championship rematch.

RICARDO
He agreed. I agreed. He's not getting
any more rest than I am.

MERRITT
What're you trying to prove?

RICARDO
What?

MERRITT
You won the fight. It was one of the
best matches in history. Cherish the
moment.

RICARDO
I am... But I want to... I want to
get back out there.

MERRITT
But you don't have to anymore. There
are other things you can do now.

RICARDO
Are there?

MERRITT
You have nothing to prove. Nobody to
fight for. You don't know how to
handle that, so you want to get back
in the ring.

RICARDO
I like being in the ring.

MERRITT
You didn't use to.

Ricardo stares at the ceiling. He frowns. She's right, but he
doesn't want to hear it.

He turns to the side and closes his eyes.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
(gently)
Ricardo?

RICARDO
I'm kinda tired. I'm gonna go to
sleep now.

Merritt looks at him. She feels bad, but she lets him be. She turns to the opposite side and closes her eyes.

INT. GYM - DAY

Ricardo walks into the gym. Bobby, who's holding a punching bag for another fighter turns to him.

BOBBY

Well look who decided to finally show up.

RICARDO

Sorry coach. I had to deal with some shit.

BOBBY

Jason'll set you up. We got a lot of work to do.

BEGIN TRAINING MONTAGE:

- Ricardo practicing punches and kicks on the bag.
 - Ricardo working on his lateral footwork.
 - Ricardo jumping rope.
 - Ricardo and Bobby looking over fight tape on his iPad.
 - Ricardo practicing sparring with his SPARRING PARTNER.
- Merritt sits in a chair at the corner of the gym, writing on her laptop.

END TRAINING MONTAGE.

INT. TV STUDIO - DAY

Ricardo, in one of his nice suits, sits a desk with a UFC COMMENTATOR PANEL of TWO. The lights are shining and the cameras are on.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

COMMENTATOR 1

Welcome back to the show. We're joined now by the reigning UFC lightweight champ, Ricky Rodriguez. Thanks for being with us Ricky.

RICARDO

Yeah, no problem.

COMMENTATOR 1

Four days until you defend the title. Does it feel any different training this time around?

COMMENTATOR 2

Especially with the venue being in your home town?

RICARDO

It really does, man. I know Orion is training his ass off right now to try and get the belt back. We both want this real bad - probably more than before.

COMMENTATOR 2

Well, in all fairness, it wasn't like the last fight was a landslide. It still went the distance.

RICARDO

This one will be different. I can guarantee you.

INT. EDDIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

He is living in a nicer place now, but it isn't set-up. Boxes and unwrapped furniture.

He has his couch and a coffee table with drugs and shit on it. Eddie and Holly, completely coked out, sit on the couch watching the show.

COMMENTATOR 2

You're that confident, huh?

RICARDO

Oh yeah.

EDDIE

I should be there. I should fucking be there backstage.

HOLLY

Whatever. Don't take it personally, hun.

EDDIE

How else am I supposed to take it?

HOLLY

It's okay, baby. You still got me.
You're not completely alone.

Eddie points at the TV.

EDDIE

I should be there. Side by side. He
promised me that.

HOLLY

Relax, baby.

Eddie takes a deep breath.

EDDIE

I don't understand what happened.

HOLLY

Just relax. Let's shoot some.

She starts rolling up his sleeve.

EDDIE

Yeah, yeah. All right.

HOLLY

I got some new shit. It's from
Canada.

EDDIE

Shit, how'd you manage that over
here?

HOLLY

Long story.

INT. GREEN ROOM - DAY

Ricardo walks into the green room, as he takes off his mic.

An ASSISTANT grabs it from him. Merritt is waiting on the
couch.

MERRITT

That was fun.

RICARDO

Yeah, those guys are cool. Where'd
Paul go?

MERRITT

Oh, he got a call. Business.

Ricardo takes his phone out of his pocket.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Wanna head home?

RICARDO

You can go home. I'm gonna give Eddie a call. See if he wants to meet up or something.

MERRITT

You sure? There's only four days left until the fight. It could be a distraction.

RICARDO

I'll be fine.

Ricardo dials a number.

MERRITT

Alright. I'll see ya later then.

RICARDO

See ya.

No answer. Ricardo sighs.

INT. EDDIE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eddie and Holly shoot up the heroin. They both exhale softly at the rush, then slouch back.

EDDIE

(slurred)

Holy shit.

Eddie and the Holly both groan as they fall into unconsciousness.

INT. RICARDO'S CAR - DAY

Ricardo drives a fancy, expensive car. He parks in the apartment complex lot.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Ricardo walks down the hallway, checking the apartment numbers. He stops at one. He knocks.

RICARDO

Eddie.

No answer.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

Eddie, I saw your car in the garage.
I know you're in there.

Ricardo knocks again.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

C'mon bro, I just wanna talk.

No answer. Ricardo presses his ear against the door. He hears an ad playing on the TV. He slowly opens the door--

--and immediately notices Eddie and Holly's bodies lying on the floor.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

Eddie! Shit. Shit. Shit.

Ricardo rushes over to Eddie who is foaming at the mouth. He wipes it off and checks his pulse.

He attempts CPR, in a panic.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

(panicking, crying)

Fuck. Fuck. No, Eddie. Fuck! Come on!
Come on, you son of a bitch! Come on!

He pulls out his phone and quickly dials 911.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Ricardo waits, Merritt by his side. Both silent.

A DOCTOR walks out to meet them. Ricardo jumps to his feet.

DOCTOR

Mister Rodriguez.

RICARDO

(demanding)

Is he alive?

The Doctor hesitates.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

FUCK!

DOCTOR

Mister Rodriguez, your brother injected a drug called Fentanyl. It's fifty to a hundred times more powerful than heroin.

RICARDO

No! No, goddammit!

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, Mister Rodriguez.

Merritt reaches out to Ricardo, but he is inconsolable. He's on the brink of having a metdtown. He punches the wall WHAM-WHAM-WHAM--

CUT TO:

INT. THE OCTAGON - NIGHT

PUNCH! Ricardo punching the air at the edge of the Octagon, a match about to begin. CROWD roaring. Ricardo is jumping in his corner, SCREAMING. He is a wild man. All sense of the calm and focused fighter we first met is gone now.

RICARDO

I'm ready! Come on! Who's ready!

BOBBY

Stay focused, kid! Take that moment, and--

RICARDO

Fuck that. I don't need no moment.

Across the ring, Orion, looking even more fit than before, is waiting, a patient fury in his eyes, but a collected one. He is ready and focused.

Ricardo turns, and where once, the sound would drown away and Ricky would take his moment. He lets the crowd and noise and thunder bombard him. He has no calm.

The bell RINGS.

Ricardo turns around and immediately goes on the offensive. But this time, he's reckless.

He unleashes wild punches, but keeps his guard down, allowing Orion to land several significant strikes, opening up lacerations on Ricardo's face.

Ricardo fights like a wild animal. He moves almost at random, and attempts strikes with no clear purpose in mind. The crowd is also taken off guard as they gasp at this fighting style.

Orion finds an opening and lands a vicious uppercut. Sweat and blood flies off Ricardo's face.

WHAM-WHAM-WHAM-BLOOD-HIT-KICK-Ricardo is getting THRASHED!

The REFEREE is about to stop the match, but Ricardo recovers and yells as he extends his right leg, striking Orion straight in the groin.

Orion staggers backward. The Referee tries to jump in the middle of the fight but Ricardo moves past him and unloads a right hook to the defenseless Orion.

The Referee grabs a hold of Ricardo, but Ricardo turns and punches the Referee.

He then leans over the fallen Orion and starts unloading punches.

Both Orion's team and Jason and Bobby rush into the octagon to hold Ricardo back. The CROWD is going nuts at the spectacle.

Ricardo screams at the top of his lungs.

INT. RICARDO'S MANSION - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ricardo sits alone on his couch, watching TV.

Unshaven, face bruised and scabbed, clothes a mess. Bottles of half empty alcohol rest on the coffee table in front of him.

COMMENTATOR 1

What we witnessed was nothing less than the deconstruction of a fighter. His focus gone. His finesse right out the window. That wasn't just amateur, that was a street fight.

COMMENTATOR 2

It is unclear what the extent of Ricky Rodriguez's punishment will be,
(MORE)

COMMENTATOR 2 (CONT'D)
but a lifetime ban from the UFC is
definitely not out of the question.

COMMENTATOR 2 (CONT'D)
And at this point, it won't be a
surprise.

COMMENTATOR 1
With everything the Rocket has been
through, I can't imagine what is
going through his mind now.

Merritt walks into the room. She places a set of KEYS on the
coffee table. It is difficult, but she has to go.

MERRITT
(gently)
You should get help.

He doesn't say a word. Merritt puts her head down and starts
walking out the door.

RICARDO
I get it. Things get fucked, and I'm
no longer the fucking hot shot, so
you bail. Cause I'm useless to you
now. Am I not a good story anymore?

Merritt stops at the door, her back to him.

MERRITT
Get help, Ricardo. I hope you get
back on your feet.

She quietly leaves. Ricardo seethes for a moment, then he
stands and staggers to the door, yanking it open and marching
after her.

RICARDO
Use me, huh? Fucking use me for my
money and my story and then bail Huh?
You're not going anywhere!

He reaches her and grabs Merritt's arm. She immediately turns
and slaps Ricardo in the face

MERRITT
Get the fuck off of me!

Ricardo raises his hand to slap her back, and Merritt looks
at him unflinching - daring him to do it.

His hand shakes, but he does not hit her. His eyes fill with tears of frustration and loss.

She gets in her car and leaves.

Ricardo stands there, numb. His phone rings, he furiously answers it.

RICARDO

What?

PAUL (V.O.)

Hey, Ricardo, it's Paul. We have a problem. Your sponsors. They're all pulling--

RICARDO

I don't want to fucking hear this.

Ricardo hangs up. He starts walking upstairs when his phone rings again.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

What!?

RORY (V.O.)

Ricky?

INT. RORY DEAN'S OFFICE - SAME

Rory is at his office window looking down at the day.

RICARDO

Yeah?

RORY

Rory Dean.

RICARDO

I know.

RORY

I think you know why I'm calling.

RICARDO

(muttering)

Yeah.

RORY

It saddens me to inform you of this, but I just thought you deserved to hear it from me personally. We're

(MORE)

RORY (CONT'D)
going to have to ban you from the
UFC... a lifetime ban.

RICARDO
Okay.

RORY
We're going issue a public statement
tomorrow morning. I just thought you
should know first.

Ricardo hangs up without a word. He stands in the entry of
his mansion and hangs his head low.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. RICARDO'S MANSION - LIVING ROOM

SUPER: ONE MONTH LATER

The place is barren. Ricardo, unshaven and messy, sits
against the wall of the empty house. MOVERS carry boxes out
of the door.

Paul walks into the empty living room.

PAUL
That's the last of it. Everything of
high value pretty much sold right
away. The other stuff is going too,
boxed or auctioned off.

RICARDO
Thanks, Paul.

Ricardo stands up. Paul reaches out his hand. Ricardo shakes
it.

RICARDO (CONT'D)
You were a good agent.

PAUL
I wish you well, Ricardo. Sincerely.

RICARDO
Thank you.

PAUL
I'll keep in touch with everything.

Ricardo nods. Paul leaves. Ricardo sighs and slowly walks out
the front door.

INT. SMALL APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ricardo enters a small apartment front door and turns on the lights. He carries a couple boxes in his arms.

He places them down then looks around at his new, small place.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo shaves.

INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ricardo sleeps on the floor, just a blanket covering him. Next to him, on the floor, the FRAMED PHOTO of himself, Yenny, and Eddie.

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON - DAY

Ricardo walks down the city street looking relatively cleaned up. He carries a backpack. He walks in front of a bookstore then stops.

He looks at the display. A promo for a new book:

**THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ROCKET - THE RICKY RODRIGUEZ STORY.
AN UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY BY Merritt Weaver.**

Ricardo looks at the cover. It is a shadowed image of a FIGHTER in a flying punch pose. Though his face and details are dark and indistinguishable, there is no doubt it's Ricky.

Ricardo looks at it solemn. He cinches up his backpack and continues down the sidewalk.

INT. CLASSROOM - NIGHT

A night class at a Community College. Nothing fancy or prestigious, but there is a room full of students carefully listening and dedicated to their futures. A TEACHER lectures.

Ricardo takes down notes. He takes a moment and glances to his right.

A few rows over he sees Maria. He continues to stare at her.

After a few seconds, Maria turns and looks back at Ricardo.

The two hold eye contact. She smiles. He smiles back and then returns to his note taking and listening of the lecture.

FADE TO BLACK.

T H E E N D